

CURRENT AFFAIRS
1ST TO 15TH SEPTEMBER 2018

INDIA POST PAYMENTS BANK

India Post Payment Bank (IPPB) was recently launched with an intention to make banking facility available at the doorstep of citizens and leverage the workforce of 300,000 postmen.

India Post Payment Bank

- Payments banks are a new model of banks conceptualized by the Reserve bank of India. They can accept deposits of up to Rs 1 lakh (which may be raised later by RBI), offer remittance services, mobile payments/ transfers/ purchases and other banking services (ATM/ debit cards, net banking and third-party funds transfers.)
- The recommendations for formation of Payments Bank was given by the Committee on Comprehensive Financial Services for Small Businesses and Low-Income Households (also called **Nachiket Mor Committee**) formed by Raghuram Rajan (then RBI Governor) in September 2013.
- Payments bank are licensed under **Section 23 of the Banking Regulation Act 1949**, and registered as public limited company under the **Companies Act, 2013**.
- IPPB is the sixth Payments bank, which has become operational after Aditya Birla, Airtel, Fino, Jio and Paytm Payments Banks.
- The Government owns 100% in IPPB, which has been set up under the aegis of the Department of Posts. It will offer products and services through counter services, micro ATMs, mobile banking app, messages and interactive voice response.
- IPPB will offer its services using QR cards. Unlike ATMs and Point of Sales (POS) machines, the postmen will scan the fingerprint, QR card and make the payment. So, the need to remember PIN and other credentials is not required.
- IPPB will carry out most banking operations like accepting deposits but can't advance loans or issue credit cards.
- IPPB has been integrated with Post Office Savings Bank (POSB).
- IPPB aims to promote digital payments mainly in the rural and remote areas of the country. It will be helpful to rural masses and urban migrants.
- Despite various efforts by the Government like the Jan Dhan Yojna, it is estimated that about 18% of the Indian population is not being served by the banking system. IPPB can be seen as filling an important gap in the scheme of inclusion.
- The service available should be efficient and cost effective. Making available a good connectivity and network, for example, can be a major challenge in remote parts for IPPB to be a success. Also, the postmen need to be trained periodically to provide such new services and he may demand an incentive for this new job.
- To overcome the possible challenges lying ahead required training programs have been started by the Department of Posts. Micro ATMs have been given in many of the Post Offices in rural areas. To sort out the issue of connectivity in remote areas, different connectivity providers are being contacted to issue SIM cards, etc.

6TH EAST ASIA SUMMIT

India attended the 6th East Asia Summit- Economic Ministers' Meeting (EAS-EMM) and 15th India-ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting (AEM) in Singapore. Singapore is currently holding the Chair of ASEAN.

The 6th East-Asia Economic Ministers' Meeting was attended by Economic Ministers from 10 ASEAN countries and their eight dialogue partners, Australia, China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Russian Federation and the United States of America.

FOCUSSED AREAS

- Open and fair market as well as improving transparency and predictability of the business environment.
- The digital economy.
- The rise of regional and global value chains, as part of their efforts to promote economic growth and integration in the region.

It was also announced in the Singapore meeting that the next ASEAN-India Business Summit will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in November 2018 with the theme "***Towards Building Strategic Partnership between ASEAN and India in the Era of the 4th IR and Digital Economy***" which will be followed by the 4th India-ASEAN Dialogue Partner Expo and Summit scheduled for 21-23 February 2019, in New Delhi.

The ***ASEAN-India Business Council (AIBC)*** presented their recommendations to the forum to sustain the momentum of trade and investment in the region. Issues related to promoting:

- Connectivity, collaboration on Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) development.
- Blue economy, healthcare, and tourism as well as women and youth economic empowerment.

EAST ASIA SUMMIT (EAS)

- The East Asia Summit (EAS) is a regional forum held annually by leaders of, initially, 16 countries in the East Asian, Southeast Asian and South Asian regions, based on the ASEAN Plus Six mechanism.
- Membership expanded to 18 countries including Russia and the United States at the Sixth EAS in 2011.
- Since its establishment, ASEAN has held the central role and leadership in the forum.
- EAS meetings are held after the annual ASEAN leaders' meetings, and plays an important role in the regional architecture of Asia-Pacific.
- The first summit was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 14 December 2005.

ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the Founding Fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

EXERCISE KAZIND 2018

Indo-Kazakhstan Joint Army Exercise 'KAZIND' being conducted between the Indian and Kazakhstan Army from 10 to 23 Sep 2018 in Otar region, Kazakhstan.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This is the third joint military exercise between the two countries.
- The second edition of the exercise was held in India last year.
- The aim of the exercise is to build and promote bilateral Army to Army relations and exchange skills and experiences between Kazakhstan Army and the Indian Army.
- The exercise will also serve as a platform for exchange of drills and procedures.

NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH

The Government is celebrating the month of September, 2018 as the National Nutrition Month under the Poshan Abhiyan.

The primary aim is to enable awareness on the importance of nutrition and how individual families can easily access government services to supplement nutrition for their children and pregnant/lactating mothers.

National Nutrition Month has eight Key Themes:

- Antenatal Care & Optimal Breastfeeding.
- Complementary Feeding.
- Anemia
- Growth Monitoring.
- Education.
- Diet and right age of marriage for girls.
- Hygiene and Sanitation.
- Food fortification.

To ensure a holistic approach, all 36 States/UTs and 718 districts will be covered in a phased manner by the year 2020.

NATIONAL NUTRITION MISSION

The goals of NNM are to achieve improvement in nutritional status of Children from 0-6 years, Adolescent Girls, Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers in a time bound manner during the next three years beginning 2017-18.

- The programme through the targets will strive to reduce the level of stunting, under-nutrition, anemia and low birth weight babies.
- NNM targets to reduce stunting, under-nutrition, anemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls) and reduce low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively. Although the target to reduce Stunting is atleast 2% p.a., Mission would strive to achieve reduction in Stunting from 38.4% (NFHS-4) to 25% by 2022 (Mission 25 by 2022).

NATIONAL NUTRITION STRATEGY

The NITI Aayog released the National Nutrition Strategy in 2017. The strategy seeks to bring nutrition into the national development agenda and to deal with problem of nutrition in a comprehensive manner.

DATA FROM NFHS 3 & 4

- In 2015-16, the percentage of stunted children under 5 was 38.4%.
- Between 2005-06 and 2015-16, there has been a rise in the percentage of children who are wasted from 19.8% to 21%. High incidence of wasting was recorded in Punjab, Goa, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Sikkim.

- While the prevalence of underweight children was 38% in rural areas, it is 29% in urban areas.
- According to WHO, infants weighing less than 2.5 Kg are 20 times more likely to die than heavier babies.
- The national average weight at birth is less than 2.5 Kg for 19% of the children.
- As per an estimate, around 58% of children in India are anaemic. It is due to nutritional deficiency of vitamins, iron and other essential minerals.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The vision of the National Nutrition Strategy is to achieve (India free from malnutrition ***Kuposhan Mukh Bharat***) by 2022.
- The focus is on preventing and reducing undernutrition across the life cycle- as early as possible, especially in the first three years of life.
- The National Nutrition Strategy seeks to contribute to key national development goals for more inclusive growth, such as the ***reduction of maternal, infant and young child mortality***, through its focus on the following monitorable targets:
 - a) Reduction in percentage age of underweight children below 5 years from the present 35.7% to 20.7% by 2022.
 - b) Reduction in prevalence of anemia in children (6-59 months) from the present 58.4% to 19.5% by 2022.
 - c) Reduction in prevalence of anemia in women and girls (15-49 years) from the present 53.1% to 17.7% 2022.

In a longer-term perspective, the strategy will also aim to progressively reduce all forms of undernutrition by 2030.

INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT OF WILDLIFE HABITATS SCHEME

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved continuation of the Centrally Sponsored Umbrella Scheme of Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-IDWH) beyond the 12th Plan period from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

BACKGROUND

The Scheme consists of Centrally Sponsored Scheme of ***Project Tiger (CSS-PT), Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-DWH) and Project Elephant (CSS-PE)***.

- A total of 18 tiger range States, distributed in five landscapes of the country would be benefitted under the Project Tiger scheme.
- Similarly, for other two schemes, the coverage is entire country in case of Development of Wildlife Habitats (DWH) and 23 elephant range States for Project Elephant.
- It would foster wildlife conservation in general with specific inputs for tiger in Project Tiger area and elephant in Project Elephant area.

Besides immense environmental benefits and effective implementation of tiger conservation inputs in and around tiger reserves under Project Tiger, wildlife conservation inputs in Protected Areas & nearby areas under Development of Wildlife Habitats and Elephant conservation inputs in Project Elephant areas, the schemes would result in overall strengthening/ consolidation of tiger, elephant and wildlife conservation in the country.

The implementation of the schemes would be done through the respective States in designated Tiger Reserves, Protected Areas and Elephant Reserves.

STRENGTHENING SKILL ECOSYSTEM

Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) announced an array of initiatives towards strengthening the skills ecosystem in India.

HIGHLIGHTS

- To ensure standardization of training and learning across all programs, DGT has aligned its courses with National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF), a competency- based framework.
- A tripartite MoU was signed between DGT, NSDC and Adobe India.
- The collaboration with Adobe will follow the launch of ***Adobe Digital Disha*** - a program focused on helping Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras and ITIs to leverage the power of Adobe Spark to integrate creativity and digital literacy into classrooms and curriculum, encouraging students to develop essential skills needed for jobs in the digital era.
- ***A MoU was signed between National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and IBM India,*** providing students with career-oriented training program on technologies like AI, Cloud, Big Data, Cybersecurity etc.
- For the first time, affiliation has been granted to an ITI in Pune Cantonment for 5 trades. MSDE plans to open similar ITIs in other Cantonment areas
- Affiliation has been granted to an ITI being run by Blind People's Association- Ahmedabad. Special Divyang friendly trades have been affiliated in the ITI. It is the first affiliation given to an ITI catering to the skilling of Divyangs.
- A new course "UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLE/DRONE PILOT" was launched to create trained people who can fly drones, observing standard guidelines and carry out its maintenance.
- It will help create a pool of trained manpower who can fly and control drones in line with Ministry of Civil Aviation's Drone policy.

13TH SUSTAINABILITY SUMMIT INAUGURATED

The 13th Sustainability Summit with the theme – "Everyone's future" the issues discussed were the growth of Indian economy, along with successful management and development of forests, wildlife habitats and ecosystems.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Emphasising that ***circular economy and resource efficiency*** can provide solutions to the challenges posed in the process of reconciling economic growth with environmental sustainability.
- India has registered 1 per cent growth in its forest and tree cover, according to the latest report of Forest Survey of India.
- The recent implementation of '***PARIVESH***'- a single window clearance system in the spheres of ***Environment, Forest, Wildlife and Coastal Regulation Zone.***
- The automated system will help applicants track the application status, as well as help in improving environmental compliance.
- India's affirmative action in embracing a sustainable lifestyle by aligning the ***5 Ps – People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership.***

RESOURCE EFFICIENCY STRATEGY

NITI Aayog in collaboration with the European Union delegation to India have released the Strategy on Resource Efficiency.

- Sustainability is a global priority and SDGs commitment and 11th Five year plan clearly enunciate importance of Resource efficiency (RE).
- Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy are important goals and central principles for achieving sustainable development.
- RE agenda in India has gained not only national priority during the EU-India summit in October 2017 but also in the G 20 RE dialogue in Berlin, Germany on November 27, 2017.
- EU will support the India, especially MoEFCC and NITI Aayog in implementing the RE strategy.
- RE Strategy emphasizes on Sustainable Public Procurement (SSP) as an action agenda which will be the market transformation tool to transform to a resource efficient economy.
- The InRP was created with support from the International Climate Initiative as part of the project 'Resource Efficiency and Secondary Raw Materials Material Management as a contribution to Climate Change Mitigation'. The InRP will issue recommendations to Indian businesses and policy-makers on improving the general conditions for resource efficiency.

RESOURCE EFFICIENCY

- Resource efficiency means using the Earth's limited resources in a sustainable manner while minimising impacts on the environment. It allows us to create more with less and to deliver greater value with less input.
- Resource efficiency very simply put is making more with fewer materials.
- In practice, through a life-cycle approach, it leads to minimizing impact on environment & the associated societal burdens, transforming 'waste' into 'resources' fostering circular economy, and strengthening resource security.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Circular economy implies reusing waste back into the production cycle to produce new products and uses instead of wasting such materials with embedded resources. Therefore, steps to achieve a circular economy are an important part of resource efficiency; however, resource efficiency encompasses a wider range of strategies through the entire life-cycle of products:

Mining/Extraction à Design à Manufacturing/Production à Use/Consumption à Disposal/Recovery.

EXERCISE NOMADIC ELEPHANT 2018

Indo-Mongolia joint exercise Nomadic Elephant-2018, commenced at Mongolian Armed Forces (MAF) Five Hills Training Area, Ullanbaatar, Mongolia. The 12 days long joint exercise will be conducted from 10 Sep to 21 Sep 2018.

The exercise will see them improve their tactical and technical skills in joint counter insurgency and counter terrorist operations in rural and urban scenario under United Nations mandate.

Exercise Nomadic Elephant is an annual, bilateral exercise since 2006 which is designed to strengthen the partnership between Indian Army and Mongolian Armed Forces.

APSARA – U REACTOR

Nearly sixty-two years after Apsara came into existence, a swimming pool type research reactor “Apsara-upgraded”, of higher capacity was born at Trombay on 10th September 2018.

- The reactor, made indigenously, uses plate type dispersion fuel elements made of Low Enriched Uranium (LEU).
- By virtue of higher neutron flux, this reactor will increase indigenous production of radio-isotopes for medical application by about fifty percent and would also be extensively used for research in nuclear physics, material science and radiation shielding.
- This development has re-emphasised the capability of Indian scientists and Engineers to build, complex facilities for health care, science education and research.

BACKGROUND

Research reactors are the back bone of Nuclear Programme as per Homi J. Bhabha, the father of Indian Nuclear programme, in early fifties. Subsequently “Apsara”, the first research reactor in Asia became operational in Trombay campus of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in August 1956. After providing more than five decades of dedicated service to the researchers, the reactor was shut down in 2009.

CROP RESIDUE MANAGEMENT

National Conference on “Potential of Waste in Energy Generation and its Challenges” organized by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers’ Welfare and Indian Federation of Green Energy (IFGE) today he emphasized the need to eliminate pollution caused by the burning of crop residues and said that the poisonous gas generated by it affects human health and destroys soil nutrients.

