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## Editorial

# Contours of Indian Foreign Policy

Foreign policy of India has come a long way in its chequered career in the last 70 years of its independence. This has been a long story of India's evolution of the conceptualization of its national interests as visualized by its successive governments. The strategy of Independent India's foreign policy had begun to evolve during the period of its struggle for freedom itself and then this grandiose plan was put into effect on attainment of sovereignty. However, foreign policy of a state cannot afford to remain static or unidirectional for a long period of time. Hence what had been conceived during pre-independence phase in the freedom struggle was soon confronted with new stark realities in a world dominated by cold war politics. Almost immediately after gaining freedom, India was militarily attacked by its newly formed immediate neighbour, Pakistan. And then came the brutal cut in India's back by communist China whom Jawaharlal Nehru had looked upon as a partner for reshaping the postcolonial world. As cold war became global, Pakistan helped it to penetrate the Indian subcontinent by joining US-sponsored military alliances in the name of containing communism, but in actuality, Pakistan harboured nefarious designs against India.. It was in this context that post-Nehru India began to contemplate building two important planks in its foreign policy: one, that without compromising its non-alignment. India could still move closer to a powerful country and in this case, it was the Soviet Union; two, that in order to make its security completely self-reliant, India had to possess the ultimate weapons, and in this case it was the nuclear bombs.

Post cold-war world brought about a new scenario for India at the international horizon. The Soviet Union, India's most trusted friend had vanished almost overnight, and the United States, the victorious warrior of cold war was flexing its muscles and trying to dominate even the United Nations. Two serious questions stared India in its face. One, what should it do in the field of its foreign policy? Two, what was the future of non-alignment in the post-cold war world?

Beginning in 1991, the stark reality that stared India in the face was the fact that both Soviet Union and cold war had ended, and the United States was the only Super Power left to dictate to the world its own 'new world order". The other related reality was that after the Geneva Accords and withdrawal of Soviet forces in Afghanistan, the United States that had played a crucial role during the Afghan quagmire, once again got engrossed with its affairs elsewhere, leaving Afghanistan in the midst of another civil war which first saw the dismantling of the communist regime left behind by the Soviet military at the mercy of the Afghan Mujahideen; and then, the Mujahideen which had been composed of several ethnic groups got split into a warfare where these groups militarily fought each other for political control of Afghanistan. This conflict is far from over yet despite an elected government in Kabul. Another truth that dawned upon South Asia, especially India was that Pakistan had converted itself into a breeding ground of terrorists whom it was using for promoting cross-border terrorism against India. And finally, yet another fact was that with collapse of the Soviet Union, and with communist China going the capitalist way in its economy (even as its politics was still the monopoly of the Communist Party) the days of socialism and socialist countries was practically over and the western hemisphere which was capitalist was now calling the shots in international economics thus ushering the heyday of what came to be known as globalization.

On gaining its freedom, India during the first decade of its Independence had tried to tap the Western states for its economic growth. But India's demands for technology- transfer in order to make itself self-reliant did not evoke much enthusiastic response from the West. Added to this was India's commitment to nonalignment as well as its adherence to socialist pattern of economy which the Indian leadership beginning with Nehru had felt was necessary for achieving both social justice and self-reliance. Nehru was of the definite view that the state in independent India should have a major role to play in reshaping Indian

economy. Nehruvian India's mixed economy along with its posture of a nonaligned country had in the past allowed it to strike a balance between the capitalist countries of West and Japan on one side, and the socialist bloc on the other. During the last years of cold war, there was already ushering of the process of globalization that had been inter-alia facilitated by Gorbachev's policy of 'perestroika' in Soviet Union. Rajiv Gandhi's government also during this period had initiated a process of decentralization and liberalization of the Indian economy

As a result of its linking itself with globalization, India indulges in economic co-operation with United States, Japan and European Union. In addition India is today member of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation (BIMSTEC) established in 1997 involving Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Today India is an active member of BRICS YET another group formed in 2010 for economic cooperation and composed of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Then, there is Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) with membership of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia established in 1996 to which India and Pakistan were added in 2015. Another organization of which India is a member was established in 1995 and became active in 1997 is IORARC (Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation) composed of many countries located on the shores of the Indian Ocean. All these international associations in which India is both an active and a leading member, were established in the post-cold war era to facilitate and enhance the process of globalization through regional cooperation in international trade during cold war. But the organization which was established in 1985 for South Asian countries known as SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) has not functioned smoothly because of India-Pakistan friction. The system does not allow discussion of bilateral issues on its forum; even then, the India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir had hindered its functioning. On the other hand BIMISTEC which is composed of five SAARC nations and two states from South East Asia has had a comparatively smooth run. This was evident, when as part of BRICS outreach effort in the developing world, India in October 2016 chose to invite BIMSTEC members to Goa and no SAARC member states were invited for the sake of keeping Pakistan out

Today China is India's largest trading partner, and the two countries have a close relationship in BRICS and SCO. Yet there are irritants between the two countries regarding the border dispute, and China must understand that nuclearized India along with more than a million strong army is not the India of 1962 as was manifested during the recent Doklam standoff. The post-cold war world saw removal of much misgivings between the US and India. However, the Pakistan factor still is major impediment in the way of India developing an especially close relationship with Washington. Both the countries as liberal democracies are conducive to each other in both military and economic sense. The US-India Civil Nuclear Deal the signing of General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) that calls for exchange of military informations, and LEMOA (Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement) that facilitates establishment of bases in agreeing countries speaks volumes of the proximity that marks US- India relations today

At the recent SAARC summit in Manila, the United States has agreed to revive the Quadrilateral composed of India, the US, Japan and Australia. It is an informal grouping that was initiated a decade back in the form of joint naval exercises but was abruptly discontinued in the face of Chinese objection. Japan and Australia are junior military allies of the US, where as India professes .nonalignment. Where on one hand, the United States can provide weight to containment of unilateral and aggressive rise of China, this may increase New Delhi's dependence on' Washington :raising questions about non alignment of India. There can be further question marks on the wisdom India of joining the Quadrilateral as Japan, Australia have much closer ties with China.

In any case ,the Quadrilateral may look as a balancing act for India. When the cold war ended, the United States had quickly projected itself as the only surviving super power competent to act unilaterally. In response, India, Russia and China had got together to build what later on emerged as BRICS. Now as a reaction to China asserting its unilateralism, India is right in joining the US, Japan and Australia. With regards to Russia in the past during the heyday of the cold war, India was compelled by the circumstances (which included US -sponsored military alliances with Pakistan and Chinese-American rapprochement) to forge closer ties with the Soviet Union that became major arms supplier to India. Today Russia and India exist in a multiple and diversified post-cold war world.

