

CURRENT AFFAIRS
16TH TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2018

WORLD OZONE DAY

"Keep Cool and Carry on": The Montreal Protocol is the theme of 24th World Ozone Day.

INDIA'S INITIATIVES

- Ministry has already undertaken an important initiative for upskilling of 100,000 Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning Servicing technicians in collaboration with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) – Skill India Mission. The Minister underlined the need to work consistently under the aegis of the Montreal Protocol to phase out Ozone Depleting Substances.
- The draft ***India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP)*** and a booklet on ***'Montreal Protocol – India's Success Story'***.
- A refurbished website on the Ozone Cell of the Ministry and a Management Information System (MIS) for Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) were also launched.
- The Minister also released two handbooks for trainers and technicians on ***"Good Service Practices and installation of room air-conditioners with HCFC-22 and flammable refrigerants"***.
- A Guide for integration of topics related to HCFC Phase out and Energy efficiency in Architectural Curriculum" was also released.

INDIA COOLING ACTION PLAN (ICAP)

India is the first country in world to develop such a document (ICAP), which addresses cooling requirement across sectors and lists out actions which can help reduce the cooling demand. This will help in reducing both direct and indirect emissions.

- The thrust of the ICAP is to look for synergies in actions for securing both ***environmental and socio-economic benefits***.
- The overarching goal of ICAP is to provide sustainable cooling and thermal comfort for all while securing environmental and socio-economic benefits for the society.
- The goals emerging from the suggested interventions stated in ICAP are:
 - a) Recognition of "cooling and related areas" as a thrust area of research under national science and technology programme to support development of technological solutions and encourage innovation challenges.
 - b) Reduction of cooling demand across sectors by 20% to 25 % by year 2037-38.
 - c) Reduction of refrigerant demand by 25% to 30% by year 2037-38.
 - d) Reduction of cooling energy requirements by 25% to 40% by year 2037-38.
 - e) Training and certification of 100,000 servicing sector technicians by the year 2022-23, in synergy with Skill India Mission.
- ***The broad objectives of the India Cooling Action Plan include –***
 - a) Assessment of cooling requirements across sectors in next 20 years and the associated refrigerant demand and energy use.
 - b) Map the technologies available to cater the cooling requirement including passive interventions, refrigerant-based technologies and alternative technologies such as not-in-kind technologies.

- c) Suggest interventions in each sector to provide for sustainable cooling and thermal comfort for all.
- d) Focus on skilling of RAC service technicians.
- e) Develop an R&D innovation ecosystem for indigenous development of alternative technologies.

MONTREAL PROTOCOL

- The Montreal Protocol is the only environmental treaty which enjoys universal ratification of 197 UN member countries.
- The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer has been recognized as the most successful international environment treaty in history.
- Its implementation has not only led to the phase-out of around 98% of ozone depleting chemicals, but also averted more than 135 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions. Nearly 2 million cases of skin cancer per year have been averted globally.

SMART BORDER FENCING

- The smart border fencing projects built under the ***Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS)*** programme is the first of its kind in the country.
- The two projects each covering a 5.5 km border stretch along the International Border have got hi-tech surveillance system that would create an invisible electronic barrier on land, water and even in air and underground and would help the BSF detect and foil infiltration bids in most difficult terrains.
- The CIBMS is designed to guard stretches where physical surveillance is not possible either due to inhospitable terrain or riverine borders.
- CIBMS uses a number of different devices for surveillance, communication and data storage. Sensors like Thermal Imager, UGS, Fiber Optical Sensors, Radar, Sonar have been mounted on different platforms like Aerostat, tower, poles etc.
- A comprehensive integration of such sensors and other technical systems of communication and data processing have been achieved in the CIBMS project.
- The signals reach the Unified Command and Control Centre where the BSF can monitor the border on real-time basis.
- The CIBMS enables round-the-clock surveillance on border and under different weather conditions be it in dust storm, fog or rain.

ISA INNOVATION & INVESTMENT FORUM

International Solar Alliance (ISA) Innovation and Investment Forum held in New Delhi.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Fossil fuel is not going to last for ever even if its resources are managed in the best possible manner.
- The use of shale gas and oil is limited and it adversely impacts the environment.
- The threat of climate change has become a reality and it has affected bio-diversity of the planet.
- Imbalanced use of energy is the root cause of many environmental problems in different parts of the world.
- It is causing unprecedented heat wave conditions in Europe, intensity and frequency of typhoons have also increased.

INDIA TOURISM MART 2018

The India Tourism Mart is being organized by the Ministry of Tourism from 16th to 18th September 2018, in partnership with the Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH) and with support of State /UT Governments.

HIGHLIGHTS

- India Tourism Mart (ITM) is being held for the first time and the Tourism industry stakeholders are coming together for such a large-scale event with Ministry's support.
- FAITH is the apex organization of all the important trade and hospitality associations of the country with all the 10 major Tourist organizations like FHRAI, HAI, IATO being involved in this mega event and India Convention Promotion Board (ICPB) is coordinating the whole event.
- The objective of the event is to create an annual Global Tourism Mart for India in line with major international travel marts being held in countries across the world.
- The Mart provides a platform for all stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industries to interact and transact business opportunities.

MEDICAL CYCLOTRON FACILITY CYCLONE -30

Medical Cyclotron Facility Cyclone-30 Became Operational at Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre (VECC), Kolkata.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Cyclotrons are used to produce radioisotopes for diagnostic and therapeutic use for cancer care.
- Cyclone-30, the biggest cyclotron in India for medical application became operational, when 30 MeV beam reached the Faraday Cup for the first time. Subsequently, beam from this facility was used to produce ¹⁸F (Fluorine-18 isotope) for the preparation of ¹⁸F Fluorodeoxyglucose (FDG), a radio-pharmaceutical used by Board of Radiation & Isotope Technology (BRIT).
- The facility will start regular production by the middle of the next year after the commissioning of the supporting nuclear systems and regulatory clearances.
- Cyclone-30 facility at VECC, Kolkata, a Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) unit, will have many unique features, under various stages of implementation, which are first of its kind in many ways.
- After the commissioning of liquid target (for FDG production) and solid targets (production of Germanium-68, Palladium-103 and other isotopes), work on studies related to installation of Iodine isotope [¹²³I] production target, material study target and Accelerator Driven System target will also be taken up.
- This facility will provide for affordable radio isotopes and related radiopharmaceuticals for the entire country especially, for Eastern India and also have export potential for Germanium-68/Gallium-68 generator for in-situ production of Gallium-68 and Palladium-103 isotopes, used for breast cancer diagnosis and prostate cancer treatment, respectively.
- Cyclone-30 commissioning re-emphasises the capability of Indian scientists and engineers to deliver at the highest level of science and technology.

PRADHAN MANTRI FASAL BIMA YOJANA

The Government has decided to incorporate the provision of penalties for States and Insurance Companies for the delay in settlement of insurance claims under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal BimaYojana (PMFBY).

HIGHLIGHTS

This crucial provision is part of the new operational guidelines issued by the Govt for the implementation of PMFBY.

- Provision of Penalties/ Incentives for States, ICs and Banks i.e. 12% interest rate to be paid by the Insurance Company to farmers for delay in settlement claims beyond two months of prescribed cut-off date. Similarly, State Govt. have to pay 12% interest rate for delay in release of State share of Subsidy beyond three months of prescribed cut-off date/submission of requisition by Insurance Companies.
- Detailed SOP for Performance evaluation of ICs and their de-empanelment.
- Inclusion of Perennial horticultural crops (on pilot basis) under the ambit of PMFBY. (OGs of PMFBY envisages coverage of food and Oilseed crops and Annul Commercial & Horticultural crops).
- Inclusion of hailstorms in post-harvest losses, besides unseasonal and cyclonic rainfalls.
- Inclusion of cloud burst and natural fire in localized calamities in addition to hailstorm, landslide, and inundation.
- Add on coverage for crop loss due to attack of wild animals on pilot basis with the additional financial liabilities of this provision to be borne by concerned state Govt.
- Mandatory capturing of Adhaar number – This would help in de-duplication.
- Target for Coverage to ICs especially of Non loanee farmers (10% incremental).
- Definition of Major Crops, Unseasonal rainfall and Inundation incorporated for clarity and proper coverage.
- Rationalization of premium release process: Release of Upfront premium subsidy based on 50% of 80% of total share of subsidy of corresponding season of previous year as GOI/State subsidy at the beginning of the season- Companies need not provide any projections for the advance subsidy. Second Installment – balance premium based on approved business statistics on Portal for settlement of claims and final installment after reconciliation of entire coverage data on portal based on final business statistics on portal.

ITU SOUTH ASIA AREA OFFICE & TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION CENTRE

The ITU South Asia Area Office and Technology Innovation Centre will be established in New Delhi. This was announced during the 4th BRICS Communications Ministers Meeting held in Durban, South Africa recently.

- This local area office will play a key role in organising capacity and capability building programmes for the region, and in accelerating the structured implementation of ITU's development programs with focus on Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Land-Locked Developed Countries (LLDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and other similarly placed nations in the region.
- The ITU Local Area Office will also impart a significant boost to technological reach and benefits for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) which act as catalysts in the inclusive growth of a region's economy and employment.

INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is an agency of the United Nations (UN) whose purpose is to coordinate telecommunication operations and services throughout the world. Originally founded in 1865, as the International Telegraph Union, the ITU is the oldest existing international organization.

- ITU headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland.
- The ITU consists of three sectors:
 - a) Radiocommunication (ITU-R) — ensures optimal, fair and rational use of the radio frequency (RF) spectrum.
 - b) Telecommunication Standardization (ITU-T) — formulates recommendations for standardizing telecommunication operations worldwide.
 - c) Telecommunication Development (ITU-D) — assists countries in developing and maintaining internal communication operations.
- There are 193 Member States of the ITU, including all UN member states except the Republic of Palau, plus the Vatican City.
- Membership of ITU is open to only UN members, which may join the Union as Member States, as well as to private organizations like carriers, equipment manufacturers, funding bodies, research and development organizations and international and regional telecommunication organizations, which may join ITU as non-voting Sector Members.

FUNCTIONS

- The ITU sets and publishes regulations and standards relevant to electronic communication and broadcasting technologies of all kinds including radio, television, satellite, telephone and the Internet.
- The organization conducts working parties, study groups and meetings to address current and future issues and to resolve disputes.
- The ITU organizes and holds an exhibition and forum known as the Global TELECOM every four years.
- Another important aspect of the ITU's mandate is helping emerging countries to establish and develop telecommunication systems of their own.
- Although the recommendations of the ITU are non-binding, most countries adhere to them in the interest of maintaining an effective international electronic communication environment.

LOTUSHR PROJECT

Union Science & Technology minister inaugurated a novel holistic Local Treatment of Urban Sewage Streams for Healthy Reuse (LOTUSHR) project at Sun Dial Park in New Delhi that produces clean water which is reused for various purposes, while simultaneously recovering nutrients and energy from the urban waste water, thus converting the Barapullah drain into profitable mines.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This plant, which can convert 10 lakh litres of sewage into clean water and generate 3 tonnes of biofuel will be scaled up and will become a model for example for the whole world.
- The Local Treatment of Urban Sewage Streams for Healthy Reuse (LOTUSHR) project inaugurated today is a joint initiative of Indian and Dutch scientists. Around a year back DBT in

consultation with DDA identified the Barapullah drain, Sarai Kale Khan, in the state of Delhi for setting up on-site experimental testing lab and for the establishment of a pilot plant.

ASHA BENEFIT PACKAGE

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its ex-post facto approval to ASHA Benefit Package w.e.f. October, 2018 (to be paid in November, 2018) with two components as under: -

- ASHAs and ASHA facilitators meeting the eligibility criteria to be enrolled in social security schemes implemented by Government of India namely, the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana.
- An increase in the amount of routine and recurring incentives under National Health Mission for ASHAs under NHM from Rs. 1000/- per month to Rs. 2000/-per month.
- The package entails an expenditure (Central funding) to Rs.1224.97 crore for two years 2018-19 and 2019-20.

BENEFICIARIES

Estimated 10,63,670(Ten lakh Sixty-Three Thousand Six Hundred Seventy) ASHAS and ASHA facilitators to be covered under Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana.

Estimated 9,57,303 (Nine lakh fifty seven thousand three hundred three) ASHAS and ASHA facilitators to be covered under Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana.

Estimated 10,22,265 (Ten lakh twenty two thousand two hundred sixty five) ASHAS will get at least minimum of Rs 2000/- per month from current Rs1000/- for routine activities.

DETAILS

- ASHAs and ASHA Facilitators to be covered under **Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (Life Insurance)**.
- The eligibility criteria are 18-70 years.
- Cover is for one-year period.
- Rs. 2 Lakh in case of death due to accident.
- Rs. 2 Lakh in case of total and irrecoverable loss of both eyes or loss of use of both hands or feet or loss of sight of one eye and loss of use of one hand or one foot.
- Rs. 1 Lakh in case of total and irrecoverable loss of sight of one eye or loss of use of one hand or one foot.
- The annual Premium of Rs 12 per beneficiary will be paid by Central Government.

ASHAs and ASHA Facilitators meeting the age criteria of **18-50 years** to be covered under **Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (Accident insurance)**.

- The annual premium of Rs. 330 (average) will be paid by the Central Government.
- Cover is for one-year period.
- Rs 2 Lakh in case of death due to any cause.
- ASHAs will get a minimum of Rs.2000/- per month from current Rs 1000/- per month as incentives for routine activities. This is in addition to other task based incentives approved at Central/State level.