According to statistics, 70% of the waste is used in industrial sector and as domestic fuel. The remaining waste can be converted into bio-components and bio fuels and can also be used in the generation of energy.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The government is providing subsidy @50-80% for crop residue management machinery. These machines help farmers in mixing crop residue with soil to make it more productive.
- Farmer groups are being provided financial assistance @80% of the project cost for establishing Farm Machinery Banks for Custom Hiring of crop residue management machinery.
- A provision of Rs 1151.80 crores for two years has been made under this scheme for states like Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and NCR.
- The management of crop residue in the field will help the soil become more fertile thereby resulting in savings of Rs 2000 per hectare from the farmer’s manure cost. By making palette from crop residue, it can be used for power generation. Under the sub mission on agricultural mechanization, 40% subsidy is given on straw rake, straw baler, loader etc.

EXERCISE YUDH ABHYAS 2018

As part of the ongoing Indo-US defence cooperation, a joint military training Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2018 is scheduled to be conducted in the foothills of Himalayas at Chaubattia in Uttarakhand from 16 September to 29 September 2018.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This will be the 14th edition of the joint military exercise hosted alternately by both countries.
- The joint exercise Yudh Abhyas 2018 will simulate a scenario where both nations will work together in counter insurgency and counter terrorism environment in mountainous terrain under United Nation charter.

HIV/AIDS ACT 2017

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has announced implementation of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017 in force from 10th September, 2018.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Act, safeguards the rights of people living with HIV and affected by HIV.
- The provisions of the Act address HIV-related discrimination, strengthen the existing programme by bringing in legal accountability, and establish formal mechanisms for inquiring into complaints and redressing grievances.
- The Act seeks to prevent and control the spread of HIV and AIDS, prohibits discrimination against persons with HIV and AIDS.
- The Act lists various grounds on which discrimination against HIV positive persons and those living with them is prohibited.
- These include the **denial, termination, discontinuation or unfair treatment** with regard to:
 - a) Employment.
 - b) Educational establishments.
 - c) Health care services.
 - d) Residing or renting property.
 - e) Standing for public or private office.
 - f) Provision of insurance (unless based on actuarial studies).
- The requirement for HIV testing as a pre-requisite for obtaining employment or accessing health care or education is also prohibited.
- Every HIV infected or affected person below the age of 18 years has the right to reside in a shared household and enjoy the facilities of the household.
- The Act also prohibits any individual from publishing information or advocating feelings of hatred against HIV positive persons and those living with them.
- As per provisions of the Act, a person between the age of **12 to 18 years** who has sufficient maturity in understanding and managing the affairs of his HIV or AIDS affected family shall be competent to act as a guardian of another sibling below 18 years of age to be applicable in the matters relating to admission to educational establishments, operating bank accounts, managing property, care and treatment, amongst others.
- As per the provisions of the Act, every person in the care and custody of the state shall have right to HIV prevention, testing, treatment and counselling services.

NATIOAL SCHOLARSHIP PORTAL MOBILE APP

- This "National Scholarship Portal Mobile App" will ensure a smooth, accessible and hassle-free scholarship system for students from poor and weaker sections.

- All the scholarships are being given directly into bank accounts of the needy students under Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mode through the National Scholarship Portal which has ensured that there is no scope for duplication and leakage.
- Students will get all the information regarding various scholarships on this mobile app.
- Students can upload necessary documents on this mobile app.
- Students from far-flung/hilly areas/North East will be the most benefitted.

CHILLER STAR LABELLING PROGRAM

Government of India launched an ambitious program to encourage the deployment of Energy Efficient chiller systems in the country. Initially, the program is launched on voluntary basis and will be valid upto 31st December 2020.

Launching, this key program emphasised the need to improve energy efficiency in space and process cooling sector, considering the occasion of **24th World Ozone Day** and the **31st Anniversary of Montreal Protocol**, which was observed on 16th September 2018.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Chiller Star Labelling Program has been formulated by Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE).
- The program envisages providing star rating in terms of its energy performance.
- This initiative will promote advancement technology for **central HVAC (Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning)** systems and will also facilitate energy efficient solutions for the large commercial and industrial applications.
- Chillers are used extensively for space conditioning of buildings and for industrial process cooling applications.
- Chillers, being energy intensive system, contribute more than 40 per cent of the total energy consumption in commercial buildings. Therefore, it is important to optimize energy performance of chillers and create awareness amongst the end users to adopt transition towards energy efficient chillers.

Through Chiller star labelling Program, it is estimated that more than 500 million units of electricity would be saved in 2019 along with Green House Gases (GHG) reduction of 0.5 million-ton equivalent of CO2. It is also anticipated to save more than 4 Billion units of electricity in the year 2030 with CO2 emission reduction of 3.5 million ton through this program.

MAN PORTABLE ANTI TANK GUIDED MISSILE

DRDO successfully flight tested a low weight, Man Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM) from Ahmednagar range.

- The MPATGM is a third-generation anti-tank guided missile which is fitted with a high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT) warhead.
- The MPATGM reportedly boasts a top attack capability and has a maximum engagement range of about 2.5 kilometers.
- It weighs around 14.5 kg to maintain man portability and has a minimum lateral centre and gravity offset.
- Effective against both stationary and moving targets, the missile will be deployed in the infantry and parachute battalions of the Indian Army.

Man-portable anti-tank systems (MANPATS or MPATS) are also shoulder-launched anti-tank rockets.

- They are typically unguided weapons and are a threat to armoured vehicles, low-flying aircraft (especially helicopters), and field fortifications.
- Generally, MANPATS fall into three distinct categories:
 - a) The first consist of a small, disposable preloaded launch tube firing a high explosive anti-tank warhead operated by a single soldier.
 - b) The second is a firing system onto /into which a rocket is loaded, operated by a single soldier.
 - c) The third are manufactured prepacked and issued as a single unit of ammunition with the launcher discarded after a single use.

WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS AND IMPACT ON INDIAN ECONOMY

Amid a rise in global crude oil prices, geopolitical uncertainty and a decline in the rupee, fuel prices across the country have witnessed a sharp spike over.

CURRENT ISSUES

- The Indian rupee, which hovered around 68.50 to a dollar until a month ago, suddenly went into a decline, falling by nearly 4% over the last one month leading to the low of 71.21.
- Rising crude oil prices.
- Fall of the Turkish lira following an economic crisis in that country impacted emerging economy currencies, which lost ground against the dollar.
- Concerns over US-China trade war.
- A weak rupee not only hurts the country and its importers on account of a higher import bill and current account deficit but also tends to be inflationary.

CRUDE OIL PRICES

Concerns around US sanctions are a rising threat to oil supplies, leading to a spike in crude prices. While there are disruptions to crude supply from Iran and Venezuela, there is widespread concern that the global oil market will get squeezed over the next few months as US sanctions restrict crude exports from Iran. Even as Saudi Arabia and some other major oil producers could raise their output, the market feels that it may not be enough to offset declines in Iran, Libya and Venezuela that are grappling with crises. The situation is expected to remain tight and oil prices may continue to rule high.

IMPACT

a) INFLATION:

- High fuel prices have a direct bearing on the non-food parts of CPI (Consumer Price Index) and WPI (Wholesale Price Index) inflation and it may have a bearing on the RBI's decision to go for another interest rate hike in its efforts to contain inflation.
- There is nothing the government can do to check the rise in global crude oil prices, nor can it do much to check the fall of the rupee as it is driven mostly by external factors.

b) CURRENT ACCOUNT DEFICIT:

- This is a measure of country's trade, when the value of goods and services it imports exceeds the value of goods and services it exports.

- The current account also includes net income, including interest and dividends, and remittances.
- A high CAD can create macro-economic vulnerability in an economy, especially affecting stability in currency markets.
- India's CAD is typically vulnerable to any rise in international crude oil prices as the country imports around 85% of its oil requirements.
- Rising global oil prices, when coupled with a sharp depreciation in the rupee, creates a double blow for the CAD as the country's import bill spikes even though the volume of import may remain the same.

EXERCISE VOSTOK

- Vostok 2018 is Russia's military exercise spanning from the Ural Mountains to the Pacific coast.
- It is the biggest military maneuvers since the height of the cold war.
- Zapad 81 is the mammoth manoeuvres carried out in Eastern Europe by the former Soviet Union in 1981.
- Chinese and Mongolian forces will also participate.
- It will involve 300,000 troops, engaging in tri-service mock-operations.
- These exercises are taking place amid Washington's growing friction with Russia and China.

GOVERNMENT E- MARKETPLACE

National Mission on Government e Marketplace (GeM) has been launched by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

- GeM is a platform that provides online, end to end procurement of commonly used goods and services for all Central and State Government Departments, Public Sector Units and affiliated bodies.
- It is developed by the Directorate General of Supplies and Disposals (DGS&D) with technical support of NeGD (National e-Governance Division of Ministry of Electronics and IT).
- It provides the tools of e-bidding, reverse e-auction and demand aggregation to facilitate the government users, achieve the best value for their money.
- The aim of the mission is to promote inclusiveness, transparency and efficiency in public procurement and achieve cashless, contactless and paperless transaction.
- The mission will accelerate the adoption and use of GeM by major central Ministries, State Governments and their agencies.

SC/ST RESERVATION

Supreme Court has quoted that SC/ST status entitling a person to quotas in jobs and educational institutions in one state will not automatically continue in another when the person migrates, except when he/she goes to Delhi.

- Union Territory of Delhi is exempted because it is the national capital and a microcosm of India.
- Thus, a person's SC/ST status will not follow him to another state would not apply to the Union Territory (UT) of Delhi.
- The court said, when a SC/ST person migrates, the automatic inclusion of them in another state would be detrimental to the interests of local communities and hence unconstitutional.

- The court also quoted that mandate of Articles 341 and 342 will be compromised if special privileges of SC/ST are carried to another state.
- However, the central list doesn't discriminate between the reserved categories of one state from that of another.

Article 341 and 342

- **Article 341** of the constitution define as to who would be Scheduled Castes with respect to any State or UT.
- **Article 342** of the constitution define as to who would be Scheduled Tribe (ST) with respect to any State or UT.
- The President of India in consultation with the Governor of a particular State may notify the castes, races or tribes be deemed to be Scheduled Castes (A-341) and to be Scheduled Tribes (A-342).
- Parliament may by law include in or exclude any caste, race or tribe from the list of SC and ST specified.

Reservation in services/post

- **Article 16(4)** of the constitution enables State to provide reservation in appointments in favour of any backward class of citizens who are not adequately represented in the services under the State.
- **Article 46** of the Constitution directs the State to promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and protect them from all forms of exploitation.
- **Article 335** states that the claims of the members of the SC and ST shall be taken into consideration in the making of appointments to services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of a State.
- It shall be consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration.

E-CIGARETTES

The Central government has directed all states and Union Territories to not allow the manufacture, sale and advertisement of e-cigarettes and other Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS).

- Electronic cigarettes or e-cigarettes, are devices that do not burn or use tobacco leaves but instead vaporize a solution, which a user then inhales.
- The main constituents of the solution, in addition to nicotine, are propylene glycol (with or without glycerol and flavouring agents).
- ENDS are devices that heat a solution to create an aerosol, which also frequently contains flavours, usually dissolved into propylene glycol and glycerin.
- A number of metals, including lead, chromium and nickel, and chemicals like formaldehyde have been found in aerosols of some ENDS.
- ENDS are not approved as NRTs (nicotine-replacement therapies) under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act and rules made thereunder.

According to Global Tobacco Epidemic 2017 report by the WHO, the governments of 30 countries like Mauritius, Australia, Singapore etc have already banned ENDS.

SEDITION: 'SECTION 124A' OF IPC

Law Commission of India has recently recommended to the Government of India to re-think or even repeal the provision of sedition (Section 124A) from the Indian Penal Code.

It was introduced in the 1870s, originally to deal with increasing Wahabi activities that posed a challenge to the colonial government.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Section 124A, commonly known as Sedition law made words or any visible representation that attempts to bring hatred or contempt or excite disaffection towards the government punishable by law.
- They shall be charged with cognizable and non-bailable offence with punishment up to imprisonment for life & fine or imprisonment for 3 years & fine or with fine alone.
- The expression disaffection includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity.
- The section has been misused in recent times to suppress even minor dissent.

Non-bailable offence – The police cannot release anyone on bail and so the arrested person must make an application for bail before a magistrate or court.

LEPTOSPIROSIS

Health Department has recently given the warning about leptospirosis disease in the post-flood period.

- Leptospirosis is a bacterial infection in rodents and other wild and domesticated species.
- It is a zoonotic disease (i.e) spread from animals to humans caused by bacteria of the genus Leptospira.
- It is transmitted to humans by exposure through water contaminated by urine from infected animals.
- The infection in man is contracted through skin abrasions and the mucosa of the nose, mouth and eyes.
- Human-to-human transmission is rare.
- However, in some cases the infection is more severe and can cause life-threatening problems, including organ failure and internal bleeding.
- Severe form of leptospirosis is known as Weil's disease.
- It is an emerging tropical infectious disease.
- Without treatment, Leptospirosis can lead to kidney damage, meningitis, liver failure, respiratory distress, and even death.

SAARC

South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Council of Ministers' meeting is going to be held in New York.

It is expected to be chaired by Nepal Foreign Minister.

BACKGROUND

- SAARC is the regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union of nations in South Asia.

- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are its members.
- Its secretariat is based in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- The organization promotes development of economic and regional integration.
- It launched the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in 2006.
- States with observer status include Australia, China, European Union, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, Myanmar, South Korea and United States.

RCEP TRADE MINISTER'S MEET

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Trade Ministers' Meeting was recently held in Singapore.

RECP

- RCEP is a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between the ten-member states of the ASEAN and the six states with which ASEAN has existing free trade agreements - Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand.
- Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam are ASEAN members.
- RCEP is viewed as an alternative to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a proposed trade agreement which includes several Asian and American nations but excludes China and India.
- RCEP will cover trade in goods, trade in services, investment, economic and technical co-operation, intellectual property, competition, dispute settlement and other issues.
- Negotiations of RCEP will aim to achieve the high level of tariff liberalisation, through building upon the existing liberalisation levels between participating countries.

REPORT- THE URBAN COMMUTE

Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), a New Delhi-based think tank has released a report titled "The urban Commute".

HIGHLIGHTS

- The report collected statistics from 14 cities - **Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Pune, Jaipur, Lucknow, Kochi, Bhopal, Vijayawada and Chandigarh.**
- According to the report, Bhopal has got the top spot for lowest overall emission and energy use from urban commute.
- On the other hand, Delhi ranked last in overall emission and fuel use.
- Kolkata and Mumbai are among the mega cities which emit least due to high usage of public transport and walking.
- The reason attributed for this is sheer number of people, high volume of travel and personal vehicles, and long trip distance.
- The report also highlighted that the increase in greenhouse gas emissions from transport sector were highest among all other sectors in India.

DEPARTMENT OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Union Home Minister has recently chaired the first review meeting of the Department of Official Language.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The officials discussed the functioning and issues related to implementation of Hindi language in official work.
- It is under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- An E-learning platform called the "**Pravah**" is being developed by the department for use in 16 Indian languages including English.
- It will enable anybody learn Hindi through his/her mother tongue with the help of this E-learning platform.
- A software called "**Kanthasth**" has also been developed by the department.
- It is for translating the all kinds of official files from English to Hindi and vice versa to make the translation work simpler and quicker.