### **Conclusion**

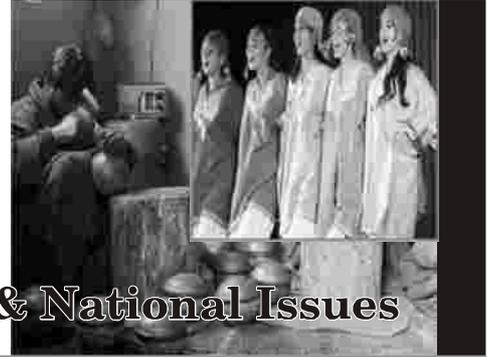
India's foreign policy has always been pragmatic with ethical overtones. India's freedom movement gave impetus to it through ideas that supported anti racism, anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism These

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thoughts gave rise to the plank of non-alignment when free India began to exercise its foreign policy, India at first tried to stay away from bloc politics during the cold war. Later India found it necessary to forge close friendship with the Soviet Union without, becoming member of a Soviet-sponsored or communist military bloc. India has always exercised its free choice to befriend any power, and to distance itself from any state that it deems necessary for its national interest. This has always been because India knows that all states have their own national interests and with passage of history these national interest(s) can, and do change. Therefore, India understands that there are no permanent enemies nor permanent friends in international politics: This is the essence of its non alignment and therefore, of its foreign policy as the two are interrelated.





## Art, Culture, Society and Social & National Issues

### UNESCO names Kumbh Mela Intangible Cultural Heritage

#### Why in news?

The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage under UNESCO has inscribed 'KumbhMela' on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

#### Background:

- ◆ This inscription is the third in two years following the inscriptions of 'Yoga' and 'Nouroz' in December.

#### About KumbhMela:

- ✍ KumbhMela' is the **largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on earth.**
- ✍ The festival, **held in Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik**, represents a syncretic set of rituals related to worship and ritual cleansing in holy rivers in India.
- ✍ As a religious festival, the tolerance and inclusiveness that KumbhMela demonstrates are especially valuable for the contemporary world.



#### About UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage:

The UNESCO's coveted list of Intangible Cultural Heritage is made up of those intangible heritage elements that help demonstrate diversity of cultural heritage and raise awareness about its importance.

- ☑ It was established in 2008 after Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003 came into effect.
- ☑ It compiles two lists viz.
  - ✓ Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and
  - ✓ List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.

Now, the list includes 814 cultural sites, 203 natural and 35 with both cultural and natural qualities.

#### Previous Intangible cultural heritage list from India:

- ✍ Chhau dance (inscribed in 2010)
- ✍ The Buddhist chanting of Ladakh (inscribed in 2012)
- ✍ Sankirtana – the ritual singing, drumming, and dancing of Manipur (inscribed in 2013)
- ✍ The traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab (inscribed in 2014)
- ✍ Ramlila- the traditional performance of the Ramayana (inscribed in 2008)

- ✎ Koodiyattam- Sanskrit Theatre of Kerala.
- ✎ Mudiyaattam- theatre ritual of Kerala.
- ✎ Tradition of Vedic Chanting.
- ✎ Kalbelia- folk songs and dances of Rajasthan.

**Source: Economic Times, The Hindu**

## Hornbill Festival

### Why in news?

Recently, 18th edition of the Hornbill Festival began at the Naga Heritage Village in Kisama, Nagaland. The festival coincided with 54th statehood day of Nagaland.

### About Hornbill Festival:

- ☑ Hornbill Festival is celebrated in Nagaland every year in the first week of December.
- ☑ It is one of the biggest indigenous festivals of the country. It is also called as the 'Festival of Festivals'.



### Key facts

- ◆ The festival is a tribute to Hornbill, the most admired and revered bird for the Nagas for its qualities of alertness and grandeur. The majestic bird is closely identified with the social and cultural life of the Nagas as reflected in tribal folklore, dances and songs.
- ◆ It is organized by the State Tourism and Art & Culture Departments. It is also supported by the Union Government.
- ◆ Hornbill Festival was established on 1st December 1963 and was inaugurated by the then President Dr. S Radhakrishnan. Over the years festival has become a unique platform for tourists to witness cultural diversity not only of Nagas and other seven sister states of northeastern region.
- ◆ It exposes both the culture and tradition of tribal peoples, and reinforces Nagaland's identity as a unique state in India's federal union.

**Source: PIB**

## Kathakar: International Storytellers Festival

### Why in news?

Recently, 7th edition Kathakar: International Storytellers Festival was held at Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi.

### Partners:

The partners for this edition of three day festival are IGNCA of Union Ministry of Culture in Delhi, Heritage Transport Museum, Gurugram and National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA), Mumbai.

### What is Kathakar?

Kathakar is special initiative, to promote the oral storytelling tradition which has existed across the world.

- ✎ It is only oral storytelling festival in India.
- ✎ It is part of bigger initiative Ghummakkad Narain- the Travelling Literature Festival which was started under aegis of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2010.
- ✎ It aims to preserve art form and also create new audiences for same.

**Background:**

- ☑ Kathakar is a special initiative within the bigger festival, Ghummakkad Narain, to promote the oral storytelling tradition which has existed across the world.
- ☑ Though performance storytelling has seen a revival in Europe, in India only few efforts have been made to contemporize the art form.

**Source: PIB****Bodhi Parva: BIMSTEC Festival of Buddhist Heritage****Why in news?**

India hosted “Bodhi Parva: BIMSTEC Festival of Buddhist Heritage” at New Delhi as part of celebrations of 20th Anniversary of BIMSTEC.

- ◆ The festival is organized by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) along with Teamwork Arts.

**About Bodhi Parva:**

- ✎ “Bodhi Parva: BIMSTEC Buddhist Heritage Festival” aims to look at the different aspects of Buddhism, in today’s context.
- ✎ The festival had diverse components including exhibition of international and Indian Buddhist art and architecture, discourses by eminent scholars and practitioners of Buddhism, guided meditation and chanting by Buddhist monks and choir, dance and music performances, screening of film on Buddhism and a food trail.

**Purpose of festival**

- ✓ To emphasise and raise awareness of Buddhism, a rich and common heritage and mark the 20th anniversary of BIMSTEC.
- ✓ To spread universal message of peace and tolerance practiced by Buddhism to address growing sense of inadequacy in face of changes and conflicts that people and the world face.

**Significance of festival:**

BIMSTEC is international organisation comprising of India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan. BIMSTEC has a deep connect with Buddhism, which originated in South Asia and then travelled and rooted itself in South East Asia. Buddhism constitutes a bridge between South and South-East Asia.

**Source: PIB****Sakhi: One stop centres in strengthening multi sectoral response to violence****Why in news?**

The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development has inaugurated a National Workshop on Role of Sakhi One Stop Centres in Strengthening Multi Sectoral Response to Violence in New Delhi.

- ◆ The conference provides platform to understand, discuss and deliberate on strengthening the multisector response to address violence against women through the Sakhi One Stop Centres across the country.

**Participants:**

Around 400 Sakhi- One Stop Centre Functionaries and nodal officials from State Department of Women and Child Development from 33 States/UTs across the country, are participating in the workshop.

**What is Sakhi scheme?**

Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has formulated a **Centrally Sponsored One Stop Centre Scheme, popularly known as Sakhi scheme** for setting up One Stop Centre.

- ✎ It is a sub-scheme of Umbrella Scheme for National Mission for Empowerment of women including Indira Gandhi Matritav Sahyaog Yojana.