EXERCISE AVIAINDRA-18

Exercise Aviaindra is an Air Force level exercise between India and the Russian Federation.

HIGHLIGHTS

- First Aviaindra was conducted in 2014 and has been planned as a bi-annual exercise.
- Exercise Aviaindra 18 was conducted at Lipetsk, Russia from 17 Sep to 28 Sep 18 and will be conducted in Jodhpur, India from 10 Dec to 22 Dec 18.
- The aim of the exercise is focused towards anti-terrorist operations in a bi-lateral scenario.
- The exercise would further enhance the co-operation and understanding each other's Concept of Operations.

ATAL BIMIT VYAKTI KALYAN YOJANA

Considering the change in employment pattern and the current scenario of employment in India which has transformed from a long-term employment to fixed short term engagement in the form of contract and temping, the ESI Corporation has approved a Scheme named "ATAL BIMIT VYAKTI KALYAN YOJANA" for Insured Persons (IP) covered under the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This scheme is a relief payable in cash directly to their Bank Account in case of unemployment and while they search for new engagement.
- ESI Corporation has approved the proposal for reimbursement of Rs. 10/- per person to the employers to encourage the seeding of Aadhar (UID) in ESIC database of their workers and their family members.
- It will curtail the multiple registrations of same Insured Persons and thus enable them to avail the benefits requiring longer contributory conditions.
- ESI Corporation has approved the proposal for relaxing the eligibility conditions for availing Super Specialty treatment has now been relaxed from earlier insurable employment of 2 years to 06 months with contribution requirement of only 78 days.
- Besides, the eligibility for availing Super Specialty treatment for dependents of Insured Person has now been relaxed to insurable employment of one year with 156 days of contributions. This relaxation will immensely help the Insured Persons and their beneficiaries to avail Super Specialty treatment free of cost as per revised eligibility.
- ESI Corporation has approved the proposal for increasing the Funeral Expenses from existing Rs. 10,000/- to Rs. 15,000/- being paid on the death of Insured Person.

MISSILE PRAHAR

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully flight tested the indigenously developed surface-to-surface tactical missile 'Prahara', from Launch Complex-III, ITR, Balasore.

- 'Prahara' is a contemporary weapon system capable of carrying multiple types of warheads and neutralizing a wide variety of targets.
- 'Prahara', developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), is capable of filling the gap between the multi-barrel rocket system 'Pinaka' and medium-range ballistic missile 'Prithvi'. It can also engage multiple targets in different directions.

- It has length of 7.3 meters, diameter of 420 mm and weighs 1,280 kg. It has operational range of 150 km and flight altitude of 35 km.
- It is a solid-fuelled short-range missile fitted with inertial navigation system.
- The missile is equipped with state-of-the-art navigation, guidance and electromechanical actuation systems with advanced on-board computer.
- It is a quick-reaction, all-weather, all-terrain, highly accurate battlefield support tactical weapon system.

ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICTS PROGRAM

Government of India has launched the Aspirational Districts Program to effectively transform the identified districts through convergence of Central and State schemes; collaborations among officers and creating competition among districts.

This program lays emphasis on district to bring about overall improvement in the living standard of the citizens and ensuring '**Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas.**' One of the key focus areas of this program is **skill development.**

ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICT PROGRAMME

The broad contours of the programme are **Convergence** (of Central & State Schemes), **Collaboration** (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors), and **Competition** among districts driven by a spirit of mass Movement. With States as the main drivers, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.

The **117 districts were identified from 28 states**, at least one from each state, in a transparent manner by a committee of Senior Officers to the Government of India, in consultation with State Officials using a composite index of key data sets that included deprivation enumerated under the **Socio-Economic Caste Census, key health and education sector performance and state of basic infrastructure.**

Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure are this programme's core areas of focus. After several rounds of consultations with various stakeholders, **49 key performance indicators** have been chosen to measure progress of the districts.

SECTOR RANKING

Health and Nutrition (30%) - With 30% of the overall composite score on health & nutrition, the program has identified 13 indicators to focus on antenatal care, postnatal care, gender parity, health of new - borns, growth of children, contagious diseases, and health infrastructure.

Education (30%): The education sector accounts of 30% of the overall index. 8 indicators have been identified focussing on learning outcomes (transition rate from primary to upper primary, and subsequently to secondary schooling, average scores in mathematics and language etc.), as well as infrastructural (toilet access for girls, drinking water, electricity supply) and institutional indicators (RTE mandated pupil-teacher ratio, timely delivery of textbooks).

Agriculture & Water resources (20%): Agriculture is the backbone of India, with more than 50% of our workforce engaged in cultivation and allied activities. 10 indicators have been identified for the

20% weightage allocated to agriculture. The focus is on outputs (yield, price realisation etc.), inputs (quality seed distribution, soil health cards), and institutional support (crop insurance, electronic markets, artificial insemination, animal vaccination etc.).

Basic Infrastructure (10%): A roof over one's head with water, electricity, and road connectivity is the priority of the Government. 7 important indicators have been identified including availability of individual household latrines, drinking water, electricity, and road connectivity. Districts are also tracked for the number of internet connected Gram Panchayats, and panchayats with Common Service Centres.

Financial inclusion & Skill Development (10%): Together, these two themes account for 10% of the overall index. 6 indicators have been identified in financial inclusion to measure progress in take - up of important central government schemes (Atal Pension Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana etc.), reach of institutional banking (number of accounts opened under Jan Dhan Yojana), and ease of institutional financing for small businesses (disbursement of Mudra loans). 5 indicators have been identified in skill development to keep track of the progress in skilling of youth, employment, and the skilling of vulnerable/marginalized youth.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION INDEX

The Union Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs Arun Jaitley launched the Financial Inclusion Index in New Delhi.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance will release an Annual Financial Inclusion Index (FII) which will be a measure of access and usage of a basket of formal financial products and services that includes savings, remittances, credit, insurance and pension products.
- The index will have three measurement dimensions:
 - a) Access to financial services.
 - b) Usage of financial services.
 - c) Quality.
- The single composite index gives a snap shot of level of financial inclusion that would guide Macro Policy perspective.
- The various components of the index will also help to measure financial services for use of internal policy making.
- Financial Inclusion Index can be used directly as a composite measure in development indicators.
- It enables fulfilment of G20 Financial Inclusion Indicators requirements.
- It will also facilitate researchers to study the impact of financial inclusion and other macro-economic variables.

1ST ASSEMBLY OF ISA; IORA & REINVEST 2018

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is organising the First Assembly of International Solar Alliance (ISA); the 2nd Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Renewable Energy Ministerial Meeting and the 2nd Global Renewable Energy Investment Meeting and Expo, (REINVEST- 2018) from 2nd to 5th October 2018 in New Delhi.

INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE

The first Assembly, in a way, will lay the foundation for ***global Solar Agenda***. The Assembly, as supreme decision-making body of the ISA, will steer the process to significantly harness solar energy for achieving universal energy access at affordable rates. The Assembly will adjudicate upon various administrative, financial and programme related issues. Ministers from ISA Treaty Framework signatory countries have been invited for the Assembly. The countries that have ratified the ISA Treaty Framework will attend the Assembly, as Members. Countries that have signed but are yet to ratify the ISA Treaty Framework will attend the Assembly as Observers.

BACKGROUND OF ISA

- The International Solar Alliance (ISA), an Indian initiative, was launched jointly by India & France on 30 November 2015 in Paris, France on the side-lines of the 21st Conference of Parties (CoP 21) to the ***United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change***.
- The Alliance, recognising that solar energy provides potential member solar resource rich countries lying fully or partially between the ***Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn***, with an unprecedented opportunity to bring prosperity, energy security and sustainable development to their peoples, opened ISA Framework Agreement for signature on 15 November 2016 in ***Marrakech, Morocco, on the side-lines of COP-22***.
- In conformity with the ISA Framework Agreement, 30 days after ratification by the 15th country, on 6 December 2017, ISA became the ***first full-fledged treaty*** based international intergovernmental organization ***headquartered in India***.
- Through this initiative, the countries, inter alia, share the collective ambition:
 - a) to address obstacles that stand in the way of rapid and massive scale-up of solar energy;
 - b) to undertake innovative and concerted efforts for reducing the cost of finance and cost of technology for immediate deployment of competitive solar generation, mobilise more than 1000 Billion US Dollars of investments by 2030.

IORA

- The ***Indian Ocean Rim Association*** was set up with the objective of strengthening regional cooperation and sustainable development within the Indian Ocean Region with 21 Member States and 7 Dialogue Partners.
- In line with the commitment made, India will be hosting 2nd IORA Renewable Energy Ministerial meet from 2nd to 4th October, 2018. In this meeting, Ministers and delegates from all 21 member-countries are expected to participate.
- India, Australia, Iran IR, Indonesia Thailand, Malaysia, South Africa, Mozambique, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Singapore, Mauritius, Madagascar, UAE, Yemen, Seychelles, Somalia, Comoros and Oman are members of IORA.

2ND RE-INVEST

- The 2nd RE-INVEST aims at accelerating the worldwide effort to scale up renewable energy and connect the global investment community with Indian energy stakeholders.
- 2nd RE-INVEST will include a three-day Conference on renewables, cleantech and future energy choices, and an Expo of renewables-related manufacturers, developers, investors and innovators.
- It would facilitate collaboration and cooperation with key stakeholders in India, which has today emerged as one of the world's largest renewable energy markets.

NATIONAL E-VIDHAN APPLICATION

NeVA, an initiative by Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, aims to make all the Legislatures of the country paperless by making the proceedings of the Houses digital.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is an attempt to provide the information about the functioning of House to the common citizen at the click of a button.
- NeVA Website, will act as a repository of data related to the business of all Legislatures in the country in a uniform manner.
- The NeVA aims to live up-to its potential of being '***One Nation, One Application***'.
- This uniformity of database will lead to easy and effective engagement of citizens with the Government, which will lead to efficient delivery of services and ensure reliability, efficiency, transparency and accountability of all the stakeholders.

NATIONAL DIGITAL COMMUNICATION POLICY 2018

The Union Cabinet has approved the National Digital Communications Policy-2018 (NDCP-2018) and re-designation of the Telecom Commission as the "Digital Communications Commission".

AIM

The NDCP-2018 envisions supporting India's transition to a digitally empowered economy and society by fulfilling the information and communications needs of citizens and enterprises by establishment of a ubiquitous, resilient and affordable digital communications infrastructure and services.

The 'Customer focused' and 'application driven' NDCP-2018 shall lead to new ideas and innovations, after the launch of advanced technology such as 5G, IOT, M2M, etc. which shall govern the telecom sector of India.

OBJECTIVES

- Broadband for all.
- Creating four million additional jobs in the Digital Communications sector.\
- Enhancing the contribution of the Digital Communications sector to 8% of India's GDP from ~ 6% in 2017.
- Propelling India to the Top 50 Nations in the ICT Development Index of ITU from 134 in 2017.
- Enhancing India's contribution to Global Value Chains.
- Ensuring Digital Sovereignty.

These objectives are to be achieved by 2022.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The policy aims to provide universal broadband connectivity at 50 Mbps to every citizen.
- Provide 1 Gbps connectivity to all Gram Panchayats by 2020 and 10 Gbps by 2022.
- Ensure connectivity to all uncovered areas.
- Attract investments of USD 100 billion in the Digital Communications Sector.
- Train one million manpower for building New Age Skill.
- Expand IoT ecosystem to 5 billion connected devices.

- Establish a comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals.
- Facilitate India's effective participation in the global digital economy.
- Enforce accountability through appropriate institutional mechanisms to assure citizens of safe and
- Secure digital communications infrastructure and services.

STRATEGY

- Establishment of a National Digital Grid by creating a National Fibre Authority.
- Establishing Common Service Ducts and utility corridors in all new city and highway road projects.
- Creating a collaborative institutional mechanism between Centre, States and Local Bodies for Common Rights of Way, standardization of costs and timelines.
- Removal of barriers to approvals.
- Facilitating development of Open Access Next Generation Networks.

Accordingly, the new National Digital Communications Policy - 2018 has been formulated, in place of the existing National Telecom Policy-2012, to cater to the modern needs of the digital communications sector of India.

MISSILE ASTRA

Astra, the indigenously developed Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM), was successfully test fired by the Indian Air Force from Su-30 aircraft, from Air Force Station, Kalaikunda.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Astra is an all-weather beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation, India.
- It is the first air-to-air missile developed by India.
- It features mid-course inertial guidance with terminal active radar homing.
- Astra is designed to be capable of engaging targets at varying range and altitudes allowing for engagement of both short-range targets at a distance of 20 km (12 mi) and long-range targets up to a distance of 80 km (50 mi).
- Astra has been integrated with Indian Air Force's Sukhoi Su-30MKI and will be integrated with Dassault Mirage 2000 and Mikoyan MiG-29 in the future.
- Limited series production of Astra missiles began in 2017

JAN DHAN DARSHAK

Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance and National Informatics Centre (NIC) has jointly developed a mobile app called Jan Dhan Darshak as a part of financial inclusion (FI) initiative .

HIGHLIGHTS

- This app will act as a guide for the common people in locating a financial service touch point at a given location in the country.