GUIDELINES FOR DRONE REGULATIONS

Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), has recently published final guidelines for operating drones by ordinary citizens.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It will come into force on December 1, 2018, the date when the civilian use of drones becomes legal in India.
- DGCA has identified multiple categories of drones, which can be broadly classified as,
 - a) **Nano** (weighing up to 250 g),
 - b) **Micro** (more than 250 g but less than 2 kg) and
 - c) **Small and above** (weighing 2 kg or more).
- Every drone bigger than Nano must obtain a unique identification number from DGCA, similar to the registration number for a car.
- Users of bigger drones will be required to obtain a **Unique Air Operator's Permit (UAOP)**, similar to a driver's licence.
- All categories of drones must be flown in the visual line of sight, and only during daytime.
- The operation of drone will be restricted to 50ft above the ground.
- The drones cannot be operated from a moving vehicle, ship or aircraft.
- The regulator has listed 12 categories of "**no-drone zones**" which includes airports, International borders including the Line of (Actual) control, strategic locations notified by Ministry of Home affairs, secretariat complexes in state capitals.

MULTIDRUG RESISTANT SUPER BAG

Researchers at the University of Melbourne has recently discovered three variants of the multidrug-resistant bug in samples from 10 countries.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Antimicrobial resistance is the ability of a microbe to resist the effects of medication previously used to treat them.
- The term includes the more specific "antibiotic resistance", which applies only to bacteria becoming resistant to antibiotics.

- Microbes resistant to multiple antimicrobials are called multidrug resistant (MDR) or sometimes superbugs.
- The bacteria that is resistant to all known antibiotics is “Staphylococcus epidermidis”.
- It is found naturally on human skin.
- It commonly infects the elderly or patients who have had prosthetic materials implanted, such as catheters and joint replacements.
- ***Global Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System (GLASS)*** was developed by WHO in 2015 to support the global action plan on antimicrobial resistance.

MULTI-DRUG RESISTANT TB

WHO has recently made an important change in the treatment of patients with Multi-drug Resistant TB (MDR-TB).

- MDR-TB is resistant to at least two of the first-line anti-TB drugs.
- According to the WHO guidelines, all injectables are to be replaced with a fully oral regimen with Bedaquiline to treat MDR-TB patients.
- Bedaquiline is the powerful anti-TB drug used to treat MDR-TB.
- The success rate of injectable treatment is less. It is because of patients discontinuing the treatment in midway due to adverse side effects.
- South Africa was the first country to scale up access to bedaquiline. It would replace the injectables for treating all MDR-TB patients.

RAPID TRIDENT

- It is a joint-annual military exercise between Ukraine and NATO.
- It will be held in western Ukraine region and it is seen as a response to Russia’s biggest military exercise Vostok.
- Ukraine’s tension with Russia remain high over the Kremlin-backed insurgency in its eastern region.

NATO is an Alliance that consists of 28 independent member countries across North America and Europe, the newest of which, Albania and Croatia.

- It is an intergovernmental political and military alliance, committed to the Principle of collective defence.
- NATO’s headquarters is in Brussels, Belgium.

BANKING OMBUDSMAN SCHEME

RBI has recently issued guidelines tightening the Banking Ombudsman scheme to strengthen the grievance redressal mechanism.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Banking Ombudsman is a quasi-judicial authority to enable the resolution of customer’s complaint relating to services rendered by Bank.
- All Scheduled Commercial Banks, Regional Rural Banks and Scheduled Primary Co-operative Banks are covered under the Scheme.
- RBI, earlier this year, has extended the scheme to deposit taking Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFC).

- The authority does not charge any fee for filing and resolving customers' complaints.
- Any person aggrieved by the decisions of Banking ombudsman can approach the Appellate Authority, which is vested with a Deputy Governor of the RBI.

INTERNAL OMBUDSMAN

- In its recent notification, RBI has asked all commercial banks having 10 or more banking outlets to have an independent internal ombudsman (IO).
- IO will review customer complaints that are either partly or fully rejected by the banks.
- This guideline is not applicable for Regional Rural Banks sponsored by commercial banks.
- The Internal Ombudsman Scheme of 2018 mandates banks to grant IO, a fixed term of three to five years, which cannot be renewed.
- The IO can be removed only with prior approval from RBI.
- The remuneration would have to be decided by the customer sub-committee of the board and not by any individual.
- The implementation of the scheme will be monitored by the bank's internal audit mechanism apart from regulatory oversight by RBI.

PERMANENT INDUS COMMISSION

India has agreed to Pakistan's request for a special inspection of the hydroelectric projects in the Jhelum river basin, including the Kishanganga scheme.

HIGHLIGHTS

- As per the Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan, Permanent Indus Commission should meet atleast once in a year.
- The commission has experts who look into issues and disputes on the ground over the utilisation of the waters of six rivers of the Indus system.
- Under the treaty, India has full use of the three "eastern" rivers (Beas, Ravi, Sutlej).
- Pakistan has control over the three "western" rivers (Indus, Chenab, Jhelum), although India is given rights to use these partially as well for certain purposes.
- The recent meeting was held in Lahore.
- It was agreed in the meeting that Pakistan will allow India to inspect the Kotri barrage in the lower Indus.

KOTRI BARRAGE

- It is a diversion dam used to control the amount of water passing through.
- It is located in the lower Indus river, Sindh province of Pakistan.
- The right-bank canal provides additional water to the city of Karachi.
- The other important barrages in the lower Indus are Guddu and Sukkur.

SPRING WATER SYSTEM

A NITI Aayog constituted group of experts has urged the government to set up a dedicated mission to revive spring water systems in the Himalayan States.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The word "Spring" means to leap from the ground.

- Natural springs are points on the earth surface through which ground water emerges and flows.
- Water from confined aquifers is forced out through a cave to make artesian wells.
- Sometimes springs are formed due to pressure from an underground water source which are usually called as “Hot Springs”.
- Natural springs acts as a source of water for both drinking and irrigation.
- Springs are often the only source of irrigation in the Himalayan region with 64% of the total cultivable area fed by springs.
- In the Eastern Himalayas, Meghalaya has the highest number of villages having spring sources and Sikkim has the greatest density.
- In the Western Himalayas, Jammu & Kashmir had both the highest number of villages with springs and the greatest density.
- The task force also mooted an idea of introducing a “Spring Health Card”, preparing a digital atlas of the country’s spring sheds, training ‘para-hydrogeologists’ who could lead grassroots conservation.

INDIAN ROOFED TURTLE

Society for Protecting Ophio fauna & Animal Rights (SPOAR), an NGO and the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) has led an initiative to save the species from severe pollution in the river.

They have installed the Kurma avatar (form of turtle) of Lord Vishnu on the outskirts of river to reduce pollution and to encompass the religious belief.

BACKGROUND

- It is a species of turtle, protected under Schedule 1 of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- It is found in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan.
- In India, it is found in Ganges, Brahmaputra and Indus River drainages.
- It is listed on CITES Appendix I.
- It is listed as “Least Concern” in the IUCN list of threatened species.
- The protected areas in Jalpaiguri is known for protecting this species.
- In addition to it, it is also found in Lota devi temple located on the basin of River Karala in Jalpaiguri.

3RD ASIA – EUROPE MEET

Republic of Korea is organising 3rd Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) conference on ‘Global Ageing and Human Rights of Older Persons’.

- It will be attended by international institutions including the UN, regional institutions such as UNESCAP, UNECE, European Union, ASEAN and international NGOs
- India is also taking part in this conference. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment will represent India.
- ASEM is an exclusively Asian–European forum, established in 1996 at the first summit in Bangkok, Thailand.
- It currently has 51 nations from the European Union and South Asia and 2 regional organisations (ASEAN, EU) as partners.
- The 3 pillars of ASEM are ***Political, Economic, Socio Cultural and Educational***.

- In 2016, it adopted *Ulaanbaatar declaration* to resolve fight against terrorism was signed in the ASEM summit.

CHAGOS ISLAND

A resolution by Mauritius was passed in UN general assembly asking the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to offer a legal opinion in the issue.

BACKGROUND

- There is a dispute between Mauritius and UK over the sovereignty of Chagos islands in the Indian Ocean.
- It is home to Diego Garcia, the key military base of the U.K. and the U.S. in the Indian Ocean.
- The island was taken by UK before the Mauritius decolonisation.
- After the Independence in 1968, most of the islanders were deported to give the island in lease to US for its airbase.
- The evicted islanders have been campaigning for their right to return home.
- Twenty-two countries and the African Union are going to appear before ICJ to give their statements.
- India has backed Mauritius over its claim on the disputed Chagos islands.
- Australia and the United States are expected to back Britain's position.

TEJAS

- Tejas is an indigenously developed light combat aircraft.
- It is a single-seat, single-jet engine, multirole light fighter.
- It is the smallest and lightest multi-role supersonic fighter aircraft in its class.
- It can fire *Air to Air Missiles*, carry bombs and Precision Guided ammunition.
- The Indian Air Force has successfully carried out the first ever mid-air refuelling of Tejas.
- A Russian-built IL-78 MKI tanker transferred fuel to a Tejas MK I aircraft.
- It is considered as a major milestone in its development cycle.
- The ability to carry out air-to-air refuelling is one of the critical requirements for Tejas to achieve final operational clearance.
- Earlier, Tejas has successfully fired an air-to-air beyond visual (BVR) range missile.

INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT OF WILDLIFE HABITATS

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has recently approved continuation of the IDWH beyond the 12th Plan period from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

- It is a centrally sponsored umbrella scheme consists of Project Tiger, Development of Wildlife Habitats and Project Elephant.
- The schemes would result in overall strengthening/ consolidation of tiger, elephant and wildlife conservation in the country.
- Besides, it would also address the Man-Animal conflict effectively and benefit the communities relocating from core protected areas.
- The implementation of the schemes would be done through the respective States in designated Tiger Reserves, Protected Areas and Elephant Reserves.

COMCASA

India and US have recently signed Communications Compatibility and Security Arrangement (COMCASA) as a part of 2+2 talks.

- It is meant to provide a legal framework for the transfer of communication security equipment from the U.S. to India.
- It helps in sharing high-tech military hardware, especially armed drones which the U.S. is willing to supply to India.
- It would facilitate “interoperability” between their forces and potentially with other militaries that use U.S. origin systems for secured data links.
- Previously, India had signed **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).**
- LEMOA gives both nations access to each other’s military facilities and GSOMIA paved the way for greater technology cooperation in the military sector.

MOBILISE YOUR CITY INITIATIVE

India and France have recently signed an implementation agreement under this initiative. This initiative will be implemented by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is an international initiative supported by the French and German governments.
- It was launched as a part of COP 21 UNFCCC Paris climate conference.
- It seeks to provide support to 100 cities worldwide in 3 years to engage in sustainable urban mobility planning to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- It will be financed by the European Union under its Asia Investment Facility (AIF) through French Development Agency (AFD).
- AFD (Agence Francaise du Development), French Development Agency is a Paris based public financial institution, which imposes the policies stated by the French government.
- India is one of the very first countries to benefit from this initiative.
- Kochi, Nagpur and Ahmadabad are the 3 cities selected for the project.

JAN DHAN YOJANA

Union Finance Ministry has recently announced that it plans to make the scheme open ended with more incentives.

The 2nd phase (2015-2018) planned to provide micro-insurance to the people and pension schemes to unorganised sector workers through Business Correspondents.

BACKGROUND

- It is a flagship financial inclusion scheme launched in 2014 for a period of 4 years.
- The scheme facilitates the opening of bank accounts with zero balance for every household to ensure access to financial services in an affordable manner.
- There are some special benefits like free accident insurance cover, over draft facility for the Jan Dhan account holders.
- The first phase of the scheme focused on opening basic bank accounts and RuPay debit card with inbuilt accident insurance cover of Rs 1 lakh.

- It has decided to provide the facility of opening zero balance account from every household to every adult.
- The accident insurance cover and overdraft facility have also been increased.
- The free accident insurance cover for those opening Jan Dhan accounts has been doubled to Rs 2 lakh.
- There will be no conditions attached for over-draft of up to Rs 2,000.
- Also, the upper age limit for availing the facility has been hiked to 65 from the earlier 60 years.

MALANAD MALABAR CRUISE TOURISM PROJECT

Ministry of Tourism sanctioned Malanad Malabar Cruise Tourism Project under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It will be focusing on the development of water-based thematic cruise experiences in North Kerala.
- The thematic cruises will be developed in Valapattanam and Kuppam River.
- Public Private Partnership model will be adopted to develop infrastructure facilities such as Passenger Terminals, Boat Terminals, Jetties, Boat Race Gallery etc.

Swadesh Darshan Scheme

It is one of the flagship schemes of Ministry of Tourism for development of thematic circuits in the country in a planned and prioritised manner.

- It is a central sector scheme.

The following thematic circuits have been identified, for development namely ***North-East India Circuit, Buddhist Circuit, Himalayan Circuit, Coastal Circuit, Krishna Circuit, Desert Circuit, Tirtankar circuit, Tribal Circuit, Eco Circuit, Wildlife Circuit, Rural Circuit, Spiritual Circuit, Sufi circuit, Ramayana Circuit and Heritage Circuit.***

- It is different from "PRASAD" scheme of Ministry of Tourism.

National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASAD) focus on development and beautification of the identified pilgrimage destinations.

NARI SHAKTI PURASKAR

- It is the Highest Civilian Honour for women in India.
- It is the national level award given by the Ministry of Women and Child Development on eminent women and institutions in recognition of their service towards the cause of women empowerment.
- The Puraskars are open to all Indian Institutions, organisations and individuals.
- It is conferred every year on the occasion of International Women's Day.
- The Ministry of Women & Child Development has recently invited nominations for the Nari Shakti Puraskars.

GREAT BARRIER REEF

Dire warnings of reef die-off were given after massive coral bleaching in 2016 and 2017. Recently, Tourism and Events Queensland has issued a "positive update, reporting that some affected areas are showing "substantial signs of recovery."

- The Great Barrier Reef is the longest coral reef in the world and the first coral reef ecosystem to be awarded UNESCO World Heritage Status.
- It stretches more than 1,430 miles along Queensland's spectacular coastline.
- Coral bleaching occurs when coral experiences stress from heightened water temperatures or poor water quality.
- In response, the coral ejects a photosynthetic alga called zooxanthellae, which removes the coral's distinctive colour.
- If the stress conditions persist, the coral will die.
- But if conditions return to acceptable levels, some coral can reabsorb the substance and recover.
- Coral bleaching occurs in multiple stages, ranging from the equivalent of a mild sunburn to coral mortality.