- ✎ The Sakhi scheme is being implemented since 1st April 2015.
- ✎ The scheme aims to facilitate access to an integrated range of services including medical aid, police assistance, legal aid/case management, psychosocial counselling, and temporary support services to women affected by violence.
- ✎ Under the scheme, it has been envisaged that One Stop Centres (OSC) would be set up across the country in a phased manner.
- ✎ The One Stop Centre will provide **support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces.**

**Source: PIB**

## **Assam publishes first draft of National Register of Citizens**

### **Why in news?**

The Assam government has released the first draft of the much-awaited National Register of Citizens (NRC) which declared 1.9 crore people of total 3.29 crore applicants as legal citizens of India.

- ◆ The rest of the applications are undergoing verification and the complete list will be updated within 2018.

### **Background:**

- ☑ The NRC is being compiled following a Supreme Court directive to identify illegal immigrants in Assam.
- ☑ The Supreme Court, which is monitoring the entire process, had ordered that the first draft of the NRC be published by December 31 after completing the scrutiny of over two crore claims along with that of around 38 lakh people whose documents were suspect.



### **What is the issue?**

- ✎ Assam faced influx from Bangladesh since the early 20th century. It is the only state having an NRC, first prepared in 1951. Since then, it had recorded 80 lakh citizens in the State.
- ✎ The process of identification of illegal immigrants in Assam has been debated and become a contentious issue in the State's politics.
- ✎ A six-year agitation demanding identification and deportation of illegal immigrants was launched by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) in 1979. It culminated with the signing of the Assam Accord on August 15, 1985.

### **What is National Register of Citizens (NRC)?**

- ✓ The NRC was introduced to identify illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and recognise the Indian citizens in Assam.
- ✓ It was first prepared in 1951 and Assam is the only state having this arrangement.
- ✓ Under NRC, immigrants who have documents proving that they entered Assam before 1971 will be considered Indian citizens and others have to show that their ascendants have lived in Assam even before 1971.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **Latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data**

### **Why in news?**

Recently, the Government has released the annual publication of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), "Crime in India 2016".

### **Key facts**

- ◆ **Total number of cybercrimes recorded in India in 2016 increased marginally** by 6.25% over the year before.

- ◆ Among cities, **Mumbai topped in the number of cases of cybercrimes followed by Bengaluru.**
- ◆ Among states, **Uttar Pradesh recorded the maximum number of incidences of cybercrime recorded.**
- ◆ Uttar Pradesh accounted for 9.5% of total crimes reported in the country, while Delhi reported the highest crime rate (974.9) for the year 2016
- ◆ **West Bengal reporting the highest number cases of human trafficking in the country.**
- ◆ **Haryana**, which has the lowest sex ratio in the country, **topped in the number of cases registered against those practising sex-determination tests in 2016.**
- ◆ **Uttar Pradesh had the highest number of crimes against women.**
- ◆ **Odisha virtually recorded no crime against foreigners.**

#### **About the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB):**

- ✍ National Crime Records Bureau is an attached office of Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
- ✍ It was established in 1986 with a mandate to empower Indian Police with information technology solutions and criminal intelligence to enable them to enforce the law effectively.
- ✍ It is responsible for collecting and analysing crime data as defined by the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
- ✍ It facilitates Investigating Officers with updated IT tools and information in Investigation of Crimes.
- ✍ The MHA has entrusted NCRB with a renewed mandate for the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) Project.
- ✍ NCRB has won Digital India Award 2016 for digitizing and uploading 'Crime in India' on Opensource Govt. Portal since 1967.
- ✍ NCRB has been training Indian and Foreign Police Officers from more than 20 countries since 1990 and till date more than 40,000 Police Officers have been trained.
- ✍ Various applications developed by NCRB include Crime & Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS), Finger Prints Science, 'Vahan Samanvay', 'TALASH', Mobile Apps Citizen Complaint, View FIR, Locator, Automated License Plate Reader and NCRB Publications of 'Crime in India', 'Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India' and 'Prison Statistics India'.

**Source: The Hindu**

### **Minority tag for Hindus: NCM forms committee**

#### **Why in news?**

The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has formed a three-member committee to look into whether Hindus should get minority status in eight states where they are not the dominant religious group.

- ◆ The committee will submit a report on this in three months.

#### **Why the committee was set up?**

- ◆ According to 2011 Census, Hindus are in a minority in Lakshadweep (2.5%), Mizoram (2.75), Nagaland (8.75), Meghalaya (11.53), J&K (28.44), Arunachal Pradesh (29) Manipur (31.39) and Punjab (38.4).
- ◆ It is argued that in the absence of the "minority" tag, benefits meant for the minority communities were being given away to majority community in each state in an illegal and arbitrary manner.



- ◆ It is also argued that neither central nor state governments have notified Hindus as a 'minority' under Section 2(c) of National Commission for Minority Act. Therefore, Hindus are being deprived of their basic rights, guaranteed under Articles 25 to 30."

### **About National Commission for Minorities (NCM):**

The NCM was set up under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 to look into complaints from members of five religious communities — Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parsis).

- ✎ Jain community was notified as a minority community in 2014.
- ✎ The NCM adheres to the United Nations Declaration of 18 December 1992 which states that "States shall protect the existence of the National or Ethnic, Cultural, Religious and Linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity." **State Minorities Commissions:**
- ✎ Besides NCM, 15 states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Assam, which are home to sizeable minority populace, have set up commissions at their respective levels.
- ✎ Aggrieved persons belonging to the communities may approach the state minorities commissions concerned for redressal of their grievances or send their representations to the NCM after exhausting all avenues of remedies available.
- ✎ The functions of the state commissions, inter-alia, are to safeguard and protect the interests of minorities provided in the Constitution and laws enacted by Parliament and state legislatures.

**Source: Indian Express**

## **India's digital gender gap could further marginalise women: UNICEF**

### **Why in news?**

The 2017 edition of UNICEF's annual flagship publication "**The State of the World's Children Report**" was recently launched.

- ◆ The theme of this year's edition is: '**Children in a digital world.**'
- ◆ The report provides country-level examples to give a sense of the kinds of barriers girls and women confront.

### **Highlights of the report:**

- ✎ In India, where only 29% of all internet users are female, girls in rural areas often face restrictions on their use of ICTs solely because of their gender.
- ✎ There is a digital gender gap as well. Globally, 12% more men than women used the internet in 2017. In India, less than one third of internet users are female.
- ✎ India is one place in which the digital divide highlights society's deep chasms. Digital divides can mirror broader societal divides — between rich and poor, cities and rural areas, between those with or without an education — and between women and men.
- ✎ The ubiquitous presence of mobile devices, the report notes, has made online access for many children less supervised and potentially more dangerous.
- ✎ Digital networks like the Dark Web and cryptocurrencies are enabling the worst forms of exploitation and abuse, including trafficking and 'made to order' online child sexual abuse.

### **What are the Causes for digital gender divide?**

- ✎ The digital gender divide is caused by a number of factors — social norms, education levels, lack of technical literacy and lack of confidence among them — but is often rooted in parents' concern for the safety of their daughters.

