

CURRENT AFFAIRS
21ST TO 30TH NOVEMBER 2018

26TH GENERAL CONFERENCE ON WEIGHTS & MEASURES

The 26th meeting of the General Conference on Weights and Measures (CGPM) was held during November 13-16 2018 at Palais des Congrès, Versailles, France.

CGPM is the highest international body of the world for accurate and precise measurements. The 26th CGPM meeting was very special and historic as the members have voted for the redefinition of 130 years old “Le grand K – the SI unit of kg” in terms of the fundamental Planck’s constant(h). The new definitions will come into force on 20 May 2019. The CGPM comprises 60 countries including India and 42 Associate Members.

- The International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM), the main executive body of CGPM has the responsibility of defining the International System of Units (SI).
- This revision of the SI is the culmination of many years of intensive scientific cooperation between the National Metrology Institutes (The national Physical Laboratory for India) and the BIPM. The dissemination of SI units for the welfare of society and industries in the country is the responsibility of Legal Metrology, Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of India.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The definition of the seven base units namely, ***second, metre, kilogram, ampere, Kelvin, mole and candela*** has been changed from being linked to artefacts to being based on the fundamental constants on nature.
- Notably the definition of kilogram has been changed from being the mass of prototype sanctioned by the 1st CGPM held in Paris in 1889 and deposited at the BIPM to the Planck constant which is a physical constant.
- Likewise, the definition of metre has been changed to link it to the speed of light. There is a change in definition of time also.

SIGNIFICANCE

The change in the definition will result in uniform and worldwide accessible SI system for international trade, high- technology manufacturing, human health and safety, protection of environment, global climate studies and the basic science under-pinning these. The units are expected to be stable in the long term, internally self-consistent and practically realisable being based on the present theoretical description of nature at the highest level.

FACTS

- The International prototype of kilogram (IPK) is kept at the BIPM, Paris and serves as the international standard of kilogram.
- It is made of **90% platinum and 10% iridium** and is a cylinder of 39 mm diameter and 39 mm height. Replicas of the IPK are made of the same material and used at BIPM as reference or working standards and national prototype of kilogram (NPK), kept at different National Metrology Institutes (NMIs).
- NPK-57, kept at CSIR- National Physical Laboratory, is sent periodically to BIPM for calibration.
- **Kibble balance** is a self-calibrating electromechanical balance and provides the measurements of mass, traceable in terms of electrical parameters and provides linkage of macroscopic mass to the Planck constant(h).
- The advantages of Kibble balance would be that the NPK need not to be sent to BIPM for calibrations and the accuracy and stability of Kibble balance is very high which is very important where low weights with high accuracies are essential, for example in **pharmaceuticals and biotechnologies**.

GURU NANAK DEV

Government of India has decided to commemorate 550th Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev from 23rd November, 2018 at national as well as international level in a befitting manner.

A number of religious activities like kirtan, katha, prabhat pheri, langar and educational activities such as seminars, workshops, lectures etc. will be organised. SGPC, Amritsar will be the knowledge partner of the Government of India. Commemorative coin and postage stamp will also be released.

GURU NANAK DEV

- Guru Nanak is the founder of Sikhism and the first of the Sikh Gurus, he lived during 1469 – 1539.
- He was born Nankana Sahib near Lahore in Modern day Pakistan and gave spiritual teachings based on the universal divinity of creation.
- He was committed towards eradicating injustice and inequality from society and also believed in the power of education.
- Guru Nanak became the first Sikh Guru and his spiritual teachings laid the foundation on which Sikhism was formed.
- Considered a religious innovator, Guru Nanak travelled across South Asia and Middle East to spread his teachings.
- He advocated the existence of one God and taught his followers that every human being can reach out to God through meditation and other pious practices.
- It teaches its followers to escape the clutches of ordinary human traits, such as **lust, rage, greed, attachment and conceit (collectively known as the 'Five Thieves')**.
- Interestingly, Guru Nanak did not support monasticism and asked his followers to lead the life of honest householder.
- His teachings were immortalized in the form of 974 hymns, which came to be known as 'Guru Granth Sahib,' the holy text of Sikhism.

KIMBERLEY PROCESS

The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) Plenary 2018, was held in Brussels, Belgium, from 12th-16th November 2018. EU will hand over the Chairmanship of KPCS to India from 1st January, 2019.

BACKGROUND

- India chaired the Ad hoc Committee on Review and Reform (AHCRR).
- This year was the fifteenth anniversary of KPCS. Since its launch in 2003, the Kimberley Process has contributed towards peace, security and prosperity. It has proven to be an effective multilateral tool for conflict prevention in stemming the flow of conflict diamonds.
- The Kimberley Process has made valuable developmental impact in improving the lives of most people dependent on the trade in diamonds.
- India is the founding member of KPCS and is actively involved in KP activities to ensure that almost 99% of the diamond trade in the world is conflict free.
- India is committed to maintain KP as an efficient and effective process in order to ensure the conflict diamond free status.
- India is at the forefront in addressing the issue of differentiation between Natural Diamonds and Lab Grown Diamonds and ensure responsible business in this area.

KIMBERLEY PROCESS

- The Kimberley Process is an international certification scheme that regulates trade in rough diamonds.

- It aims to prevent the flow of conflict diamonds, while helping to protect legitimate trade in rough diamonds.
- The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) outlines the rules that govern the trade in rough diamonds.
- The KPCS has developed a set of minimum requirements that each participant must meet. The KP is not, strictly speaking, an international organisation: it has no permanent offices or permanent staff. It relies on the contributions – under the principle of ‘burden-sharing’ – of participants, supported by industry and civil society observers. Neither can the KP be considered as an international agreement from a legal perspective, as it is implemented through the national legislations of its participants.
- The Kimberley Process (KP) is a **multilateral trade regime established in 2003** with the goal of preventing the flow of conflict diamonds.
- The core of this regime is the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) under which States implement safeguards on shipments of rough diamonds and certify them as “conflict free”.
- As of November 2013, there are 54 participants representing 81 countries, with the European Community counting as a single participant.

CONFLICT DIAMONDS

Conflict diamonds, also known as ‘blood’ diamonds, are rough diamonds used by rebel movements or their allies to finance armed conflicts aimed at undermining legitimate governments.

INSTITUTION’S INNOVATION COUNCIL PROGRAM

Union HRD Ministry launched the ‘Institution’s Innovation Council (IIC) program under Innovation cell of MHRD in New Delhi.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The purpose of formation of network of Institution’s Innovation Councils (IICs) is to encourage, inspire and nurture young students by exposing them to new ideas and processes resulting in innovative activities in their formative years.
- MHRD has established an “Innovation cell” at AICTE with a purpose to systematically foster the culture of Innovation in all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the country.
- More than 1000 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have already formed IICs in their campuses and enrolled for the IIC network managed by MHRD’s Innovation cell to promote innovation through multitudinous modes leading to an innovation promotion eco-system in their campuses.
- Universities are the main research centers of developed countries and because of their research they are at the top in global innovation ranking.
- The educational advancement in higher education can only be achieved by encouraging best practices in innovation and advance research and Innovation Cell has undertaken many initiatives in this direction such as implementing programs like Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievement (ARIIA), Smart India Hackathon (SIH)- 2019, etc

ATMOSPHERE & CLIMATE RESEARCH – MODELLING OBSERVING SYSTEMS & SERVICES (ACROSS)

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved continuation of the nine sub-schemes of the umbrella scheme “Atmosphere & Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems & Services (ACROSS)” during 2017-2020. The CCEA also approved establishment of National Facility for Airborne Research (NFAR) during 2020-21 and beyond.

It will be implemented by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences** through its institutes namely India **Meteorological Department (IMD), Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), and Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Service (INCOIS).**

HIGHLIGHTS

The scheme will provide improved weather, climate and ocean forecast and services, thereby ensuring transfer of commensurate benefits to the various services like Public weather service, disaster management, Agro-meteorological Services, Aviation services, Environmental monitoring services, Hydro-meteorological services, climate services, tourism, pilgrimage, power generation, water management, Sports & adventure etc.

- ACROSS scheme pertains to the atmospheric science programs of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and addresses different aspects of weather and climate services, which includes warnings for cyclone, storm surges, heat waves, thunderstorms etc.
- Each of these aspects is incorporated as nine sub-schemes under the umbrella scheme "ACROSS" and is implemented in an integrated manner through the aforesaid four institutes.
- The ACROSS scheme consists of nine sub-programmes which are multi-disciplinary and multi institutional in nature and will be implemented in an integrated manner through IMD, HIM, NCMRWF and INCOIS.

UN ENVIRONMENT AWARD

United Nation Environment has awarded Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India with Asia Environment Enforcement Awards, 2018 for excellent work done by the Bureau in combating transboundary environmental crime.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Asia Environment Enforcement Awards publicly recognize and celebrate excellence in enforcement by government officials and institutions/teams combating transboundary environmental crime in Asia.
- The awards are given to outstanding individuals and/or government organizations/teams that demonstrate excellence and leadership in enforcement of national laws to combat transboundary environmental crime in one of the following eligibility criteria areas: collaboration; impact; innovation; integrity and gender leadership.
- WCCB has been conferred this award in Innovation category.
- WCCB has adopted innovative enforcement techniques that have dramatically increased enforcement of transboundary environmental crimes in India. Notably it has developed **an online Wildlife Crime Database Management System** to get real time data in order to help analyze trends in crime and devise effective measures to prevent and detect wildlife crimes across India.
- This system has been successfully used to analyse trends, helping put in preventive measures as well as for successfully carrying out operations such as **Operation SAVE KURMA, THUNDERBIRD, WILDNET, LESKNOW, BIRBIL, THUNDERSTORM, LESKNOW-II** along with other enforcement agencies resulting in the arrest of 350 wildlife criminals and huge seizures of Tiger/Leopard Skin/bones and other trophies, Rhino Horn, Elephant Ivory, turtles/tortoises, Mongoose raw hairs as well as Mongoose hair brushes, protected birds, Marine products, live Pangolin as well as its scales, deer antlers etc. across all the states.
- The award was decided upon by a selection panel set up by the UN Environment and this is the second time in a row the awards are being given by UN Environment to India.

WCCB

- Wildlife Crime Control Bureau is a statutory body established by the Government of India under the MoEFCC, to combat organized wildlife crime in the country.
- Under Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, it is mandated:
 1. To collect and collate intelligence related to organized wildlife crime activities.

2. To disseminate the same to State and other enforcement agencies for immediate action so as to apprehend the criminals.
 3. To establish a centralized wildlife crime data bank.
 4. Co-ordinate actions by various agencies in connection with the enforcement of the provisions of the Act.
- Apart from these functions WCCB also assists and advises the Customs authorities in inspection of the consignments of flora & fauna as per the provisions of Wild Life Protection Act, CITES and EXIM Policy governing such an item.

ALLIED & HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONS BILL 2018

The Union Cabinet has approved the Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2018 for regulation and standardisation of education and services by allied and healthcare professionals.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Establishment of a Central and corresponding State Allied and Healthcare Councils; 15 major professional categories including 53 professions in Allied and Healthcare streams.
- The Bill provides for Structure, Constitution, Composition and Functions of the Central Council and State Councils, e.g. Framing policies and standards, Regulation of professional conduct, Creation and maintenance of live Registers, provisions for common entry and exit examinations, etc.
- The Central Council will comprise 47 members, of which 14 members shall be ex-officio representing diverse and related roles and functions and remaining 33 shall be non-ex-officio members who mainly represent the 15 professional categories.
- The State Councils are also envisioned to mirror the Central Council, comprising 7 ex-officio and 21 non-ex-officio members and Chairperson to be elected from amongst the non-ex-officio members.
- Professional Advisory Bodies under Central and State Councils will examine issues independently and provide recommendations relating to specific recognised categories.
- The Bill will also have an overriding effect on any other existing law for any of the covered professions.
- The State Council will undertake recognition of allied and healthcare institutions.
- Offences and Penalties clause have been included in the Bill to check malpractices.
- The Bill also empowers the Central and State Governments to make rules.
- Central Govt. also has the power to issue directions to the Council, to make regulations and to add or amend the schedule.

7TH INTERNATIONAL TOURISM MART

The "7th International Tourism Mart for the North-East States" held in Agartala.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This is the 7th edition of the International Tourism Mart, an annual event organised in the North Eastern region with the objective of highlighting the tourism potential of the region in the domestic and international markets.
- It brings together the tourism business fraternity and entrepreneurs from the eight North Eastern States. The event has been planned and scheduled to facilitate interaction between buyers, sellers, media, Government agencies and other stakeholders.
- The International Tourism Marts are organised every year in the North Eastern States on rotation basis.
- The earlier editions of this mart had been held in Guwahati, Tawang, Shillong, Gangtok and Imphal.

The North East Region of India comprising the states of **Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim** is endowed with diverse tourist attractions and products.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORKPLACE ACT

To ensure security of women at all workplaces, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has empanelled institutions/organisations to conduct awareness exercises on the provisions of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.

HIGHLIGHTS

- As of November, 2018, as many as 223 institutes/organisations have been empanelled from across the country to impart training in local languages.
- These empanelled institutes have to submit quarterly reports through SHe-Box, an online complaints portal, of all the training programmes/workshop conducted by them under the SH Act.
- The empanelled institutes/organisations/companies have so far organized over 700 capacity building exercises which were attended by nearly 50,000 participants.
- A Handbook and Training Module on the SH Act has also been published by the Ministry to provide information about the provisions of the Act in an easy-to-use practical manner.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AT WORKPLACE ACT, 2013

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013 mandates all the workplace which include any department, organisation, undertaking, establishment, enterprise, institution, office, branch or unit which is established, owned, controlled or wholly or substantially financed by funds provided directly or indirectly by the appropriate Government, local authority, corporation or a co-operative society with more than 10 workers to constitute an Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) to receive complaints of sexual harassment.