CORAL REEF

- A coral reef is an underwater ecosystem characterized by reef-building corals.
- Reefs are formed of colonies of coral polyps held together by calcium carbonate. Most coral reefs are built from stony corals, whose polyps cluster in groups.
- Often called "rainforests of the sea", shallow coral reefs form some of Earth's most diverse ecosystems. T
- They occupy less than 0.1% of the world's ocean area, yet they provide a home for at least 25% of all marine species including fish, mollusks, worms, crustaceans, echinoderms, sponges, tunicates and other cnidarians.
- Coral reefs flourish in ocean waters that provide few nutrients.
- They are most commonly found at shallow depths in tropical waters, but deep water and cold water coral reefs exist on smaller scales in other areas.

WORLD SUMMIT ON ACCREDITATION

Union Human Resources and Development ministry has recently inaugurated world summit on Accreditation.

The theme of WOSA 2018 is "**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN OUTCOME BASED ACCREDITATION**" and the sub-themes are:

Sub-Theme 1 – Achieving Excellence through Learning Outcomes.

Sub-Theme 2 – Role of Industry in Technical Education.

Sub-Theme 3 – Ranking and Rating of Higher Education Institutions – Do they have a Role in Quality Improvement?

Sub-Theme 4 – Linking Government Funding with Quality.

Sub-Theme 5 – Use of ICT in Accreditation in Large Jurisdictions.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The summit is a biennial Summit organised by National Board of Accreditation (NBA).

- The summit provides platform to stakeholders to share their knowledge and information on accreditation.
- NBA has already organised three Summits in 2012, 2014 and 2016.

National Board of Accreditation

- NBA is an autonomous organisation under ***Ministry of Human Resource Development.***
- It engaged in quality assurance of the programs offered by the professional and technical institutions in India through accreditation.
- It has been accorded Permanent Signatory Status of ***Washington Accord*** since June, 2014.
- It has adopted internationally implemented outcome-based assessment and accreditation to ensure the graduates are globally competent.

INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION

The 67th biennial meeting of International Whaling Commission (IWC) is going to be held in Brazil.

In the upcoming meeting, Brazil is going to push for "***Florianopolis Declaration***".

The declaration insists that commercial whaling is no longer a necessary economic activity and would allow the recovery of all whale population to pre-industrial whaling levels.

Its objectives are

- Setting out catch limits by species and area which may be zero as it the case for commercial whaling,
- Designating specified areas as whale sanctuaries,
- Protection of calves and females accompanied by calves,
- Prescribe open and closed seasons and areas for whaling and restrictions on hunting methods.

HIGHLIGHTS

- IWC was set up for the proper conservation of whale stocks and orderly development of the whaling industry.
- The headquarters of the IWC is in Impington, near Cambridge, England.
- Currently, 88 nations are members to this commission including India.
- In 1982 the IWC adopted a moratorium on commercial whaling, which is opposed by Japan, Russia, and other nations.
- It allows non-zero whaling quotas for aboriginal subsistence and member nations may issue 'Scientific Permits' to their citizens.

Commercial Whaling

- The resolution banning the commercial whaling was vehemently opposed by Japan, Russia.
- Australia supported the resolution and opposed the attempts to undermine the moratorium.
- Iceland and Norway are the only countries that allow commercial whaling.
- Iceland has come under direct pressure to end whaling from the European Union.
- Aboriginal subsistence hunting is allowed in several countries including the US, Russia, Greenland, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in the Caribbean.
- Japan continued to hunt whales despite the moratorium, exploiting a loophole allowing "scientific research".

In the recently concluded session of IWC in Brazil, pro-whaling nations blocked the proposal of setting up of sanctuary.

- Whale Sanctuary was proposed in South Atlantic by 39 countries in International Whaling Commission.
- It was meant to provide haven for endangered marine mammals.
- The idea was proposed by Brazil in 2001 in IWC meeting.
- It was co-sponsored by Argentina, Gabon, South Africa and Uruguay.
- Pro-whaling nations include Japan and Russia.

CONTINUOUS EMISSION MONITORING SYSTEM

Recently, CPCB has recommended that even non-polluting industries should also consider installing CEMS as a tool of self-regulation.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Continuous emission monitoring system (CEMS) is a real time air and water pollution monitoring system.
- It comprises of analytical components and software designed to provide continuous real time measurements of pollution by analyzing representative samples of air and water.
- It is an initiative by Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF&CC) and Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to strengthen pollution regime.
- In 2014, CPCB makes installation of CEMS compulsory for 17 categories of highly polluting industries, Common Bio-Medical Waste and Common Hazardous Waste incinerators.

COMPREHENSIVE NUCLEAR TEST BAN TREATY

UN chief has recently reiterated his appeal to eight nations, including India and the US, to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

HIGHLIGHTS

- CTBT is a multilateral treaty that bans all nuclear explosions, for both civilian and military purposes, in all environments.
- It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 September 1996.
- It can only enter into force after it is ratified by eight countries with nuclear technology capacity, namely China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and the United States.
- China, Egypt, Iran, Israel and the United States have signed but not ratified the Treaty.
- India, North Korea and Pakistan have not signed it.
- According to CTBT, each State Party undertakes not to carry out any nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion, and to prohibit and prevent any such nuclear explosion at any place under its jurisdiction or control.
- The Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), an international organization headquartered in Vienna, Austria, was created.

MILEX – 2018

- MILEX is a military field exercise of countries of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technological and Economic Cooperation).

- Its aim is to practice the BIMSTEC nations in planning and conduct of counter terrorist operations.
- The exercise focusses on counter-terrorism operation in semi-urban setting.
- The countries of BIMSTEC organisation are Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal.
- The headquarters is in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

39TH SESSION OF UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

- The 39th session of UN Human Rights Council is going to be held in Geneva.
- It is expected to adopt a resolution on the human rights situation in Myanmar.
- The session follows the report by the **UN Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar**, which detailed crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide by Myanmar's security forces in Rakhine State.

UNHRC

- UNHRC is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system, responsible for promoting and protecting human rights around the world.
- It has 47 seats with tenure of 3 years.
- Members are elected by UN General Assembly by two-third majority vote and no member may occupy a seat for more than 2 consecutive terms.
- It is a separate entity from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), but the council works closely with the OHCHR.
- It accesses human rights situation in all 193 UN member states periodically.
- It published a report on human rights situation in Kashmir and urged Indian government to repeal Armed Forces (Jammu & Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990. But Indian government rejected the report.

EL NINO

World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), has recently forecasted a 70% chance of an El Nino developing by the end of this year.

WMO

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

Indian Meteorological Department, Pune has recently been recognized as the Regional Climate Centre for providing regional climate services to South Asian countries.

EL NINO & LA NINA

El Nino and La Nina are opposite phases of what is known as the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle.

- The ENSO cycle is a scientific term that describes the fluctuations in temperature between the ocean and atmosphere in the east-central Equatorial Pacific.
- La Nina is sometimes referred to as the cold phase of ENSO and El Nino as the warm phase of ENSO.
- These deviations from normal surface temperatures can have large-scale impacts not only on ocean processes, but also on global weather and climate, including India.

For a normal monsoon season, the pressure distribution is as such:

- The Peruvian coast has relatively high pressure than the areas near north Australia and South-East Asia.
- The Indian Ocean is slightly warmer than the adjoining oceans (West pacific –see diagram) and thus the pressure is low relatively due to the warm seas. This is why the moisture laden winds move from near the west pacific to the Indian Ocean and from there on to the lands.
- The pressure on heated Indian land is much lower than that on the Indian Ocean.
- This facilitates the movement of monsoon winds from the sea to the Indian land without any significant diversion.
- But if for some reason this normal distribution is affected, then there is a change in the way trade winds (or monsoon winds) would blow.

However, the following is the pressure and temperature distribution in an El-Nino situation. This is because of the following reasons (and its effects):

- Off the coast of Peru (read in Eastern Pacific and Central Pacific), there is normally cool surface water because of the cold Peruvian current. But El Niño makes it go warm.
- When the water becomes warm, the trade winds, which otherwise flow from East to west, either reverse their direction or get lost.
- Due to this warm water, the air gets up and surface air pressure above Eastern Pacific gets down. On the other hand, the waters cool off in western pacific and off Asia. This leads to rise in surface pressure over the Indian Ocean, Indonesia, and Australia.
- Now as the pressure over the Peruvian coast reduces because of the warm sea water, the flow of moisture laden winds is directed to the Peruvian coasts from the western pacific (the areas near North Australia and South-east Asia – refer to the diagrams above).
- Hence, the moisture laden winds that should have moved towards the Indian coast now move towards the Peruvian coast.
- The warm water causes lots of clouds getting formed in that area, causing heavy rains in Peruvian desert during El Niño years.

This robs the Indian subcontinent of its share in the Monsoon rains. The greater the temperature and pressure difference, the greater would be the shortage in the rainfall in India.

La-NINA

La Niña, “anti-El Niño” or simply “a cold event” is the cooling of water in the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

- The water in Eastern Pacific, which is otherwise cool; gets colder than normal. There is no reversal of the trade winds but it causes strong high pressure over the eastern equatorial Pacific.
- On the other hand, low pressure is caused over Western Pacific and Off Asia.
- This has so far caused the following major effects: Drought in Ecuador and Peru. Low temperature, High Pressure in Eastern Pacific.
- Heavy floods in Australia; High Temperature in Western Pacific, Indian Ocean, Off coast Somalia and good rains in India. Drought in East Africa.

IMPACT

For India, an El Niño is often a cause for concern because of its adverse impact on the south-west monsoon; this happened in 2009. A La Niña, on the other hand, is often beneficial for the monsoon, especially in the latter half. The La Niña that appeared in the Pacific in 2010 probably helped 2010's south-west monsoon end on a favorable note. However, it also contributed to the deluge in Australia, which resulted in one of that country's worst natural disasters with large parts of Queensland either under water from floods of unusual proportions or being battered by tropical cyclones.

VC 11184

- India's first missile tracking ship VC 11184 has been built by Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL).
- It has the capacity to carry 300-strong crew with hi-tech gadgets and communication equipment, powered by two diesel engines, and a large deck capable of helicopter landing.
- It will be named after its official induction into the Indian Navy.
- This will be the first of its kind ocean surveillance ship being built as part to strengthen the country's strategic weapons programme.

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

United States has recently threatened to prosecute ICC officials if Americans are charged with war crimes committed in Afghanistan.

BACKGROUND

- ICC is an intergovernmental organization and international tribunal.
- It is headquartered in ***The Hague in the Netherlands.***
- It has the jurisdiction to prosecute individuals for the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, crime of aggression and war crimes.
- It is the ***world's first permanent international criminal court.***
- It is intended to complement existing national judicial systems and it may therefore only exercise its jurisdiction when certain conditions are met.
- States which become party to the ***Rome Statute*** becomes member of ICC and the co-operation of the non-party states with the ICC is of voluntary nature.
- But when a case is referred to the ICC by the UN Security Council, all UN member states are obliged to cooperate, since its decisions are binding for all of them.
- India is not a signatory to the Rome Statute.
- The United States has not signed up to the court and in 2002, its Congress passed a law enabling U.S to invade the Netherlands to liberate any U.S. citizen held by the court.

BRU REFUGEES

Recently, the Centre and the state governments of Tripura and Mizoram has recently signed an agreement for repatriation of Bru community from Tripura to Mizoram.

Union government has given a choice to Bru refugees in relief camps in Tripura, to either go back to their villages in Mizoram or be ready to be denied free ration and other facilities.

BACKGROUND

- In 1990s, Mizo nationalists had demanded that the Brus be left out of the state's electoral rolls, contending that the tribe was not indigenous to Mizoram.
- The Bru militancy was a reactionary movement against Mizo nationalist groups.
- In 1997, the murder of a Mizo forest guard at the Dampa Tiger Reserve in Mizoram allegedly by Bru militants led to a violent backlash against the community.
- It forced several thousand people belonging to Bru community to flee to neighbouring Tripura.
- The displaced Bru people from Mizoram have been living in various camps in Tripura since 1997.

NATIONAL TECHNICAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION

- India's first missile tracking ship is being built for NTRO by Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL).
- NTRO is India's technical intelligence agency.
- It is working under the supervision of the Prime Minister's Office and the National Security Adviser.
- The organisation has the same "Norms of Conduct" as Intelligent Bureau (IB) and Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).
- In 2017, ministry of home affairs through its notification, listed NTRO under The Intelligence Organisations (Restriction of Rights) Act, 1985.

The provisions of the act are,

- a) It prevents employees of a notified agency from forming unions/associations,
- b) puts restrictions on the employee's freedom of speech,
- c) bars any communication with the press, or publishing a book or other document without the permission of the head of the intelligence organisation.

DAIRY PROCESSING & INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND

The fund was recently inaugurated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.

- The fund will be set with an outlay of Rs.10000 crore.
- The amount will be sourced from NABARD as a loan and end borrower contribution (as interest for the loan).
- The fund will be disbursed to National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) and National Dairy Development Corporation (NCDC).
- It funds the project focussing on building an efficient milk procurement system through building proper infrastructure and equipments.
- These projects will be implemented by NDDB and NCDC through milk unions and dairy cooperatives.
- Milk cooperatives (end borrowers) will be provided financial assistance in the form of loan at 6.5% interest which will be reimbursed over a period of 10 years.

RICE FARMING IMPACTING CLIMATE CHANGE

According to a recent study, rice farming across the world could be responsible for up to twice the level of climate impact.

- The study found that intermittently flooded rice farms can emit 45 times more nitrous oxide as compared to the maximum from continuously flooded farms that predominantly emit methane.
- Methane and Nitrous oxide (N₂O) emission from rice farms could have the same long-term warming impact as about 600 coal plants.
- India, china, Indonesia, Vietnam and Bangladesh are the world's biggest producers of rice.
- The emissions from intermittently flooded rice farms contribute to global warming far more than the previous estimate of 10%.
- The researchers also found an inverse correlation between methane and N₂O emissions from rice farming.
- Water and organic matter management techniques that reduce methane emissions can increase N₂O emissions.
- N₂O is a long-lived greenhouse gas that traps several times more heat in the atmosphere than methane over 20 and 100 years time frames.

UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES PREVENTION ACT

Maharashtra Police has recently invoked UAPA for arresting activists accused of inciting violence in Bhima Koregaon.

UAPA

- The UAPA was introduced in 1967 as a legislation to set out reasonable restrictions on the fundamental freedoms under Article 19(1) of the constitution.
- These restrictions were meant to be used to safeguard India's integrity and sovereignty.
- After repealing Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) act (TADA) and Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), UAPA became the primary anti-terror legislation in India.
- The offences covered under UAPA are terrorist act, membership of terrorist organisation, funding, support and recruitment for terror activities.
- It has poor conviction rate as 22 of 33 trials ended in acquittal or discharge in 2016
- There is a major argument against this act that it has been used by the government to curb extremist activities as opposed to unlawful activities and people are targeted on the basis of their religion or community.