- ✎ In a society that is still largely patriarchal, for girls, traits like deference and obedience are often valued over intelligence and curiosity. In some households, technology is not seen as necessary or beneficial for girls and women.
- ✎ Many fear that allowing girls to use the internet will lead to liaisons with men, bringing shame on the family. For most girls, if they are allowed to use the internet, their every move is monitored by their parents or brothers.

**Necessity of bridging of digital gender gap:**

If girls and women remain digitally illiterate, they risk becoming further marginalised in society and at home. Therefore, bridging gender gap is necessary. Besides, digital connection and literacy offer advantages in a knowledge-based society, improving children’s lives and their future earning potential.

**The way Ahead**

- ✎ Girls and boys in India have the unique opportunity to benefit from the connectivity that the digital world can provide.
- ✎ Only collective action — by governments, the private sector, children’s organizations, academia, families and children themselves — can help level the digital playing field and make the internet safer and more accessible for children.

**Source: The Hindu**



## Polity & Governance, Social Justice and Social Development

### Bill to criminalise instant triple talaq introduced in Lok Sabha

#### Why in news?

The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights of Marriage) Bill, 2017, which makes instant triple talaq (or 'talaq-e-biddat') illegal and void was introduced in the Lok Sabha.

#### Background:

The Supreme Court had termed the practice of instant triple talaq unconstitutional while considering a petition to that effect. The then CJI J S Khehar had directed the government to bring in a legislation in this regard.

#### Highlights of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017:

- ✎ The bill makes instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat in any form — spoken, in writing or by electronic means such as email, SMS and WhatsApp — “illegal and void”.
- ✎ The proposed law seeks to make triple talaq a punishable offence and describes the practice as against “constitutional morality” and “gender equity”.
- ✎ Anyone who pronounces instant divorce “shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and a fine”
- ✎ As per the provisions of the Bill, the husband could also be fined and the quantum of fine would be decided by the magistrate hearing the case.
- ✎ The proposed law will be applicable only to instant triple talaq and will empower the victim to approach a magistrate seeking “subsistence allowance” for herself and minor children. The woman can also seek the custody of her minor children from the magistrate who will take a final call on the issue.
- ✎ The draft bill also envisages entitling divorcee Muslim women for maintenance.



#### Criticism of the bill:

- ✓ Several Muslim clerics and Muslim organisations have opposed the Bill, terming the government's stand as “uncalled for interference” in the personal laws of the community.
- ✓ The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) opposed the legislation holding it against the Sharia law and may potentially destroy families if made into a law.
- ✓ Some civil society organizations have questioned criminalising a practice. Some Muslim women have also claimed that such a bill would hamper chances of conciliation between the husband and wife.

Source: The Hindu

## Govt directs NGOs to open account in any designated bank

### Why in news?

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has directed all NGOs, individuals and business entities receiving foreign funds to open accounts in any of 32 designated banks, including one foreign, within a month.

- ◆ It also asked them to ensure that such funds are not utilised for activities detrimental to the national interest.
- ◆ The MHA order comes in exercise of the powers conferred under Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010.

### Purpose of the order:

The directive to the NGOs, companies and individuals to open foreign contribution accounts in banks, which are integrated with the central government's Public Financial Management System (PFMS), came for providing a higher level of transparency and hassle-free reporting compliance.

### About Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act 2010:

The FCRA 2010 provides for regulation of acceptance of foreign funds/foreign hospitality by certain individuals, associations, organisations and companies. It ensures that such contributions or hospitality is not being utilised for activities detrimental to the national interest.

Currently, around 10,000 FCRA-registered NGOs are operating in country.

### What is Public Financial Management System?

PFMS is an electronic fund tracking mechanism compiles, collates and makes available in real-time, information regarding all government schemes.

- ✎ The PFMS, also known as **Central Plan Scheme Monitoring System (CPSMS)**, tracks fund disbursement and ensures that state treasuries are integrated with the Centre to ensure money is sent as and when required.
- ✎ PFMS, **administered by the department of expenditure**, is an end-to-end solution for processing payments, tracking, monitoring, accounting, reconciliation and reporting. It is a web based application.
- ✎ It provides the government real-time information on resource availability and utilisation across schemes.
- ✎ In addition, the platform will allow government expenditure to adopt a Just-in- Time (JIT) approach, with payments made only when they are needed.
- ✎ The government has set a target to integrate PFMS with all state treasuries in current fiscal and implement Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) for welfare and scholarship schemes.

In future, Government aims to transform PFMS to Government-wide Integrated Financial Management System (GIFMIS) as a comprehensive payment, receipt and accounting system.

### Significance of the PFMS:

- ☑ The PFMS aims to help in complete tracking and monitoring flow of funds to implementing agencies and ensuring timely transfer of funds.
- ☑ It will help government to ascertain actual status of utilization of funds by multiple implementing agencies of central and the state governments.
- ☑ It will also cut need for paper work and in long way help in monitoring and tracking of any unnecessary parking of funds by implementing agencies, thus minimising cases of delay and pending payments to large extent.
- ☑ It will help to plug leakages in system and help to manage and maintain data that government can use to develop more scientific approach.

**Source: The Hindu**

## Uniform Civil Code: Law panel may recommend piecemeal amendments to family laws

### Why in news?

The 21st Law Commission is now planning to suggest specific amendments to several personal law legislations, dropping the idea of UCC, which gained momentum during public debate on instant triple talaq.

### Remarks made by the Law Commission:

The Law Commission remarked that

- ✓ It will try to recommend religion-wise amendments in family laws.
- ✓ It would be the piecemeal way to suggest what are the changes required in Hindu law, Muslim law, Christian law, Parsi law, etc.
- ✓ It will target the problems of each religion and deal with them accordingly. It cannot take the whole UCC, as it cannot go outside the constitution.

### What is the Uniform Civil Code?

- ✗ Uniform civil code is the proposal to replace the personal laws based on the scriptures and customs of each major religious community in India with a common set governing every citizen.
- ✗ These laws are distinguished from public law and **cover marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption and maintenance.**

### Constitutional provisions:

- ✗ Article 44 of the Directive Principles of state sets its implementation as duty of the State.
- ✗ According to Article 44, "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India".
- ✗ Since, the Directive Principles are only guidelines, it is not mandatory to use them.

### Controversy over UCC:

- ✗ Apart from being an important issue regarding secularism in India, it became one of the most controversial topics in contemporary politics during the Shah Bano case in 1985.
- ✗ The debate then focused on the Muslim Personal Law, which is partially based on the Sharia law and remains unreformed since 1937, permitting unilateral divorce and polygamy in the country.