- While locator apps are a common feature for many individual banks and financial service providers, in this era of inter-operable banking services, Jan Dhan Darshak app will be in a unique position to provide a citizen centric platform for locating financial service touch points across all providers such as banks, post office, CSC, etc.

AGRI FOOD VALUE CHAIN PARTNERSHIP

ASSOCHAM's 2-day Exhibitions, Conferences & Roundtables on Agri Food Value Chain Partnerships - End to End Approach inaugurated.

- The Government is committed to promoting Agri Food Value Chain related activities at local, regional, national and also International level.
- e-NAM was launched by the government to reduce the supply chain by integrating the value chain participants.
- In order to address the problem of fluctuations in the prices of ***tomatoes, onions and potatoes (TOP), "Operation Green"*** was launched with an outlay of Rs 500 crore in this year's budget.
- Under this scheme, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), agricultural logistics, processing facilities and professional management will be promoted.
- Under the ***Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)***, the ***Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region*** was approved on January 2016 with a total outlay of Rs 400 crore.
- Besides this, the government has approved a new Central Sector Scheme – Pradhan ***Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana (Scheme for Agro-Marine Processing and Development of Agro-Processing Clusters)*** for the period 2016-20 co-terminus with the 14th Finance Commission cycle.
- PM Kisan SAMPADA Yojana is a comprehensive package which will result in creation of modern infrastructure with efficient supply chain management from farm gate to retail outlet.

National Informatics Centre (NIC) and National Informatics Centre Services Incorporated (NICSI)

have jointly set up a ***Centre of Excellence for data analytics (CEDA)*** to support Government departments to unlock the hidden potential of the data that they are generating as part of the governance processes and use it to improve the overall governance.

- Centre of Excellence for Data Analytics (CEDA)*** is being set up with the sole vision of starting and fast-tracking the adoption of advanced analytic and machine learning capabilities by making the Centre the locus of expertise and excellence in the field of Data Analytics.
- The centre aims to provide data analytics services to the government and help in solving complex policy issues through data-driven decision making so as to ensure effective formulation and implementation of various development initiatives that will ultimately benefit the citizens.
- CEDA proposes to establish strong partnerships with academia and industry to ensure that the cutting edge technologies and quality expertise are brought in to help the Government take advantage of the booming analytic wave.
- As part of its service offerings, it will help the departments
 - Understand their business requirements and define their analytic needs.
 - Identify the data sets that are required to meet the analytic needs.
 - Determine access to the relevant data sources (both within as well as outside the government).
 - Build the required data analytic solutions.

- e. In integrating departmental data silos and deliver an integrated whole-of government analytics for an integrated policy formulation.

INCREDIBLE INDIA MOBILE APP

The Union Minister for Tourism launched the ‘Incredible India Mobile App’ and the “Incredible India Tourist Facilitators Certification” programme.

India will be the host country for official World Tourism Day celebrations for the UNWTO, in 2019. The theme for the World Tourism Day 2018 being “Tourism & Digital Transformation”.

The **Certification programme** launched, is the only one-of-its-kind of online learning, aims to brand the country in a positive light, through these facilitators, by building capacity of the key touch points for tourists, desiring that each interaction result in superior experience for the visitors. This online learning platform has been developed by Wipro Limited.

The **Incredible India Mobile App**, showcases India as a holistic destination, revolving around major experiences, such as spirituality, heritage, adventure, culture, yoga, wellness and more. The app has been developed by Tech Mahindra.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

India and the United Nations to sign a Five-Year Sustainable Development Framework (2018-2022).

HIGHLIGHTS

- Government of India-United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (SDF) 2018-2022 outlines the work of UN agencies in India, to support the achievement of key development outcomes that have been identified in consultation with the government and are aligned to the national priorities.
- The NITI Aayog is the national counterpart for the UN in India for the operationalization of the UNSDF.
- Nineteen (19) UN agencies have signed on the UNSDF 2018-2022.
- The UNSDF 2018-22 comprises of seven priority areas that outline the work that UN agencies will undertake jointly or individually, fully aligned with the priorities of the GoI.
- **The seven priority areas outlined in the UNSDF are:**
 1. Poverty and Urbanization.
 2. Health, Water, and Sanitation.
 3. Education and Employability.
 4. Nutrition and Food Security.
 5. Climate Change, Clean Energy, and Disaster Resilience.
 6. Skilling, Entrepreneurship, and Job Creation.
 7. Gender Equality and Youth Development.

SATAT INITIATIVE

Petroleum Minister to launch SATAT initiative to promote Compressed Bio-Gas as an alternative, green transport fuel.

This significant move has the potential to boost availability of more affordable transport fuels, better use of agricultural residue, cattle dung and municipal solid waste, as well as to provide an additional revenue source to farmers.

- SATAT, the initiative is aimed at providing a **Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT)** as a developmental effort that would benefit both vehicle-users as well as farmers and entrepreneurs.
- Use of CBG will also help bring down dependency on crude oil imports.

BACKGROUND

- Bio-gas is produced naturally through a process of anaerobic decomposition from waste / bio-mass sources like agriculture residue, cattle dung, sugarcane press mud, municipal solid waste, sewage treatment plant waste, etc.
- After purification, it is compressed and called CBG, which has pure methane content of over 95%.
- Compressed Bio-Gas is exactly similar to the commercially available natural gas in its composition and energy potential.
- With calorific value (~52,000 KJ/kg) and other properties similar to CNG, Compressed Bio-Gas can be used as an alternative, renewable automotive fuel.
- Compressed Bio-Gas can be produced from various bio-mass/waste sources, including agricultural residue, municipal solid waste, sugarcane press mud, distillery spent wash, cattle dung and sewage treatment plant waste.
- The other waste streams, i.e, rotten potatoes from cold storages, rotten vegetables, dairy plants, chicken/poultry litter, food waste, horticulture waste, forestry residues and treated organic waste from industrial effluent treatment plants (ETPs) can be used to generate biogas.
- There are multiple benefits from converting agricultural residue, cattle dung and municipal solid waste into CBG on a commercial scale:
 1. Responsible waste management, reduction in carbon emissions and pollution.
 2. Additional revenue source for farmers.
 3. Boost to entrepreneurship, rural economy and employment.
 4. Support to national commitments in achieving climate change goals.
 5. Reduction in import of natural gas and crude oil .
 6. Buffer against crude oil/gas price fluctuations
- The potential for Compressed Bio-Gas production from various sources in India is estimated at about 62 million tonnes per annum.

COMPRESSED BIO-GAS PLANTS

Compressed Bio-Gas plants are proposed to be set up mainly through independent entrepreneurs. CBG produced at these plants will be transported through cascades of cylinders to the fuel station networks of OMCs for marketing as a green transport fuel alternative. The 1,500-strong CNG stations network in the country currently serves about 32 lakh gas-based vehicles. The Working Group on Biofuels, set up under the National Policy on Biofuels 2018, is in the process of finalising a pan-India pricing model for Compressed Bio-Gas.

The entrepreneurs would be able to separately market the other by-products from these plants, including bio-manure, carbon-dioxide, etc., to enhance returns on investment.

- It is planned to roll out 5,000 Compressed Bio-Gas plants across India in a phased manner, with 250 plants by the year 2020, 1,000 plants by 2022 and 5,000 plants by 2025.
- These plants are expected to produce 15 million tonnes of CBG per annum, which is about 40% of current CNG consumption of 44 million tonnes per annum in the country.
- The ***National Policy on Biofuels 2018*** emphasises active promotion of advanced bio-fuels, including CBG.
- The Government of India had launched the ***GOBAR-DHAN (Galvanising Organic Bio-Agro Resources) scheme*** earlier this year to convert cattle dung and solid waste in farms to CBG and compost. The scheme proposes to cover 700 projects across the country in 2018-19.
- The programme will be funded under ***Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) component of Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin (SBM-G)*** to benefit households in identified villages through Gram Panchayats.

MPLAD SCHEME

Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) has provision for MPs to contribute funds for rehabilitation and reconstruction works in the areas affected by severe calamity. ALSO, Central Information Commission (CIC) in its recent report has highlighted that Rs.12,000 crore of MPLADS remains unspent.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The MPLADS allots Rs.5 crore per year to each Member of Parliament (MP) to be spent on projects of their choice in their constituency.
- Lok Sabha MP has to choose a gram panchayat from the constituency he/she represents and the Rajya Sabha MP chooses it from the state he/she represents.
- MPs cannot pick villages which belong to themselves or their spouses.
- The scheme is funded and administered through the Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).
- Projects are to be recommended to and implemented by the district-level administration.

CURBING COUNTERFEITING OF DRUGS IN INDIA

In order to fight the growing problem of counterfeit drugs in India, NITI Aayog and Oracle signed a Statement of Intent (Sol) to pilot a real drug supply-chain using blockchain distributed ledger and Internet of Things (IoT) software. Apollo Hospitals and Strides Pharma Sciences will partner in this effort.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The major advantages of blockchain software will be its ability to allow the sharing of information across the drug supply chain securely with every exchange of information getting recorded, inability to tamper with any record of the drug movement and inability to delete any records so there can be no dispute, if an offender is caught.
- Blockchain technology helps to permanently register a drug's record in the manufacturer's drug supply chain (serial number, labelling, scanning), leaving no scope for record tampering.
- At every point of hand change, it records the drug's movement – from manufacturer to logistics, to stockist to hospital, or pharmacy to consumer.
- In case of a fake drug, the software will detect irregularity.

- Additionally, critical information such as chemical ingredients of the drug or maintenance of temperature control in case of life saving drugs or vaccines, can also be tracked.

LANCET REPORT ON NCDs

A report in The Lancet found that India is among the more than half the world's countries that are unlikely to meet the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for 2030 to reduce, by one-third, premature deaths due to four major non-communicable diseases (NCDs) — cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The study, led by Imperial College London researchers, found that the probability of death of one of these four NCDs between the ages of 30 and 70, in India, was 20% for women and 27% for men.
- In 2016, 1 million women and 1.46 million men in that age group died due to NCDs in India.
- Worldwide, there were 1.7 million such deaths before the age of 70.
- Women in South Korea and Japan, and men in Iceland and Switzerland, were least likely to die prematurely from these NCDs.

NEW FPI NORMS

SEBI issued a circular directing certain categories of FPIs such as trusts, banks, mutual funds, and investment managers to disclose their beneficial owners within six months.

HIGHLIGHTS

- A beneficial owner is a person who, directly or indirectly, derives the benefits of ownership.
- The circular said that Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) and Resident Indians (RIs) cannot be beneficial owners of a fund investing in India.
- The regulator also asked FPIs to disclose names and addresses of the beneficial owners; whether they were acting alone or together through one or more natural persons as a group; tax residency jurisdiction; and the beneficial owner group's percentage shareholding capital or profit ownership in the FPI.

*The issues raised by the stakeholders would be studied by an expert group headed by former RBI Deputy Governor **H R Khan**. The panel had been set up by the regulator in March to advise it on redrafting FPI regulations for simplification, and to advise on any other issue relevant to these investors.*

NEED TO AMEND

The regulator wants to tighten KYC norms to prevent money laundering and round tripping of funds, especially if an investment is made via a high-risk jurisdiction. Typically, countries with a known history of money laundering and funding terrorism activities are considered as high-risk jurisdictions. However, Sebi has not named these countries, or issued clear definitions. It has instead outsourced the definition of high-risk jurisdictions to custodian banks, who in the absence of clear directions from the regulator, apply their own sets of standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Khan committee has proposed that NRIs, OCIs and RIs should be allowed to hold a non-controlling stake in FPIs, and no restrictions should be imposed on them to manage non-investing FPIs or Sebi-registered offshore funds.
- It has recommended that erstwhile PIOs should not be subjected to any restrictions, and clubbing of investment limits should be allowed for well-regulated and publicly-held FPIs that have common control.
- The panel has suggested that the time for compliance with the new norms should be extended by six months, after they are finalised, and non-compliant investors should be given another 180 days to wind down their existing positions.
- It has also asked SEBI to do away with additional KYC requirements for beneficial owners in case of government-related FPIs.
- The committee has recommended changes in the norms pertaining to the identification of senior managing officials of FPIs, and for beneficial owners of listed entities.
- It has suggested changes in the disclosure of personal information of beneficial owners.
- It has said, however, that all new rules should apply equally to investors using participatory notes (P-Notes).

COLLATERALISED DEBT OBLIGATION

A CDO, short for Collateralised Debt Obligation, is a financial product that came into focus during the financial meltdown a decade ago, when it performed badly and caused huge losses to financial institutions.

HIGHLIGHTS

- A CDO is a structured financial product that pools together cash flow-generating assets and repackages these assets into tranches that can then be sold to investors.
- The pooled assets could include mortgages, bonds and loans that are primarily debt obligations that serve as collateral for the CDO.
- In a CDO, the tranches vary substantially on the basis of their risk profiles.
- The ***senior tranches*** are typically considered safer because they have first priority on payback from the collateral in the event of default. So, these have a higher credit rating and offer lower coupon rates, while the ***junior tranches*** offer higher coupon rates to compensate for their higher default risk.

BACKGROUND

The earliest CDOs were constructed by Drexel Burnham Lambert, the home of former junk bond king Michael Milken, in 1987 by assembling portfolios of junk bonds issued by various companies. These instruments exploded in popularity after 2004, with CDO sales rising from \$30 billion in 2003 to \$225 billion in 2006. But a subsequent implosion, triggered by the bursting of the US housing bubble, saw ***CDOs become one of the worst-performing instruments*** during the market meltdown of 2007-09. This resulted in losses running into hundreds of billions of dollars for some of the biggest financial institutions. Some of these went bankrupt while others had to be bailed out.