Bhima Koregaon Battle

- It is one of the last battles of 3rd Anglo-Maratha War in January 1818, between Maratha ruler Baji Rao Peshwa II and the British East India Company along with the local Mahar community.
- The battle brought an end to the domination of Peshwas.
- Historically, Mahars were considered as untouchables.
- Maratha King Shivaji, nevertheless, recruited large number of Mahars into the Maratha Army in the 17th century.
- However, relations between Mahars and Peshwas turned sour after Baji Rao II reportedly insulted the community by rejecting their offer to serve the army.
- This made them to side with the English against the Peshwa's numerically superior army.

- After the victory, British erected a commemorative victory pillar (Koregaon Ranstambh) in Bhima-Koregaon village in 1818.

MANGKHUT TYPHOON

- It is a super storm of category 5, with winds of more than 200 kph (124 mph) which tore across the northern tip of the Philippines.
- It brought heavy rain and causing widespread power and communications outages.
- A hurricane is a storm that occurs in the Atlantic Ocean and north eastern Pacific Ocean, a typhoon occurs in the north western Pacific Ocean, a cyclone occurs in the south Pacific or Indian Ocean, a willy-willy in south-west Australia.

G-20 MEET

G-20 Trade and Investment Ministerial Meeting is being held in Mar del Plata in Argentina.

- The Ministerial Meeting discuss about building an inclusive trade system that contributes to sustainable and shared growth.
- G20 Digital Economy Ministerial Meeting was held at Salta, Argentina last month.
- G-20 is made up of 19 countries and the EU.
- G-20 members represent 75% of international trade, half of foreign direct investment flows, half of foreign flows and 80% of global production.

PARYATAN PARV 2018

Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with other Central Ministries, State Governments is organizing the second edition of "Paryatan Parv".

- Paryatan Parv is being organized with the objective of drawing focus on the benefits of tourism, showcasing the cultural diversity of the country and reinforcing the principle of "Tourism for All".
- The three components of Paryatan Parv, are:
 - a) **Dekho Apna Desh**: To encourage Indians to visit their own country.
 - b) **Tourism for All**: Tourism Events at sites across all States in the country are being organised.
 - c) **Tourism & Governance**: Interactive Sessions & Workshops with Stakeholders on varied e-

INDIA - AFRICA

India has recently launched digital bridge called e-VidyaBharati & e-ArogyaBharati Network between India and Africa.

- The network covers 48 african countries and operates based on satellite technology.
- It aims at providing quality tele-education and tele-medicine facility by linking select Indian Universities, Institutions and Super Specialty Hospitals to African educational institutions and hospitals.

PRADHAN MANTRI MATRU VANDANA YOJANA

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) recently marked the anniversary of the launch of scheme as Matru Vandana Saptah.

PMMVY

- Pradhan Mantri Matritva 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.

HIV ESTIMATION 2017 REPORT

The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) has released the report HIV Estimations 2017.

HIGHLIGHTS

- As per the report, in 2017, India had around 21.40 lakh people living with HIV (PLHIV) with adult prevalence of 0.22%.
- SArround 87.58 thousand new HIV infections and 69.11 thousand AIDS related deaths happened in 2017 while around 22,675 mothers needed Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) for prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV.
- HIV Estimations 2017 corroborate the previous rounds in terms of characteristic of the HIV epidemic in India i.e. national prevalence and incidence remains low, but the epidemic is high in some geographical regions and population group.
- The rate of decline in annual new HIV infections has been relatively slower in recent years.
- The report concludes that, overall, the impact of the programme has been significant with more than 80% decline in estimated new infection from peak of epidemic in 1995.
- Similarly, estimated AIDS related death declined by 71% since its peak in 2005.

The report highlights the significant achievement of National AIDS response on prevention as well as on treatment front but has also indicated that there is no place for complacency as country move forward on ambitious goal of attaining the '**End of AIDS' by 2030.**

BACKGROUND

The HIV Estimations 2017 is the 14th round in the series of HIV Estimations under National AIDS Control Programme (NACP).

NACO undertakes HIV estimations biennially in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) – National Institute of Medical Statistics (NIMS).

The first round of HIV estimation in India was done in 1998, while the last round was done in 2015.

NATIONAL AIDS CONTROL ORGANISATION

- It is a division of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare that provides leadership to HIV/AIDS control programme in India through 35 HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Societies.
- In 1986, following the detection of the first AIDS case in the country, the National AIDS Committee was constituted in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- As the epidemic spread, need was felt for a nationwide programme and an organization to steer the programme.
- In 1992 India's first National AIDS Control Programme (1992-1999) was launched, and National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) was constituted to implement the programme.

INDIA'S INDIGENOUS MEDICAL KIT

Scientists at Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS) claim to have developed India's first indigenous medical kit that may ensure protection from serious injuries and faster healing of wounds resulting from nuclear warfare or radioactive leakage.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The kit has been developed for the armed, paramilitary and police forces only as they are the first ones likely to get exposed to radiation — be it during nuclear, chemical and biomedical (NCB) warfare or a rescue operation after a nuclear accident.
- The kit has over 25 items, including radio-protectors that provide 80-90% protection against radiation and nerve gas agents, bandages that absorb radiation as well as tablets and ointments.
- Developed in India for the first time, it's a potent alternative to similar kits that were till now being procured from strategically advanced nations such as the US and Russia at much higher prices.

SIGNIFICANCE

During radioactive accidents thousands of patients may be rushed to hospitals. In several cases, if not most, they will also have traumatic, orthopaedic, surgical injuries or burns. The blood of such patients will have radioactive elements and will require wound dressing with significantly higher absorption capacity so that nothing leaks and infects others. Such highly absorptive dressings and gauze also make it safer for the medical staff to handle radioactive patients as the chance of their own contamination is reduced.

The kit is a potential alternative to those being procured from nations such as the US and Russia at much higher prices. Such medicines will help everyone and not just soldiers. This will also help the victims affected in terrorist attacks.

EyeROV TUNA

India's first underwater robotic drone EyeROV TUNA was recently handed over to Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory (NPOL) of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

HIGHLIGHTS

- It has been designed and developed indigenously by Kochi-based start-up IROV Technologies Pvt Ltd (EyeROV).
- It is smart micro-ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicle) or underwater drone.

- This underwater drone will be used by NPOL for research and development activities which in turn would result in commercial product for defence purposes.
- It is designed to perform visual inspection and surveys of submerged structures up to depth of 100 metres.
- It is also equipped to perform variety of functions, including inspection of ship hulls, undersea cables or bridge moorings, fish farms, dams, port structure and bridge foundations and also in various underwater research operations.
- Its commercial use will eliminate need for costlier and riskier manual inspection by divers.

NAHARGARH BIOLOGICAL PARK

Rajasthan's first lion safari has been inaugurated at Nahargarh Biological Park.

- The park is located on Delhi-Jaipur National Highway in the Aravalli foothills, nearly 12 kilometers from state capital Jaipur.
- Lions in this park were brought from Junagarh, Gujarat under an exchange programme.
- The park will serve for breeding lions and also centre of attraction for tourists. It will provide new habitat to lions and also add tourism venue to the Pink City.

SECTION 498A

Taking note of the 'misuse' of Section 498A, the Supreme Court has said that the accused can now seek anticipatory bail.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The apex court, while modifying the verdict given by its two-judge bench, said that there is no scope for courts for constitutionally filling up gaps in penal law.
- The earlier order had provisions for setting up of a committee to deal with complaints of dowry harassment.
- Erasing role of ***NALSA (National Legal Services Authority)*** and NGOs, the apex court said courts are there to protect harassed husbands and their relatives, who are not remotely connected to matrimonial cruelty, by granting them anticipatory bail.
- A batch of pleas were filed in the Supreme Court seeking revisiting of a judgement that had reduced the severity of the anti-dowry law on the offence of subjecting a married woman to cruelty by spouse and in-laws.
- A two-judge bench of the apex court in July last year had voiced concern over "abuse" of section 498 A (subjecting a married woman to cruelty) and passed a slew of directions, including that no arrest should "normally be effected" without verifying allegations as violation of human rights of innocents could not be brushed aside.

SECTION 498A:

Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code deals with husband or relatives of husbands subjecting a woman to cruelty. Punishment under the Section is a maximum of three years and was so far a non-bailable offence.

EXPORTING CORRUPTION REPORT

The 2018 edition of the 'Exporting Corruption Report' has been released by anti-corruption organisation Transparency International. The classification of enforcement is based on the convention countries' enforcement actions in the period 2014-2017.

HIGHLIGHTS

- In this 2018 report, China, Hong Kong, India and Singapore – all with 2% or more of world exports, but not parties to the OECD (Anti-Bribery) Convention – are classified for the first time and all fall into the lowest level (little or no enforcement).
- This poor performance argues for these countries' accession to the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention.
- They are, however, parties to the UN Convention against Corruption, which also calls for enforcement against foreign bribery.
- Transparency International urges them to join the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention.
- India is among four countries with “no or little enforcement” mechanism to check foreign bribery.
- The report asks India to criminalise foreign bribery and introduce effective legislation to protect whistle blowers in the private sector.
- The Indian government does not publish statistics on its foreign bribery enforcement and does not disclose such statistics on request.
- The authorities do not disclose any information about unpublished cases related to bribery of foreign public officials by Indians.
- India is also not clear whether the governmental enforcement and investigative agencies collect information related to foreign bribery, separately or not
- There are also inadequacies in implementation of Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) Treaty. The translation of documents into foreign languages is a major factor slowing down the MLA process.

OECD ANTI BRIBERY CONVENTION

- The OECD Anti-Bribery Convention was adopted in 1997 to address the supply side of international corruption.
- Its aim is to create a level playing field between OECD countries by subjecting countries to the same criminal standards. Before the OECD Convention, the US was the only OECD country that prohibited its companies from bribing foreign officials.
- The OECD Convention does not address private (business-to-business) bribery.
- There are now 44 parties to the convention, 36 of them members of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development).

HIGHLIGHTS

- Prohibits the bribery of foreign officials.
- Includes an obligation to prosecute companies suspected of bribing public officials abroad.
- Encourages enhanced collaboration between the law enforcement agencies of signatory countries.
- Bans the tax deductibility of bribes to foreign public officials.
- Recommends the establishment of effective whistleblowing mechanisms.

- The OECD carries out rigorous peer-review examinations monitoring the level of implementation of the OECD Convention and OECD recommendations.

STRATEGIC TRADE AUTHORISATION (STA-1)

The United States has asserted that it will continue to advocate for New Delhi's membership to the Nuclear Suppliers Group as it meets all the criteria. US has granted India the Strategic Trade Authorisation (STA-1) status. The status places India in the inner circle of America's closest allies.

HIGHLIGHTS

India has been seeking entry into the 48-member nuclear group, which controls nuclear trade.

While India, which is backed by the US and a number of western countries has garnered the support of a majority of the group's members, China has stuck to its stand that new members should sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), making India's entry difficult as the group is guided by the consensus principle. India is not a signatory to the NPT.

NSG

Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is a multinational body concerned with reducing nuclear proliferation by controlling the export and re-transfer of materials that may be applicable to nuclear weapon development and by improving safeguards and protection on existing materials. Interestingly, the NSG was set up in 1974 as a reaction to India's nuclear tests to stop what it called the misuse of nuclear material meant for peaceful purposes.

India sought membership of the NSG in 2008, but its application hasn't been decided on, primarily because signing the NPT or other nuclear moratoriums on testing is a pre-requisite. However, India has received a special waiver to conduct nuclear trade with all nuclear exporters.

India, Pakistan, Israel and South Sudan are among the four UN member states which have not signed the NPT, the international pact aimed at preventing the spread of nuclear weapons.

NATIONAL WATER AWARDS

Union Ministry of Water Resources has instituted National Water Awards. The awards will be given for 13 categories.

The objective of these awards is to encourage all stakeholders including NGOs, Gram Panchayats, Urban local bodies, water user associations, institutions, corporate sector, Individuals etc. for adopting innovative practices of ground water augmentation by rainwater harvesting and artificial recharge.

It also seeks to encourage water use efficiency, recycling and reuse of water and creating awareness through people's participation in targeted areas for ground water resources development, adequate capacity building etc.

FIXED DOSE COMBINATION DRUGS

The government has prohibited the manufacture, sale or distribution of 328 fixed dose combination (FDC) drugs for human use with immediate effect.

The health ministry's ban on FDCs included painkillers, anti-diabetic, respiratory and gastro-intestinal medicines, covering 6,000 brands.

FIXED DOSE COMBINATIONS

An FDC is a cocktail of two or more active drug ingredients in a fixed ratio of doses. According to US healthcare provider IMS Health, almost half the drugs sold in India in 2014 were FDC, making it a world leader in combination drugs.

SIGNIFICANCE

FDCs' popularity in India is due to advantages such as increased efficacy, better compliance, reduced cost and simpler logistics of distribution. FDCs have shown to be particularly useful in the treatment of infectious diseases like HIV, malaria and tuberculosis, where giving multiple antimicrobial agents is the norm. FDCs are also useful for chronic conditions especially, when multiple disorders co-exist.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

Cabinet approves continuation of Capacity Development Scheme for the period 2017-18 to 2019-20.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

- The Capacity Development Scheme is an Ongoing Central Sector Scheme of MoSPI.
- The overall objective of the scheme is to augment infrastructural, technical as well as manpower resources for making available credible and timely Official Statistics for policy makers and public at large.
- The major ongoing activities under the Capacity Development Scheme, include:
 - a) Augmenting resources for bringing out important statistical products, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Consumer Price Index (CPI), Index of Industrial Production (IIP), Statistical classifications, etc.
 - b) Conducting various Socio-Economic surveys, capacity building and strengthening statistical coordination, and improving IT infrastructure.
 - c) Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), a continuous survey to assess quarterly labour data in urban areas and annual labour data for the whole country (urban and rural areas).
 - d) For better statistical coverage of sectors/areas, three new surveys have been taken up under the Capacity Development Scheme, namely, Time Use Survey (TUS), Annual Survey of Service Sector Enterprises (ASSSE), and Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE).

UN INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE AWARD

Shri Manoj Jhalani, Additional Secretary & Mission Director (NHM), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, has been conferred with the prestigious UN Interagency Task Force (UNIATF) Award for his outstanding contribution towards prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and related Sustainable Development Goals.

UNIATF

- A July 2013 resolution at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) formally established the UN Interagency Task Force on NCDs by expanding the mandate of the existing UN Ad Hoc Interagency Task Force on Tobacco Control.
- The Task Force is convened and led by WHO, and reports to ECOSOC through the UN Secretary General.

- UN Interagency Task Force (UNIATF) on the Prevention and Control of NCDs coordinates activities of relevant United Nations funds, programmes and specialised agencies and other intergovernmental organisations, to support the realisation of the commitments made in the UN Political Declaration on NCDs, in particular through the implementation of the WHO Global NCD Action Plan 2013-2020.
- Following the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, UNIATF's scope of work was expanded in 2016 to include "NCD related SDGs" – i.e. mental health, violence and injuries, nutrition, and environmental issues that impact on NCDs.