### Background:

- ☑ India has separate sets of personal laws for each religion governing marriage, divorce, succession, adoption and maintenance. Hindu family laws were modified in the 1950s but those for the Christians and Muslims are colonial-era relics.
- ☑ Activists have long argued Muslim personal law, which remained mostly unchanged, contains provisions biased against Muslim women, often victims of polygamy and the triple talaq system.
- ☑ The Uniform Civil Code has been a long-standing poll promise and ideological position of the present government, but many minority groups have opposed what they see as an effort to erase their cultural and religious identities.
- ☑ The law ministry had in June 2016 sent a reference to the commission asking it for an in-depth examination of "matters in relation to the Uniform Civil Code" and whether the time was ripe for bringing it in.
- ☑ Amid a raging debate on uniform civil code, the law panel had in October last year sought public views on the subject to revise and reform family laws, saying the aim is to address social injustice rather than to do away with the plurality of laws. In an appeal issued then, the commission had said the objective behind the endeavor is to address discrimination against vulnerable groups and harmonize various cultural practices.

### According to the Law Commission, why UCC is not possible?

#### Exemptions under the Constitution:

As the Law Commission stated that the exemptions under the Constitution must be honoured and UCC could disturb the essence of the Constitution. Constitution itself has given so many exemptions to so many people like the tribals, etc. There are exemptions even in Civil Procedure Code and Criminal Procedure Code. UCC is not a solution and there cannot be a composite Act.

#### Protection under the Constitution:

According to the Law Commission, UCC is also not possible because of the customs prevalent in remote parts of India, which are protected by the Constitution. "In a particular community in North East, the whole property goes to the younger daughter. Then the son-in-law comes and settles there and he is not only husband of the girl but also becomes the husband of the girl's mother. This practice is known as **Nokuram** and the son-in-law becomes the man in place of father-in-law for all purposes and not only property. Now what do you do with it under UCC? It is protected under the Constitution.

#### Why India needs a uniform civil code?

India needs a uniform civil code for two principal reasons:

First, a secular republic needs a common law for all citizens rather than differentiated rules based on religious practices.

There is a second reason why a uniform civil code is needed: gender justice. The rights of women are usually limited under religious law, be it Hindu or Muslim. The practice of triple talaq is a classic example.

#### Way ahead:

- ✓ The Law Commission will recommend religion-wise "piece meal" amendments to family laws if it finds it difficult to come out with a composite uniform civil code.
- ✓ The commission is in the process of segregating the nearly 45,000 suggestions it has received on its questionnaire on the uniform civil code.

**Source: Economic Times**

### Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2017

#### Why in news?

The Centre has introduced the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill of 2017 in the Parliament.

#### Key Facts:

- ◆ The Bill proposes to allow non-resident Indians (NRIs) to emerge as a decisive force in the country's electoral politics on their own terms.
- ◆ The amendment paves the way to remove an "unreasonable restriction" posed by Section 20A of the Representation of the People Act, which requires overseas electors to be physically present in their electoral constituencies to cast their votes.

#### What is Section 20A of the Representation of the People Act?

Section 20A lays down the special provisions for citizens of India residing outside India. They are as follows:

Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act, every citizen of India —

- ✎ whose name is not included in the electoral roll;
- ✎ who has not acquired the citizenship of any other country; and
- ✎ who is absenting from his place of ordinary residence in India owing to his employment, education or otherwise outside India (whether temporarily or not), shall be entitled to have his name registered in the electoral roll in the constituency in which his place of residence in India as mentioned in his passport is located.

**Reasons for passage of this bill:**

- ☑ Section 20A of the Representation of the People Act provides for registration and inclusion of overseas electors in the electoral rolls.
- ☑ Additionally, the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 provide for overseas electors to register themselves in the electoral rolls of their respective constituencies on the basis of self-attested copies of their passport and valid visa, and exercise their franchise in person on production of the original passport at the time of voting at the specified polling booth.
- ☑ Thus, the rules demand for the physical presence of overseas electors in their respective polling stations in India on the day of polling. This causes hardship to the overseas electors.

This amendment proposes facilitating an external mode of voting, that is, voting by proxy, whereby such electors can exercise their franchise from their places of residence abroad.

**Significance of this move:**

- ✓ If the Bill is passed, overseas voters can appoint a proxy to cast their votes on their behalf, subject to certain conditions to be laid down in the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961. This would considerably mitigate the difficulties presently faced by overseas electors in exercising their franchise.
- ✓ The government's decision to allow NRIs to vote from overseas could emerge as a decisive force in the country's electoral politics as there are 114 countries that conduct such voting.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **Electronic-Human Resource Management System (e-HRMS)**

**Why in news?**

The Union Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions launched the electronic-Human Resource Management System (e-HRMS).

**What is e-HRMS?**

e-HRMS is an online platform for central government employees to apply for leave and access their service-related information.

**Objective of e-HRMS:**

The e-HRMS was launched as a step towards the ease of governance and is in lines with Government's goal of minimum government, maximum governance.

**Benefits of e-HRMS:****For employees:**

- ☑ It will enable employees to see all their details with respect to service book, leave, salary, GPF, etc. and also apply for different kind of claims and reimbursements, loan and advances, leave, leave encashment, LTC advances, tour etc. on a single platform.
- ☑ The system is designed in such a way to obtain all management-related inputs and reports through its dashboard.

**For authorities:**

- ☑ It will enable senior authorities to check all pendency of data updating as well as claims, which will in turn instill more responsibility and accountability among all government servants.
- ☑ Availability of centralized data will enable Government for policy research and planning as such educational qualifications and other competencies and deficiencies may be easily obtained.
- ☑ It will enable Government to take transfer and posting decisions more pragmatically based on reliable first hand data.

**Significance of e-HRMS:**

- ✓ The launch of e-HRMS is in the direction of fully automated human resource management system with target to bring all government employees on employee portal.

- ✓ Such automated system will take care of all processes of personnel management from hiring to retiring on digital platform and dispense manual system of management.

**Source: The hindu**

## Good Governance Day

### Why in news?

Good Governance Day is a day of national importance in India observed annually on the 25th of December, the birth anniversary of former-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

### Background:

- ☑ Good Governance Day was established in 2014 to honour Prime Minister Vajpayee by fostering awareness among the Indian people of accountability in government.
- ☑ In keeping with this principle, the Government of India has declared Good Governance Day to be a working day for the government.

### Objectives of Good Governance Day:

- ✓ To make people aware about the government commitment for providing a transparent and accountable administration in the country.
- ✓ To enhance the welfare and betterment of the people.
- ✓ To standardise the government functioning and to make it a highly effective and accountable governance for the citizens of the country.
- ✓ To implement the good and effective policies to complete a mission of good governance in India.
- ✓ To enhance the growth and development in the country through good governance.
- ✓ To bring citizens closer to the government to make them active participants in the good governance process.

**Source: PIB**

## Special courts for the trial of politicians

### Why in news?

The Centre informed the Supreme Court that it has decided to set up 12 special courts to deal exclusively with criminal cases against lawmakers and politicians.

- ◆ The move is aimed to end the inordinate delay in the prosecution of politicians in criminal cases.

### Need for such courts:

- ✎ In 2014, as many as 1,581 lawmakers – that is, Members of Parliament (MPs) and members of legislative assemblies (MLAs) – were facing prosecution in a mind-boggling 13,500 cases. The numbers would only have increased since. Ten cases were later dropped due to death of the politicians named in the cases.
- ✎ Moreover, there are several high-profile cases against leaders from almost all political parties—regional and national where investigations have dragged on for years and those facing trial have evaded prison.