CDOs played a big role in contributing to the escalation of the global financial crisis during the peak of the crisis.

COMMITMENT TO DEVELOPMENT INDEX

A ranking of 27 of the richest countries has placed the United States near the bottom — at rank 23 — in terms of the “Commitment to Development Index” (CDI), implying that the US is among the least committed to policies that benefit people living in the poorer nations.

The annual CDI report is released by Centre for Global Development, a Washington-based non-profit think-tank.

- The latest report, released, shows that the poor performance by the US was driven by low scores on ***foreign aid, finance, and environmental policies***.
- The report ranks the 27 richer countries on these three aspects and four others, then ranks them on overall performance.
- Sweden tops the list, followed by Denmark and Finland. At the bottom, below the US, are Japan, Poland, Greece and South Korea.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX REPORT

The latest human development index (HDI) report released by the United Nations Development Programme shows India’s inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI) at 0.468, or a 26.8% drop from its unadjusted HDI of 0.640.

In the latest ranking, India ranked 130 among 189 countries.

HIGHLIGHTS

- On both indices (the higher the better), India is ahead of Bangladesh and Pakistan.
- The report also compares the three countries on gender inequality index (GII) which, the report says, can be interpreted as the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity.
- Here again, India ranked higher than Bangladesh and Pakistan (the lower the better).
- India has a GI of 0.524, ranking it 127 out of 160 countries in 2017, while Pakistan is ranked 133 and Bangladesh 134.
- In India, 11.6% of parliamentary seats are held by women, and 39% of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education compared to 63.5% of their male counterparts.
- For every 100,000 live births, 174 women die from pregnancy-related causes.

Human Development Index (HDI) is a tool to measure country’s overall achievement social and economic dimensions.

- It considers 4 indicators –
 1. life expectancy for health,
 2. expected years of schooling,
 3. mean of years of schooling for education and
 4. Gross National Income per capita for standard of living.

UNDP

- UNDP, an UN organization formed in 1965, is to help countries eliminate poverty and achieve sustainable human development.
- The status of UNDP is that of an executive board within the United Nations General Assembly.

- It is working to strengthen new frameworks for development, disaster risk reduction and climate change.
- It also encourages the protection of human rights and the empowerment of women in all its programmes.
- The UNDP Human Development Report Office also publishes an annual Human Development Report (since 1990) to measure and analyse developmental progress.
- In addition to a global Report, UNDP also publishes regional, national, and local Human Development Reports.

MASALA BONDS

The government announced measures aimed at checking the rupee's slide and lowering the current account deficit. One of these is removal of some restrictions on what are known as "masala bonds", such as doing away with the withholding tax on these and fetters on Indian banks.

By withholding tax of 5% on masala bond offerings in FY19, the government and the RBI hope to make these bonds a little more attractive to foreign investors who could then buy into rupee bonds of Indian firms — and the inflows that result could help check the slide of the rupee and also reduce the current account deficit over time.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Masala bonds are essentially bonds issued by Indian companies, denominated in rupees, to overseas investors to attract funds for projects, especially in infrastructure.
- By issuing bonds in rupees in the overseas markets, the risk is transferred to investors who sign up for that considering the growth prospects of the country and the issuing company as well as the strength of the rupee.
- From the issuer's perspective, it means cheaper borrowings compared to raising funds in India besides diversifying its sources of fund-raising.

BACKGROUND

The International Finance Corporation, the private arm of the World Bank, set the ball rolling on rupee bonds in 2013 (after the currency came under attack) by issuing successive tranches of such bonds. After 2016, many Indian companies such as HDFC, NHAI, REC, IIFCL and NTPC hit the international market with rupee bonds, which became popular as "masala bonds" as foreign investors started buying into these bonds, attracted by the prospect of high growth compared to many other countries. The capital raised by many Indian companies through these masala bonds, and which flowed back into the country, helped boost the Indian currency. The broader, long-term aim of countries that issue such local-currency bonds abroad — these are counted as part of the country's foreign debt — is to gain global acceptance for their currencies and find a wider set of investors, besides ensuring liquidity for their debt offerings in international markets.

PRAGATI

Recently, PM chaired the 29th interaction with PRAGATI and reviewed the progress made in the working of the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana.

HIGHLIGHTS

- PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance And Timely Implementation) is a multi-purpose and multi-modal platform existing in the Prime Minister's Office.
- It was launched in 2015 and is not a public web platform.
- It is used exclusively by the Prime Minister to give suitable directions for redressal of grievance.
- It also monitors and reviews compliance on the projects and programmes of the Government of India as well as projects flagged by State Governments.
- It brings on one stage the Secretaries of Government of India and the Chief Secretaries of the States.
- It deploys three technologies - Digital data management, video-conferencing and geo-spatial technology.

MASS EMBRYO TRANSFER PROGRAMME

Government has undertaken a Mass Embryo Transfer programme in Indigenous Breeds under National Mission on Bovine Productivity.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Embryo transfer refers to a step in the process of assisted reproduction in which embryos are placed into the uterus of a female with the intent to establish a pregnancy.
- It is implemented with the objective of conservation and development of indigenous breeds under Rashtriya Gokul Mission.
- Under this programme, embryos of higher genetic merit indigenous bovines are being transferred in to surrogate cows.
- Embryos of Indigenous breeds such as Sahiwal, Gir, Red Sindhi, Ongole, Deoni and Vechur have been proposed to be transferred under this programme.
- Twenty Embryo Transfer Technology Centres are being established in the country.

PM JAN AROGYA YOJANA

Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) was recently launched in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is the “world's largest government funded healthcare program” targeting more than 50 crore beneficiaries.
- It provides universal Healthcare through access of Health and Wellness Centers (HWCs) at the primary level and engagement of public and private sector at the secondary & tertiary levels.
- The first component Health and Wellness centres covers both ***maternal and child health services*** and non-communicable diseases, including free essential drugs and diagnostic services.
- First ***'health and wellness centre'*** has been inaugurated in ***Bijapur district in Chhattisgarh.***
- The second component is the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), which aims to reduce out of pocket hospitalisation expenses.
- It will provide a cover of up to ***Rs. 5 lakhs per family per year***, for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.
- It will provide cashless and paperless access to services for the beneficiary at the point of service.
- The scheme is creating a cadre of certified frontline health service professionals called Pradhan Mantri Arogya Mitras (PMAMs).

- PMAM will be primary point of facilitation for the beneficiaries to avail treatment at the hospital and thus, act as a support system to streamline health service delivery.

ICGS VIJAYA

Ministry of Defence has initiated a project for building 7 offshore patrol vessels with private sector partnership.

- In 2017, the first in the series Indian Coast Guard (ICG) Ship Vikram was commission.
- ICGS Vijaya, the second in the series of 98-metre offshore patrol vessels was commissioned recently.
- It is fitted with advanced technology, navigation and communication equipment, sensor and machinery
- The ship will be based at Paradip.
- It will be deployed extensively for Exclusive Economic Zone (EZ) surveillance and other duties
- It is designed to carry one twin-engine helicopter and four high speed boats.

CHILLER STAR LABELLING PROGRAMME

Chiller Star Labelling rogramme was recently launched by Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE).

HIGHLIGHTS

- A Chiller is a machine that removes heat from a liquid via a vapor-compression cycle.
- Chillers are used extensively for space conditioning of buildings and for industrial process cooling applications.
- It is energy intensive system and contribute to more than 40% of total energy consumption in commercial buildings.
- It envisages providing star rating to chillers interms of its energy performance.
- Through this programme, it is estimated that more than 500 million units of electricity would be saved along with reduction of Greenhouse Gas emission (GHG) of 0.5 million-ton equivalent by 2019.

Bureau of Energy Efficiency

- Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) was set up under the provisions of Energy Conservation Act, 2001.
- Its mission is to assist in developing policies with the primary objective of reducing energy intensity of the Indian Economy.
- Energy Conservation Act provides for regulatory and promotional functions of BEE.
- BEE is responsible for:
 - a) Create awareness and disseminate information on energy efficiency and conservation.
 - b) Promote innovative financing of energy efficiency projects.
 - c) Give financial assistance to institutions for promoting efficient use of energy and its conservation.
 - d) Prepare educational curriculum on efficient use of energy and its conservation.
 - e) Implement international co-operation programmes relating to efficient use of energy and its conservation.

RAKHINE REGION

UNHRC and UNDP has recently been given permission for the first time to enter northern Rakhine to access local conditions in the state since last year.

- It is the first step of the UN's confidence building measures.
- More than 7,00,000 rohingya muslims fled the northern rakhine region.
- UNHCR will publish a report about its investigations into atrocities against rohingyas.

DECLINE IN RUPEE

The Union government announced a list of measures to arrest the sharp decline in rupee recently.

MEASURES PROPOSED

- **Imports** - Steps would be taken to curb the import of non-essential goods and encourage the export of domestic goods to address the rising current account deficit. The non-essential import commodities will be decided after consultations with concerned ministries and will be WTO-compliant.
- **FPI limit** - Restrictions will be removed with respect to FPI exposure limit of 20 percent in corporate bond portfolio to a single corporate group or company or entity and 50 per cent of any issue of corporate bond.
- **Masala Bonds** - Indian borrowers will be encouraged to issue rupee-denominated 'masala bonds' to facilitate the inflow of dollars and de-risk the economy from fluctuations in the exchange rate. Also, the current withholding tax of 5% on Masala bonds issued till March 2019 and the restrictions on Indian banks on marketing and under writing of masala bonds would be removed.
- **External commercial borrowing [ECB]** – The manufacturing entities will be permitted to avail ECB facility with minimum maturity of one year, instead of the earlier limit of three years.

REASONS FOR DECLINING

- **Devaluation** – It generally decreases the price of exports in foreign countries and provides a boost to exports by making them more competitive. Correspondingly, volume of imports in the domestic economy would be reduced by making imports more expensive. But since several countries are devaluing at the same time, India is neither benefitting from their exports being cheaper abroad nor will there be a huge fall in imports.
- **Alternate Energy** – Failure in finding sustainable domestic sources of energy to address the over-reliance on oil imports creates tremendous stress on CAD.
- **Inflation** - The depreciating rupee is also a symptom of persistently higher domestic inflation in India. For instance, the rupee has lost about 60% of its value in the last 10 years against the dollar in line with vastly different inflation rates between the two countries.
- **Ripple effects** – Crude oil price hikes increases the cost of transportation of goods being transported by road, including food items, it creates ripple effects on rising food inflation in the country.

MANUAL SCAVENGING

There were instances of death while cleaning septic tanks, in Delhi and Odisha, recently.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Manual scavenging is regulated by the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.
- Under this, no person, local authority or agency should engage or employ people for hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks.
- Mechanised cleaning of septic tanks is the prescribed norm.
- Safety gear for rare instances when human intervention is unavoidable is prescribed.
- A violation can be punished with two years of imprisonment or fine or both.
- It also prohibits the construction of insanitary latrines.
- Each occupier of insanitary latrines shall be responsible for converting or demolishing the latrine at his/her own cost.
- The District Magistrate and the local authority shall be the implementing authorities.

RASHTRIYA POSHAN MAAH

Ministry of AYUSH and Central Council of Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) celebrated Rashtriya Poshan Maah (National Nutrition Month).

HIGHLIGHTS

- PM's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment (POSHAN) Abhiyan strive to reduce the level of stunting, under-nutrition, anemia and low birth weight babies.
- It targets to reduce stunting, undernutrition, anemia and reduce low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively.
- Mission 25 by 2022 – Although it targets to reduce stunting by 2%, Mission would strive to achieve reduction in Stunting from 38.4% (NFHS-4) to 25% by 2022.
- It may include following nutrition strategies and interventions,
 1. supplementary nutrition,
 2. IYCF (Infant and Young Child Feeding) immunisation,
 3. food fortification,
 4. adolescent nutrition,
 5. dietary diversification
 6. maternal health.
- Behaviour change communication is the key component of POSHAN Abhiyaan for converting it into Jan Andolan (People's movement).
- All the States and districts will be covered in a phased manner i.e. 315 districts in 2017-18, 235 districts in 2018-19 and remaining districts in 2019-20.
- It will be funded 50% by the Government of India and 50% by World Bank or other Multinational Development Banks.

INDUSTRIAL LICENSING

Recently, the home ministry has got the power to issue industrial licences for defence manufacturing from Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP).

- The defence manufacturing includes electronic aerospace and defence equipment manufacturing.
- The following are the 6 industries which require compulsory licensing
 1. Arms and ammunition, explosives and allied items of defence equipment,
 2. Defence aircraft and warships,
 3. Atomic substances,

4. Narcotics and psychotropic substances,
5. Hazardous chemicals, distillation and brewing of alcoholic drinks,
6. Cigarettes/cigars and manufactured tobacco substitutes.

AKASH MISSILE

Recently, it was test fired with an indigenous radio frequency seeker. It soon will get an upgraded variant and Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) gave its procedural approval to the variant.