- The Government of India (GoI) has enacted the Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (the SH Act), 2013 with the objective to create a safe and secure workplace for women free from sexual harassment.
- This Act caters to women working both in organised and unorganised sector and establishes a redressal mechanism for the disposal of their complaints.
- This Act is unique in its broad coverage which includes all women irrespective of their work status, whether working in organised or unorganised, public or private sectors, regardless of hierarchy. The domestic workers are also included within its ambit.
- It defines “sexual harassment at the workplace” in a comprehensive manner, to cover circumstances of implied or explicit promise or threat to a woman’s employment prospects or creation of hostile work environment or humiliating treatment, which can affect her health or safety.

SHE BOX PORTAL

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has linked She-Box, the online portal to report complaints of Sexual Harassment at Workplace, to all the Central Ministries, Departments and 653 districts across 33 States/Union Territories.

- An effort to provide speedy remedy to women facing sexual harassment at workplace.
- Once a complaint is submitted, it will be directly sent to the section of the employer concerned.
- Here, both the WCD and the complainant can monitor the progress of the inquiry.
- Those who have already filed a written complaint with the concerned Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) or Local Complaint Committee (LCC) constituted under the Sexual Harassment Act are also eligible to file their complaint through this portal.
- **Handbook and Training Module on the Sexual Harassment Act:** The Ministry has published a Handbook and Training Module to provide information about the provisions of the Act in easy to use practical manner.

JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE

Government of India has decided to mark the remembrance of 100 years of the historical Jallianwala Bagh Massacre in 2019.

BACKGROUND

The Jallianwala Bagh massacre, also known as the Amritsar massacre, took place on April 13, 1919. This is remembered as one of the deadliest attacks in the history of the world and is also a turning point in India's freedom struggle.

At the Jallianwala Bagh, which is garden spread across 6 to 7 acres, a large gathering of 15,000-20,000 people with a majority of Sikhs, took place to celebrate the Punjabi harvest festival of Baisakhi. They had also gathered to revolt against the repressive Rowlatt Act that provided for stricter control of the press, arrests without warrant and indefinite detention without trial.

FACTS

- On this day, around 50 troops of the British Indian Army, under the command of Colonel Reginald Dyer, fired rifles into a crowd of Baishakhi pilgrims, who had gathered in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, Punjab.
- The civilians, that had a majority of Sikh population, had gathered in Jallianwala Bagh to celebrate the harvest festival and also to condemn the arrest and deportation of two national leaders, **Satya Pal and Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew.**
- On Colonel Dyer's orders, his troops indiscriminately fired on the group of gathered civilians for about 10 minutes.
- According to British government, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre left 379 dead and 1,200 wounded. The Indian National Congress, however, estimated that more than were 1,500 injured, with approximately 1,000 dead.
- The incident fueled anger among people, leading to the Non-cooperation Movement of 1920-22.

QUADRICYCLE

Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has notified the insertion of the item 'Quadricycle' as a 'non-transport' vehicle under the Motor Vehicles Act 1988.

QUADRICYCLE

A Quadricycle is a vehicle of the size of a 3-wheeler but with 4 tyres and fully covered like a car. It has an engine like that of a 3-wheeler. This makes it a cheap and safe mode of transport for last mile connectivity.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This new category, which will mainly be used to classify small four wheeled personal vehicles (or commercial vehicles) will have to pass a list of emissions, crash and other norms which will be laid down by the government and the Automotive Research Association Of India - ARAI.
- The first vehicle to be launched under this new category will be the Bajaj Qute.
- There was no such special category in India like the ones in Europe and in other countries around the world.
- In order to meet the criteria of a 'Quadricycle' a vehicle will have to weigh less than 475 kg (kerb weight).
- The Quadricycle will also have to go through a rigorous crash test program in India to meet road worthiness along with a strict set of emissions test for petrol, diesel and alternative fuel vehicles.
- The government has also approved of full electric or hybrid quadricycles and those too will have to go through its own set of tests to meet road worthiness.

MOTOR VEHICLES ACT 1988

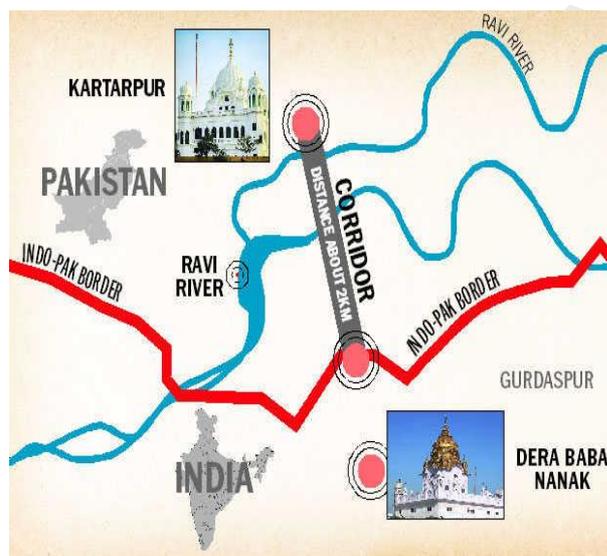
The Motor Vehicles Act 1988 is an Indian law that controls all matters pertaining to road transport vehicles in India.

- The act was enforced on 1st July 1989 replacing the earlier Motor Vehicles Act 1939. The 1939 act had supplanted the first enactment of such an act which was the Motor Vehicles Act of 1914.
- The Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 gives the statutory provisions with respect to the licensing of conductors and drivers, motor vehicles registration, control of vehicles by way of permits, regulation of traffic, special provisions concerning state transport undertakings, liability, vehicles insurance, offences, penalties, etc.
- In order to exercise the legal provisions given in the Act, the Indian government formulated the Central Motor Vehicles Rules 1989.
- The 1989 law has been reviewed and the old law has been amended with the Indian Motor Vehicles Act 2017.
- The new act has many changes regarding fines and penalties for drivers and auto manufacturers for violations. The new law has made the penalty for deaths due to drunk-driving as 7 years instead of the earlier 2 years.

DERA BABA NANAK – KARTARPUR SAHIB ROAD CORRIDOR

India will laid the foundation stone for the construction of Dera Baba Nanak - Kartarpur Sahib road Corridor (upto international border) at a function in village Mann in Gurdaspur district of Punjab.

HIGHLIGHTS



- Guru Nanak Dev ji had assembled the Sikh community at Kartarpur and lived there for 18 years till 1539. The Gurudwara Darbar Sahib is built where Guru Nanak Dev Ji took his last breath.
- To mark Guru Nanak Dev Ji's 550th birth anniversary in 2019, the Government of India decided on 22nd Nov 2018 to build the Kartarpur road Corridor upto the international border between India and Pakistan as an integrated development project.
- The Corridor will let Sikh pilgrims visit the iconic Gurudwara Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur on the banks of river Ravi in Pakistan.
- The temple is located around 4km (2.5 miles) from the border with India.

EMBRYO TRANSFER TECHNOLOGY

On the occasion of "National Milk Day" the Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM), 10 semen centres have been identified for the production of Sex Sorted Semen for the production of more female animals. Proposals for two centres, in Uttarakhand and Maharashtra, have been approved.

Embryo transfer technology is extremely effective for increasing production and breed improvement. E-Pashuhaat portal is playing a crucial role in connecting farmers & breeders to trade in disease-free germplasm; an app has been created & integrated with UMANG.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The foundation stone of **sex sorted semen centre** in **Rishikesh, Uttarakhand** was laid in June 2018.
- Besides, **INDUSCHIP** has been developed for genomic selection of indigenous breeds and 6000 dairy animals have been genetically evaluated using it.
- Under the **Pashu Sanjivni** component of the scheme, 9 crore milch animals are being identified using UID (Unique Identification Device).
- The government launched **e-pashuhaat portal** in November 2016. The portal is playing a crucial role in connecting farmers, breeders and other agencies to trade in disease-free germplasm, namely live animals, frozen semen and embryos.
- Now, a **mobile application - e-pashuhat (GPMS Transportal)** - has been created and integrated with UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance) application.
- This year a new scheme the **Dairy Processing & Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF)** has been initiated by the government.

BACKGROUND

Steps undertaken by the Government for development of cattle population in the country is as under:

1. **Rashtriya Gokul Mission** has been launched December 2014 for the development and conservation of indigenous bovine breeds thereby enhancing milk production and productivity. The framework of the scheme is to enhance milk production & productivity through induction of high genetic merit bulls for semen production; field performance recording; strengthening of bulls mother farms; setting up of Gokul Grams etc.
2. **National Programme for Bovine Breeding** is being implemented for enhancing productivity of milch animals through extension of Artificial Insemination (AI) coverage. This is done through establishment of Multi-Purpose AI Technicians in Rural India (MAITRIs); strengthening of existing AI centres; monitoring of AI etc.
3. **National Mission on Bovine Productivity** has been launched in November 2016 with the aim of enhancing milk production and productivity and thereby making dairying more remunerative to the farmers. The scheme is being implemented with following components:
 - a) **Pashu Sanjivni**- this component includes identification of animals in milk using UID, issuing health cards to all animals in milk and uploading data on INAPH data base.
 - b) **Advance reproductive Technique**- under the component sex sorted semen production facility is being created at 10 A graded semen stations and 50 Embryo Transfer Technology Labs with IVF facilities are being created in the country.
 - c) **E Pashu Haat Portal**- The e-pashu haat portal has been launched in November 2016 for linking farmers and breeders of indigenous breeds.
 - d) **National Bovine Genomic Centre for Indigenous Breeds (NBGC-IB)**: The NBGC-IB is being established for enhancing milk production and productivity through genomic selection among indigenous breeds.
4. Two **National Kamdhenu Breeding Centres** are being established one in the State of Andhra Pradesh for southern region and other in Madhya Pradesh for northern region of the country with the aim of development and conservation of indigenous breeds in a scientific manner and thereby enhancing milk production and productivity.
5. **National Dairy Plan-I** a world Bank assisted project being implemented in 18 major dairy States with aim of enhancing milk production and productivity in order to meet demand of milk in the country through strengthening of semen stations; bull production programme (progeny testing and pedigree selection), ration balancing programme etc.

6. Government has also established three subordinate organizations namely (i) **Central Cattle Breeding Farms (CCBFs)** (ii) **Central Herd registration Scheme** and (iii) **Central Frozen Semen Production & Training Institute**.

These organizations are also undertaking genetic upgradation of milch animals through supply of disease free high genetic merit bulls for semen production and natural service for use in the breeding programme being implemented by the States.

INTEGRATED HEALTH INFORMATION PLATFORM

Union Health Secretary did soft-launch of the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) segment of Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP) in seven states.

The first one-of-its-kind initiative by the Government of India, IHIP uses the latest technologies and digital health initiatives.

- The Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP) is a web-enabled near-real-time electronic information system that is embedded with all applicable Government of India's e-Governance standards, Information Technology (IT), data & meta data standards to provide state-of-the-art single operating picture with geospatial information for managing disease outbreaks and related resources.
- Real time data reporting (along through mobile application); accessible at all levels (from villages, states and central level).
- Advanced data modelling & analytical tools.
- GIS enabled Graphical representation of data into integrated dashboard.
- Role & hierarchy-based feedback & alert mechanisms.
- Geo-tagging of reporting health facilities.
- Scope for data integration with other health programs.

INTEGRATED DISEASE SURVEILLANCE PROJECT

- Integrated Disease Surveillance Project (IDSP) was launched by Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare in November 2004 for a period upto March 2010. The project was restructured and extended up to March 2012. The project continues in the 12th Plan with domestic budget as Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme under NHM for all States with Budgetary allocation of 640 Cr.
- A Central Surveillance Unit (CSU) at Delhi, State Surveillance Units (SSU) at all State/UT headquarters and District Surveillance Units (DSU) at all Districts in the country have been established.

OBJECTIVES

To strengthen/maintain decentralized laboratory-based IT enabled disease surveillance system for epidemic prone diseases to monitor disease trends and to detect and respond to outbreaks in early rising phase through trained Rapid Response Team (RRTs).

HIGHLIGHTS

- Under IDSP data is collected on epidemic prone diseases on weekly basis (Monday–Sunday).
- The information is collected on three specified reporting formats, namely “S” (suspected cases), “P” (presumptive cases) and “L” (laboratory confirmed cases) filled by Health Workers, Clinicians and Laboratory staff respectively.
- The weekly data gives information on the disease trends and seasonality of diseases.
- Whenever there is a rising trend of illnesses in any area, it is investigated by the Rapid Response Teams (RRT) to diagnose and control the outbreak.

- Data analysis and actions are being undertaken by respective State/District Surveillance Units.

PAISA PORTAL

"PaISA – Portal for Affordable Credit & Interest Subvention Access"

A centralized electronic platform for processing interest subvention on bank loans to beneficiaries under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) named "PAISA – Portal for Affordable Credit and Interest Subvention Access", was launched.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The web platform has been designed and developed by Allahabad Bank which is the Nodal bank.
- "PAISA is yet another effort by the government to connect directly with the beneficiaries, ensuring that there is greater transparency and efficiency in delivery of services.
- DBT of subvention on monthly basis under DAY-NULM will give the necessary financial support to small entrepreneurs in a timely manner.
- All 35 states / UTs & all scheduled commercial banks, RRBs and Cooperative Banks are expected to be on board the PAISA portal the year end.

DEENDAYAL ANTYODAYA YOJANA

Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana (DAY) aims to uplift the urban poor folks by enhancing sustainable livelihood opportunities through skill development.

- Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana was launched under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (HUPA). Government of India has provisioned Rs.500 crore for the scheme.
- The scheme is integration of the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) and National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM).
- National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) is renamed as Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana-(DAY-NULM) and in Hindi as - Rashtriya Shahri Aajeevika Mission. Under the scheme urban areas extends the coverage to all the 4041 statutory cities and towns, there by covering almost the entire urban population.
- The scheme has two component one for urban India and other for rural India.
 1. The **Urban component** named as **Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana** will be implemented by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation.**
 2. The **rural component** named as **Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana** will be implemented by the **Ministry of Rural Development.**

HIGHLIGHTS

- Employment through Skill Training and Placement - An expenditure of Rs.15, 000 per person is allowed on training of urban poor which is Rs.18, 000 in North-East and J&K. Social Mobilization and Institution
- Development - It will be done through formation of Self-Help Groups (SHG) for training members and hand holding, an initial support of 10, 000 is given for each group. Assistance of Rs.50, 000 is provided to Registered Area Level Federations.
- Subsidy to urban poor - An interest subsidy of 5% - 7% for setting up individual micro-enterprises with a loan of up to 2 lakh and for group enterprises with a loan limit of up to Rs.10 lakhs.
- Shelters for urban homeless - Cost of construction of shelters for urban homeless is fully funded under the Scheme.
- Other means - Development of vendor markets and also the promotion of skills for the vendors through setting up infrastructure and special projects for the rag picker and differently abled etc.

'HAUSLA-2018'

The National Festival for Children of Child Care Institutions (CCIs)- "Hausla 2018" of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) was inaugurated New Delhi.

The inter-Child Care Institution festival draws children from 18 States for the various events like painting competition, athletics meet, football, chess competition and speech writing as part of the Festival.

HIGHLIGHTS

The idea behind the entire event is to provide a national platform for the children from CCIs across India to showcase their talent, to make them realise the hidden talent they possess and to help take it forward in their life.

The theme for the event is "Child Safety".

LOGIX INDIA

Union Minister of Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation, Suresh Prabhu launched the logo and brochure of Logix India 2019 in New Delhi.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Logix India will enable effective international trade logistics and help provide efficient and cost-effective flow of goods on which other commercial sectors depend.
- Logix India 2019 is scheduled to take place in New Delhi from 31st January to 2nd February 2019. The mega logistics event is being organized by the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) as a major initiative to improve logistics cost effectiveness and operational efficiencies for India's global trade.
- **India ranked 44 in the World Bank Logistics Performance Index 2018.**
- Delegates from more than 20 countries including Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq are expected to participate.
- It will focus on investment opportunities in infrastructure development, warehouse consolidation, technology integration and IT enablement and skilling of manpower.
- Logistics costs in India are 13-15% of the product cost, while the global average is 6%.

SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL YOUTH PEACE CONFERENCE

Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti (GSDS), functioning under Ministry of Culture, Government of India has organised a 3 day 'South Asia Regional Youth Peace Conference' in partnership with UNESCO- MGIEP and Standing Together to Enable Peace from November 28-30, 2018.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The objective of the conference was to create a platform to eliminate stereotypes, prejudices across all borders, to understand micro-macro aspect of the issues, identify common challenges and develop plan of action, to build a network of youth leaders.
- The countries represented include: **Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.**
- As part of the ongoing celebrations of the 150th birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, the young people have come together to create an action plan to power the Sustainable Development Goals.
- This conference focuses on building a network for young leaders from South Asian countries working on various social issues, to identify avenues for partnership and collaboration, support and show solidarity towards each other's initiatives, nurture relationships and promote global citizenship to work towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

- The thematic thrust areas include *Gender; Interfaith issues; Food Security in the context of Gandhian vision of village economy; Digital Media; Arts, Democracy and Dialogue.*

MISSION RAKSHA GYAN SHAKTI

Union Defence Minister has launched Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti (Power of Defence Knowledge). It aimed at educating scientists and technologists in defence public sector undertakings and ordnance factories OFs to create more patents.

HIGHLIGHTS

- A target has been set to train approximately 10,000 persons of OFs and DPSUs on IPR in the financial year 2018-19 under the mission.
- Mission Raksha GyanShakti' which aims to provide a boost to the IPR culture in indigenous defence industry.
- The event showcased salient inventions and innovations achieved by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and Ordnance Factories (OFs) which have resulted in successful filing of Intellectual Property Right (IPR) applications.
- An IP Facilitation Cell was established.
- The Directorate General of Quality Assurance (DGQA) has been entrusted with the responsibility of coordinating and implementing the programme.
- The event brought out that the end objective of 'Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti' is to inculcate IP culture in Indian defence manufacturing ecosystem.

HIGH END SKILL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

India's premier National Research Laboratory CSIR-Institute of Microbial Technology (CSIR-IMTECH) announced a new partnership with Merck, a leading German science and technology company, to establish a 'High End Skill Development Centre' in CSIR-IMTECH, Chandigarh.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Equipped with the next generation technologies, like gene editing & single-molecule biomarker detection, the centre will help accelerate healthcare research and train Indian students and researchers in latest life science technologies and make them industry ready.
- This will be a first of its kind, Academia-Industry-led, 'High End Skill Development Centre' laboratory in Chandigarh that has been established to augment Government of India's initiative for skilling India in the area of Life Science.
- This 'High End Skill Development Centre' will enrich skills by conducting workshops, trainings and seminar series on cutting edges life science processes, tools and techniques.
- The Centre will have skill development-oriented curriculum and real-time exposure to the cutting-edge technologies which will be further strengthened after assessing initial outcomes.
- This High-End Skill Development Centre will function on the principle of "no-profit, no-loss" basis and has been primarily created to augment Government of India's initiative for building skills in the area of Life Science.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR HIMACHAL PRADESH

The Union Home Ministry launched Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) for Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh is the first state to launch pan-India single emergency number '112' under ERSS.

HIGHLIGHTS

- To increase the effectiveness of Emergency Response, the ERC has also been integrated with Location Based Services provided by Telecom Service Providers.
- To ensure safety of women, a SHOUT feature has been introduced in '112 India' mobile app to seek immediate assistance from registered volunteers in the vicinity apart from the immediate assistance from Emergency Response Centre. The SHOUT feature is exclusively available to women.
- The '112 India' mobile app will be subsequently rolled out in all States & Union Territories to help people across the country access the unified emergency services.
- Central Government has allocated 321.69 Crore under Nirbhaya Fund for implementation of ERSS project across the country.

NPCC GOT THE MINIRATNA STATUS

National Projects Construction Corporation Limited (NPCC) has been conferred with the status of Miniratna : Category –I by the Government of India. The empowerment of Miniratna Status to NPCC will help the company in taking speedy decisions by enhancing the delegation of powers to the Board.

MAHARATNA STATUS	NAVRATNA STATUS	MINIRATNA STATUS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having Navratna status. • Listed on Indian stock exchange with minimum prescribed public shareholding under SEBI regulations. • Average annual turnover of more than Rs. 25,000 crore, during the last 3 years. • Average annual net worth of more than Rs. 15,000 crore, during the last 3 years. • Average annual net profit after tax of more than Rs. 5,000 crore, during the last 3 years. • Should have significant global presence/international operations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Miniratna Category – I and Schedule 'A' CPSEs, which have obtained 'excellent' or 'very good' rating under the Memorandum of Understanding system in three of the last five years, and have composite score of 60 or above in the six selected performance parameters, namely, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • net profit to net worth, • manpower cost to total cost of production/services, • profit before depreciation, interest and taxes to capital employed, • profit before interest and taxes to turnover • earning per share and • inter-sectoral performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CPSEs which have made profits in the last three years continuously and have positive net worth are eligible to be considered for grant of Miniratna status.

GLOBAL AGRICULTURE & FOOD SUMMIT 2018

Global Agriculture & Food Summit-2018 held at Ranchi.

HIGHLIGHTS

- To reduce the cost of production, Soil Health Card, use of neem-coated urea and schemes related to 'per drop more crop' are being targeted and implemented.

- To promote organic farming, **Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)** was initiated in 2014-15 and for north east **Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCD-NER)** was started
- **National Agriculture Market (eNAM)**, a new market mechanism has been started in order to ensure remunerative price for the farmers' produce while advancing towards 'one nation one market'.
- The **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)** was initiated from Kharif 2016 to overcome the risks related to agriculture against disasters. This scheme covers all food grains, oilseeds and commercial/horticultural crops. All risks - prior to the crop sowing, during the harvest and after harvest - are included in the scheme.
- **Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana** has been started with an allocation of Rs 6,000 crore. The forward and backward linkage of agro processing clusters is being developed in order to enhance food processing capabilities. Close to 20 lakh farmers are being benefitted while also creating employment opportunities for about 5.5 lakh people.

IN-RN EXERCISE KONKAN 18

Naval cooperation between India and the United Kingdom is based on the long term strategic relationship between both countries. The Bilateral KONKAN exercise provides a platform for the two Navies to periodically exercise at sea and in harbour, so as to build interoperability and share best practices.

The KONKAN series of exercises commenced in 2004, and since then has grown in scale. KONKAN-2018 will be conducted from 28 Nov to 06 Dec 18 off Goa with units participating from both navies. The harbour phase is scheduled from 28 Nov to 30 Nov 18, followed by the sea phase from 02 to 06 Dec 18.

AMRUT

"Under the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), over 2400 projects worth Rs. 74,000 crores that are targeted towards improved water supply, sewerage, and drainage have been approved under the State Annual Action Plans for the period 2015-2020".

SMART Cities are also developing smart, sustainable and resilient sanitation systems through public private partnership" he added.

AMRUT

The scheme was launched by Prime Minister in June 2015 with the focus of the urban renewal projects is to establish infrastructure that could ensure adequate robust sewerage networks and water supply for urban transformation.

- Rajasthan was the first state in the country to submit State Annual Action Plan under Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT).
- AMRUT is the new avatar of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM).
- The scheme is dependent with public private partnership model (PPP) model
- AMRUT adopts a project approach to ensure basic infrastructure services relating to **water supply, sewerage, storm-water drains, transportation and development of green spaces and parks with special provision for meeting the needs of children.**
- AMRUT will be implemented in 500 locations with a population of one lakh and above. It would cover some cities situated on stems of main rivers, a few state capitals and important cities located in hilly areas, islands and tourist areas.
- Under this mission, 10% of the budget allocation will be given to states and union territories as incentive based on the achievement of reforms during the previous year.

- Central assistance will be to the extent of 50% of project cost for cities and towns with a population of up to 10 lakhs and one-third of the project cost for those with a population of above 10 lakhs.
- Under this mission, states get the flexibility of designing schemes based on the needs of identified cities and in their execution and monitoring.
- States will only submit state annual action Plans to the centre for broad concurrence based on which funds will be released. But, in a significant departure from JNNURM, the central government will not appraise individual projects.

Recently, MoUD modified the AMRUT reform matrix, creating a template that enables States and cities to go beyond incrementalism and implement transformational changes over three years.

The template spells out five major reforms, such as

1. 'Trust and verify' (40% weightage).
 2. 'Professionalisation of municipal cadre' (25% weightage).
 3. 'Land titling law' (15% weightage).
 4. 'Credit rating' (10% weightage).
 5. 'Value capture finance' (10% weightage).
- AMRUT now sets aside 10 per cent of funds for incentives to be given based on self-assessment by ULBs and corroborated by State-level high-powered steering committees based on the report of independent monitoring agencies.
 - While AMRUT cascades the autonomy to design, monitor and approve projects to states and civic bodies, it also persuades local stakeholders to put more skin in the game by participating in execution.
 - The corpus of the Reforms Incentive Fund, accessible to those adhering to mandates and milestones, has been increased six-fold to Rs. 3,300 per annum for the next three years.
 - The Centre is also increasingly looking at impact-oriented urban programmes where States and ULBs take more responsibility for implementation and sustaining urban infrastructure. So traditional grant-based programmes are being embedded with impact and outcome milestones.
 - JNNURM was considered to have big city bias. AMRUT has cast the net wider, reaching all urban centres with a population of one lakh and more.
 - Under the programme, the number of reforms expected from States and ULBs has decreased, but the number of cities expected to adhere to reforms have increased.
 - Under the new AMRUT reforms, in the initial year, States are also expected to formulate value capture financing policy, tools and rules for all cities with a million plus population. In the subsequent years, they will have to operationalise and implement it.
 - Cities with investment grade rating will be encouraged to float municipal bonds and those below the rating will continue working on improving their ratings.

GANGA MUSEUM

National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) is planning to set up a Ganga Exhibition and a Ganga Museum as an instrument for public outreach, depicting the river's history and mythology, its importance for the livelihood of a huge population, as well as efforts for Ganga Rejuvenation.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Expert from India and the European Union are meeting for two days to hold an International Workshop on "Developing a Ganga Museum Concept: Exchanging Experiences and Ideas between India and Europe" along with GIZ India as a part of Indo German Development Co-operation to exchange ideas and experiences regarding various aspects of the proposed museum, knowledge centre and exhibition.
- NMCG has been working towards the possibility for the establishment of a Ganga Museum.

NMCG

- NMCG is the implementation wing of National Council for Rejuvenation, Protection and Management of River Ganga (referred as National Ganga Council).
- It has a two-tier management structure and comprises of Governing Council and Executive Committee, both of the tiers are headed by the Director General (DG), NMCG.
- Executive Committee is authorized to approve projects under mission up to R.s 1000 crore.
- Similar to structure at national level, State Program Management Groups (SPMGs) acts as implementing arm of State Ganga Committees
- This structure attempts to bring all stakeholders on one platform to take a holistic approach towards the task of Ganga cleaning and rejuvenation
- In 2016, National Ganga Council has replaced National Ganga River Basin Authority(NGRBA) which was constituted under the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act (EPA), 1986.

DISHA DASHBOARD

- It aims to create a data driven governance solution for elected representatives for planning, monitoring and evaluating multiple parameters of various schemes under DISHA.
- The DISHA application with 6 schemes of 3 Ministries integrated to it was launched as a single source of information in respect of schemes run by various Ministries.
- Eventually it will cover the key parameters of all the 42 identified Programs/Schemes of the participating Ministries/Department.
- The DISHA Dashboard aims at creating a data-driven governance solution for elected representatives for planning, monitoring and evaluating multiple parameters of various schemes under DISHA.
- As on date, 18 schemes of 9 Ministries have been integrated with the DISHA Dashboard.