### Centre's proposal:

- ✎ Disposing of 1,581 criminal cases involving political persons within a time frame of one year as directed by the SC is the aim as well as the objective of the scheme.
- ✎ Twelve special courts for a period of one year shall be set up to dispose of cases against politicians.

- ✎ Among 12, two special courts would handle cases against 228 MPs and the other 10 would be set up in 10 states — Andhra, Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala, MP, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, UP and Bengal—where the number of MLAs booked for criminal acts is more than 65.

#### **Implications of the decision:**

- ✎ The Centre's decision could be a setback to politicians who, despite facing serious charges, have remained members of Parliament and state assemblies due to time consumed in trials. Such cases will fall in the purview of special courts and their fate will be decided expeditiously.

**Source: The Hindu**

### **Meghalaya launches India's first social audit law**

#### **Why in news?**

With the launch of 'The Meghalaya Community Participation and Public Services Social Audit Act, 2017', Meghalaya has become the first state in India to operationalise a law that makes social audit of government programmes and schemes a part of government practice.

#### **Background:**

Prior to enacting this law, social audits of government programmes were done at the initiative of civil society organisations. These social audits had no official legal sanction.

#### **Key facts:**

- ◆ The legislation provides a legal framework for allowing citizens' participation in the planning of development, selection of beneficiaries, concurrent monitoring of programmes, redress of grievances, and audit of works, services, and programmes on an annual basis.
- ◆ The legislation is applicable to 11 departments and 21 schemes.
- ◆ A social audit facilitator will be appointed to conduct the audit directly with the people.
- ◆ The facilitator will present findings to the Gram Sabha, who will add inputs and the result will finally go to autonomous auditors.

#### **Significance of social audit law:**

- ☑ It gives people a direct say in how money will be spent and fills an information gap for officers as they are directly in touch with the ground.
- ☑ Social audits have been civil society initiatives rather than government-mandated. They are now part of the system.

#### **Significance of social audit:**

- ✓ Social audit is considered as grassroots method of auditing and stems from people themselves.
- ✓ It will make auditing more meaningful. It is considered as an extension of larger accountability framework.
- ✓ It will further lead to institutionalization of participatory democratic governance.

**Source: The Hindu**

### **NITI Aayog launches ATAL Community Day**

#### **Why in news?**

NITI Aayog's Atal Innovation Mission has decided to celebrate Atal Tinkering Lab's Community Day on December 15th.

#### **About the Community Day:**

- ✎ The day **will mark the Atal Tinkering Lab Community Drive Initiative** in which 25 young Mentors will engage with more than 200 students who are not enrolled in the formal education system.

- ✎ These mentors will visit four locations in New Delhi to conduct brief sessions with children from various NGOs, on how innovations can help resolve the problems in the communities.

#### **About Atal Tinkering Lab Community Drive Initiative:**

- ✎ The initiative is aimed at maximizing impact of Atal Tinkering Labs by extending innovation to children in community who do not have access to formal educational institutions.
- ✎ Its purpose is to provide these children with same educational tools as the students in Atal Tinkering Labs to enable them to become problem solvers.
- ✎ The NGOs participating in it include organizations working with disabled children, street and working children, and girls from the weaker sections of society.

#### **About Atal Tinkering Labs:**

- ✎ Atal Tinkering Labs are meant to be non-prescriptive by nature, and mentors are expected to be enablers rather than instructors.
- ✎ More than 900 Atal Tinkering Labs have been established across the country as a part of the Atal Innovation Mission.
- ✎ They are dedicated works spaces where students from Class 6th to Class 12th learn innovation skills and develop ideas that will go on to transform India.

#### **About Atal Innovation Mission:**

- ✎ NITI Aayog's Atal Innovation Mission is among one of the flagship programs of the Government to promote innovation and entrepreneurship in the country and to set up the Atal Tinkering Labs across the country.
- ✎ It aims to give substantial boost to the innovation ecosystem and to catalyze the entrepreneurial spirit in the country.
- ✎ Its prime objective is to provide an innovation promotion platform involving academics, researchers and entrepreneurs, drawing upon national and international experiences to foster a culture of innovation in India.
- ✎ It will also promote a network of world-class innovation hubs, Start-up businesses and other self-employment activities, particularly in technology driven areas.

**Source: PIB**

## **Supreme Court agrees to examine plea to bar politicians from contesting from two seats**

### **Why in news?**

The Supreme Court agreed to adjudicate on whether politicians could be barred from contesting from more than one seat in an election and sought assistance from the Attorney General (AG) to decide the issue.

### **What is the issue?**

- ✎ One person, one vote & one candidate, one constituency is the dictum of democracy. However, as per the law – **Section 33 (7) of the Representation of the People Act of 1951**, as it stands today, a person can contest the election for the same office from two constituencies simultaneously.
- ✎ A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court challenging Section 33 (7) of RPA 1951 that allows a person to contest elections to Parliament and state assemblies from two constituencies and sought an end to the practice.

### **What the Section 33(7) of RPA says?**

Section 33(7) of the Representation of People's Act permits a candidate to contest any election (Parliamentary, State Assembly, Biennial Council, or bye-elections) from up to two constituencies. The

provision was introduced in 1996 prior to which there was no bar on the number of constituencies from which a candidate could contest.

### **Arguments in favour of barring candidates contesting from more than one seat:**

When a candidate contests from two seats, it is imperative that he has to vacate one of the two seats if he wins both. This, apart from the consequent unavoidable financial burden on the public exchequer, government manpower and other resources for holding bye-election is also an injustice to the voters of the constituency which the candidate is quitting from.

### **Election Commission's views on the issue:**

- ☑ Election Commission was in favour of not allowing politicians from contesting from multiple seats saying it resulted in wastage of public money as when fresh election was conducted, the candidate had to vacate one seat after winning in both the constituencies.
- ☑ Commission had already requested the Centre to amend the law for barring people from fighting election from multiple constituencies in an election.

Law Commission had also recommended Centre to amend the law but the Centre had not taken any step to implement the suggestion.

### **Alternative suggested by Election Commission:**

The ECI alternatively suggested that if existing provisions are retained then the candidate contesting from two seats should bear the cost of the bye-election to the seat that the contestant decides to vacate in the event of his/her winning both seats. The amount in such an event could be Rs 5 lakh for assembly election and Rs 10 lakh for parliament election.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **National Conference on E-Courts Project**

### **Why in news?**

The e-Committee, of the Supreme Court of India in association with the Department of Justice (DoJ) of the Government of India recently held a National Conference on e- courts project in New Delhi.

The Conference focused on the progress, sharing of best practices, experiences, important issues and emerging challenges under the Project.

### **What is e-courts project?**

The eCourts Mission Mode Project is a national eGovernance project for ICT enablement of district and subordinate courts of the country.