The DAC also accorded approval for progressing Design and Development of Individual Under Water Breathing Apparatus (IUWBA) for T 90 Tanks. Developed by DRDO Lab DEBEL, the IUWBA is used by the crew of Tanks as a safety gear and is required by the Tank crew for emergency escape when negotiating water obstacles while deep fording.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Akash is an indigenously developed medium-range, surface-to-air missile defence system.
- DRDO developed Akash as part of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme initiated in 1984.
- It can target aircraft up to 30 km away, at altitudes up to 18,000 m.
- It consists of Rohini radar that detects incoming aircraft with a range of 120 km.
- It can intercept fighter jets, cruise missiles as well as ballistic missiles.
- This is the first surface-to-air missile with indigenous seeker that has been test fired.
- With this success, India has achieved the capability of making any type of surface-to-air missile.
- The Missile to be procured is an upgraded version of the previously inducted Akash missiles and will include seeker technology, possess 360-degree coverage and will be of compact configuration with reduced signature.
- The upgraded Akash Weapon System is operationally critical equipment which will provide protection to vital assets.

DAC

- To counter corruption and speed up decision- making in military procurement, the government of India in 2001 decided to set up an integrated DAC. It is headed by the Defence Minister.
- The objective of the DAC is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces, in terms of capabilities sought, and time frame prescribed, by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.
- The DAC is responsible to give policy guidelines to acquisitions, based on long-term procurement plans. It also clears all acquisitions, which includes both imported and those produced indigenously or under a foreign license.

INDIA – MOROCCO

Union cabinet has recently approved the revised air services agreement between India and Morocco. Under the agreement, both countries designate one of more airlines.

- These designated airlines of either country.
- Have the right to establish offices in the territory of the other country for the promotion and sale of air services.
- Can enter into cooperative marketing arrangements with the designated carriers of same party, other party and third country.

- Can operate any number of services to/from the six points specified in the Route Schedule to the agreement.
- These developments will enable the people of each country to travel to the other country leading to better economic and cultural ties.

ICC – ROHINGYA MUSLIMS

ICC has recently opened preliminary probe into Myanmar crimes against Rohingya Muslims.

SICC judges has previously ruled that though Myanmar has not signed up to the Hague-based ICC, the court still has jurisdiction over crimes against the Rohingya because Bangladesh is a member.

A preliminary examination can lead to a formal investigation by the ICC.

The UN fact-finding mission also repeated suggestions that crimes against the Rohingya be referred to the ICC.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ICC is an intergovernmental organization and international tribunal headquartered in The Hague in the Netherlands.
- ICC has the jurisdiction to prosecute individuals for the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, crime of aggression and war crimes.
- ICC is the world's first permanent international criminal court.
- States which become party to the Rome Statute becomes member of ICC, thus totalling 123 members.
- 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.

STATUTORY RECOGNITION TO TRADE UNIONS

Union government has proposed to grant statutory recognition to TUs by amending the Trade Unions Act, 1926 (TU Act).

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Centre proposes to grant statutory recognition to TUs by amending the Trade Unions Act, 1926 (TU Act), so that other central and state ministries take them seriously.
- The proposed Section 28-A in the TU Act would require the Centre and the States to provide for statutory recognition of trade unions.
- The amendment provides that in the event of any dispute over recognition by the Central or the State governments, it will be decided by an authority, and by means provided by the appropriate government.

CONCERNS

- The TU Act merely provides for voluntary registration of trade unions, and not for their statutory recognition by employers for collective bargaining purposes.
- Despite demands by trade unions and employers, statutory recognition by employers does not exist in the Act.

- In the absence of statutory union recognition and bargaining obligation, any minority union can vitiate industrial relations in a firm either on its own or by connivance with employers.
- The proposal also completely ignores the serious “allegations and complaints” made by various CTUOs that the Labour Ministry has been carrying out several labour reforms without consulting them.

TRADE UNION IN INDIA

- The trade union movement in India, for various reasons, has been characterised by a multiplicity of unions. Hence, a tripartite national body determines the membership criteria for designating trade union organisations as central trade union organisations (CTUOs). On the basis of this process, certain unions are deemed ‘recognised’.
- Trade unions with a verified membership of five lakh spread over at least four States and four industries as on December 31, 2002 were given the status of CTUOs by the Office of the Chief Labour Commissioner (Central), as per the 2002 exercise, currently there are 13 CTUOs.

NATIONAL DATABASE ON SEX OFFENDERS

India became the ninth country in the world to have a National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO).

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is accessible only to law enforcement agencies for the purpose of “investigation and monitoring”.
- The database is for those convicted for sexual offences 2005 onwards.
- It includes name, address, photograph and fingerprint details of the convict.
- The database will be maintained by the National Crime Records Bureau, that will also track whether the State police were updating the records on time.
- The database will include offenders convicted under charges of rape, gang rape, Protection of Children from Sexual Offenders Act (POCSO) and eve teasing.

PM-AASHA

Recently, the Centre announced a hike in MSPs for several Kharif crops. It said, it will pay farmers the cost of production (as determined by CACP) plus a 50% ‘profit’ while procuring. However, this works well only for paddy, wheat, and select cash crops where there is direct procurement by the industry.

The government-driven procurement is almost nil in crops such as oilseeds, thereby defeating the purpose of MSPs. Besides, due to various other factors, there is increasing farmer unrest across the country.

The reach of the current MSP procurement system is very poor both in terms of geography and the crops covered.

Prices of key agricultural commodities have fallen below their MSP (minimum support price). The AASHA scheme thus tries to address the gaps in the MSP system and give better returns. It also promises to plug the holes in the procurement system.

The three schemes that are part of AASHA are:

1. the Price Support Scheme (PSS)
 2. the Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS)
 3. the Pilot of Private Procurement and Stockist Scheme (PPPS)
- These three components will complement the existing schemes of the Department of Food and Public Distribution.
 - They relate to paddy, wheat and other cereals and coarse grains where procurement is at MSP now.

PSS - Under the PSS, physical procurement of pulses, oilseeds and copra will be done by Central Nodal Agencies. Besides, NAFED and Food Cooperation of India will also take up procurement of crops under PSS. Expenditure and losses due to procurement will be borne by the Centre.

PDPS - Under the PDPS, the Centre proposes to cover all oilseeds. The difference between the MSP and actual selling/modal price will be directly paid into the farmer's bank account. Farmers who sell their crops in recognised mandis within the notified period can benefit from it.

PPSS - In the case of oilseeds, States will have the option to roll out PPSSs in select districts. Under this, a private player can procure crops at MSP when market prices drop below MSP. The private player will then be compensated through a service charge up to a maximum of 15% of the MSP.

ADVANTAGES

- AASHA points to an innovative, MSP-plus approach to the problem of non-remunerative prices.
- The different components would cover the gaps in the procurement and compensation mechanism for crops.
- It will also help revive the rural economy by assuring better income to farmers.
- With better prices across crops, the new scheme may ensure crop diversification and reduce the stress on soil and water.
- In the current physical procurement, government agencies end up stock-piling foodgrains.
- This results in incurring storage costs and significant wastage and leakages as well. So, if effectively implemented, the AASHA scheme will result in savings for the Centre.
- As, there is no need for going through the hassle of physical procurement, storage and disposal.

DISADVANTAGES

PDPS - The experience of Madhya Pradesh which implemented the PDPS under the Bhavantar Bhugtan Yojana last year. Ground level checks revealed that traders plotted with each other and depressed the prices at mandis. They forced farmers to sell at lower prices and pocketed the compensation from the government. Many small and marginal farmers are unable to sell their produce under the Bhavantar scheme. They face the double burden of lowered price and no compensation. So, the key here will be the implementation as failure to create a system of checks and balances can derail them.

PSS - The PSS would be easier to implement, with nodal agencies doing the procurement. However, providing funds would be a key challenge for the Centre. The state governments consider it financially burdensome. If all States apply to NAFED/FCI for procurement of oilseeds or pulses, the agencies will fall short of funds. The states may also find it hard to implement it from the current kharif marketing season, which begins soon. The Centre needs to figure out how to handle procurement and disposal efficiently.

PPSS - The PPPS may work, but private procurers may be wary of the Centre's delayed payments. To ensure that AASHA works, the Centre first needs to break the trader lobbies at mandis. This could be done by widening the competition by inter-linking mandis. e-NAM promises to do so, but, States need to be proactive in undertaking regulatory reforms.

NAFED

- National Agricultural Cooperative marketing Federation of India (NAFED) was established in 1958.
- It is registered under the multi state co-operative societies act.
- Its objective is to promote co-operative marketing of agricultural produce to benefit the farmers.

FCI

The Food Corporation of India was set up under the Food Corporation's Act 1964, with the following objectives -

- Effective price support operations for safeguarding the interests of the farmers.
- Distribution of food-grains throughout the country for public distribution system.
- Maintaining satisfactory level of operational and buffer stocks of food-grains to ensure National Food Security.

NATIONAL RURAL LIVELIHOODS MISSION

The Union cabinet has recently approved extension of special financial package for implementation of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission for Jammu and Kashmir for one year (2018-19).

HIGHLIGHTS

- Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) is assisted by investments from World Bank.
- It aims at enabling rural poor to increase household income through sustainable livelihood enhancements and improved access to financial services.
- Universal Social Mobilisation - At least one woman member from each identified rural poor household, is to be brought under the Self Help Group (SHG) network.
- Target Group is identified through the Participatory Identification of Poor (PIP) method and it is delinked from BPL.
- The responsibility of identification of poor must be vetted by the Gram Sabha and approved by the Gram Panchayat.
- NRLM provides Revolving Fund (RF) and Community Investment Fund (CIF) as resources in perpetuity to the institutions of the poor to strengthen their institutional and financial management capacity.
- Financial Inclusion - It promotes financial literacy among the poor.
- Partnerships with NGOs and linkages with Panchayat Raj Institutions.

INDIA BANGLADESH FRIENDSHIP PIPELINE PROJECT

This project was recently inaugurated jointly by India and Bangladesh.

- This 130-kilometre pipeline project will connect Siliguri in West Bengal in India and Parbatipur in Dinajpur district of Bangladesh.

- The capacity of the pipeline will be one million metric tonnes per annum.
- This project will fulfil energy needs at a cheaper rate to Bangladesh's northern part.

INDIA'S REACTORS UNDER IAEA

India has decided to place four more reactors under the IAEA safeguards.

- Two Russian-designed Pressurised Light Water Reactors and two Pressurised Heavy Reactors being built with Indian technology will be covered.
- With this, a total of 26 Indian nuclear facilities will be under the international nuclear energy watchdog.

IAEA is an international organization that seeks to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and to inhibit its use for any military purpose, including nuclear weapons and materials.

- It was established as an autonomous organization which is not under direct control of the UN, but reports to both the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council.
- Unlike most other specialized international agencies, the IAEA does much of its work with the Security Council, and not with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.
- It is widely known as the world's Atoms for Peace organization.
- It is headquartered at Vienna with 168 members nations.
- North Korea has withdrawn its candidature from IAEA.

LIVESTOCK CENSUS

The 20th Livestock Census will be conducted in all districts across the country in participation with all States and Union Territories.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The ultimate responsibility for conducting the Livestock Census rests with the Animal Husbandry Departments of the States/UTs.
- The Central Government coordinates the work of the States and gives necessary guidance to ensure uniformity in collection of census data.
- It is a Central Sector Scheme with 100% central assistance.
- It usually covers all domesticated animals and headcounts of those animals will be carried out during a specific time period.
- The breeds of various major species including poultry as registered by National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR) will be covered in the Livestock Census.
- The Livestock Census has been conducted in the country periodically since 1919-20.

CYBER SHIKSHAA INITIATIVES

- Project Cyber Shikshaa focus on skilling women engineering graduates in the niche field of Cyber Security.
- It is launched by Microsoft & Data Security Council of India (DSCI) in association with Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY).
- The primary objective is to connect with underserved women from Tier 2 / Tier 3 cities and to align a career path for them in Cyber Security.
- Centre of Advance Computing (CDAC) will impart training to the selected women candidates from all over India.

- Initially, the project will be rolled out in the following cities - Noida, Patna, Hyderabad and Mohali, followed by other cities in the next phase.
- The program will be a 4-months interactive training course with combination of theory, case studies practical hands-on and projects.

COMMON RISK MITIGATION MECHANISM

- It is under the International Solar Alliance.
- It will be formally announced at the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 24) to be held in Poland in December.
- It has been taken over by the World Bank and it has mobilised \$1 million for preparatory work.
- The objective of CRMM is de-risking and reducing the financial cost of renewable energy projects in ISA-member countries.
- It will act as a pooled insurance with limited liability.
- Banks and multi-lateral institutions can contribute to the fund for a marginal premium.

CLIMATE FINANCE LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

The Climate Finance Leadership initiative support a global mobilisation of private capital in response to the challenge of climate change.

- It work to fulfill the private financing objectives included in the landmark 2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement.
- Paris agreement reaffirmed the goal of mobilizing at least \$100 billion per year by 2020 through a combination of public development finance and private foreign direct investment.
- It will draw members from top international financial firms and corporations.
- It focus on catalysing scaled-up investments in clean energy and climate resilience projects around the world, in both developed and emerging markets.
- The initiative will have a one-year term culminating in a UN Climate Summit to be held in September 2019.
- It will work closely with the government of France and will provide a first report to G7 Finance Ministers by July 2019.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX

An update of Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) brought out by UNDP has been released.

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX

- MPI is brought out by UNDP and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative.
- It is made up of several factors that constitute poor people's experience of deprivation such as,
 - a) Poor health,
 - b) Lack of education,
 - c) Inadequate living standard,
 - d) Lack of income,
 - e) Disempowerment,
 - f) Poor quality of work and
 - g) Threat from violence.
- The MPI goes beyond income to look at health, education and living standards.