OBJECTIVES

- **Access:** The DISHA Dashboard will allow viewing of the data coming in from various schemes dynamically, which gets updated periodically.
- **Users:** The DISHA Dashboard will have multiple users as per their respective areas of jurisdiction. To illustrate, MPs and MLAs will be able to look at the data at the PC and AC levels in their areas of jurisdiction. MPs would be able to drill down to the PC level and MLAs will be able to drill down to the AC level and up to a village or Gram Panchayat level.
- **Periodicity of Data:** The DISHA Dashboard will show historic data (wherever possible). The data will be updated as the MIS gets updated.
- **Granularity:** The dashboard will have the following drill down flow to show the most granular data for a scheme, subject to availability:

BLUE REVOLUTION INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND

The Union Government in its Budget in its Budget 2018 has set aside Rs. 8000 crore for setting up of a dedicated Blue Revolution Infrastructure Development Fund (BRIDF).

OBJECTIVES

- The fund would fill the large infrastructure gaps in fisheries sector.
- Create employment opportunity to the rural population in fishing and allied activities.
- Contributes towards enhancement of fish production and productivity.
- Offers many fold benefits.
- Fulfill the requirements of tapping the full fisheries potential.

HIGHLIGHTS

- BRIDF will provide concessional finance to the State Governments/Union Territories, State entities, cooperatives, individual entrepreneurs, etc. for development of fisheries infrastructure facilities both in marine and inland fisheries sector.
- The infrastructure facilities to be funded under the BRIDF will broadly cover development of fishing harbours and fish landing centres, creation of cold chain infrastructure facilities such as ice plants cold storage, fish transport facilities, fish processing units, fish markets; fish seed farms, fish feed mills/plants cage culture in reservoirs, mariculture activities, introduction of deep-sea fishing vessels, setting up of disease diagnostic and aquatic quarantine facilities etc.
- The fund has the potential to benefit over 4 million marine and inland fisher folk especially women, SHGs, weaker sections, due to availability of modern infrastructure and added value of produce.
- The fund would be created in collaboration with NABARD, NCDC and Specified commercial banks. National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) will be the Nodal Implementing Agency for overall coordination of the BRIDF activities.

PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA

As of March, 2014, 97838 habitations (55%) were connected. Today 1,30,947 habitations stand connected under PMGSY and another 14,620 through State Governments' programmes bringing the total habitations connected to 82%.

The PMGSY set out to provide all weather road connectivity to 1,78,184 habitations of 500 population in plain areas and 250 population in hilly areas.

HIGHLIGHTS

1,10,000 kilometers of upgradation is proposed as PMGSY-III. To do so, annual funding support of Rs. 19,000 crores will be maintained, from the Central Government up to 2022. Prime Minister's dream of "**New India 2022**" requires connectivity and also consolidations of roads that connect markets, to enable farmers to get the benefit of markets.

15% of all PMGSY roads are now being taken up through use of innovative green technologies like use of waste plastic, geo-textiles, fly ash, iron and copper slag and cold mix. This not only reduces cost of construction, but also promotes use of local and 'waste' materials, thereby reducing carbon footprint.

PMGSY

- The PMGSY is under the authority of the Ministry of Rural Development and was begun on 25 December 2000
- Aims to provide all-weather road connectivity to all eligible unconnected habitations.
- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- The programme envisages connecting all eligible unconnected habitations with :
 1. A population of 500 persons and above in plain areas
 2. 250 persons and above in Hill States, Tribal (Schedule-V) areas, the Desert Areas (as identified in Desert Development Programme) and 82 Selected Tribal and Backward Districts under Integrated Action Plan (IAP) as identified by the Ministry of Home Affairs/Planning Commission.
- The programme also has an Upgradation component in order to ensure full farm to market connectivity.
- The Rural Roads is one of the six components of Bharat Nirman
- World Bank has supported PMGSY since its inception.
- For this scheme, 75 paise per litre has been earmarked out of cess levied on high speed diesel.
- It considers habitation as unit for providing connectivity and not a revenue village.

- The scheme encourages use of “Green Technologies” and non-conventional materials (like waste plastic, geo-textiles, fly-ash, iron and copper slag etc) for constructing rural roads.
- Funding pattern: In ratio of 60:40 between Centre and State for all States except for 8 North Eastern and 3 Himalayan States (Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu & Kashmir) for which it is 90:10.

NATIONAL RURBAN MISSION

Prime Minister launched the SP Mukharjee National Rurban Mission (SPM NRM)

The National Rurban Mission aims to spur social, economic and infrastructure development in rural areas by developing a cluster of 300 Smart Villages over the next 3 years across the country. PM referred to rurbans as territories ‘with soul of village and facilities of city’. SPMRM was announced in the Union Budget 2014-15.

BACKGROUND

- A predecessor to SPMRM was the **Provision of Urban Amenities to Rural Areas (PURA)**, announced in 2003.
- This concept was given by former president Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and discussed in his book ‘Target 3 Billion’.
- It aimed at Provision of urban amenities and livelihood opportunities in rural areas to bridge the rural urban divide thereby reducing the migration from rural to urban areas.
- PURA was for holistic and accelerated development of compact areas around a potential growth center in a Panchayat (or group of Panchayats) through Public Private Partnership (PPP) by providing livelihood opportunities and urban amenities to improve the quality of life in rural areas. PURA is treated as a “Project” and not a government scheme – Private sector partner had to prepare a detailed business

HIGHLIGHTS

NRM through development of rurban growth clusters aims at catalyzing overall regional growth for simultaneously benefiting the rural as well as urban areas of the country.

OBJECTIVES

1. Strengthening of rural areas and de-burdening the urban areas.
2. Balanced regional development and growth of the country by simultaneously benefiting the rural as well as urban areas of the country.

- The State Governments would identify the clusters which have latent potential for growth in accordance with the Framework for Implementation prepared by the Union Ministry of Rural Development.
- States government will prepare Integrated Cluster Action Plans for Rurban Clusters. It will be comprehensive plan documents detailing out the strategy for the cluster development.
- The clusters will be geographically contiguous Gram Panchayats with different population and follow administrative convergence units of Gram Panchayats.
- **Population Requirements:**
 1. Coastal and plain areas must have population of about 25000 to 50000.
 2. Hilly, desert or tribal areas must have 5000 to 15000.
 3. There will be a separate approach for selection of clusters in Tribal and Non-Tribal Districts.
- **Fourteen components:** Optimum level of development components include (a) Skill development training (b) Agro Processing/Agro Storage/ Services and Warehousing (c) Sanitation (d) Digital Literacy (e) Solid and

liquid waste management (f) Provision of piped water supply (g) Village streets and drains (h) Street lights (i) Upgrading school/higher education facilities (j) fully equipped mobile health unit (k) Service Centers for electronic delivery of citizen centric services/e-gram connectivity (l) Public transport (m) Inter-village road connectivity (n) LPG gas connections.

SHARADA PEETH

In the run-up to the inauguration of the Kartarpur corridor, Kashmiri Pandit groups were demanding a similar arrangement for pilgrims to Sharada Peeth, an important temple across the Line of Control.

HIGHLIGHTS



- The ancient temple of Sharada (also spelt Sharda or Sarada) and the adjacent ruins of Sharada University lie in Neelam Valley, 160 km from Muzaffarabad, and right across the Line of Control in a small village, Shardi or Sardi, where the river Neelam (Kishanganga) converges with the Madhumati and Sargun streams.
- The legend is that when there was a war between evil and good, goddess Sharada saved the pot of knowledge and carried it on her head to these mountains where she dug the earth and hid it. Then she turned herself into stone to cover this pot carrying knowledge. Thus, there used to be only a rectangular stone covering the floor of the Sharada temple.
- Sharda in Kashmir has been described as the Shakti embodying the three separate manifestations i.e. Sharda (the goddess of learning) Narda (the goddess of knowledge) and Vagdevi (the goddess of articulation).
- Sharda encompasses knowledge, learning and articulation.
- During the reign of Kanishka I, Sharada was the largest academic institution in entire Central Asia. Side by side with imparting education in Buddhist religion, history, geography, structural science, logic and philosophy was taught. This University had evolved its own script, known as Sharad. At one point, there were five thousand resident scholars and it had the world's biggest library also.

CRISPR CAS 9

A scientist in China claims to have created the world's first genetically-edited babies using CRISPR technique. The twin girls born with their DNA altered to prevent them from contracting HIV. This kind of gene-editing is banned in most countries as the technology is still experimental and DNA changes can pass to future generations, potentially with unforeseen side-effects.

GENE EDITING

- **Genes** contain the bio-information that defines any individual. Physical attributes like height, skin or hair colour, more subtle features like intelligence or eyesight, susceptibility to certain diseases, and even behavioural traits can be attributed to information encoded in the genetic material.
- **Gene "editing"** — sometimes expressed in related, but not always equivalent, terms like genetic modification, genetic manipulation or genetic engineering — is not new, and is widely practised in agriculture, to increase productivity or resistance to diseases, etc.

CRISPR

CRISPR (short for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) technology is a relatively new, and the most efficient, tool for gene “editing”. The technology replicates a natural defence mechanism in bacteria to fight virus attacks, using a special protein called **Cas9**.

- **CRISPR-Cas9 technology** behaves like a cut-and-paste mechanism on DNA strands that contain genetic information. The specific location of the genetic codes that need to be changed, or “edited”, is identified on the DNA strand, and then, using the Cas9 protein, which acts like a pair of scissors, that location is cut off from the strand. A DNA strand, when broken, has a natural tendency to repair itself.
- CRISPR-Cas9 is a simple, effective, and incredibly precise technology.
- It allows researchers to permanently modify genes in living cells and organisms.
- This can be used to correct mutations at precise locations in the human genome to treat genetic causes of diseases.
- Correcting the mutation in an embryo ensures that the child is born healthy and the defective gene is not passed on to future generations.
- The gene editing tool has **two components**:
 1. A single-guide RNA (sgRNA) that contains a sequence that can bind to DNA.
 2. The Cas9 enzyme which acts as a molecular scissor that can cleave DNA.

ABORIGINALS OF ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

‘Civilisation’ has destroyed the aboriginals of Andaman & Nicobar. The death of an interloper on North Sentinel Island underlines the threat to the 55,000-yr-old sovereignty of the Islands’ last tribe standing. After 12 years, the Sentinelese have again rejected external contact in the most emphatic way possible.

North Sentinel Island, Strait Island and Little Andaman Island, home to the **Sentinelese, Great Andamanese, and Onge** respectively, were on the August list, as were nine Nicobar islands that are home to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

BACKGROUND

The Great Andamanese, an alliance of ten coastal clans, fought the **Battle of Aberdeen** against the **British** in 1859, and were enslaved and eventually decimated. The seafaring Onge were forced to make room for the settlers. The forest-dwelling Jarawa fiercely resisted outsiders until the late 1990s. The reclusive Sentinelese still hold their tiny fort. All remain animistic in faith.

Missionaries had greater success on the Nicobar Islands to the south, which lie on the ancient marine trade route between Europe and the Far East. Evangelists started to approach the Nicobar tribes from the 15th century onward, and a Christian movement eventually succeeded on the Islands during the final decades of British occupation.

The **Nicobar tribes are Mongoloid; the Andaman tribes, including the Sentinelese, are Negrito** — evidence for the Homo sapiens migration from East Africa some 70,000 years ago. The Sentinelese are a **pre-Neolithic people who have inhabited North Sentinel Island** for an estimated 55,000 years without contact with the outside world. They are short statured possibly due to the “island effect” that causes genetic limitation over time.

The Sentinelese have, however, remained hostile from the time efforts began to reach out to them in 1967. The government gave up in the mid-1990s, and in order to safeguard their health and sovereignty, decided that no one could enter a 5-km buffer zone around their island, which was already out of bounds.

Under the **Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963**, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands are a “Restricted Area” in which foreigners with a restricted area permit (RAP) can stay on 13 islands, and make day visits to another 11.

CURRENT SCENARIO

But in recent years, the Andaman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Andaman Association of Tour Operators have pressed to have the RAP restrictions relaxed. In August 2018, the Home Ministry dropped the RAP requirement for visiting 29 inhabited islands until 2022, even though “separate approvals... continue to be required for visiting Reserve Forests, Wildlife Sanctuaries and Tribal Reserve.”

The Sentinelese and other aboriginal tribes of the archipelago are protected under **The Andaman and Nicobar (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956**. As per these regulations:

- Traditional areas occupied by the tribes are declared as Reserves
- It prohibited entry of all persons to reserves except those with authorisation.
- Photographing or filming the tribe members is also an offence.

The rules were amended later to enhance penalties. But restricted area permits were relaxed for some islands recently.

ISSUES

- Due to their isolation, it is unlikely the Sentinelese have immunity against even common diseases. A large chunk of the population of the 10 Great Andamanese tribes was wiped out after the indigenous peoples caught **syphilis, measles, and influenza** on an epidemic scale following contact with the early settlers.
- When NH 223 was being built in the 1980s, the Jarawa repeatedly attacked workers. The state power-fenced the construction site, and several Jarawa were electrocuted.
- In 2002, the Supreme Court ordered that the road be closed, and the 2004 Jarawa Policy called for a supplementary route to reduce traffic on the Andaman Trunk Road. A sea route was to start by March 2015, but the highway remains open.
- In January 2014, eight Jarawa girls were abducted by settlers, and local media quoted a Jarawa youth as naming offenders who allegedly often entered the reserve to lure Jarawa women.
- Fewer than 50 Great Andamanese are alive today. In 2010, Boa, the last of the Bo, a Great Andamanese tribe, died — taking with her the knowledge and language of her people. A few months earlier, another ancient language, Khora, had passed with Boa’s neighbour Boro.
- In December 2008, at least 15 Onge men died after drinking from a plastic container that had washed up on **Dugong Creek**. The Onge, who now number fewer than 100, have abandoned hunting-gathering and depend entirely on government help.
- From 2004 onward, the 400-odd surviving Jarawa began to retreat into the forest, closing the window of their willing interaction with the world. But the highway continues to bring the world — and sexual exploitation, substance abuse and disease — into their shrinking sanctuary.