NCDs

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), also known as chronic diseases, tend to be of long duration and are the result of a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behaviours factors. The main types of NCDs are cardiovascular diseases (like heart attacks and stroke), cancers, chronic respiratory diseases (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma) and diabetes.

PRADHAN MANTRI ANNADATA AAY SANRAKSHAN ABHIYAN (PM AASHA)

Giving a major boost to the pro-farmer initiatives of the Government and in keeping with its commitment and dedication for the Annadata, the Union Cabinet has approved a new Umbrella Scheme "Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanrakshHan Abhiyan" (PM-AASHA). The Scheme is aimed at ensuring remunerative prices to the farmers for their produce as announced in the Union Budget for 2018.

The umbrella scheme 'PM-AASHA' comprises three sub-schemes:

- Price Support Scheme (PSS).
- Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS).
- Pilot of Private Procurement & Stockist Scheme (PPPS).

Price Support Scheme (PSS):

- Under the scheme, the physical procurement of pulses, oilseeds and Copra will be done by Central Nodal Agencies with the proactive role of the state governments.
- Further, in addition to NAFED, the Food Cooperation of India (FCI) will take up PSS operations in states and districts.
- The procurement expenditure and losses due to procurement will be borne by the Union Government as per norms.

Price Deficiency Payment Scheme this scheme (PDPS):

- Under the scheme, it is proposed to cover all oilseeds for which minimum support price (MSP) is notified.
- In this, direct payment of the difference between the MSP and the selling/modal price will be made to pre-registered farmers selling his produce in the notified market yard through a transparent auction process. All payments will be done directly into the registered bank account of the farmer.
- This scheme does not involve any physical procurement of crops as farmers are paid the difference between the MSP price and sale or modal price on disposal in the notified market. The support of the central government for PDPS will be given as per norms.

Pilot of Private Procurement & Stockist Scheme (PPPS):

- For oilseeds, the states will have the option to roll out Private Procurement Stockist Scheme (PPSS) on pilot basis in selected districts and Agricultural Produce Market Committee's (APMC) of district involving the participation of private stockiest.
- The pilot district and selected APMC(s) will cover one or more crop of oilseeds for which MSP is notified.
- Since this is similar to the PSS scheme, as it involves physical procurement of the notified commodity, the scheme shall substitute PSS/PDPS in the pilot districts.
- The selected private agency shall procure the commodity at MSP in the notified markets during the notified period from the registered farmers in accordance with the PPSS Guidelines, whenever the prices in the market fall below the notified MSP and whenever authorised by the state or UT government to enter the market. The maximum service charges up to 15% of the notified MSP will be payable.

DISTRIBUTED LEDGER & BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY

Cabinet has approved MoU on Collaborative Research on Distributed Ledger and Block Chain Technology in the context of Development of digital economy by Exim Bank under BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Distributed Ledger/Block chain technology holds potential for solutions to various challenges being faced in the financial sector space of the BRICS nations.
- The MoU intends to enhance understanding of Distributed Ledger/Block Chain technology, through the joint research efforts to identify areas within respective business operations where it may have the potential for applications aimed at enhancing the operational efficiencies.

BACKGROUND

The ***Xiamen Declaration*** signed in China on digital economy by the BRICS leaders had highlighted the importance of the digital economy and how the BRICS nations could leverage the thriving and dynamic digital economy that will foster global economic development and benefit everyone. Accordingly, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Collaborative Research on Distributed Ledger and Block chain Technology in the Context of the Development of the Digital Economy was suggested to be inked by all member banks.

BLOCKCHAINS

- Blockchains are a new data structure that is ***secure, cryptography-based, and distributed*** across a network.
- The technology supports cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, and the transfer of any data or digital asset.
- Spearheaded by Bitcoin, blockchains achieve consensus among distributed nodes, allowing the transfer of digital goods without the need for centralized authorisation of transactions.
- The present blockchain ecosystem is like the early Internet, a permission less innovation environment in which email, the World Wide Web, Napster, Skype, and Uber were built.
- The technology allows transactions to be simultaneously anonymous and secure, peer-to-peer, instant and frictionless.

- It does this by distributing trust from powerful intermediaries to a large global network, which through mass collaboration, clever code and cryptography, enables a tamper-proof public ledger of every transaction that's ever happened on the network.
- A block is the "current" part of a blockchain which records some or all of the recent transactions, and once completed, goes into the blockchain as permanent database.
- Each time a block gets completed, a new block is generated. Blocks are linked to each other (like a chain) in proper linear, chronological order with every block containing a hash of the previous block.

BENEFITS:

- As a public ledger system, blockchain records and validate each and every transaction made, which makes it secure and reliable.
- All the transactions made are authorized by miners, which makes the transactions immutable and prevent it from the threat of hacking.
- Blockchain technology discards the need of any third-party or central authority for peer-to-peer transactions.
- It allows decentralization of the technology.

ETHANOL BLENDED PETROL PROGRAMME

Cabinet approves on Fixation/Revision of ethanol price derived from B heavy molasses / partial sugarcane juice and 100% sugarcane juice under Ethanol Blended Petrol Programme for Ethanol Supply Year 2018-19.

There has been a consistent shortfall in supply of ethanol in the past, mainly on account of the cyclical nature of the sugarcane harvests in the country. There is "lack of an integrated approach in the EBP across its value chain."

HIGHLIGHTS

- The decision will serve multiple purposes of reducing excess sugar in the country, increasing liquidity with the sugar mills for settling cane farmer's dues and making higher ethanol available for Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme.
- All distilleries will be able to take benefit of the scheme and large number of them are expected to supply ethanol for the EBP programme.
- Remunerative price to ethanol suppliers will help in reduction of cane farmer's arrears, in the process contributing to minimizing difficulty of sugarcane farmers.
- Ethanol availability for EBP Programme is expected to increase significantly due to higher price being offered for procurement of ethanol from B heavy molasses / partial sugarcane juice and 100% sugarcane juice for first time.
- Increased ethanol blending in petrol has many benefits including reduction in import dependency, support to agricultural sector, more environmental friendly fuel, lesser pollution and additional income to farmers.

BENEFITS

Increased ethanol blending in petrol has many benefits including reduction in import dependency, support to agricultural sector, more environmental friendly fuel, lesser pollution and additional income to farmers.

ETHANOL BLENDED PETROL PROGRAMME

- It was launched by the Government in 2003 on pilot basis which has been subsequently extended to the Notified 21 States and 4 Union Territories to promote the use of alternative and environmental friendly fuels.
- It aims at blending ethanol with petrol, thereby bringing it under the category of biofuels and saving millions of dollars by cutting fuel imports.
- Ethanol Blended Petrol Programme is being implemented by the Ministry or Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs).
- This intervention also seeks to reduce import dependency for energy requirements and give boost to agriculture sector.

The National Policy on Bio-fuels has set a target of **20% blending of biofuels**, both for **bio-diesel and bio-ethanol**. This will require an integrated approach in the Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP).

INDIA'S FIRST SHIP TRACKING MISSILE

Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL) is gearing up to undertake sea trials of India's first missile tracking ship by the first week of October.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This will be the first of its kind ocean surveillance ship being built as part of the efforts to strengthen the country's strategic weapons programme.
- Its induction will put India in the elite of club of a few countries that have such a sophisticated ocean surveillance ship.
- It has the capacity to carry 300-strong crew with hi-tech gadgets and communication equipment, powered by two diesel engines, and a large deck capable of helicopter landing.

ANIMAL WELFARE BOARD OF INDIA

Union Women and Child Development has accused the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) of being lax in enforcement of rules that specify how wild animals can be depicted in films and television programmes.

ISSUE

The ministry has listed "blatant errors" by the AWBI subcommittee that screens applications from film-makers. Ministry alleged that the committee did not seek details of the species being used, which were required to determine whether they were protected. It had even allowed their depiction in scenes that could promote cruelty to animals. This is against the Supreme Court's orders.

ANIMAL WELFARE BOARD OF INDIA

Established in 1962 under Section 4 of The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, the Animal Welfare Board of India is a statutory advisory body advising the Government of India on animal welfare laws, and promotes animal welfare in the country of India. Animal Welfare Board of India was started under the stewardship of Late Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale, well known humanitarian.

- The Board was initially within the jurisdiction of the Government of India's Ministry of Food and Agriculture.

- In 1990, the subject of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was transferred to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, where it now resides.
- The Board consists of 28 Members, who serve for a period of 3 years.
- It works to ensure that animal welfare laws in the country are followed and provides grants to Animal Welfare Organisations.
- The Board oversees Animal Welfare Organisations (AWOs) by granting recognition to them if they meet its guidelines.

BIMSTEC FIELD TRAINING EXERCISE

The first BIMSTEC field training exercise is being held at Foreign Training Node at Aundh in Pune, Maharashtra.

The theme of exercise includes counter-terrorism in semi-urban terrain and cordon and search.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The main aim of this military exercise is to promote strategic alignment among the member-states and to share best practices in the area of counter-terrorism.
- Armies of BIMSTEC members including India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand.
- Nepal is not participating in the exercise.
(The withdrawal of the Nepal Army from the event comes in the wake of stringent criticism from the ruling and opposition parties in the country, warning Nepal Prime Minister K P Oli that the move would go against the country's history of following a policy of keeping equal distance from its neighbours, without ever being part of a regional bloc militarily.)

BIMSTEC

- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization comprising of seven members states in South Asia and Southeast Asia lying in littoral and adjacent areas of Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity.
- This sub-regional organisation came into being on June 6, 1997, through the Bangkok Declaration.
- It is headquartered in Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- It comprises of seven members countries: five deriving from South Asia — including ***Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka*** — and two from Southeast Asia, including ***Myanmar and Thailand***.

HARITAGE TAG FOR TWO IRRIGATION PROJECT OF TELANGANA

A meeting of the International Executive Council, the highest decision-making body of International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID), at Saskatoon in Canada last month has accepted Telangana government's nomination of Sadarmatt anicut across river Godavari in Nirmal district and Pedda Cheruvu in Kamareddy district in the ICID Register of Heritage Irrigation Structures.

SADARMATT ANICUT:

- It was constructed during 1891-92 across Godavari river on the left arm on downstream of Sriram Sagar Project near Medampally village in Nirmal.

- It was built by Nawab Iqbal-ud-Dowla who bore the title of Vicar-ul-Umrah Bahadur about 50 km downstream of the Sri Ram Sagar Project (SRSP) and is chiefly fed by Sawarnavagu stream.
- The anicut was constructed only for irrigation purpose to provide water to 13,100 acres of land. While major crop being irrigated under Sadarmatt is paddy (contributing 80% of irrigated area), the other crops include maize and turmeric.

PEDDA CHERUVU

- The Pedda Cheruvu (big tank in Telugu) was built in 1897 during the rule of Mir Mahaboob Ali Khan, the sixth Nizam of Hyderabad State.
- This tank was taken up under the second round of Mission Kakatiya to be developed as a mini tank bund with an estimated outlay of 6.6 crore.

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON IRRIGATION AND DRAINAGE (ICID)

- The ICID is a Technical and Voluntary Not-for-profit, International NGO, dedicated to enhance the world-wide supply of food and fibre for all people by improving water and land management, and the productivity of irrigated and drained lands.
- The ICID By-laws have been enacted its International Executive Council for the due implementation of the provisions of the Constitution of the Commission.
- It is headquartered in New Delhi.
- ICID has been involved in the global discussions leading to Agenda 21, World Water Vision, World Water Forums etc., which have become the focal point of several of its technical activities.
- In recognition of its significant contribution to the programs and objectives of International Year of Peace proclaimed by the UN General Assembly, on 15 September 1987 ICID was designated as a Peace Messenger by the UN Secretary General.

DEBT RECOVERY TRIBUNAL

The central government has raised the pecuniary limit from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 20 lakh for filing application for recovery of debts in the Debts Recovery Tribunals by such banks and financial institutions.

The move is aimed at helping reduce pendency of cases in the 39 DRTs in the country.

As a result, no bank or financial institution or a consortium of banks or financial institutions can approach the DRTs if the amount due is less than Rs 20 lakh.

DRT

- Debt Recovery Tribunals were established to facilitate the debt recovery involving banks and other financial institutions with their customers. DRTs were set up after the passing of ***Recovery of Debts due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act (RDDBFI), 1993.***
- Section 3 of the RDDBFI Act empowers the Central government to establish DRTs.
- Appeals against orders passed by DRTs lie before Debts Recovery Appellate Tribunal (DRAT).

BACKGROUND

- The Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) enforces provisions of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions (RDDBFI) Act, 1993 and also **Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interests (SARFAESI) Act, 2002.**
- The Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) are fully empowered to pass comprehensive orders and can travel beyond the Civil procedure Code to render complete justice.
- A Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) can hear cross suits, counter claims and allow set offs.
- However, a Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) cannot hear claims of damages or deficiency of services or breach of contract or criminal negligence on the part of the lenders.
- In addition, a Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) cannot express an opinion beyond its domain, or the list pending before it.
- The Debts Recovery Tribunal can appoint Receivers, Commissioners, pass ex-parte orders, ad-interim orders, interim orders apart from powers to Review its own decisions and hear appeals against orders passed by the Recovery Officers of the Tribunal.

COMPOSITION

- A DRT is presided over by a presiding officer who is appointed by the central govt. and who shall be qualified to be a District Judge; with tenure of 5 years or the age of 62, whichever is earlier.
- No court in the country other than the SC and the HCs and that too, only under articles 226 and 227 of the Constitution have jurisdiction over this matter.

SNOW LEOPARDS

Officials from Himachal State Wildlife Department have spotted snow leopard in Lippa-Asra wildlife sanctuary in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh. This finding indicates that snow leopards are inhabiting new areas.

HIGHLIGHTS

- They are listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
- They inhabit alpine and subalpine zones at elevations from 3,000 to 4,500 m (9,800 to 14,800 ft). In the northern range countries, they also occur at lower elevations.
- The snow leopard is the state animal of Uttarakhand and the National Heritage Animal of Pakistan.
- Their habitat extends through twelve countries: Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. China contains as much as 60% of all snow leopard habitat areas.
- In India, their geographical range encompasses a large part of the western Himalayas including the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh in the eastern Himalayas.
- The snow leopard, like all big cats, is listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), which makes trading of animal body parts (i.e., fur, bones and meat) illegal in signatory countries. It is also protected by several national laws in its range countries.
- Global Snow Leopard Forum, 2013: 12 countries encompassing the snow leopard's range (Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan).
- Bishkek Declaration: To protect the species and its environment.

- Global Snow Leopard and Eco-system Protection Program: It is a joint initiative of range country governments, international agencies, civil society, and the private sector. Goal — secure the long-term survival of the snow leopard in its natural ecosystem.

CHABAHAR PORT

Iran will hand over the strategic Chabahar port to an Indian company within a month for operation as per an interim pact. Under the agreement signed between India and Iran earlier, India is to equip and operate two berths in Chabahar Port Phase-I on a 10-year lease.