- It not only captures living conditions better, but also addresses the difficulties involved in estimating income poverty.

HIGHLIGHTS

- According to it, India has pulled 271 million people out of poverty between 2005-06 and 2015-16 and halved its poverty rate from 55 % to 28 %.
- This is quite impressive and the period also happens to be the best phase of economic growth that the country experienced since Independence.
- The real MPCE (monthly per capita consumption expenditure) increased by much more in the second period (2004-05 to 2011-12) as compared to the first (1993-94 to 2004-05).

BACKGROUND

- India absurdly follows low income poverty lines fixed by the Suresh Tendulkar committee (which submitted its report in 2009).
- Recognising the limitations of income-based poverty lines, a number of targeted schemes in India are in the nature of BPL-plus programmes.
- An income-plus approach to identifying the deprived is also built into the Socio Economic and Caste Census.

RAMSAR CONVENTION

The convention has recently issued its first-ever global report on the state of World's wetlands. The report is titled as "Global Wetland Outlook". The report found that around 35% of wetlands were lost between 1970 and 2015.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Ramsar convention adopted in the year 1971 that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.
- This intergovernmental treaty came into force in 1975.
- It has been ratified by most of the world's nations, including the U.S., China and India.
- It has designated more than 2,300 sites of international importance.

Wetlands include lakes, rivers, marshes and peatlands, as well as coastal and marine areas like lagoons, mangroves and coral reefs.

In India, The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is the nodal Ministry for wetlands conservation. Wetlands in India account for 4.7% of the total geographical area.

STATE DISASTER RESPONSE FUNDS

The Centre has announced to enhance its contribution to the (SDRF) from 75 per cent to 90 per cent for general category states with effect from April 1 this year.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Under the Disaster Management Act 2005, a financial mechanism has been set up by way of National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) at national level and State Disaster Response Funds (SDRF) at state level.
- The funds are to meet the rescue and relief expenditure during any notified disaster.
- The funding for disaster relief are governed by the National Disaster Management Policy.

- As per the policy, the State governments have to provide disaster relief from their respective State Disaster Response Funds (SDRFs).
- Additional assistance will be provided from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) only for a “calamity of severe nature”.
- SDRF has been constituted in each state in which the Centre had been, so far, contributing 75 per cent for general category states and 90 per cent for special category states of hilly regions.
- With the declaration, the contribution of all states to the SDRF fund would be only 10 per cent.
- The NDRF is funded through a National Calamity Contingent Duty levied under GST for selected goods and contribution from any person or institutions.

LIQUIDITY COVERAGE RATIO

RBI has recently notified that banks are allowed to use up to 15 % (currently 13%) of holdings under the SLR reserves to meet their liquidity coverage ratio (LCR) requirements.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This move will take the total carve-out from SLR available to banks to 15 per cent of their deposits.
- The RBI move follows concerns over tight liquidity conditions and banks’ unwillingness to lend to NBFCs.
- The liquidity coverage ratio (LCR) refers to highly liquid assets held by financial institutions to meet short-term obligations.
- Statutory Liquidity Ratio is the percentage of deposits that banks have to mandatorily invest in government and state government securities, which is currently at 19.5 %.

CHAMPIONS OF THE EARTH

In its 2018 edition, Indian Prime Minister and France President has been awarded under Policy Leadership category for their International Solar Alliance (ISA) initiative.

- Indian PM Modi has also been awarded for his pledge to eliminate single use plastic in India by 2022.
- Cochin International Airport has also been honoured with the award for Entrepreneurial Vision, for its leadership in the use of sustainable energy.
- The awards will be presented during the Champions of the Earth Gala in New York City, on the side-lines of the 73rd UN General Assembly.

BACKGROUND

- It is the UN's highest environmental honour.
- It was launched in the year 2005 by UNEP.
- It recognizes exemplary individuals and organisations whose actions created positive impact on environment.
- It recognizes laureates in the following categories: ***Lifetime Achievement; Policy Leadership; Action and Inspiration; Entrepreneurial Vision; Science and Innovation.***

GOODS & SERVICE TAX NETWORK

Union Cabinet has recently approved increasing the government stake in GSTN to 100 per cent

HIGHLIGHTS

- GSTN provides the technological support to the GST.
- It handles massive amounts of data and deals with crucial data sets such as indirect tax returns and refunds.
- At present, the government holds a 49% stake, with Centre and states share of 24.5% each.
- The balance 51% is held by five non-government institutions.
- Thus, the government will acquire the entire 51 per cent equity held by the non-government institutions.
- The stake will be acquired equally by the Central and state governments.
- The Cabinet also decided to allow change in the existing composition of the GSTN board.
- It will have a total of 11 directors including a Chairman and a Chief Executive (CEO).
- While 3 directors each will be nominated by the Central and state governments, 3 other independent directors would be nominated by the board of directors.

AMITAVA ROY PANEL

Supreme Court has recently set up a panel headed by retired SC Judge Amitava Roy Panel to look in to prison reforms and decongest crowded jails.

- The panel will examine way and means to prevent violence against inmates, get the required legal aid and rehabilitate them.
- It will also examine the feasibility of setting up more open prisons.
- It will examine the functioning of undertrial review committees, availability of legal aid and advice, grant of remission, parole and furlough.

WAYU

- It is a device developed by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), Nagpur-based laboratory of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).
- It is to address air pollution at high traffic zones, which have lot of buildings in the neighbourhood leading to restricted flow of air called "Street Canyon" effect.
- A fan sucks air around the device and pollutants like dust and particulate matter are separate using three filters of different dimensions.
- The air is led into a specially designed chamber where carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons content in the air are oxidized.
- After oxidation, the pollutants will turn into less harmful carbon dioxide using activated carbon coated with titanium dioxide.
- The purified air is then ejected with force into the atmosphere so as to help dilute pollutant content in the outside air.

GENE EDITING

Ethical concerns have been raised over the clinical application of gene editing technique in recent times.

CONCERNS

- Safety is a key question because gene editing has the possibility of accidentally cutting DNA that is similar to the real target.
- A study published in the journal Nature Medicine, found that therapeutic application of the genome-editing tool may increase the risk of cancer.

- It could be potentially used to edit out undesirable traits in human beings in the name of improving genetic quality of a human population, as Eugenics.
- It could also be used by governments to create a 'superior' race and by the private sector in the name of creating a perfect child for the parents.
- Altering genes in sperm, eggs or embryos through "germ line" engineering leads to concerns regarding creation of designer babies with enhanced traits.
- This leads to the argument that gene editing be reserved for serious diseases with no good alternatives and performed under rigorous oversight.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

- CRISPR was used successfully to repair a heart-damaging gene in human embryos.
- It marked a step towards preventing inherited diseases from being passed on to the next generation.
- It can be useful in learning how genes cause disease or influence development and what therapies might help.
- It was also found that gene editing in the brain can help decrease the repetitive behaviours, which is a symptom of autism spectrum disorders.
- The approach can also be used to treat other neurological diseases such as epilepsy and the brain cancer glioblastoma.
- Scientists in the UK have used genome editing to study DNA function in human embryos that could help better understand the biology of our early development.
- The findings could improve IVF treatments and understand some causes of pregnancy failure in the future if key genes responsible for successful development of embryos are identified.
- Researchers also are using gene editing to hatch malaria-resistant mosquitoes, grow strains of algae that produce bio-fuels, improve crop growth, even make mushrooms that don't brown as quickly.

CRISPR

- It is a gene editing technique which stands for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats.
- It harnesses the natural defence mechanisms of bacteria to alter an organism's genetic code.
- The bacteria are likened to a pair of molecular scissors that can cut the two DNA strands at a specific location and modify gene function.
- The cutting is done by enzymes like Cas9, guided by pre-designed RNA sequences, which ensure that the targeted section of the genome is edited out.

INDIA INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FESTIVAL

The fourth edition of India International Science Festival (IISF) is going to be organised in Lucknow.

- It will be organised with its focal theme "Science for Transformation".
- Ministry of Science and Technology, Earth Sciences in association with Vijnana Bharati is organising this festival since 2015.
- The first and second edition of IISF were held in New Delhi and the third in Chennai.
- World Record Attempts have been a key part of India International Science Festival since 2015.
- This year, a World Record attempt will be made to "isolate DNA" by 500 students from class 8th to 10th standard.

SAFEGUARD DUTY**Safeguard duties are applied when,**

- There is a surge in imports of a particular product irrespective of a particular country.
- It causes serious injury to the domestic industry.
- Safeguard measures are applied to all imports of the product in question irrespective of the countries in which it originates or from which it is exported.
- This aspect distinguishes Safeguards from antidumping measures which are always country specific.
- Safeguards are applied in the form of either safeguard duty or in the form of safeguard QRs (import licenses).
- These measures are administered in India by an authority called Director General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- Earlier, it was administered by Director General of Safeguards (DGS) under Ministry of Finance. But its function was shifted to DGTR earlier this year.

INTERCEPTOR MISSILE TEST

India's Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system is concentrated on tracking and destroying incoming hostile missiles both inside (endo) and outside (exo) the earth's atmosphere.

- The BMD program includes a two-tiered system consisting of two interceptor missiles, namely Prithvi Air Defence (PAD)/ Pradyumna and Advanced Air Defence (AAD)/Ashwin Ballistic Missile Interceptor.
- India successfully conducted an interceptor missile (Prithvi Defence Vehicle) test off the Abdul Kalam Island in Odisha Coast.
- The Prithvi Defence Vehicle (PDV) is being developed by DRDO which is set to replace the existing PAD.
- PDV mission is for engaging the targets in the exo-atmosphere region at an altitude above 50 km of the earth's atmosphere.
- PDV is guided by high-accuracy Inertial Navigation System (INS).
- AAD mission is for engaging the targets in the endo-atmosphere at a lower altitude of 15-30 km.

HORNBILL WATCH INITIATIVE

- It is an interactive web interface that allows a person to report on hornbills anywhere in India.
- It was launched by Scientists from Nature Conservation Foundation and Conservation India.
- Hornbills play essential roles in forest ecosystems as dispersers of seeds of forest plants.
- There are nine hornbill species in India out of which four are found in the Western Ghats. They are,
 - a) Indian Grey Hornbill (endemic to India),
 - b) the Malabar Grey Hornbill (endemic to the Western Ghats),
 - c) Malabar Pied Hornbill (endemic to India and Sri Lanka) and
 - d) Widely distributed but endangered Great Hornbill.
- India also has one species that has one of the smallest ranges of any hornbill, the Narcondam Hornbill, found only on the island of Narcondam.
- The hornbills were reported from 70 protected areas in the country.

TOTAL EXPENSE RATIO

- The ratio is associated with Mutual Funds investment.
- Mutual funds are investments where an investor entrusts his/her money with an investment manager (of an asset management company) to manage it efficiently.
- This money management comes at a cost, which is usually charged as a percentage of the investment.
- The charge levied is called Total Expense Ratio and money received from the investment is reduced by this ratio.
- For example, if a fund charges 2% as the TER, and the fund produces a gross profit (return) of 15% in a given year, the investor would get 13%.
- SEBI, the regulator of Mutual Funds, has laid down rules on how much an asset management company can charge an investor to manage their funds.

LOKPAL

Government has constituted eight-member search committee headed by former Supreme Court judge, Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, to recommend names for posts of Lokpal chairperson and members. The selection process of Lokpal is underway as per guidelines of laid down in Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

The search committee will start functioning soon. It will recommend names for Lokpal chairperson and members. It can also consider names other than those recommended by the search committee.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Act allows setting up of anti-corruption ombudsman called Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayukta at the State-level.
- The Lokpal will consist of a chairperson and a maximum of eight members.
- The Lokpal will cover all categories of public servants, including the Prime Minister. But the armed forces do not come under the ambit of Lokpal.
- The Act also incorporates provisions for attachment and confiscation of property acquired by corrupt means, even while the prosecution is pending.
- The States will have to institute Lokayukta within one year of the commencement of the Act.
- The Act also ensures that public servants who act as whistleblowers are protected.

POWERS

- The Lokpal will have the power of superintendence and direction over any investigation agency including CBI for cases referred to them by the ombudsman.
- As per the Act, the Lokpal can summon or question any public servant if there exists a prima facie case against the person, even before an investigation agency (such as vigilance or CBI) has begun the probe. Any officer of the CBI investigating a case referred to it by the Lokpal, shall not be transferred without the approval of the Lokpal.
- An investigation must be completed within six months. However, the Lokpal or Lokayukta may allow extensions of six months at a time provided the reasons for the need of such extensions are given in writing.
- Special courts will be instituted to conduct trials on cases referred by Lokpal.

LOO REVIEW CAMPAIGN

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, under the aegis of Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban has partnered with Google to launch the Loo Review campaign.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is aimed to encourage all local guides in India to rate and review public toilets on Google Maps.
- This campaign will allow all citizens to locate public toilets in their cities on Google Maps, Search and the Assistant and also provide feedback on the same.
- Local Guides are people who share reviews, photos, and knowledge on Google Maps to help people explore the world.