The Sentinelese have been the exception — protected by coral reefs that make landing on their island dangerous, and by the tribe’s unwavering hostility towards outsiders.

HUMAN MICROBIOME

From November 19 to 22, Pune hosted an international conference on microbiome research — a field of study that is still in its infancy in India.

The project will include collection of saliva, stool and skin swabs of 20,000 Indians across various ethnic groups from different geographical regions. India provides for a wide range of research with more than 4,500 ethnic groups and presence of two global biodiversity hotspots (Himalayan range and Western Ghats).

HUMAN MICROBIOME

The human body carries diverse communities of microorganisms, which are mainly bacterial. These are referred to as “human microbiome”. These organisms play a key role in many aspects of host physiology, ranging from metabolism of otherwise complex indigestible carbohydrates and fats to producing essential vitamins, maintaining immune systems and acting as a first line of defense against pathogens.

SIGNIFICANCE

Research on the human microbiome has thrown light on various aspects — how different parts of the human body are occupied by characteristic microbial communities, and how various factors contribute in shaping the composition of the microbiome, including the genetics, dietary habits, age, geographic location and ethnicity. These studies laid a strong foundation to decipher the microbiome’s implications on health and a wide range of diseases.

AIR QUALITY LIFE INDEX

A new index has found that fossil fuel-driven particulate air pollution reduces global average life expectancy by 1.8 years, making it the single greatest threat to human health. Produced by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC), the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) — the ‘L’ stands for ‘Life’.

HIGHLIGHTS

AQLI found that particulate pollution’s effect on life expectancy exceeds that of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, behavioural killers like cigarette smoking, and even war. Compared to 1.8 years from particulate pollution, first-hand cigarette smoke leads to a reduction in global average life expectancy of about 1.6 years. Alcohol and drugs reduce life expectancy by 11 months; unsafe water and sanitation take off 7 months; and HIV/AIDS, 4 months. Conflict and terrorism take off 22 days.

- In India, people would live 4.3 years longer on an average if their country met WHO guidelines on particulate concentration – expanding the average life expectancy at birth there from 69 to 73 years.
- Loss of life expectancy is highest in Asia, exceeding 6 years in many parts of India and China. India and China, which make up 36% of the world’s population, account for 73% of all years of life lost due to particulate pollution.
- The AQLI is based on a pair of peer-reviewed studies that quantify the causal relationship between long-term human exposure to particulate pollution and life expectancy. The results from these studies are then combined with hyper-localised, global particulate matter measurements.

GAUSE’S LAW IN ECOLOGY

- Also known as the competitive exclusion principle, this refers to the proposition that the populations of two competing species cannot remain at stable levels over time.
- When two species compete for control over a limited amount of resources, the dominant species will take advantage over its weak competitor.
- This will cause the weaker species to get excluded from its previous territory and its population to drop over time.

NATIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

- National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) is a non-profit public limited company set up by Ministry of Finance as Public Private Partnership (PPP) model.

- The Government of India through Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) holds 49% of the share capital of NSDC, while the private sector has the balance 51% of the share capital.
- NSDC aims to promote skill development by catalyzing creation of large, quality and for-profit vocational institutions.
- Further, the organization provides funding to build scalable and profitable vocational training initiatives.
- NCDC has a differentiated focus on 21 sectors for understanding of their viability and make every sector attractive to private investment.

INCLUSIVE WEALTH REPORT (IWR)

IWR is a biennial effort led by the UN Environment, which provides important insights into long-term economic growth and human well-being.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Index measures the wealth of nations through a comprehensive analysis of a country's productive base and the country's wealth in terms of progress, well-being and long-term sustainability.
- The biennial report finds The Republic of Korea, Singapore and Malta as the nations that have had the most economic growth.
- The report also revealed that carbon damage is relatively larger in high-income countries.

UN ENVIRONMENT

- The United Nations Environment Program (UN Environment) is global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda.
- It promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.
- The World Meteorological Organization and UN Environment established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988.
- UN Environment is also one of several Implementing Agencies for the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol, and it is also a member of the United Nations Development Group.

HEDGING IN CPMPANIES

RBI has recently relaxed norms for External Commercial Borrowing (ECB) by reducing the mandatory hedging provision to 70% from the current 100%.

HIGHLIGHTS

- A hedge is an investment to reduce the risk of adverse price movements in an asset.
- The notification has come after strengthening of the dollar in the recent times which made ECB route unattractive to companies.
- A notification issued by RBI highlights that mandatory hedge coverage has been reduced under Track I of the ECB framework.
- Track I refer to medium-term foreign currency-denominated ECBs with a minimum average maturity of 3-5 years.
- ECBs raised prior to this circular would be required to mandatorily roll over their existing hedge only to the extent of 70% of outstanding ECB exposure.
- The move will help reduce costs for companies that raise foreign funds.

HOG DEER

Recently searchers reported the presence of a small population of hog deer in Keibul Lamjao National Park (KLNP), Manipur.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The study indicates that the western limit of hog deer is Manipur and not central Thailand as believed earlier.
- Two sub-species of hog deer have been reported from its range.
- The western race is distributed from Pakistan and the Terai grasslands (along the Himalayan foothills, from Punjab to Arunachal Pradesh).
- The eastern race of hog deer is found in Thailand, Indo-China, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.
- The species has lost ground in most of its distribution range, a small and isolated population of under 250 was reported from Cambodia.
- The hog deer is an **endangered species** in the IUCN Red List and is protected under Schedule I of the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

SIBERIAN UNICORN

Genetic analyses have shown that the Siberian unicorn was the last surviving member of a unique family of rhinos.

- Siberian unicorn are giant, shaggy Ice Age rhinoceros, and they are extraordinary single horn.
- Weighing up to 3.5 tonnes with a single enormous horn, the Siberian unicorn roamed the steppe of Russia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Northern China.
- The Siberian unicorn was a very close relative of the extinct woolly rhino and living Sumatran rhino.

VIRTUAL CLIMATE SUMMIT

It was announced in the Global Environment Facility (GEF) assembly recently held in Vietnam. It is the brainchild of Marshall Islands President who insisted upon such summit in the GEF assembly.

- The summit is convened by the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) in its capacity as the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) chair.
- Its main aim is to encourage the international community to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.
- It is an innovative climate summit which is an entirely online event to be a carbon neutral event.
- It is the world's first ever political global meeting to be held in online.
- Its focus is on to renew political momentum in tackling climate change.

CLIMATE VULNERABLE FORUM

- The climate vulnerable forum is an international partnership of countries highly vulnerable to a warming planet.

- The Forum serves as a South-South cooperation platform for participating governments to act together to deal with global climate change.
- It brings together climate vulnerable developing countries from across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific.
- The forum held its first meeting in Maldives in the year 2009.
- CVF High-level meeting was last convened during the UNFCCC Climate Change Conference in Paris (COP21).
- The **Manila-Paris Declaration** and the 2016-2018 Roadmap of the CVF, adopted at this meeting, spell out the CVF's planned efforts during this time period.
- The forum has a rotating chairmanship that has been held by Maldives, Kiribati, Bangladesh, Costa Rica and Philippines, Ethiopia and currently held by Republic of Marshall.

HANTAVIRUSES

- Hantaviruses are a group of viruses that may be carried by some rodents.
- It was first identified in the year 1993.
- It can cause severe and sometimes fatal respiratory infections and are known to infect lung cells.
- It can cause a rare but deadly disease called Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS).
- It is transmitted to humans who inhale the virus from the urine, faeces, or saliva of infected rodents.
- No treatments or vaccines are available.
- Infections caused by them are expected to increase in the coming decades as temperatures across the globe rise due to climate change.

MIGRATION PACT

The Australian government has recently decided to withdraw from the UN's Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Earlier, USA, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland had withdrawn from the agreement.
- The agreement was signed in the UNGA by adopting a political declaration "New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants" in 2016.
- The declaration pledged to uphold the rights of refugees, help them resettle and ensure they have access to education.
- The pact is not binding on member countries.
- It is aiming to make migration all over the world safer.
- It addresses issues such as how to protect migrants and how to integrate them into new countries or how to return them to their original home countries.
- Under the agenda, member States committed to cooperate internationally to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration.

BIODIVERSITY IN ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

Zoological Survey of India has recently published a report on faunal diversity of islands of India.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is the first time in India that database of all faunal species found in Andaman & Nicobar (A&N) island has been documented.
- It proves that the A&N island, comprising only 0.25% of India's geographical area, are home to more than 10% of the country's fauna species.

- There are 1,067 endemic faunal species found only on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and nowhere else.
- Some of the endemic species in the island are Narcondam hornbill, Nicobar megapode, the Nicobar tree shrew, the Long-tailed Nicobar macaque, and the Andaman day gecko.

DATA CITY PROGRAMM

The programme was launched by the State government of Karnataka in Bengaluru.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The programme aims at solving burning issues of the city using innovative solutions developed by startups from a pool of applications.
- It is a 7 months long programme where the corporates, startups, government agencies and citizens will work closely to find solutions of city's growing issues.
- It is the first Data City programme launched in Asia.
- The State government has entered into a partnership with NUMA, an international innovation and learning hub, and SUEZ, a France based utility company for this project.

GOAT PLAGUE

A smart vaccine has recently been developed for Goat Plague disease by the researchers from UK and India.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The vaccine has the potential to help eradicate goat plague, which causes losses of billions of dollars a year.
- Goat plague is a highly contagious viral disease that afflicts goats and sheep in many parts of the country.
- It is caused by a morbillivirus in the family of paramyxoviruses, that is related to rinderpest, measles and canine distemper.
- It kills small ruminants in large numbers unless they are vaccinated.
- Apart from India, goat plague is prevalent in many African countries, West Asia, China and Mongolia.
- It is listed in the OIE (World organization for Animal Health) Terrestrial Animal Health Code, and countries are obligated to report the disease to the OIE.

INDIAN VILLAGES' ACCESS TO ENERGY

Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) recently released a report on Indian villages' access to energy.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The survey was conducted in six of the country's major energy-deprived states - Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and West Bengal.
- It has found a strong improvement in Indian villages' access to energy.
- Towards Universal Electricity - Electricity through the national grid is now the main lighting source for 75% of India's rural households.
- In 2015, when the last round of the survey was held, most of this population was burning kerosene oil for light.
- Cooking Fuel - In the past three years, the number of rural households using LPG as primary cooking fuel has also more than doubled to 39%.
- Thus, they have shifted from firewood to LPG as cooking fuel and from kerosene oil to electricity for lighting.

- The increase in rural energy access shows at least a partial success of the Ujjwala and Saubhagya welfare schemes.
- Saubhagya aims to connect every rural household to the national power grid.
- Ujjwala provides low-income families with free LPG connections.

BHARAT NET PROJECT

The BharatNet project failed to deliver its intended purpose which calls for a complete overhaul of the implementation machinery.

BHARAT NET PROJECT

BharatNet is a project of national importance to establish, by 2017, a highly scalable network infrastructure accessible on a non-discriminatory basis, to provide on demand, affordable broadband connectivity of **2 Mbps to 20 Mbps** for all households and on demand capacity to all institutions, to realise the vision of Digital India, in partnership with States and the private sector.

The entire project is being funded by Universal service Obligation Fund (USOF), which was set up for improving telecom services in rural and remote areas of the country. The objective is to facilitate the delivery of e-governance, e-health, e-education, e-banking, Internet and other services to the rural India.

The three-phase implementation of the BharatNet project is as follows:

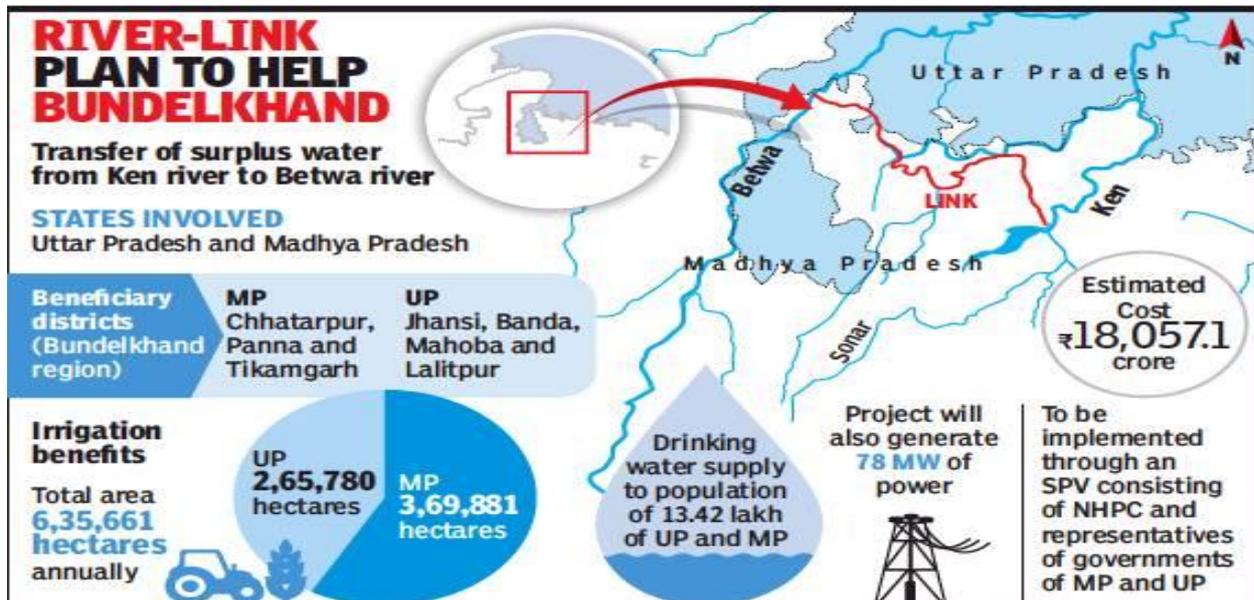
1. The first phase envisages providing one lakh gram panchayats with broadband connectivity by laying underground optic fibre cable (OFC) lines by December 2017.
2. The second phase will provide connectivity to all 2,50,500 gram panchayats in the country using an optimal mix of underground fiber, fiber over power lines, radio and satellite media.
 - It is to be completed by March 2019.
 - For success in phase-2, which will also involve laying of OFC over electricity poles, the participation of states will be important. This is a new element of the BharatNet strategy as the mode of connectivity by aerial OFC has several advantages, including lower cost, speedier implementation, easy maintenance and utilization of existing power line infrastructure.
 - The last mile connectivity to citizens was proposed to be provided creating Wi-Fi hotspots in gram panchayats.
3. In the third phase from 2019 to 2023, state-of-the-art, future-proof network, including fiber between districts and blocks, with ring topology to provide redundancy would be created.