CHABAHAR PORT

- Iran's Chabahar port is located on the Gulf of Oman and is the only oceanic port of the country. The port gives access to the energy-rich Persian Gulf nations' southern coast and India can bypass Pakistan with the Chabahar port becoming functional.
- The first and foremost significance of the Chabahar port is the fact that India can bypass Pakistan in transporting goods to Afghanistan.
- Chabahar port will boost India's access to Iran, the key gateway to the International North-South Transport Corridor that has sea, rail and road routes between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.

EIGHT BIRDS TO BE EXTINCT

Scientists have declared eight species of birds to be extinct in what are being seen as the first avian extinctions of the 21st century.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The study was conducted by non-profit "BirdLife International".
- It assessed 51 species judged "critically endangered" on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) "Red List" by using a new statistical method.
- The species gone extinct include Spix's macaw, the Alagoas foliage-gleaner, the cryptic treehunter, the Pernambuco pygmy-owl, the poo-uli, or black-faced honeycreeper and the glaucous macaw.
- Five of these new extinctions have occurred in South America and have been attributed by scientists to deforestation.
- Four out of the eight species declared extinct belong to Brazil.

BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

- BirdLife International (***formerly the International Council for Bird Preservation***) is a global partnership of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources.
- It is the world's largest partnership of conservation organisations, with over 120 partner organisations.
- BirdLife International publishes a quarterly magazine, World Birdwatch, which contains recent news and authoritative articles about birds, their habitats, and their conservation around the world.
- BirdLife International is the official Red List authority for birds, for the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

IMPORTANT BIRD & BIODIVERSITY AREAS

- The IBAs are “places of international significance for the conservation of birds and other biodiversity” and are “distinct areas amenable to practical conservation action”.
- Declaring a site as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area does not ensure that the site gets legal protection or becomes inaccessible to people.
- Instead BirdLife International encourages national and State governments to recognise the areas as sites of vital importance for conservation of wildlife and to empower local community-based conservation initiatives.

ATAL PENSION SCHEME

Union Cabinet decided to indefinitely extend Atal Pension Scheme, which had lapsed in August 2018. It also has broadened its scope by keeping it open-ended. The extension was given by taking into consideration of mass participation.

NEW CHANGES

- To further incentivize people’s participation in the scheme, age criterion for participation has been revised.
- Earlier, people of age **18 to 60 years** were entitled to enroll in this scheme.
- But now it has been relaxed further to **65 years**, taking into consideration rise in average age-expectancy.
- Also, now the scheme will expand its focus to target individuals, instead of households.
- Besides, all accounts opened after August 2018 will have accident insurance limit of Rs 2 lakh, double than earlier Rs 1 lakh limit.
- The overdraft facility of the scheme has also been increased from Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000.

ATAL PENSION YOJANA

- Under the APY, subscribers would receive a fixed minimum pension of Rs. 1000 per month, Rs. 2000 per month, Rs. 3000 per month, Rs. 4000 per month, Rs. 5000 per month, at the age of 60 years, depending on their contributions, which itself would vary on the age of joining the APY.
- The Central Government would also co-contribute 50% of the total contribution or Rs. 1000 per annum, whichever is lower, to each eligible subscriber account, for a period of 5 years, that is, from 2015-16 to 2019-20, to those who join the NPS before 31st December, 2015 and who are not members of any statutory social security scheme and who are not Income Tax payers.
- The minimum age of joining APY is 18 years and maximum age is 40 years.
- The benefit of fixed minimum pension would be guaranteed by the Government.

PROGRAMME FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) has officially decided to participate in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) after gap of nine years. It will send team of officers to Paris to negotiate India’s terms of participation in PISA 2021.

BACKGROUND

India had taken part in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2009 and bagged the 72nd rank among 74 participating countries. Then UPA government had boycotted PISA, blaming “out of context” questions for India’s dismal performance.

PISA

- The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years.
- First conducted in 2000, the major domain of study rotates between reading, mathematics, and science in each cycle.
- PISA also includes measures of general or cross-curricular competencies, such as collaborative problem solving.
- By design, PISA emphasizes functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory schooling.
- PISA is coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization of industrialized countries, and is conducted in the United States by NCES. Data collection for the most recent assessment was completed in Fall 2015.

PISA 2021

- PISA 2021 test is likely to be administered in schools in Union Territory of Chandigarh.
- Apart from schools in Chandigarh, HRD Ministry also suggested that all Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) and Navodaya Vidyalayas (NVs), funded and run by Centre, shall take the test.

SLINEX 2018

India, Sri Lanka joint naval exercise SLINEX-2018 was recently held at Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

BACKGROUND

- SLINEX exercise started in 2005 was previously held once in two years and now it has been converted to annual event this year onwards.
- SLINEX exercise is continuation of ongoing operational interaction between both navies wherein regular ships visits are being undertaken between the two countries.
- SLINEX 2017 was held at Visakhapatnam in September 2017 wherein two ships SLNS participated from Sri Lanka Navy.

NALSA COMPENSATION SCHEME

In support of minor survivors of rape or sexual assault, the Supreme Court of India has issued a slew of guidelines.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Minor survivors of rape or sexual assault will get compensation on par with women victims.
- National Legal Services Authority's (NALSA) compensation scheme for women rape and sexual assault survivors shall be extended to minor children.
- Special Judges under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act should disburse compensation to minor victims of sex abuse as per the NALSA's 'Compensation Scheme for Women Victims/Survivors of Sexual Assault/Other Crimes-2018'.

NALSA COMPENSATION SCHEME

- The NALSA scheme provides a uniform payment of 5 lakh to a maximum 10 lakh for "loss of life" and to gang rape survivors in any part of the country.

- Similarly, in case of rape and unnatural sexual assault, the victim would get a minimum of 4 lakh and maximum of 7 lakh as compensation.
- Among other categories, if a victim suffers the loss of foetus, that is, by miscarriage as a result of assault or loss fertility, the NALSA scheme offers a compensation of 2 lakh to 3 lakh.
- The scheme provides a victim of acid attacks, in case of disfigurement of face, would get a minimum compensation of 7 lakh, while the upper limit would be 8 lakh.
- In acid attack cases, if the injury was more than 50%, a minimum compensation of 5 lakh would be given, while the maximum would be 8 lakh.

NALSA

NALSA has been constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, to provide free legal services to weaker sections of society. The aim is to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reasons of economic or other disabilities.

- NALSA organises Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes.
- NALSA identifies specific categories of the marginalised and excluded groups and formulates various schemes for the implementation of preventive and strategic legal service programmes.
- Services provided by the agency include free legal aid in civil and criminal matters for the poor and marginalised people who cannot afford the services of a lawyer in any court or tribunal.
- Free legal services include provision of aid and advice to beneficiaries to access the benefits under the welfare statutes and schemes and to ensure access to justice in any other manner.

DRAFT BILL TO CLEAN GANGA

With an aim to clean the river Ganga, Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation has prepared a draft bill. The draft bill has provisions for several stringent measures.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The draft seeks to constitute **Ganga Protection Corps** whose personnel will have the authority to arrest those who pollute the river. The offenders may face a prison term of up to three years and a fine of up to Rs 5 lakh. GPC will follow Code of Criminal Procedure.
- Its personnel will be provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs and will be deployed by National Ganga Rejuvenation Authority.
- The draft bill lays down provision for a National Ganga Council and a National Ganga Rejuvenation Authority to enforce the law and protect the river which flows over 2500 km.

No person or municipal authority will establish or take any steps to set up any industrial or residential or commercial premises or structure which may result in discharge of any sewage or trade effluent into the Ganga, otherwise he may face a five-year prison term or a fine of Rs 50,000 per day or both.

Among the cognizable offences, there are “Construction activities causing obstruction in the river; withdrawal of ground water for industrial or commercial consumption from the land fronting the river and its tributaries; commercial fishing or aqua culture in the river and its tributaries; discharging untreated or treated sewage into the river”.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS SUMMIT 2018

The International Women Entrepreneurs Summit 2018 is being held in Kathmandu, Nepal.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is organised by the South Asian Women Development Forum.
- **Theme: “Equality begins with Economic Empowerment”** .
- The main objective of the summit is to bring together achievers, women business leaders, professionals, international service providers, resource organisations, experts, government representatives and other stakeholders with a focus on innovative economic transformation through discussions and collaborations.

SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN DEVELOPMENT FORUM

- SAWDF is an autonomous, nonprofit organization based in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- It was granted the status of SAARC Recognized Body by 36th Session of SAARC Council Ministers at 18th SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu in 2014.
- It is first SAARC Recognized Body organisation working on women entrepreneurs issues.
- It represents national women entrepreneurs’ associations or organizations, institutions working towards economic issues of women entrepreneurs in SAARC Region.
- Its membership is based on organizations with extensive work around women’s entrepreneurship.

DRAFT CHARTER OF PATIENT’S RIGHTS

The draft Charter of Patients’ Rights, prepared by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), has been released. The Ministry plans to implement the Charter of Patients’ Rights through State governments for provision of proper health care by clinical establishments.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The draft charter includes 17 rights with description, draws upon all relevant provisions, inspired by international charters and guided by national level provisions, with the objective of consolidating these into a single document.
- The proposed Charter draws upon all the existing relevant provisions, with the objective of consolidating these into a single document, thereby making them publicly known in a coherent manner.
- There is an expectation that this document will act as a guidance document for the Centre and state governments to formulate concrete mechanisms so that patient’s rights are given adequate protection and operational mechanisms are set-up to make these rights functional and enforceable by law.
- The charter also prescribes certain responsibilities that the patient must adhere to.
 - a. Providing all required information to their doctor, without concealing relevant facts, so as to ensure a correct diagnosis and treatment.
 - b. Patients are also expected to follow all instructions regarding appointment time, co-operate with hospital staff and fellow patients, avoid creating disturbance to other patients, and maintain cleanliness in the hospital.
 - c. Patients should respect the dignity of the doctor and other hospital staff. Whatever the grievance may be, patient or caregivers should not resort to violence in any form.
 - d. The patients should also take responsibility for their actions based on choices made regarding treatment options and in case they refuse treatment.

INTERNATIONAL AVIATION SUMMIT

The International Aviation Summit is being held New Delhi.

- The summit has been jointly organised by the Airports Authority of India, Ministry of Civil Aviation and International Air Transport Association (IATA).
- The Indian Government is preparing for a massive air traffic surge to handle as many as 100 crore passengers in next 15-20 years, much above the 50 crore trips a year as predicted by IATA.
- According to IATA, India is expected to overtake Germany, Japan, Spain and the UK within the next ten years to become the world's third largest air passenger market.

CHALLENGES

- India's aviation industry is showing contrast as on one hand there are infrastructural and economic issues plaguing the sector while on the other, airline companies are busy buying planes to meet the demand.
- With a surge in domestic air travel demand in India, the country's airlines are gearing up for a rise and have ordered around 1,000 aircraft over the next eight years. But despite traffic growth, the financial outlook for domestic airlines has deteriorated dramatically since January.
- Imposing GST on international air tickets is being seen as a violation of international standards. The GST rate is 5% and 12% on economy and business class tickets respectively.

IATA

- The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is the trade association for the world's airlines, representing some 280 airlines or 83% of total air traffic. Formed in April 1945, it is the successor to the International Air Traffic Association, which was formed in 1919.
- IATA supports airline activity and helps formulate industry policy and standards. It also provides consulting and training services in many areas crucial to aviation.
- It is headquartered in Montreal, Quebec, Canada with Executive Offices in Geneva, Switzerland.

COFFEE CONNECT

The government has launched Coffee Connect – India coffee field force app and Coffee Krishi Tharanga – digital mobile extension services for coffee stakeholders.

COFFEE CONNECT

- The mobile app Coffee Connect has been developed to ease the work of field functionaries and to improve the work efficiency.
- This application provides solution by harnessing the power of mobility comprising the latest technology in easing the whole process of the field.
- This includes activities like digitization of Coffee Growers & Estates with Geo Tagging, collecting the Plantation details.
- It will also help in transparency in the activities of the extension officers and officials, transparency in subsidy disbursement and real time report generation.

COFFEE KRISHI THARANGA

- The Coffee Krishi Tharanga services are aimed at providing customized information and services to increase productivity, profitability, and environmental sustainability.

- NABARD has partly funded the Pilot project.
- The solution will help in to reach maximum growers in limited period, efficient, timely, customised advisory, improve the efficiency through digitization and leverage existing mobile reach for wider delivery of improved technology.

COFFEE BOARD OF INDIA

- The Coffee Board of India is an organisation managed by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of the government of India to promote coffee production in India.
- It was established by an act of Parliament in 1942.
- Its duties included the promotion of the sale and consumption of coffee in India and abroad, conducting coffee research, financial assistance to establish small coffee growers, safeguarding working conditions for laborers, and managing the surplus pool of unsold coffee.

INDIAN OCEAN WAVE EXERCISE 2018

India along with 23 other nations is participating in this major Indian ocean-wide tsunami mock drill which involves evacuation of thousands of people from coastal areas in over half a dozen coastal states.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This tsunami warning exercise is being organised by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO.
- It was the IOC that coordinated the setting up of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (IOTWMS) in the aftermath of December 2004 tsunami.
- Besides testing the standard operating procedure (SOP) and communication links at all levels of the warning chain, a primary objective of IOWave18 exercise is to enhance tsunami preparedness at community level.
- The purpose of exercise is to increase tsunami preparedness, evaluate response capabilities in each state and improve coordination throughout the region.

SIGNIFICANCE

Exercise IOWave18 will simulate Indian Ocean countries being put in a tsunami warning situation and require the respective National Tsunami Warning Centres and the Disaster Management Offices in each country to implement their Standard Operating Procedures.

IOWave18 will also provide an opportunity for Member States to test the indicators of Indian Ocean Tsunami Ready (IOTR) programme in pilot communities. IOTR is a community performance-based programme that facilitates a structural and systematic approach in building tsunami preparedness.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION

- UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) promotes international cooperation and coordinates programmes in marine research, services, observation systems, hazard mitigation, and capacity development to understand and manage the resources of the ocean and coastal areas.
- The Commission aims to improve the governance, management, institutional capacity, and decision-making processes of its Member States with respect to marine resources and climate variability.

- IOC coordinates ocean observation and monitoring through the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) which aims to develop a unified network providing information on the oceans.
- IOC also coordinates and fosters the establishment of regional intergovernmental tsunami warning and mitigation systems in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, in the North East Atlantic, Mediterranean and Caribbean seas.

E-PHARMACIES

Ministry of health and family welfare has issued a draft notification recently on the sale of drugs by E-Pharmacies. The notification is about the amendment of Drugs and Cosmetics Rules amendment to enable registration of the e pharmacies and monitoring of their functioning.