### **Objective:**

The major objectives of the Project are to make whole judicial system ICT enabled by putting in place

- ✓ Adequate and modern hardware and connectivity;
- ✓ Automation of workflow management in all courts;
- ✓ Electronic movement of records from taluka/trial to appeal courts;
- ✓ Installation of video conferencing (VC) facility and
- ✓ Recording of witness through Video Conferencing.

### **It has two phases:**

- ✓ Phase I 2010-15
- ✓ Phase II 2015-19

### **Implementation:**

- ✓ It is being implemented by the Government of India with a total outlay of 1670 crores (Phase II).



**Specific targets set under the Project include:**

- ✓ Computerization of all the courts (around 20400) and DLSA and TLSC;
- ✓ WAN and cloud connectivity in 3500 court complexes;
- ✓ Full Installation and use of Video Conferencing facility at 3000 Court Complexes and 1150 prisons;
- ✓ Charting out key identified citizen services like electronic filing, daily orders, delivery of decrees, online case status in all the district courts etc.

**Source: PIB****Government gives green light for single-judge NGT Benches****Why in news?**

Amending the National Green Tribunal (Practices and Procedure) Rules, 2011, the Centre has passed a notification allowing the NGT chairperson to “constitute a single-member bench” in “exceptional circumstances.”

- ◆ However, the notification does not define the “exceptional circumstances”.
- ◆ According to the earlier rules, the bench consisted of “two or more members” with at least one judicial member and another expert. The balance of judicial and independent experts was necessary to ensure that technical aspects of disputes were adequately addressed.
- ◆ This move will address problem of vacancies in NGT.

**What is the issue?**

- ✎ The NGT faces a manpower shortage with some of its Benches likely to be headless by next February as appointments have not been made.
- ✎ The tribunal has three courts in its principal Bench in Delhi and four zonal Benches — in the east, west, central and south to encompass all States and Union Territories — and faces the prospect of functioning with less than one-third of its sanctioned strength of 20.
- ✎ Recently, the Supreme Court pulled up the Centre for not filling up vacancies in the NGT principal and zonal Benches.

**About National Green Tribunal (NGT):**

The NGT was established in 2010 under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.

- ✎ It is a specialized body equipped with the necessary expertise to handle environmental disputes involving multi-disciplinary issues.
- ✎ It also includes enforcement of any legal right relating to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property and for matters connected therewith.
- ✎ It adjudicates matters relating to Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974; Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974; Environment (Protection) Act, 1986; Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991; Forest Conservation Act and Biological Diversity Act.
- ✎ The NGT is guided by principles of natural justice and not bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908.
- ✎ It is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing.
- ✎ New Delhi is the Principal Place of Sitting NGT. Bhopal, Pune, Kolkata and Chennai are other regional sitting of the Tribunal.

**Members of the NGT:**

- ☑ The tribunal shall consist of a full time chairperson, judicial members and expert members.
- ☑ The minimum number of judicial and expert member prescribed is ten in each category and maximum number is twenty in each category.
- ☑ Another important provision included in the law is that the chairperson, if find necessary, may invite any person or more person having specialized knowledge and experience in a particular case before the tribunal to assist the same in that case.
- ☑ A judge of the Supreme Court of India or Chief Justice of High Court are eligible to be Chairperson or judicial member of the Tribunal. Even existing or retired judge of High Court is qualified to be appointed as a Judicial Member.

**Source: Indian Express**

**Rajasthan ordinance on immunity for public servants****Why in news?**

A controversial criminal law ordinance of the Rajasthan government, which gave protection to public servants and imposed restrictions on the media, has lapsed.

- ◆ The state government is now forced to reconsider the new piece of proposed legislation.

**About the new bill:**

- ✎ The bill prohibits the courts from ordering investigation against both serving and former judges, magistrates and public servants in the state, without taking prior permission from the government.
- ✎ The ordinance provides 180 days of immunity to the officers. If there is no decision on the sanction request post the stipulated time period, it will automatically mean that sanction has been granted.
- ✎ Under the new law, the media has also been gagged and are not allowed to report on the accusation against such a person until the prosecution gets the go-ahead from the sanctioning authority, which may take up to six months.
- ✎ The amendment seeks curb on publishing and printing or publicising in any case the name, address, photograph, family details of the public servants. Violating the clause would call for two years imprisonment.

**Criticism of the bill:**

- ☑ The Ordinance empowers the sanctioning authority to take a decision in six months, from the date of the receipt of the proposal for sanction, which has been questioned by the opposition party which said it may give enough time for the accused to move files and dilute the case.
- ☑ Activists have also opposed the bill that seeks to “protect both serving and former judges, magistrates and public servants in Rajasthan” from being investigated for on-duty action without its prior sanction, saying it muzzles free speech.

**The Way Ahead**

Now, the select committee will decide the fate of the Bill, which has sought to amend the Criminal Procedure Code and Indian Penal Code, and give its recommendation either to withdraw the Bill or re-introduce it in the Assembly with some amendments.

**Source: The Hindu, Indian Express**

**Supreme Court seeks Centre's response on Haj norms****Why in news?**

Recently, the Supreme Court sought the Centre's response to a petition filed by the Kerala State Haj Committee challenging the provisions of the Haj guidelines for 2018-22.

**Background:**

- ☑ Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India had constituted a Committee to review the existing Haj Policy of the Government for 2013-17 and to suggest framework for **new Haj policy 2018-22**.
- ☑ The ministry had constituted the five-member panel headed by former minority affairs secretary Afzal Amanullah in January this year in light of a 2012 Supreme Court order asking the Centre to abolish the Haj subsidy gradually by 2022.
- ☑ The Committee presented its Report to the government in recent past.
- ☑ The recommendations hold much significance as presently, Indian women cannot undertake Haj without a male Mehram even if she wants to go with a group of women. Male Mehram refers to a male a woman cannot marry at any time in her life (i.e. father, brother or son etc.)

**Important recommendations of the Haj Committee:**

- ✎ The recommendation of allowing women to undertake Haj without a male mehram, however, comes with two conditions. Firstly, a woman has to be aged over 45 years and the second condition stipulates women to travel in a group of four or more women.
- ✎ The panel has also proposed to increase the quota for Mehrams from 200 to 500.
- ✎ The proposed policy recommends abolishing the quota for septuagenarians (a person who is between 70 and 79 years old) and fourth timers in the pilgrimage.
- ✎ The proposed policy also recommends bringing down the number of embarkation points (EPs) from which pilgrims can take flights to Saudi Arabia from 21 to nine which include Delhi, Lucknow, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Cochin. It also proposes to build suitable Haj houses at these EPs.
- ✎ The policy suggests sending pilgrims by ship, relatively less expensive than flights. The policy says the Saudi government will be consulted regarding Haj travel by ship.
- ✎ EPs are being reduced keeping in mind ship journeys. It proposes inviting global expressions of interest from vessel owners having a capacity of 4,000 plus passengers
- ✎ The draft policy also recommended that the Haj Committee of India be exempted from Income Tax, Goods and Services tax (GST) and other local taxes. The air charter services provided for the benefit of pilgrims too should be exempted from service tax/GST.
- ✎ The proposed policy aims at rationalising distribution of the Haj quota between the Haj Committee of India and private tour operators in the ratio of 70:30 for the next five years.
- ✎ The policy also proposes to ensure the stay of all Indian Haj pilgrims in Saudi Arabia within Mina.