SANGAI FESTIVAL

- Sangai Festival is an annual cultural extravaganza in Manipur, the festival helps to promote Manipur as a world class tourism destination.
- Every edition of the festival showcases the tourism potential of the state in the field of Arts & Culture, Handloom, Handicrafts, Indigenous Sports, Cuisine, Music and Adventure sports of the state etc.
- The 'Festival' is named after the State animal, Sangai, the brow-antlered deer found only in Manipur.
- The State's classical dance form, 'RasLeela' is quite famous all over the world for its distinctiveness from any other dance forms in India.

SANGAI DEER

- The Sangai is an **endemic and endangered** subspecies of brow-antlered deer found only in Manipur, India.
- It is found in its natural habitat only at **Keibul Lamjao National Park** over the floating biomass in the south eastern part of Loktak Lake.

KEN-BETWA LINK PROJECT

- Ken River is one of the major rivers of the Bundelkhand region of central India, it originates from Kaimur Range in Jabalpur district.
- Betwa River or Betravati is a tributary of the Yamuna, It rises in the Vindhya Range, north of Hoshangabad in Madhya Pradesh.
- The Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP) is India's first river linking project started in 2017.
- It aims to transfer surplus water from the Ken River in MP to Betwa in UP to irrigate the drought-prone Bundelkhand region spread across the two states.

MARIJUANA

- Cannabis-based drugs have the potential to meet the unmet needs of terminally-ill cancer patients and of those suffering from epilepsy and sickle cell anemia (a hereditary disease that afflicts nearly two crore tribal living mainly in central States).
- Indian scientists are researching on the active ingredients present in the cannabis plant in the management of these diseases.
- Two active compounds of cannabis that are being explored for medical use are Tetrahydro Cannabinol (THC) and Cannabidiol (CBD).
- In India recreational use of cannabis is prohibited under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.
- The bar does not apply to an edible preparation called bhang, which is allowed in some States.

IMPORTING OIL

US administration has granted India and 7 other countries waivers on purchase of oil from Iran.

- Saudi Arabia is India's top exporter for crude oil followed by Iraq, Nigeria, Venezuela.
- Iran is placed 5th for the last six years though imports from Iran have increased in recent years.
- Vadinar in Gujarat has handled the maximum crude oil imports. It is followed by Sikka, Jamnagar in Gujarat and Paradip in Odisha.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

- **Preferential Trade Agreement** - It is a trading bloc that gives preferential access to certain products from the participating countries by reducing tariffs but not abolishing them completely.
- **Free Trade Agreement** – It is a trade bloc, which eliminates tariffs, import quotas, and preferences on most (if not all) goods and services traded between participating countries.
- **Customs Union** – It is an agreement to have free trade among countries and to adopt common external barriers against any other country interested in exporting to these countries.
- **Common Market** - A type of custom union where there are common policies on product regulation, and free movement of goods and services, capital and labour.
- **Economic Union** – It is a trade bloc with common policies on product regulation, freedom of movement of goods, services and the factors of production (capital and labour) and a common external trade policy.

EASE OF DOING BUSINESS GRAND CHALLENGE

It was launched to resolve 7 identified 'Ease of doing business' problems with the use of cutting edge technologies.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The objective is to tap the potential of young Indians, startups and other private enterprises to provide solutions to complex problems using current technology.
- Ease of doing business report is published by World Bank.
- India's rank in 2018 has recorded a jump of 23 positions against its rank of 100 in 2017 to be placed at 77th rank among 190 countries.
- India has improved its rank by 53 positions in the last two years and 65 positions in the last four years (2014-18).

BASIC NATIONS MEET

Environment ministers and climate change negotiators from Brazil, South Africa, China and India (BASIC) Countries recently convened in Delhi.

HIGHLIGHTS

- They aimed at pushing Climate finance from developed countries.
- Developed countries have committed to providing \$100 billion annually from 2020 as part of their NDC.
- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) are the commitments made by countries to adapt to climate change and reduce emissions.
- It is ahead of the 24th United Nations Conference of Parties (COP) meeting at Katowice, Poland in December, 2018.
- It will specify how countries will agree to take forward commitments taken at the 21st COP in Paris in 2015.

BASIC GROUP

The BASIC countries (also Basic countries or BASIC) are a bloc of four large newly industrialized countries – Brazil, South Africa, India and China – formed by an agreement on 28 November 2009. The four committed to

act jointly at the Copenhagen climate summit, including a possible united walk-out if their common minimum position was not met by the developed nations.

APEC MEET

The recent Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit was held in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The meeting was topped by disputes between the US and China over trade, security and which would be the better investment partner for the region.
- APEC is a forum for 21 Pacific Rim member economies that promotes free trade throughout the Asia Pacific region.
- It is headquartered at Singapore.
- It was established due to growing inter dependence among Asia Pacific regions, increasing regional trade blocs, to diffuse growing power of Japan.
- The criterion for membership is that the member is a separate economy, rather than a state and the result of it is the inclusion of Taiwan.
- APEC also includes three official observers: ASEAN, the Pacific Islands Forum and the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council.
- India is not in the grouping.

SIMBEX 18

SIMBEX is the Maritime Bilateral Exercise between Singapore and India, held in the Bay of Bengal.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The exercise had witnessed successful missile engagements of aerial targets by ships of the two navies, anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and rocket firings.
- Indian Navy Hawk Jet fighters and INS Shakti has participated in the exercise.
- SIMBEX 18 marks the largest edition of these exercises thus far which have been progressing uninterrupted for the since inception in 1994.

AGNI I

Recently the night trial of the indigenously developed nuclear capable Agni-I India's surface-to-surface ballistic missile was successfully conducted from the Abdul Kalam Island off Odisha coast.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Agni missile is a family of medium to intercontinental range ballistic missiles developed by DRDO of India under the **Integrated Guided Missile Development Program**.
- The missile has a strike range of beyond 700 km has a specialized navigation systems and it has already been inducted in the Indian Army.

INTEGRATED GUIDED MISSILE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The project started in 1982–83 with popular political support from the successive governments and bestowed under the leadership of Abdul Kalam who oversaw its ending in 2008 after these strategic missiles were successfully developed.

FIVE MAJOR MISSILES DEVELOPED UNDER THIS PROGRAM

1. Short range surface-to-surface missile – **Prithvi.**
2. Short range low-level surface-to-air missile – **Trishul.**
3. Medium range surface-to-air missile – **Akash.**
4. Third-generation anti-tank missile- **Nag.**
5. Intermediate-Range Surface-to-Surface Ballistic missile - **Agni**

AMUR FALCON

- Amur falcons are known to breed in southeast Russia and northern China.
- These birds migrate west through India and across the Arabian Sea to southern Africa where they spend their winters, making a round-trip of at least 20,000 km every year, travelling between their breeding and wintering grounds.
- This arduous journey includes a non-stop flight over the Arabian Sea after passing across India.
- The resilient falcons arrive in large numbers, during October in Nagaland and a few other places in north-eastern India.
- The Amur falcon is protected under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

REMISSION OF CONVICTS

Three girls of TN Agricultural University were burnt alive when their bus was set afire by 3 after Jayalalithaa was convicted in a corruption case in 2000.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Three convicts were initially sentenced to death, but the punishment was commuted to life in prison by the Supreme Court 2 years ago.
- They were recently granted remission and set free. TN governor cleared the government's recommendation to release them prematurely.
- The Governor had earlier returned the file seeking remission of their life sentence for reconsideration by the government.
- However, the State sent back the file sticking to its stand, following which the governor accepted the recommendation to release them.
- **Legal provision – Section 433A** deals with the restriction of powers of remission or commutation in certain cases.
- It says that, a sentence of death imposed on a person has been commuted under section 433 into one of imprisonment for life, such person shall not be released from prison unless he/she had served at least 14 years of imprisonment.

PARDONING TERMS

- **Pardon** - It removes both the sentence and the conviction and completely absolves the convict from all the sentences, punishments and disqualifications.
- **Commutation** - It denotes the substitution of one form of punishment for a lighter form.
- **Remission** - It implies reducing the period of sentence without changing its character.
- **Respite** - It denotes awarding a lesser sentence in place of one originally awarded due to some special fact, such as the physical disability of convict or the pregnancy of a woman offender.
- **Reprieve** - It implies a stay of the execution of a sentence (especially that of death) for a temporary period. Its purpose is to enable the convict to have time to seek pardon or commutation from the President/Governor.

UNESCO'S INTANGIBLE HERITAGE LIST

The United Nations added reggae music, born in the 1960s and made famous by artists like Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, to its list of "intangible heritage" for the world to treasure. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization added the genre to its list of global cultural treasures deemed worthy of protection and promotion.

HIGHLIGHTS

- According to the UN, reggae's contributions to international discussions on issues of injustice, resistance, love and humanity "underscore the dynamics of the element as being at once cerebral, socio-political, sensual and spiritual".
- While in its embryonic state reggae music was the voice of the marginalised, the music is now played and embraced by a wide cross-section of society, including various genders, ethnic and religious groups.
- The other items added to the list of intangible heritage include **Chidaoba, an ancient form of martial art practised by men in Georgia; hurling, an Irish field game; Japan's Raiho-shin, the ritual visits of deities in masks and costumes; Jordan's As-Samer, which consists mainly of dancing and singing on special occasions; and the traditional spring festive rites of horse breeders in Kazakhstan.**

UNESCO'S INTANGIBLE HERITAGE LIST

UNESCO established its Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage with the aim of ensuring better protection of important intangible cultural heritages worldwide and the awareness of their significance.

- This list is published by the **Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage**, the members of which are elected by State Parties meeting in a General Assembly
- The list was established in 2008 when the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage took effect.
- As of 2010 the programme compiles two lists.
 1. The longer, **Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**, comprises cultural "practices and expressions that help demonstrate the diversity of this heritage and raise awareness about its importance."
 2. The shorter, **List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding**, is composed of those cultural elements that concerned communities and countries consider require urgent measures to keep them alive.

INDIA'S INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

1. Kumbh Mela.
2. Novrouz.
3. Yoga.
4. Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab, India.
5. Sankirtana, ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur.
6. Buddhist chanting of Ladakh: recitation of sacred Buddhist texts in the trans-Himalayan Ladakh region, Jammu and Kashmir, India.
7. Chhau dance.
8. Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan.
9. Mudi yettu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala.
10. Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas, India.
11. Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre.
12. Tradition of Vedic chanting.
13. Ramlila, the traditional performance of the Ramayana.

GLOBAL WAGE REPORT 2018-19

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has released Global Wage Report 2018-19. As per the report, women are paid the most unequally in India, compared to men, when it comes to hourly wages for labour. On average, women are paid 34% less than men.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The gender wage gap has remained unchanged at 20% from 2016 to 2017.
- In advanced economies (G20), real wage growth declined from 0.9 per cent in 2016 to 0.4 per cent in 2017, meaning near stagnation. By contrast, in emerging economies and developing G20 countries, real wage growth dipped marginally from 4.9 per cent in 2016 and 4.3 per cent in 2017.
- Inequality is higher in monthly wages, with a gap of 22 per cent.
- Overall, real wages grew just 1.8 per cent globally (136 countries) in 2017.
- In most countries, women and men differ significantly in respect of working time – specifically, that part-time work is more prevalent among women than among men.

SAUBHAGYA SCHEME

8 States have achieved 100% saturation in household electrification under Saubhagya namely Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Bihar, J&K, Mizoram, Sikkim, Telangana and West Bengal.

SAUBHAGYA

- Its objective is to provide access to electricity connections to all the remaining households in the country.
- Scheme will provide subsidy on equipment such as transformers, wires and meters.
- Ministry of Power would be the implementing authority.
- Power connection will be provided in both rural and urban areas of the country.
- The scheme was launched on the occasion of the birth centenary of Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya on 25th
- An award scheme has been instituted with awards of more than Rs. 300 crore to be won by States/Discoms.
- The first DISCOM/Power Departments who complete 100% household electrifications will be felicitated with cash award of Rs. 50 Lakh for the employees and 100 crore grants for distribution infrastructure.
- The Government is committed to ensure 24x7 access to electricity for all by 31st March 2019.

WITNESS PROTECTION SCHEME

The Supreme Court approved India's first Witness Protection Scheme, noting that one of the main reasons for witnesses to turn hostile is that they are not provided appropriate protection by the State. It shall be the 'law' under Article 141/142 of the Constitution, until the enactment of suitable Parliamentary and/or State Legislations on the subject.

BACKGROUND

The question of witness protection had come up in a PIL that sought protection for witnesses in cases against self-styled Godman Asaram Bapu. The scheme was drawn up by the central government with inputs from 8 states/Union Territories, legal services authorities of five states and open sources including civil society, three high courts as well as from police personnel. The scheme was finalised in consultation with National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).