BACKGROUND

- The joint campaign to be run throughout October and November 2018 is an effort to increase the awareness and ease of locating public toilets across India. 500+ cities in India with more than 30,000 toilets with the name of “SBM Toilet” are currently live on Google Maps.
- One of the objectives of the SBM- U is to provide sanitation coverage through public toilet facilities across cities in India for achieving Open Defecation Free (ODF) status.
- There is now a need to ensure that the ODF status is sustained through continuous usage and proper maintenance of public toilets.
- The ‘Public toilets near me’ feature will benefit citizens, particularly women and senior citizens, who often find it difficult to find access to clean toilets in the public space.
- The feedback provide by local guides through the Loo Review campaign will press upon the Urban Local Bodies to take proactive steps to improve public toilet facilities across the country.

AGMARK ONLINE SYSTEM

The government has launched an online platform for processing applications related to quality certification mark ‘Agmark’ for agricultural products.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is being implemented across the country to conduct quality control functions.
- It will be available 24×7.
- It will make process of application is simple, quick, transparent.
- Through this online system, certificate of authorisation (domestic), permission of laboratories (domestic), permission of printing press and services related to laboratory information management system will be provided online.
- The online system will make processes easy, reliable and cost effective.
- It also has provisions for online receipt of fees from the applicants as payments can be received in digital mode through bharatkosh.gov.in website.

AGMARK

- Agmark is certification mark that assures conformity to set of standards approved by Government agency Directorate of Marketing and Inspection.
- It is legally enforced by Agricultural Produce (Grading and Marking) Act of 1937 (and ammended in 1986).
- The present AGMARK standards cover quality guidelines for 205 different commodities spanning variety of cereals, pulses, vegetable oils, essential oils, fruits & vegetables, and semi-processed products like vermicelli.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR TOTAL ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons is observed every year on 26 September across the world.

HIGHLIGHTS

- To provide an occasion for world community to reaffirm its commitment to global nuclear disarmament as high priority.
- To provide opportunity to educate public and their leaders about real benefits of eliminating such weapons, and the social and economic costs of perpetuating them.

BACKGROUND

The International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons was proclaimed by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in December 2013 as follow-up to its high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament which was held on 26 September 2013, in New York, US.

UNGA called for urgent commencement of negotiations in Conference on Disarmament of comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons to prohibit their possession, development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer and use or threat of use, and to provide for their destruction.

INDIAN OCEAN NAVAL SYMPOSIUM (IONS)

In the series of meetings of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Working Group (IWG) on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), the 3rd meeting is being held at Headquarters Eastern Naval Command, Vishakhapatnam.

IONS

- IONS, the 21st century's first significant international maritime security initiative launched in February 2008, provides a forum for discussion of regional maritime issues and promotes friendly relationships among member nations.
- It presently has 24 members and eight observer navies.
- It is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues and, in the process, endeavours to generate a flow of information between naval professionals that would lead to common understanding and possibly agreements on the way ahead.

- Under the charter of business adopted in 2014, the grouping has working groups on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Information Security and Interoperability (IS&I) and anti-piracy now renamed as maritime security.

INDIAN CULINARY INSTITUTE

Indian Culinary Institute (ICI) has been inaugurated at Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. It is promoted by Union Ministry of Tourism.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The main objective of setting up of the Indian Culinary Institute (ICI) is to institutionalize a mechanism to support efforts intended to preserve, document, promote and disseminate Indian Cuisine, meet the sectoral requirement of specialists specific to Indian Cuisine, as also of promoting Cuisine as a Niche Tourism product.
- The ICIs will be Centres of Excellence which will offer structured regular programmes of study specific to culinary arts and culinary management leading to graduate and post graduate level degrees, promote research and innovation, organize demand driven certificate and diploma courses, document and create data base specific to Indian cuisine and commission studies and survey on cuisine.

EDUCATION & HEALTH EXPENDITURES

A study on spending on education and health care by various countries by various countries has been released. The study is based on analysis of data from sources, including government agencies, schools, and health care systems.

The study was conducted by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the request of the World Bank. It is the first of its kind to measure and compare the strength of countries' "**human capital**". The study underscores that when a country's human capital score increases, its economy grows.

HIGHLIGHTS

- India ranks 158th in the world for its investments in education and health care. The nation is placed behind Sudan (ranked 157th) and ahead of Namibia (ranked 159th) in the list.
- South Asian countries ranking below India in this report include Pakistan (164), Bangladesh (161) and Afghanistan (188).
- Countries in the region that have fared better than India in terms of human capital include Sri Lanka (102), Nepal (156), Bhutan (133) and Maldives (116).
- India has improved its performance from its position of 162 in 1990. However, India is falling behind in terms of health and education of its workforce, which could potentially have long-term negative effects on the Indian economy.
- The study places Finland at the top.
- The U.S. is ranked 27th, while China is at 44th and Pakistan at 164th.
- Turkey showed the most dramatic increase in human capital between 1990 and 2016.
- Asian countries with notable improvement include China, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam.
- Within Latin America, Brazil stands out for improvement.
- All these countries have had faster economic growth over this period than peer countries with lower levels of human capital improvement.

- In addition, the greatest increase among sub-Saharan African countries was in Equatorial Guinea.

The findings show the association between investments in education and health and improved human capital and GDP which policy-makers ignore at their own peril. As the world economy grows increasingly dependent on digital technology, from agriculture to manufacturing to the service industry, human capital grows increasingly important for stimulating local and national economies.

GLOBAL MEDIA COMPACT

UN has announced Global Media Compact to raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals. India's ministry of information and broadcasting is part of it.

HIGHLIGHTS

- SDG Media Compact is an initiative marking a new drive to advance awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were unanimously adopted by all world leaders at the United Nations in 2015.
- The Compact seeks to inspire media and entertainment companies around the world to leverage their resources and creative talent to advance the Goals.
- The Compact is an initiative of the United Nations, in collaboration with the UN Foundation and with the support of Fleishman Hillard.

ADVANTAGES

- The SDG Media Compact is inclusive and aims to embrace media companies from all regions and all platforms. Participating organizations will have the opportunity to create content partnerships with the United Nations, whereby the organization will increase its efforts to source and share high-value media content and newsworthy opportunities relating to the SDGs.
- Regular monitoring and review meetings will gauge engagement.
- Collectively, the founding members of the SDG Media Compact already comprise an audience in the billions spanning over 80 countries on 4 continents and many more companies are expected to join.

SDGs

- The 17 Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by world leaders at the historic Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015.
- Encompassing everything from health, to gender equality, and education, the Goals will mobilize efforts around the world to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

Psbloanin59minutes.com

Finance and Corporate Affairs Ministry has launched a web portal which is a transformative initiative in MSME credit space. The web portal psbloansin59minutes.com will enable in principle approval for MSME loans up to Rs. 1 crore within 59 minutes from SIDBI and 5 Public Sector Banks (PSBs).

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is one of its kind platforms in MSME segment which integrates advanced fintech to ensure seamless loan approval and management.
- The loans are undertaken without human intervention till sanction and or disbursement stage.
- The Portal sets a new benchmark in loan processing and reduces the turnaround time from 20-25 days to 59 minutes. Subsequent to this in principle approval, the loan will be disbursed in 7-8 working days.
- The solution uses sophisticated algorithms to read and analyse data points from various sources such as IT returns, GST data, bank statements, MCA21 etc. in less than an hour while capturing the applicant's basic details.
- The system simplifies the decision-making process for a loan officer as the final output provides a summary of credit, valuation and verification on a user-friendly dashboard in real time.

SEVERE ACUTE MALNUTRITION

The National Technical Board on Nutrition (NTBN) has approved guidelines proposed by WCD Ministry for severe acute malnutrition. The measures are part of the community-based health management of children suffering from SAM.

GUIDELINES

- Severely malnourished children must be fed freshly cooked food prepared from locally available cereals, pulses and vegetables. This is to be distributed by anganwadi centres, as part of the country's first-ever guidelines for nutritional management of children suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM).
- The guidelines outline the role of anganwadi workers and auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs) in identifying severely wasted children.
- According to the recommendations, anganwadi workers have to provide modified morning snacks, hot cooked meals and take-home ration for SAM children.
- They have to segregate those with oedema or medical complications and sending them to the nearest health facility or nutrition rehabilitation centres.
- The remaining children are enrolled into "**community-based management**". This includes provision of nutrition, continuous monitoring of growth, administration of antibiotics and micro-nutrients as well as counselling sessions and imparting of nutrition and health education.
- The morning snacks and hot-cooked meals, which are served at anganwadis to children between the age of three to six years, should be "prepared freshly and served at the centralised kitchen/anganwadi centres.
- Locally available cereals, pulses, green leafy vegetables and tubers, vitamin C rich fruits, as well as fresh milk and 3-4 eggs every week" have also been prescribed.
- Importantly, the government has also revised the method to be used to measure wasting and advised calculating weight based on the height of children instead of the mid-upper arm circumference.

SEVERE ACUTE MALNUTRITION

- Severe acute malnutrition is the most extreme and visible form of undernutrition. Its face is a child – frail and skeletal – who requires urgent treatment to survive.
- Children with severe acute malnutrition have very low weight for their height and severe muscle wasting. They may also have nutritional oedema – characterized by swollen feet, face and limbs.
- About two thirds of these children live in Asia and almost one third live in Africa.

- Severe acute malnutrition is a major cause of death in children under 5, and its prevention and treatment are critical to child survival and development.
- Across the globe, an estimated 16 million children under the age of 5 are affected by severe acute malnutrition.
- This number is staggering – most importantly, because children with severe acute malnutrition are nine times more likely to die than well-nourished children.
- These deaths are the direct result of malnutrition itself, as well as the indirect result of childhood illnesses like diarrhoea and pneumonia that malnourished children are too weak to survive.
- Severe acute malnutrition can increase dramatically in emergencies. But despite what we see in the headlines, the majority of cases occur in developing countries not affected by emergencies.
- These settings are plagued by chronic poverty, lack of education, poor hygiene, limited access to food and poor diets. The result is significant barriers to sustainable development in these nations.

WORLD WILDLIFE FOUNDATION'S 'Tx2' PROGRAMME

Nepal is set to become the first country in the world to double its tiger population as part of the World Wildlife Foundation's (WWF) 'Tx2' programme which aims to double the number of tigers all over the world.

The government of Nepal recently announced that there are now an estimated 235 wild tigers in the nation, nearly double the number from around 121 in 2009.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The success of Nepal in doubling tiger numbers has been largely attributed to the country's political commitment and the adoption of innovative tools and approaches towards tiger conservation.
- Nepal was the first country to achieve global standards in managing tiger conservation areas, an accreditation scheme governed by the ***Conservation Assured Tiger Standards (CA|TS)***.

'Tx2' PROGRAMME

- The World Wildlife Foundation had launched its ambitious TX2 programme at the St Petersburg Tiger Summit in 2010.
- The programme aims to double the world tiger population by 2022, which is the year of the tiger in the Chinese calendar.

WWF'S ROLE

- WWF remains a major driving force behind Tx2. It aims at:
- Driving political momentum to ensure tigers remain a top priority for world leaders.
- Professionalising wildlife protection by training rangers, developing conservation standards (CA|TS) and technology (SMART) to achieve Zero Poaching.
- Tackling the illegal wildlife trade through our partnership with TRAFFIC.
- Focusing efforts in key tiger landscapes.
- Ensuring there is space for both tigers and people in the future.

TIGER RANGE COUNTRIES

Wild tigers are found in a variety of habitats across Asia. There are currently **13 tiger range countries; Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Viet Nam.**

DAKSHINA BHARAT HINDI PRACHAR SABHA

The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, inaugurated the centenary celebrations of the Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha on September 22, 2018.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The organisation was established by Annie Besant in 1918 with support from Mahatma Gandhi, who became the founder president of the Sabha, who held the post till his death.
- In 1964, the institution was recognised by the Indian Government as one of the Institutes of National Importance.
- It was established to propagate the study of Hindi in the then Madras Presidency and princely states of Banganapalle, Cochin, Hyderabad, Mysore, Pudukkottai, Sanduru and Travancore.
- The first Hindi class was taken by Gandhi's son Devdas Gandhi.

COUNTRY PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

The World Bank Group (WBG) Board of Executive Directors has endorsed a new Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for India.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The CPF aims to support India's transition to a higher middle-income country by addressing some of its key development priorities — resource efficient and inclusive growth, job creation and building its human capital.
- The India CPF represents the largest country programme of the WBG, reflecting the strong collaboration between India and the Group's institutions — **The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA).**
- The WBG expects to deliver \$25-30 billion during this CPF period, ending in FY22.
- With a fast-growing economy, global stature, and its unique experience of lifting the highest number of poor out of poverty in the past decades, India is well-positioned to become a high middle-income country by 2030.

COUNTRY PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

- The World Bank Group's Country Partnership Framework (CPF) aims to make our country-driven model more systematic, evidence-based, selective, and focused on the Bank's twin goals of ending extreme poverty and increasing shared prosperity in a sustainable manner.
- The CPF replaces the Country Assistance Strategy (CAS).
- Used in conjunction with a Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD), the CPF guides the World Bank Group's (WBG) support to a member country.
- A **Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD)** informs each new CPF.

- The aim of the SCD is to identify the most important challenges and opportunities a country faces in advancing towards the twin goals. This is derived from a thorough analysis, and informed by consultations with a range of stakeholders.

NEELAKURINJI

Tamil Nadu government has announced a novel scheme for the protection of the exotic Neela kurinji (*Strobilanthes kunthianus*) plants that flower only once in 12 years.