SIGNIFICANCE

- With this, Rs 3000 crore online pharma business will be regularised from the day of final notification.
- These rules have been proposed to ensure accessibility and availability of drugs to the people across India.
- After the rules are finalised, people will be able to get genuine drugs through these online pharmacies.

HIGHLIGHTS

- All the e-pharmacies have to be registered compulsorily with the Central Drugs Standard control organisation.
- Psychotropic substances, habit-forming medicines like cough syrup and sleeping pills, schedule x drugs will not be sold online.
- Apart from registration, the e pharmacies have to obtain a license from the State government to sell the medicines online.
- The application of registration of e-pharmacy will have to be accompanied by a sum of Rs 50,000 while asserting that an e-pharmacy registration holder will have to comply with provisions of Information Technology Act, 2000 (21 of 2000).
- The details of patient shall be kept confidential and shall not be disclosed to any person other than the central government or the state government concerned, as the case may be.
- The supply of any drug shall be made against a cash or credit memo generated through the e-pharmacy portal and such memos shall be maintained by the e-pharmacy registration holder as record.
- Both state and central drug authorities will be monitoring the data of sales and transactions of e pharmacies. Any violation of rules the registration of e-pharmacies will be suspended, and it can be cancelled too.
- The premises from which e-pharmacy is operated regular inspections will be conducted every two years by the central licencing authority.

WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR SOUTH EAST ASIA

1st Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia was recently held.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Regional Committee for South-East Asia is the World Health Organization's governing body in the South-East Asia Region, with representatives from all 11 Member States of the Region.
- It meets in September every year to review progress in health development in the Region, formulate resolutions on health issues for the Member States, as well as to consider the regional implications of World Health Assembly resolutions, among others.

World Health Organization in South-East Asia:

- The South-East Asia Region of the World Health Organization, established in 1948, was the first of its six regions.
- Home to a quarter of the world population, WHO SEARO provides leadership on health matters, articulates evidence-based policy options, provides technical support to countries and monitors health trends.

WHO South-East Asia Countries:

- Bangladesh, Bhutan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand & Timor-Leste.
- WHO by a resolution, has delineated six geographic areas for regional organizations as follows:

a) Eastern Mediterranean.	d) Europe
b) Western Pacific.	e) Africa (South of the Sahara).
c) South-East Asia.	f) The America

KRISHNA KUTIR

Union Ministry of Women and Child Development recently inaugurated widows' home 'Krishna Kutir' at Vrindavan in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. The construction of the home was funded by Central Government and it will be managed by the Uttar Pradesh Government.

Krishna Kutir is a special home for 1000 widows set under Swadhar Greh scheme and is the largest ever facility of its kind created by government organization. It was constructed to mitigate the plight of widows living in pathetic condition in Vrindavan.

SWADHAR SCHEME

- The Swadhar scheme was launched by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2002 for rehabilitation of women in difficult circumstances.
- The scheme provides shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalized women/girls who are in need.
- The beneficiaries include widows deserted by their families and relatives, women prisoners released from jail and without family support, women survivors of natural disasters, women victims of terrorist/extremist violence etc.
- The State Governments/UT Administration invite applications from eligible organizations and the proposals which fulfil the norms are placed before a Project Sanctioning Committee (PSC) chaired by Secretary (WCD) of the State/UT concerned.

As per guidelines of the Swadhar Greh Scheme, to seek financial assistance the agency should meet following requirements:

- The agency should be either recognized by State/UT under existing law or should be well known with the experience or working in the field for at least 3 years and its work should be reported satisfactory by the State Govt./UT Administration concerned.
- It should ordinarily have been engaged in the field of women's welfare/social welfare for a minimum period of two years.
- Its financial position should be sound.
- It should have facilities, resources, experience and personnel to undertake the management of such project.
- It should run Swadhar Greh on a no-profit basis.
- It should have facilities like computers, internet connection etc at Swadhar Greh.

PUBLIC CREDIT REGISTRY

Recently, RBI Deputy Governor Viral Acharya made a case for setting up a Public Credit Registry (PCR), incorporating unique identifiers: Aadhaar for individual borrowers and Corporate Identification Number for firms.

The ***Reserve Bank of India (RBI)*** had formed a ***high-level task force on public credit registry (PCR)*** for India. The task force was chaired by Y M Deosthalee.

The task force has suggested the registry should capture all loan information and borrowers be able to access their own history. Data is to be made available to stakeholders such as banks, on a need-to-know basis. Data privacy will be protected.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The PCR will be an extensive database of credit information for India that is accessible to all stakeholders.
- The idea is to capture all relevant information in one large database on the borrower and, in particular, the borrower's entire set of borrowing contracts and outcomes.
- Generally, a PCR is managed by a public authority like the central bank or the banking supervisor, and reporting of loan details to the PCR by lenders and/or borrowers is mandated by law.
- The contractual terms and outcomes covered and the threshold above which the contracts are to be reported vary in different jurisdictions, but the idea is to capture all relevant information in one large database on the borrower, in particular, the borrower's entire set of borrowing contracts and outcomes.

ADVANTAGES

- A PCR can potentially help banks in credit assessment and pricing of credit as well as in making risk-based, dynamic and counter-cyclical provisioning.
- The PCR can also help the RBI in understanding if transmission of monetary policy is working, and if not, where are the bottlenecks.
- Further, it can help supervisors, regulators and banks in early intervention and effective restructuring of stressed bank credits.
- A PCR will also help banks and regulators as credit information is a 'public good' and its utility is to the credit market at large and to society in general.

ECO-SENSITIVE ZONES OF WESTERN GHATS

The six Western Ghats States, including Kerala, have been restrained by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) from giving environmental clearance to activities that may adversely impact the eco-sensitive areas of the mountain ranges.

Western Ghats region is under serious stress. The region is one of the richest biodiversity areas which needed to be conserved.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The extent of Eco-Sensitive Zones of Western Ghats, which was notified by the Central government earlier, should not be reduced in view of the recent floods in Kerala.
- Any alteration in the draft notification of zones may seriously affect the environment, especially in view of recent incidents in Kerala.

BACKGROUND

The Western Ghats Ecological Expert Panel had earlier proposed “much larger areas for being included in the eco-sensitive zone” though the Kasturirangan-led High Level Working Group, also appointed by the MoEF to look into the WGEEP report, had reduced it. The Ministry had accepted the Kasturirangan report and issued the draft notifications on ecologically sensitive zones.

GADGIL COMMITTEE

Environment Ministry set up the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel under Gadgil. The panel was asked to assess the ecology and biodiversity of the Western Ghats and suggested measures to conserve, protect and rejuvenate the entire range that stretches to over 1500 km along the coast, with its footprints in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.

- It defined the boundaries of the Western Ghats for the purposes of ecological management.
- It proposed that this entire area be designated as ecologically sensitive area (ESA).
- Within this area, smaller regions were to be identified as ecologically sensitive zones (ESZ) I, II or III based on their existing condition and nature of threat.
- It proposed to divide the area into about 2,200 grids, of which 75 per cent would fall under ESZ I or II or under already existing protected areas such as wildlife sanctuaries or natural parks.
- The committee proposed a Western Ghats Ecology Authority to regulate these activities in the area.
 - a) Ban on the cultivation of genetically modified in the entire area.
 - b) Plastic bags to be phased out in three years.
 - c) No new special economic zones or hill stations to be allowed.
 - d) Ban on conversion of public lands to private lands, and on diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes in ESZ I and II.
 - e) No new mining licences in ESZ I and II area.
 - f) No new dams, thermal power plants or large-scale wind power projects in ESZ I.
 - g) No new polluting industries in ESZ I and ESZ II areas.
 - h) No new railway lines or major roads in ESZ I and II areas.
 - i) Strict regulation of tourism.
 - j) Cumulative impact assessment for all new projects like dams, mines, tourism, housing.

KASTURIRANGAN COMMITTEE

- None of the six concerned states agreed with the recommendations of the Gadgil Committee, which submitted its report in August 2011.
- In August 2012, then Environment Minister constituted a High-Level Working Group on Western Ghats under Kasturirangan to “examine” the Gadgil Committee report in a “holistic and multidisciplinary fashion in the light of responses received” from states, central ministries and others.
- Its report revealed that of the nearly 1,750 responses it had examined, 81% were not in favour of the Gadgil recommendations.
- In particular, Kerala had objected to the proposed ban on sand mining and quarrying, restrictions on transport infrastructure and wind energy projects, embargos on hydroelectric projects, and inter-basin transfer of river waters, and also the complete ban on new polluting industries.

CHINA MALDIVES FRIENDSHIP BRIDGE

China-Maldives Friendship Bridge has been officially opened for traffic.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The bridge is an iconic project of the Maldives and China in co-building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.
- The 2-km bridge connects capital Male and neighboring Hulhule island where the Maldives’ main international airport is located.
- The bridge has made it possible for locals and tourists to transit between the two islands on land within five minutes.
- The China-Maldives Friendship Bridge has the power to unlock Malé’s economy, and position China as a leading investor in Maldives’ transport and trade for years to come.

EXERCISE KAKADU

Exercise Kakadu 2018 will be held in Australia. KAKADU 2018 is the 14th edition of the exercise.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Exercise KAKADU, which started in 1993, is the premier multilateral regional maritime engagement exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and supported by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).
- The exercise is held biennially in Darwin and the Northern Australian Exercise Areas (NAXA).
- Exercise KAKADU derives its name from Kakadu National Park, which is a protected area in the northern territory of Australia, 171 km south-east of Darwin.
- During the exercise, professional exchanges in harbour and diverse range of activities at sea, including complex surface, sub-surface and air operations would enable sharing of best practices and honing of operational skills.

MAGSAYSAY AWARD

Two Indians Bharat Vatwani and Sonam Wangchuk are among six who have been declared winners of 2018 Ramon Magsaysay Award.

MAGSAYSAY AWARD

- It is Asia's highest honour and is often regarded as the region's equivalent of the Nobel Prize.
- It was established in 1957 by trustees of the New York City based Rockefeller Brothers Fund and Philippine government in the memory of Philippines' third President Ramon Magsaysay.
- It is awarded annually to individuals or organizations from Asia region for their altruistic and philanthropic service.
- It carries Medallion bearing the likeness of the late President Ramon Magsaysay, cash prize and a certificate.

PAKAL DUL & LOWER KALNAI HYDROPOWER PROJECTS

India has invited Pakistani experts to visit the sites of its two hydropower projects on the Chenab river next month to address its concerns.

Pakal Dul: The 1,000 megawatt Pakal Dul hydroelectric power project on Marusadar River, a tributary of Chenab River, in Jammu and Kashmir will provide 12% free power to the state. The project will not only be the largest hydroelectric power project in the state but also the first storage unit.

Lower Kalnai hydroelectric power plant project involves the construction of a 48MW (2x24MW) hydroelectric power plant. It will include the construction of a dam, tunnel, powerhouse, and substations and installation of generators and transformers and the laying of transmission lines.

BIOSIMILARS

- A biosimilar is a biologic medical product that is almost an identical copy of an original product that is manufactured by a different company.
- Biosimilars are officially approved versions of original "innovator" products and can be manufactured when the original product's patent expires.
- Reference to the innovator product is an integral component of the approval.

BIOSIMILAR & GENERICS

- Biosimilars involve developing equivalent of biological entity while generics involve developing equivalent of a chemical entity-the Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient.
- In case of biosimilars, biological entities being some ward different (and not as it is of replica), every organism has to be engineered to produce the same therapeutic effect while in generics, the copies of API can be generated.
- Biosimilars differ from generics – in complexity, in the manufacturing processes and in the data needed to demonstrate similarity for approval. The structure of Generic Simple and well-defined whereas for Bio-similar its Complex with potential structural variations.
- Regulatory procedure to get approval for biosimilars is complex as compared to that of a generic.

ADVANTAGE FOR INDIA

- Due to enormous soaring demand for generic drugs, India's pharmaceutical producers emerged as world market leaders in this sector and were a major business success story in the 2000s.

- In the process, Indian producers made a valuable contribution to reducing costs and to expanding access to life-saving treatments for patients, both in emerging markets and in developed countries.
- Recently there is a wave of consolidation among pharma retailers, stiffer competition from Chinese pharma manufacturers and an uptick in generic drug applications have combined to put downward pressure on drug prices.
- It is imperative that India's pharmaceutical manufacturers create new markets to restore market confidence in their growth prospects.

USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

USA has twice bombed Syria over its alleged use of chemical weapons, in April 2017 and April 2018.

CHEMICAL WEAPON CONVENTION

- The Chemical Weapons Convention Act was enacted in 2000 to give effect to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction signed by the government on January 14, 1993.
- The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is a multilateral treaty that bans chemical weapons and requires their destruction within a specified period of time.
- The CWC is implemented by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which is headquartered in The Hague. OPCW won the 2013 Nobel peace prize.
- The CWC is open to all nations and currently has 193 states-parties. Israel has signed but has yet to ratify the convention.
- Three states have neither signed nor ratified the convention are Egypt, North Korea and South Sudan.
- The OPCW receives states-parties' declarations detailing chemical weapons-related activities or materials and relevant industrial activities.
- After receiving declarations, the OPCW inspects and monitors states-parties' facilities and activities that are relevant to the convention, to ensure compliance.

CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION ACT

- The Act defines chemical weapons and empowers the Centre to set up a National Authority to act as the "national focal point" for effective channel for communication between groups, organisations and other state parties on matters relating to the Convention and for fulfilling the obligations of the country.
- The definition includes in its ambit "any equipment" specifically designed for employing chemical weapons.
- The Act defines chemical weapons as toxic chemicals, including munitions and devices, specifically designed to cause death or other harm.

RIGHT TO DISSENT

The quick arrest of academicians, human rights activists' journalists and thinkers by the Maharashtra police in connection with the Bhima-Koregaon violence has brought out an interesting remark from the Supreme Court of India.

The apex court said, Dissent is a safety valve for democracy. If this safety valve is not allowed to function then the pressure cooker will burst.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Right to Dissent is an important addition of expressing one's view, and on many of its most important constituent elements.
- It will enable practitioners and citizens to claim their rights and participate more effectively in the project of democracy.
- Disagreeing with each other is a fundamental human trait. There is not a single individual who does not disagree with something or the other all the time.

Dissent means "a strong difference of opinion on a particular subject, especially about an official suggestion or plan or a popular belief".

FACTS

"Rail Sahyog" portal is an example of changing times & speedy execution of projects in Railways. This portal will provide an opportunity for Industry/ Companies/ Associations to collaborate with Railways. Railways is taking various initiatives for upgrading its infrastructure, technology, hygiene among host of other things for an enhanced passenger experience.

Fourth IAvC was recently held in Leiden, Netherlands. It was jointly organized by International Maharishi Ayurveda Foundation, Netherlands; All India Ayurvedic Congress, New Delhi and International Academy of Ayurveda, Pune in association with Indian Embassy in Netherlands. The congress focused on promotion and propagation of Ayurveda in Netherlands and its neighbouring countries of Europe.