HIGHLIGHTS

- The important features of the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 include identifying categories of threat perceptions, preparation of a '**Threat Analysis Report**' by the head of the police, protective measures like ensuring that the witness and accused do not come face to face during probe, protection of identity, change of identity, relocation of witness, witnesses to be apprised of the scheme, confidentiality and preservation of records, recovery of expenses etc.
- The programme identifies "**three categories of witnesses as per threat perception**":
 1. Category A: Those cases where threat extends to life of witness or family members during investigation, trial or even thereafter.
 2. Category B: Those cases where the threat extends to safety, reputation or property of the witness or family members during the investigation or trial.
 3. Category C: Cases where the threat is moderate and extends to harassment or intimidation of the witness or his family members, reputation or property during the investigation, trial or thereafter.
- The bench also asked all states and Union Territories to set up vulnerable witness deposition complexes, as required by the Scheme, by the end of 2019.
- These rooms will be equipped with facilities to prevent the accused and witness coming face to face.
- The expenses for the programme will be met from a **Witness Protection Fund** to be established by states and Union Territories.

HEATWAVES

Indian policy makers must take a series of initiatives to mitigate the increased risks to health, and the loss of labour hours due to a surge in exposure to heatwave events in the country over the 2012-2016 period, the Lancet Countdown 2018 report recommends.

The report prepared jointly with the Public Health Foundation of India also urges a review of existing occupational health standards, labour laws and sectoral regulations for worker safety in relation to climatic conditions.

HIGHLIGHTS

- From 2014-2017, the average length of heatwaves in India ranged from 3-4 days compared to the global average of 0.8-1.8 days, and Indians were exposed to almost 60 million heatwave exposure events in 2016, a jump of about 40 million from 2012.
- Almost 153 billion hours of labour were lost globally in 2017 due to heat, an increase of 62 billion hours from the year 2000.
- Observing that a recent report "places India amongst the countries who most experience high social and economic costs from climate change", the study makes several recommendations.
 1. These include identifying "heat hot-spots" through appropriate tracking of meteorological data.
 2. promoting "timely development and implementation of local Heat Action Plans with strategic inter-agency co-ordination.
 3. A response which targets the most vulnerable groups.
- If the average global temperature rose by more than one degree Celsius from the present, India could "annually" expect conditions like the 2015 heat wave that killed at least 2,000, according to the 'Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C,' commissioned by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

HEATWAVES

A heat wave is usually measured relative to the usual weather in the area and relative to normal temperatures for the season. Temperatures that people from a hotter climate consider normal can be termed a heat wave in a cooler area if they are outside the normal climate pattern for that area.

COMPENSATION IMPOSED ON THERMAL POWER PLANTS

Noting that thermal power plants across the country have not prepared plans for 100% utilisation of fly ash, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has imposed an environmental compensation ranging from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore on them. The amount will be dependent on respective capacities of the thermal power plants.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Liability in this regard is not only of the persons responsible for non-utilisation but also for generators of the fly ash. The generator cannot avoid responsibility for due disposal of any residue pollutants on account of its activity. The principle of extended producer's liability is well-recognised as part of sustainable development.
- The Bench added that thermal power plants that have utilised 100% of fly ash need not pay the fine. The thermal power plants have been asked to deposit the compensation with the apex pollution control board by December 20.
- A joint committee comprising representatives from the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the Central Pollution Control Board and IIT-Roorkee has been constituted by the tribunal to finalise action plans to **"achieve 100% utilisation of fly ash."**
- It may be noted that the last date for achieving 100% utilisation was December 31, 2017. But States have sought extension of time by two to five years up to the year 2023.

FLY ASH

- Fly ash is a by-product from burning pulverized coal in electric power generating plants.
- During combustion, mineral impurities in the coal (clay, feldspar, quartz, and shale) fuse in suspension and float out of the combustion chamber with the exhaust gases. As the fused material rises, it cools and solidifies into spherical glassy particles called fly ash.
- Fly ash is a pozzolan, a substance containing aluminous and siliceous material that forms cement in the presence of water.
- When mixed with lime and water, fly ash forms a compound similar to Portland cement. This makes fly ash suitable as a prime material in blended cement, mosaic tiles, and hollow blocks, among other building materials

CORAL RESEEDING PROJECT

Scientists have launched the largest-ever attempt to regenerate coral on the endangered Great Barrier Reef by harvesting millions of the creatures' eggs and sperm during their annual spawning.

HIGHLIGHTS

- They plan to grow coral larvae from the harvested eggs and return to these areas of the reef which have been badly damaged by climate-related coral bleaching.
- The "Larval Restoration Project" launch was timed to coincide with the annual coral spawn on the reef.
- **Coral along large swathes of the 2300km reef have been killed by rising sea temperatures linked to climate change, leaving behind skeletal remains in a process known as coral bleaching.**
- Aim of the reseeded project was to grow coral larvae together with microscopic algae. The two live in symbiosis on the reef.

RUSSIA – UKRAINE SEA CLASH

Russia's capture of three Ukrainian naval ships and over 20 crew members in the disputed Azov Sea has refocused international attention on the conflict on Europe's eastern corridors.

Ukraine insists that the patrol of the Kerch Strait, where the vessels were impounded, was authorised under a bilateral agreement with Moscow. A new bridge over the strait that connects mainland Russia with Crimea has raised concerns about Moscow's greater control and influence in the region.

SEA OF AZOV



- Sea of Azov is a sea in Eastern Europe, it is linked by the narrow Strait of Kerch to the Black Sea in the south, and it is sometimes regarded as a northern extension of the Black Sea.
- The sea is bounded in the north and in the west by Ukraine, in the east by Russia.
- The Don and Kuban are the major rivers that flow into it.
- The Sea of Azov is the shallowest sea in the world, with the depth varying between 0.9 and 14 metres.
- The Kerch Strait is under the control of Russia which is the only connection between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, and the only way to reach Ukrainian ports, due to this there is a conflict in this region.

SUSTAINABLE BLUE CONFERENCE

Africa is hosting a historic conference that has to do with environmental protection. The first ever Sustainable Blue Conference starts today in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi.

It is under the theme: 'The Blue Economy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.'

HIGHLIGHTS

- This is the first conference on Sustainable Blue Economy.
- It is taking place across three continents. Kenya is hosting it with Canada and Japan as co-hosts.
- At the same time, there is international recognition that we need to develop our waters in an inclusive and sustainable manner for the benefit of all.

- “The Sustainable Blue Economy Conference builds on the momentum of the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 2015 Climate Change Conference in Paris and the UN Ocean Conference 2017 ‘Call to Action’.
- The multi-pronged conference will primarily:
 1. Identify how to harness the potential of the blue economy to create jobs and combat poverty and hunger.
 2. Show how economic development and healthy waters go hand in hand.
 3. Capture commitments and practical actions that can be taken today.
 4. Bring together the players needed to transition to a blue economy

CONCERNS

- Overfishing and its ecosystem impacts is increasingly becoming an equity and humanitarian issue; global leaders must urgently act together – with a strong sense of urgency.
- The world has rallied around the enormous pressures facing our oceans and waters, from plastic pollution to the impacts of climate change.

BLUE ECONOMY

- The **Blue Economy** is the economic benefit and value we realize from the Earth’s coastal and marine environment.
- **Sustainable Blue Economy** is a marine-based economy that provides social and economic benefits for current and future generations, restores, protects and maintains the diversity, productivity and resilience of marine ecosystems, and is based on clean technologies, renewable energy, and circular material flows.

ATOMIC ENERGY REGULATORY BOARD

Union Government has appointed renowned scientist Nageshwara Rao Guntur as Chairperson of Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB).

AERB

- It was established in November 1983 to carry out certain regulatory and safety functions in the fields of nuclear and radiation safety on a countrywide basis
- It was constituted by President of India by exercising powers conferred by Section 27 of Atomic Energy Act, 1962 to carry out certain regulatory and safety functions under the Act.
- The regulatory authority of AERB is derived from rules and notifications promulgated under Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986.
- Its mission is to ensure that use of ionising radiation and nuclear energy in India does not cause undue risk to health and environment.

CHAR DHAM HIGHWAY PROJECT

The government’s ambitious plan to connect the Char Dham pilgrimage spots in Uttarakhand by all-weather highways was put under a question mark. The Supreme Court (SC) sought the Centre’s response on why it should not stay the National Green Tribunal’s (NGT) clearance to the project.

The proposed four-lane expressway to Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Bardinath in the hill state has been among the flagship projects of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. Expanding the national highway network itself has been a key thrust area for the current regime.

Originally, the appellation Char Dham referred to a pilgrimage circuit encompassing four important temples—Puri, Rameswaram, Dwarka, and Badrinath—located roughly at the four cardinal points of the subcontinent.

CHAR DHAM HIGHWAY

- Char Dham Expressway National Highway is a proposed two-lane (in each direction) express National Highway with a minimum width of 10 metres in the state of Uttarakhand.
- The proposed highway will compliment the under-development Char Dham Railway by connecting the four holy places in Uttarakhand states includes Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri.
- The project includes 900 km national highways will connect whole of Uttarakhand state.
- The highway will be called **Char Dham Mahamarg (Char Dham Highway)** and the highway construction project will be called as **Char Dham Mahamarg Vikas Pariyojana (Char Dham Highway Development Project)** and is made to improve the connectivity to the **Chota Char Dham** centered in the Himalayas.
- Road will include several long bridges and tunnels to eliminate accident and slide prone areas. Indian
- Railway and National Highways Authority of India have been directed, by the Chief Secretary of India, to ensure that rail and road highway routes are integrated on this circuit

UN CENTRAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND

The United Nations has announced \$9.2 million in health and nutritional aid for crisis-stricken Venezuela, where hunger and preventable disease are soaring amid the collapse of the country's socialist economic system.

The U.N. Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) will support projects to provide nutritional support to children under five years old, pregnant women and lactating mothers at risk, and emergency health care for the vulnerable.

UN CENTRAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND

- It is a humanitarian fund established by the United Nations General Assembly on December 15, 2005 and launched in March 2006.
- With CERF's objectives to:
 1. Promote early action and response to reduce loss of life.
 2. Enhance response to time-critical requirements.
 3. Strengthen core elements of humanitarian response in underfunded crises.
 4. CERF seeks to enable timelier and more reliable humanitarian assistance to those affected by natural disasters and armed conflicts.
- The fund is replenished annually through contributions from governments, the private sector, foundations and individuals.
- The CERF grant element is divided into two window:
 1. **Rapid Responses (approximately two thirds of the grant element)**
The Rapid Response window provides funds intended to mitigate the unevenness and delays of the voluntary contribution system by providing seed money for life-saving, humanitarian activities in the initial days and weeks of a sudden onset crisis or a deterioration in an ongoing situation. The maximum amount applied to a crisis in a given year typically does not exceed \$30 million, although higher allocations can be made in exceptional circumstances.
 2. **Underfunded Emergencies (approximately one third of the grant element):** The Underfunded Emergencies window supports countries that are significantly challenged by "forgotten" emergencies.

ORANGE DAY

The 25th of every month has been designated as Orange Day by the UN Women campaign Say No, UNiTE launched in 2009 to mobilize civil society, activists, governments and the UN system in order amplify the impact of the UN Secretary-General's campaign, UNiTE to End Violence against Women.

Participants the world over are encouraged to wear a touch of orange in solidarity with the cause - the colour symbolizes a brighter future and a world free from violence against women and girls.

The **2018 theme is Orange the World: #HearMeToo** and like previous editions, the date marks the launch of 16 days of activism that will conclude on 10 December 2018, International Human Rights Day.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS

- Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in our world today remains largely unreported due to the impunity, silence, stigma and shame surrounding it.
- In general terms, it manifests itself in physical, sexual and psychological forms, encompassing:
 1. Intimate partner violence (battering, psychological abuse, marital rape, femicide).
 2. Sexual violence and harassment (rape, forced sexual acts, unwanted sexual advances, child sexual abuse, forced marriage, street harassment, stalking, cyber- harassment).
 3. Human trafficking (slavery, sexual exploitation).
 4. Female genital mutilation.
 5. Child marriage.

TITLI CYCLONE – RAREST OF RARE

The Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (RIMES) for Africa and Asia, a 45-nation international organisation on disaster warning, has termed 'Titli', the severe cyclonic storm that devastated Odisha in October, as 'rarest cyclone'.

More than 200 years of cyclone track history in the Odisha coast reveals that the Titli cyclone is the rarest of rare in terms of its characteristics such as recurvature after landfall and retaining its destructive potential after landfall and recurvature away from the coastal areas for more than two days.

Earlier, India Meteorological Department had called the formation of Titli as a 'rarest of rare' occurrence. The severe cyclone had changed its path after landfall.

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 center located at the campus of the Asian Institute of Technology in Pathumthani, Thailand.
- RIMES provides regional early warning services and builds capacity of its Member States in the end-to-end early warning of tsunami and hydro-meteorological hazards.

- 12 Member States: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Comoros, **India**, Lao PDR, Maldives, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Seychelles, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste.
- 19 Collaborating Countries: Afghanistan, Armenia, Bhutan, China, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Somalia, Tanzania, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, and Yemen.
- RIMES was registered with the United Nations under Article 102 on 1 July 2009, and has been supported since inception by **UNESCAP and DANIDA**.

DUDHWA TIGER RESERVE

- It is protected area in Uttar Pradesh that stretches mainly across the Lakhimpur Kheri and Bahraich districts.
- It comprises Dudhwa National Park, Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary and Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary.
- It shares north-eastern boundary with Nepal, which is defined to large extent by Mohana River.
- The area is vast Terai alluvial floodplain traversed by numerous rivers and streams flowing in south-easterly direction.
- Apart from tigers, it is also home to swamp deer, sambar deer, barking deer, spotted deer, hog deer, Indian rhinoceros, sloth bear, ratel, jackal, civets, jungle cat, fishing cat, etc.

PYGMY FALSE CAT SHARK

A new species of a deep sea shark- the Pygmy false catshark, has been found in the northern Indian Ocean, the first such discovery in India since 2011 when the Mangalore houndshark was identified.

- The Pygmy false catshark is currently known only from deep waters (200-1000m depth) and has a length of about 65cm. It is dark brown without any prominent patterns.
- The new species was found off the southwestern coast of India and north of Sri Lanka.
- Its scientific name is *Planonassus indicus* – from ‘planus’ meaning flat and ‘nasus’ meaning nose.
- The new species was first observed was on April 26, 2008, when it was caught in fishing nets in Kochi, Kerala.