NEELAKURINJI

- Kurinji or Neelakurinji (*Strobilanthes kunthianus*) is a shrub that is found in the shola forests of the Western Ghats in South India.
- Nilgiri Hills, which literally means the blue mountains, got their name from the purplish blue flowers of Neelakurinji that blossoms only once in 12 years.
- Some Kurinji flowers bloom once every seven years, and then die. Their seeds subsequently sprout and continue the cycle of life and death.
- The Paliyan tribal people living in Tamil Nadu used it as a reference to calculate their age.

CYBER CRIME PREVENTION AGAINST WOMEN & CHILDREN PORTAL

- The portal will receive complaints from citizens on objectionable online content related to child pornography, child sexual abuse material, sexually explicit material such as rape and gang rape.
- The portal is convenient and user friendly that will enable complainants in reporting cases without disclosing their identity.
- This will not only aid the victims/complainants but also help the civil society organizations and responsible citizens to anonymously report complaints pertaining to child pornography, child sexual abuse material or sexually explicit material such as rape and gang rape.
- Complainants can also upload the objectionable content and URL to assist in the investigation by the State Police.
- The complaints registered through this portal will be handled by police authorities of respective State/UTs.
- There are other features such as a victim or complainant can track his/her report by opting for "report and track" option using his/her mobile number.
- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) will proactively identify such objectionable content and take up with intermediaries for its removal. For this NCRB has already been notified as the Government of India agency to issue notices under Section 79(3)b of IT Act.

CPEC

Pakistan has invited Saudi Arabia to join the CPEC as the third "strategic partner". Saudi participation in this mega project will ensure huge investment in Pakistan through this platform.

CPEC

- The CPEC is the flagship project of the multi-billion dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a pet project of Chinese President Xi Jinping, aimed at enhancing Beijing's influence around the world through China-funded infrastructure projects.
- The 3,000 km-long China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) consisting of highways, railways, and pipelines is the latest irritant in the India–China relationship.

- CPEC eventually aims at linking the city of Gwadar in South Western Pakistan to China's North Western region Xinjiang through a vast network of highways and railways.
- The proposed project will be financed by heavily-subsidised loans, that will be disbursed to the Government of Pakistan by Chinese banking giants such as Exim Bank of China, China Development Bank, and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China.

ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION

The government has appointed renowned scientist Kamlesh Nilkanth Vyas as chairman of Atomic Energy Commission and secretary of Department of Atomic Energy (DAE). He will succeed Shekhar Basu.

AEC

- The Indian Atomic Energy Commission was first setup in August 1948 in the Department of Scientific Research.
- Later on, in accordance with a Government Resolution, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) was established in the Department of Atomic Energy.
- The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) was setup on August 3, 1954 under the direct charge of the Prime Minister through a Presidential Order.
- According to the Resolution constituting the AEC, the Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Atomic Energy is ex-officio Chairman of the Commission.
- The other Members of the AEC are appointed on the recommendation of the Chairman, AEC and after approval by the Prime Minister.
- ***Important functions of the Atomic Energy Commission are:***
 - a) To organise research in atomic scientists in the country.
 - b) To train, atomic scientists in the country.
 - c) To promote nuclear research in commission's own laboratories as well as in India.
 - d) To undertake prospecting of atomic minerals in India and to extract such minerals for use on industrial scale.

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY

The government along with United Nations body FAO has launched an agriculture project with \$33.5 million grant from Global Environment Facility (GEF) that seeks to bring transformative change in the farm sector through conservation of biodiversity and forest landscapes.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The project is being funded by the GEF and implemented by the government of India (agriculture and environment ministries) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
- The project aims to transform agricultural production to generate global environmental benefits by addressing biodiversity conservation, land degradation, climate change mitigation and sustainable forest management.
- The project, to be implemented in five landscapes in Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand, strives to bring harmony between conservation and development efforts of the country.

GEF

- The Global Environment Facility was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems.
- It is an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector that addresses global environmental issues.
- GEF funds are available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to meet the objectives of the international environmental conventions and agreements.
- The World Bank serves as the GEF Trustee, administering the GEF Trust Fund.
- It is a FINANCIAL MECHANISM for five major international environmental conventions: the **Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).**

7TH UNWTO GLOBAL SUMMIT ON URBAN TOURISM

7th UNWTO Global Summit on Urban Tourism is being held in Seoul, capital of South Korea.

Theme: 'A 2030 Vision for Urban Tourism'.

- World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and Seoul Metropolitan Government and supported by Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of South Korea and Seoul Tourism Organization.
- The summit provides unique platform to discuss key issues shaping future of urban tourism in the context of the 2030 Urban Agenda.
- It brings together high-level representatives from National Tourism Administrations, city authorities and related stakeholders, serving as platform to exchange experiences and expertise.

UNWTO

- The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.
- UNWTO's membership includes 158 countries, 6 Associate Members and over 500 Affiliate Members representing the private sector, educational institutions, tourism associations and local tourism authorities.
- As the leading international organization in the field of tourism, UNWTO promotes tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability and offers leadership and support to the sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies worldwide.
- UNWTO encourages the implementation of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, to maximize tourism's socio-economic contribution while minimizing its possible negative impacts, and is committed to promoting tourism as an instrument in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), geared towards reducing poverty and fostering sustainable development worldwide.
- UNWTO generates market knowledge, promotes competitive and sustainable tourism policies and instruments, fosters tourism education and training, and works to make tourism an effective tool for development through technical assistance projects in over 100 countries around the world.

MISSION ON JHUM CULTIVATION

A recent NITI Aayog report has recommended that the Ministry of Agriculture should take up a “mission on jhum cultivation” to ensure inter-ministerial convergence.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Various authorities often have divergent approaches towards shifting cultivation. This creates confusion among grass-roots level workers and jhum farmers said the report.
- Therefore, shifting cultivation fallows must be legally perceived and categorised as ‘regenerating fallows’ and credit facilities must be extended to those who practise shifting cultivation.
- Land for shifting cultivation should be recognised as “agricultural land” where farmers practise agro-forestry for the production of food rather than as forestland.

CONCERNS

The report notes that between 2000 and 2010, the land under shifting cultivation dropped by 70 %. People are returning to fallow land left after shifting in a shorter span. Earlier the cultivators returned to fallows after 10-12 years, now they are returning in three to five years which has impacted on the quality of the soil.

JHUM CULTIVATION

Jhum cultivation, also known as the slash and burn agriculture, is the process of growing crops by first clearing the land of trees and vegetation and burning them thereafter. The burnt soil contains potash which increases the nutrient content of the soil.

This practice is considered as an important mainstay of food production for a considerable population in North-East India.

ASIA PACIFIC POLICY GROUP

Almost three months after Pakistan was placed on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list for failing to curb terror funding, Pakistan’s recent action against terror financing, particularly on the “legal” front, was found to be “unsatisfactory”, according to a review by the Asia Pacific Policy Group (APPG).

HIGHLIGHTS

- Not much has been achieved by Pakistan, especially on the legal side (like freezing of assets, attachment of funds, militant groups infrastructures etc).
- Another review for Pakistan will be held in December this year following which a final evaluation report will be prepared.
- For Pakistan, the first deadline is January 2019 failing which they may face more heat. By then, Pakistan will have to publish updated lists of persons and entities proscribed under the Anti-Terrorism Act and the UN-designated entities.

APG

- It is the FATF-style regional body for the Asia-Pacific region. It is an inter-governmental organisation founded in 1997 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- The APG consists of 41 members jurisdictions and a number of observer jurisdictions and international/regional observer organisations.

- Under the APG's Terms of Reference (updated 2012) membership is available for jurisdictions with a presence in the Asia-Pacific region who commit to the policy objectives of the organisation including undergoing a mutual evaluation (peer review) to determine the level of compliance of the member with the international standards against money laundering and terrorist financing.
- Observer status is available to any jurisdiction in the Asia-Pacific region interested in becoming a member or any other jurisdiction which supports the goals and work of the APG.
- International organisations which support the work of the APG may also join as supporting observers.

Jurisdictions that join the APG, either as members or as observers, must commit to implement the international standards against money laundering, the financing of terrorism and proliferation financing (WMD), in particular the Recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). These standards were substantially updated in 2012 and are supplemented by a complex assessment methodology in 2013 which forms the benchmark for mutual evaluations.

RIVER POLLUTION

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has released a report on the extent of pollution in rivers in India.

Based on the recommendations of the National Green Tribunal, the CPCB last month apprised the States of the extent of pollution in their rivers.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The number of polluted stretches of the country's rivers has increased to 351 from 302 two years ago, and the number of critically polluted stretches — where water quality indicators are the poorest — has gone up to 45 from 34.
- Several of the river's stretches — in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh — are actually far less polluted than many rivers in Maharashtra, Assam and Gujarat. These three States account for 117 of the 351 polluted rivers stretches.
- The most significant stretches of pollution highlighted by the CPCB assessment include the Mithi river — from Powai to Dharavi — with a BOD (***Biochemical Oxygen Demand***) of 250 mg/l; the Godavari — from Someshwar to Rahed — with a BOD of 5.0-80 mg/l; the Sabarmati — Kheroj to Vautha — with a BOD of 4.0-147 mg/l; and the Hindon — Saharanpur to Ghaziabad — with a BOD of 48-120 mg/l.

BACKGROUND

- The CPCB, since the 1990s, has a programme to monitor the quality of rivers primarily by measuring BOD, which is a proxy for organic pollution — the higher it is, the worse the river.
- The health of a river and the efficacy of water treatment measures by the States and municipal bodies are classified depending on BOD, with a BOD greater than or equal to 30 mg/l termed 'priority 1,' while that between 3.1-6 mg/l is 'priority 5.'
- The CPCB considers a BOD less than 3 mg/l an indicator of a healthy river.

PRADHAN MANTRI MATRU VANDANA YOJANA

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

National level achievement of the scheme post an year's implementation on grounds is 48.11 Lakhs of women enrollment under the scheme till September 13, 2018, out of which 37.30 Lakhs have been paid the maternity benefit which accounts to a total fund disbursement of Rs1168.63 Crores.

PRADHAN MANTRI MATRITVA VANDANA YOJANA

- 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.

SWAYANGSIDDHA

To combat human trafficking, the West Bengal government has rolled out a scheme, Swayangsiddha, in its different districts. As per the NCRB data West Bengal has highest recorded case of trafficking among the States.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Swayangsiddha, which means self-reliance, will be executed by the West Bengal Police.
- The scheme aims to empower young boys and girls to make informed choices so that they are less vulnerable to trafficking and child marriage.
- Swayangsiddha Groups have been formed in schools and colleges with interested students. These groups were formed with students between the age group of 12 to 21 years.

OBJECTIVES

- Raising awareness on human, gender and child rights and strengthening prevention of human trafficking and child marriage using a converging approach.
- Engaging youth from different schools and colleges to combat human trafficking and child marriage.
- Strengthening response mechanism in collaboration with Police and child protection committees to build safe community.
- Strengthening access to schemes and entitlements on education, training, livelihood and food security for vulnerable groups

HIV ESTIMATION 2017

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

- 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.

HIGHLIGHTS

- As per the report, in 2017, India had around 21.40 lakh people living with HIV (PLHIV) with adult prevalence of 0.22%.
- Around 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.

BACKGROUNDS

The objective of HIV Estimations is to provide updated information on the status of HIV epidemic in India at national and State/UT level. Estimations of adult HIV prevalence, annual new infections (HIV incidence), AIDS-related mortality and prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) needs are produced as outcomes of HIV estimations. The modelled estimates are needed because there is no direct reliable way of measuring these core indicators which are used to track the epidemic and monitor and evaluate the response in countries around the world.

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.**

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.

FACTS

- **E-SHAJ PORTAL:** The government launched an online 'e-Sahaj' portal. The portal will facilitate an applicant to submit application online and also to view the status of his application from time to time.
- Two loan agreements were recently signed between Ministry of Finance and Japan International Cooperation Agency. The projects are **Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail Project and Kolkata East-West Metro Project.**
- Germany has rolled out the world's first hydrogen-powered train. Hydrogen trains are equipped with fuel cells that produce electricity through a combination of hydrogen and oxygen, a process that leaves steam and water as the only emissions. Excess energy is stored in ion lithium batteries on board the train. Thus, the technology is eco-friendly when compared to polluting diesel trains.
- ***The Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) has set up a flightless bird research centre.*** The centre has been setup on the university campus at Pookode in Wayanad district. The centre envisages to carry out research on adaptation and comparative physiological studies of flightless birds such as the ostrich, rhea, and emu, and artificial incubation of their eggs.
- ***The Kolkata Municipal Corporation has recently launched the country's first flood forecasting and early-warning system.*** It was launched with the support of the Asian Development Bank. It will provide real-time data on inundation, rainfall intensity, temperature, air quality and other climate-related data.
- ***To showcase the courage, valour and sacrifice of Armed Forces during Surgical Strikes conducted in 2016, 'Parakram Parv' is being observed from 28-30 September 2018.*** Indian Army conducted surgical strikes in 2016 which had strategic ramifications and were aimed to dissuade inimical adversary from adopting the path of violence and to ensure an environment of peace for the Nation.
- India has contributed USD 1 million for the installation of solar panels on the roof of the imposing UN building at the world body's headquarters in New York. The contribution will help reduce carbon footprint and promote sustainable energy. This contribution makes India first responder to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' call for climate action.