TRIBAL DICTIONARY

The Odisha government has come out with lexicons of 21 tribal languages.

- The bilingual tribal dictionaries will be used in multilingual education (MLE) initiated by the State government at the elementary level in tribal-dominated districts.
- The bilingual tribal dictionaries for MLE and trilingual tribal language proficiency modules in all the 21 tribal languages have been formulated by the Special Development Council. Both will help in enhancing proficiency in tribal languages.
- Odisha has a unique place on the tribal map of India for having the maximum number of Scheduled Tribe communities.
- The State is home to 62 different tribal communities, including 13 particularly vulnerable tribal groups. These tribes speak 21 languages and 74 dialects.
- Of the 21 tribal languages, seven have their own scripts. However, Odia is used as the medium of communication in the dictionaries.

PRADHAN MANTRI MATRU VANDANA YOJANA

As per the latest data released by the Centre for Digital Financial Inclusion (CDFI) that uses technology for financial inclusion, the government has transferred over Rs 1,600 crore to eligible mothers under Pradhan

Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana through direct benefit transfer so far. Rs 16,04,66,63,000 has been transferred through direct benefit transfer to 48.5 lakh women.

CDFI is a non-profit organisation. It had conceptualised, designed and implemented the **PMMVY-CAS (Common Application Software) System** through which disbursements were made.

PMMVY

- Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) is a maternity benefit rechristened from erstwhile Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY). The IGMSY was launched in 2010.
- The scheme is a conditional cash transfer scheme for pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for first live birth.
- It provides a partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare and to provide conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices.
- The maternity benefits under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) are available to all Pregnant Women & Lactating Mothers (PW&LM) except those in regular employment with the Central Government or State Government or Public Sector Undertaking or those who are in receipt of similar benefits under any law for the time being in force.
- The scheme is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under which cost sharing ratio between the Centre and the States & UTs with Legislature is 60:40 while for North-Eastern States & three Himalayan States; it is 90:10. It is 100% Central assistance for Union Territories without Legislature.

OPEN TRANSIT DATA PLATFORM

To increase transparency and build transport solutions, the transport department of the Delhi government has launched the Open Transit Data platform which provides real-time datasets free of cost.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Through this the government aims to provide real-time data which can be used by third party app developers and researchers.
- This includes geo-coordinates of all bus stops, route maps, timetables as well as the real time GPS feeds of bus locations which will be updated every 10 seconds.
- The portal was designed and developed by IIIT Delhi on behalf of the Delhi government. The government believes that application developer and researchers would be able to use the data for bringing out transport solutions.
- It is a major step to promote collaboration and co-creation of innovative and inclusive transport solutions for the people of Delhi. This initiative will provide a lot of useful information at the fingertips of citizens and encourage more and more people to switch to public transport, thereby impacting pollution.

PROMPT CORRECTIVE ACTION

The 11 state-run banks, which are under the Reserve Bank's prompt corrective action (PCA) framework, has seen a 400 basis points increase in their share of retail loans at 19% of the system in the four years ending September 2018.

The PCA framework puts restrictions on weaker banks on many aspects, including fresh lending and expansion, and salary hikes among others. Of the 21 state-owned banks, as many as 11 are under the PCA framework now and these banks' NPAs hover in high double-digits, with that of IDBI Bank being the highest at close to 33% in the September 2018 quarter.

PROMPT CORRECTIVE ACTION

- PCA norms allow the regulator to place certain restrictions such as halting branch expansion and stopping dividend payment. It can even cap a bank's lending limit to one entity or sector.
- Other corrective action that can be imposed on banks include special audit, restructuring operations and activation of recovery plan. Banks' promoters can be asked to bring in new management, too. The RBI can also supersede the bank's board, under PCA
- The PCA is invoked when certain risk thresholds are breached. There are three risk thresholds which are based on certain levels of **asset quality, profitability, capital** and the like. The third such threshold, which is maximum tolerance limit, sets **net NPA at over 12% and negative return on assets for four consecutive years.**
- **The parameters that invite corrective action from the central bank are:**
 1. Capital to Risk weighted Asset Ratio (CRAR).
 2. Net Non-Performing Assets (NPA).
 3. Return on Assets (RoA).
 4. Leverage ratio.

MUDRA LOANS

Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) still have a long way to go to achieve the scale of commercial banks in Mudra loans, but they're growing swiftly in sanctioning these small loans for businesses.

According to the 2017-18 annual report of Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), though NBFCs sanctioned only over ₹27,000 crore of Mudra loans in FY18 against ₹92,492.68 crore by public sector banks, their year-on-year growth was faster.

PMMY

Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) is a scheme launched on April 8, 2015 for providing loans upto 10 lakh to the non-corporate, non-farm small/micro enterprises. These loans are classified as MUDRA loans under PMMY.

- These loans are given by Commercial Banks, RRBs, Small Finance Banks, Cooperative Banks, MFIs and NBFCs.
- The government proposes to set up a Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency (MUDRA) Bank through a statutory enactment.
- The Bank would partner with state level/regional level co-ordinators to provide finance to Last Mile Financer of small/micro business enterprises.
- It is proposed to initiate MUDRA as a unit of SIDBI to benefit from SIDBI's initiatives and expertise.
- The primary product of MUDRA will be refinance for lending to micro businesses / units under the aegis of the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana.
- The initial products and schemes under this umbrella have already been created and the interventions have been named '**Shishu**', '**Kishor**' and '**Tarun**' to signify the stage of growth / development and funding needs of the beneficiary micro unit / entrepreneur as also provide a reference point for the next phase of graduation / growth for the entrepreneur to aspire for: -
 1. Shishu: covering loans upto Rs. 50,000/-.
 2. Kishor: covering loans above Rs. 50,000/- and upto Rs. 5 lakhs.
 3. Tarun: covering loans above Rs. 5 lakh and upto Rs. 10 lakhs.

GLOBAL STOCKTAKE

'Global stocktake' refers to a proposed five-yearly review of the impact of countries' climate change actions. Under the Paris Agreement, every country must present a climate action plan in five-yearly cycles. It is supposed to be similar to the plan countries submitted in the run-up to the talks that concluded last week.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Under the Paris Agreement, the first global stocktake will happen in 2023.
- It will assess whether the net result of the climate actions being taken was consistent with the goal of keeping the increase in global average temperature from pre-industrial times to within 2 degree Celsius.
- The stocktake will help the world determine whether it needs to do more — and how much more.
- While every country is required to participate in the global stocktake, the exercise will not assess whether actions of any individual country are adequate or not. It will only make an assessment of the “collective” efforts of the world.
- That is because the climate actions are supposed to be “nationally determined”, and nations have problems over being told by others what they should do. The stocktake will not go into who should do how much — and will rather focus on what needs to be done.
- In accordance with the demands of developing countries, the stocktake will cover not only the results of actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but of actions being taken to adapt to the effects of climate change as well.
- It will also include an assessment of whether developed countries are offering adequate help to developing countries by providing money and technology, as mandated by the Paris Agreement.

RUSSIAN IGLA-S MISSILE SYSTEM

Indian Army has picked Russia's Igla-S missile system as choice for its multibillion dollar contract for man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS).

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is latest model of Russian MANPADS (Man-portable air-defense system) technology. It offers superior performance over earlier supplied SA-18 missiles to India.
- It is designed for use against visible aerial targets at short range such as tactical aircraft, helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicle (UAVs), cruise missile, head-on or receding, in presence of natural (background) clutter and countermeasures.
- As per requirements of Indian Army, it will have maximum range of 6km, altitude of 3km along with all-weather capability.
- Igla-S missile system will replace the existing Igla in service which is in urgent need of replacement.

INDIAN HORNED FROGS

Scientists have discovered four new species of Indian horned frogs from Himalayan regions of Northeast India.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Horned frogs get their name from fleshy horn-like projection on upper eyelids of some species.
- They were discovered in the forests of Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh.
- Scientists have named them as Himalayan horned frog (*Megophrys himalayana*), Garo white-lipped horned frog (*Megophrys oreocrypta*); Yellow spotted white-lipped horned frog (*Megophrys flavipunctata*) and Giant Himalayan horned frog (*Megophrys periosa*).

- These frogs vary in size — yellow spotted white-lipped horned frog measures about 5.7-7.5 cm and is smallest among four.
- Giant Himalayan horned frog measures about 7.1 to 11.2 cm, making it largest of 15 horned frog species found in Northeast India.

G20 SUMMIT

For the first time, India will host the annual G-20 Summit in 2022 coinciding with the country's 75th anniversary of independence. Prime Minister of India made the announcement at the closing ceremony of the 13th G-20 Summit in the Argentinian capital Buenos Aires on 1st December 2018.

The second **Russia-India-China 'RIC' Trilateral Summit** also took place in the Argentinian capital after a gap of 12 years. Meeting was mainly characterized by warmth and positivity; the leaders also discussed cooperation and coordination in various areas, which could contribute to global peace and stability.

G 20

- It is an international forum for the governments and central bank governors from 19 countries and the European Union.
- It was formed on 26 September 1999 to discuss policies relating to financial stability.
- Its agenda was expanded since 2008 including heads of governments / heads of states as well as finance ministers and foreign ministers.
- It thus, brings important industrialized and developing countries to discuss important issues in the global economy.

INDIA'S TAKEAWAY

1. **JAI:** It was the first meeting among the three leaders of **Japan, India and USA.**
 - What really brings them together at the moment is the convergence of interests such as **ensuring stability, prosperity and security in the Indo-Pacific region.** Greater importance was also given to India in terms of economic, political and security architecture by both the countries.
 - Free, open, inclusive and rules-based order is essential for the regional peace and prosperity.
 - Japan, India and USA are also engaged in **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue** (initiated in 2007 and re-established in 2017) in parallel with joint military exercises of an unprecedented scale, called **Exercise Malabar.**
2. **RIC**
 - Leaders of India, China and Russia called for reforming multilateral institutions, including the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), as they understood the benefits of a multilateral trading system and an open world economy for global growth.
 - They also agreed to have regular consultations to jointly promote international and regional peace and stability, to strengthen cooperation through BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) and the East Asia Summit (EAS) mechanisms, to address global challenges such as terrorism and climate change.

FACTS

- ❖ Indian Army conducted '**Cockerel Gunners'** White Water Rafting Expedition' at Rishikesh on 29 November 2018. The expedition commenced on 26 November 2018 wherein a team comprising of 20 adventure enthusiasts of a Medium Regiment were flagged off at Rudraprayag.
- ❖ **India's first Owl festival had held in Pune, by an NGO** working towards nature education and conservation. This festival aims to provide information on owl conservation and to create awareness

about owl as a bird and debunking numerous superstitions associated with it. Indian Owl is protected under the **Wildlife (Protection) Act of India**. Owls are in **threatened category**, major causes behind this are superstitions and habitat loss both are man-made.

- ❖ **Transgenic Rice:** CSIR-National Botanical Research Institute have developed transgenic rice by inserting a novel fungal gene. The new innovation will result in reduced arsenic accumulation in rice grain. In India large number of people are affected by arsenic toxicity, it is imperative to develop rice with lesser arsenic content and high yield.
- ❖ **BHUDHAAR INITIATIVE:** Andhra Pradesh government has recently launched “Bhudhaar” initiative. It aimed at enabling easy identification of details of the land parcel. Under this, each land parcel will be given a Bhudhaar number, an 11-digit unique figure. It would put an end to irregularities in land registration and corruption in revenue department.
- ❖ **LARGEST SUGAR PRODUCER:** Brazil traditionally the world’s top sugar producer, this year the output from the nation will tumble 21 percent to 30.6 million tons due to adverse weather and a shift to produce more cane-based ethanol. By this India will hold the title of world’s largest sugar producer for the first time in 16 years. However, Brazil is expected to remain the top exporter, followed by Thailand.
- ❖ **‘COPE INDIA 2019’:** It is a bilateral exercise between Indian Air Force (IAF) and US Air Force (USAF) conducted in Indian. The 2019 edition will be held in West Bengal. The first such exercise was conducted at IAF air force station in Gwalior from February 2004.
- ❖ **Legion d’Honneur (Legion of Honour):** Global software major Wipro Chairman Azim Premji has been conferred with the highest French civilian award ‘Chevalier de la Legion d’Honneur’ (Knight of the Legion of Honour) in Bengaluru, in recognition of his contribution to the Indian IT industry and philanthropy. The Legion of Honour, instituted in 1802 by Napoleon Bonaparte, is the highest civilian award given by the French Republic for outstanding service to France, regardless of the nationality of the recipients. The President of France is the Grand Master of the Order of the Legion of Honour.
- ❖ **70-feet tall statue of Lord Buddha** unveiled at Rajgir in Nalanda district. It is second tallest statue of Buddha in the country. The statue has been installed above 16 metre radius pedestal in middle of lake Ghora Katora. Ghora Katora is natural lake surrounded by five hills. It has been made from 45,000 cubic foot pink sand stone.
- ❖ Uttar Pradesh Government has launched **Women Empowerment Resolution Campaign** to develop leadership capacities in women and make them vocal for their rights. The purpose of this campaign is to ensure the empowerment of women through different programs in the state. Under it, the women employees of the state government will go to their house to know about schemes introduced by Center and the state government for women. Issues like education, self-employment, health, sanitation and nutrition will be included under this campaign.
- ❖ **‘Vajra Prahar’ is an Indo-US** Special Forces joint training exercise conducted alternately in India and the US. The 2018 edition of this exercise has commenced at Mahajan Field Firing Range (MFFR), Bikaner in Rajasthan. The aim of the exercise is to promote military relations between the two countries by enhancing interoperability and mutual exchange of tactics between Special Forces.
- ❖ Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh, who is also a renowned Diabetologist, has mooted **“Heli-Clinics”/ Helicopter Clinics** for remote areas, which could particularly be of great help to provide specialized medical care to people living in inaccessible hilly terrains of the States like Jammu & Kashmir and Northeast.