**Objections put forth by the petitioners:**

- ✓ The Haj quota allocated to India is 1.7 lakh pilgrims. The HCI's share is 75% and private tour operators take the rest. The new guidelines reduce the HCI's share to 70% and raises the tour operators' quota to 30%. The reduction of HCI's share means fewer persons from the weaker sections can afford to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. The petition said the reduction in the HCI's quota was arbitrary and unreasonable and went against the interests of the Indian pilgrims.
- ✓ The earlier policies exempted pilgrims aged above 70 and those who had unsuccessfully tried to get a seat from the draw of lots. But the new guidelines gave no such exemption.
- ✓ The new rules did not provide pilgrims travelling through the Haj committees any protection from the "unreasonable" air fare, usually three times more.

**Source: The Hindu**

## 3rd December: International Day of Persons with Disabilities

### Why in news?

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities is observed every year on December 3 to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development around the globe.

### Key facts:

- ◆ Theme of the year 2017: “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient society for all”
- ◆ International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3) is an international observance instituted by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1992.
- ◆ The observance of the Day aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities.
- ◆ It was originally called “International Day of Disabled Persons” until 2007.

### Disability around the globe:

- ☑ At least 10% of the world’s population, or 650 million people, live with a disability.
- ☑ 20% of the world’s poor are disabled.
- ☑ The percentage of children with disabilities not attending school is extremely variable and is between 65 – 85% in some African countries.
- ☑ Mortality for children with disabilities may be as high as 80% in countries where under-five mortality as a whole has decreased to below 20%.
- ☑ In many low-income and middle-income countries, only 5-15% of disabled people who require assistive devices and technology have access to them.



### ‘Invisible minority’

- ✗ People with disabilities are arguably the largest ‘invisible minority’ on the planet. WHO figures say that 15.3% of the world’s population lives with some kind of disability.
- ✗ But India’s 2011 census says that only 2.21% of the population have disabilities. Disability activists say this low count is because, in Indian culture, there is a tendency to hide disability.

### Efforts for the welfare of Persons with Disabilities:

- ✓ UN’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006
- ✓ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- ✓ Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction,
- ✓ The Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action,
- ✓ The New Urban Agenda, and
- ✓ The Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development
- ✓ Community-based rehabilitation
- ✓ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) [However, the MDGs do not explicitly mention disability]

**Source: The Hindu**

## Supreme Court rejects plea for single school board

### Why in news?

In contrast to its 2011 judgment, the Supreme Court refused to entertain a petition seeking common syllabus and curriculum across all education boards.

**First initiative of one Education Board system:**

- ◆ Tamil Nadu, in August 2011, became the first Indian state to have a common syllabus, textbooks and examinations.
- ◆ Prior to that, schools in the state were following four boards—the state board, Matriculation board, Oriental board, and the Anglo-Indian board.
- ◆ While the proposal was mooted a few years ago, the government managed to merge the four boards after a long legal battle.
- ◆ ‘**Samacheer Kalvi**’ as the common curriculum board is called is framed on the lines of National Curriculum Framework. This, however, does not include national boards like the CBSE and ICSE. While this was the first initiative of its kind, its success is yet to be measured in qualitative terms.

**Arguments in favour of “One Nation-One Education Board” system:****Petitioner’s arguments:**

- ☑ The petition sought a common education system, meaning common syllabus and common curriculum for all children aged 6 to 14 years.
- ☑ The petition alleged that the education system does not provide equal opportunities to everyone.
- ☑ The petition argued that in expounding the Constitution to meet the requirements of Articles 21A read with Articles 14, 15, 16, 38(2), 39(f), 46 & 51A, measures such as a common education system viz. common syllabus and a common curriculum is a necessity. It would enable every child to be placed on a level playing field for the challenges of the future and meaningfully contribute in achieving the great golden goals as set out in the Preamble.
- ☑ The petition further asked the Centre to establish a “One Nation One Education Board” system, in substitution of the existing multi-board system.
- ☑ The petition had said that Article 21A of the Constitution makes education a fundamental right of children but the executive has not introduced common education system in spirit of the provisions.
- ☑ The plea said that injury is caused to the children because prevailing education system does not provide equal opportunity to all the children in spirit of the Article 16 and Preamble of the Constitution, as syllabus and curriculum are very different.

**What the 2011 judgement says?**

- ✎ In 2011, a three-judge Bench led by Justice J.M. Panchal in the Tamil Nadu and Others versus K. Shyam Sunder and Others, had held that a common syllabus, especially for children aged between six and 14, would achieve the “code of common culture”.
- ✎ The judgment had even viewed the idea of a common syllabus as a precursor to the Uniform Civil Code and an antidote to fanaticism and divisiveness.
- ✎ The judgment had held that the “right of a child should not be restricted only to free and compulsory education, but should be extended to have quality education without any discrimination on the ground of their economic, social and cultural background”.
- ✎ Separate education facilities are inherently unequal and violate the doctrine of equality.
- ✎ The Court had held that a “uniform education system would achieve the code of common culture, removal of disparity, depletion of discriminatory values in human relations”.

**Arguments against the “One Nation-One Education Board” system:**

- ✓ The constitution of the new board requires a lot of thought and planning. The first concern is that the very credibility of our internal assessment is so low that how does one judge students?
- ✓ Moreover, the heterogeneity of our schools – while some schools have the best of facilities and teachers, a large number of them don’t even have blackboards – is a huge impediment in standardisation of education.

**Source: The Hindu**

## CGA launches the upgraded version of Central Pension Accounting Office (CPAO) website

### Why in news?

Recently, The Controller General of Accounts, Department of Expenditure has launched the upgraded version of Central Pension Accounting Office (CPAO).

### Aim of the move:

The move is primarily aimed to cater to the needs of central civil pensioners and other stakeholders in the Ministries/Departments and Banks.

### About the website:

- ✎ The website has been developed in-house by the NIC Wing of CPAO.
- ✎ The website provides a single window for both accessing pension related information and facilitating grievance Redressal of pensioners.

### About Controller General of Accounts:

The Controller General of Accounts is the **apex Accounting Authority of the Central Government**.

- ✎ It exercises the powers of the President under **Article 150 of the constitution** for prescribing the forms of Accounts of the Union and State Governments on the advice of the Comptroller & Auditor General of India.

### Functions of CGA:

- ☑ It is the Principal Accounting Adviser to Government of India and is responsible for establishing and maintaining a technically sound Management Accounting System.
- ☑ The Office of CGA prepares monthly and annual analysis of expenditure, revenues, borrowings and various fiscal indicators for the Union Government.
- ☑ Under Article 150 of the Constitution, the **Annual Appropriation Accounts (Civil) and Union Finance Accounts** are submitted to Parliament on the advice of Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

**Source: PIB**

## SC Seeks Attorney General's help in PIL on Autonomy To Election Commission of India

### Why in news?

The Supreme Court has sought the Attorney-General's assistance on a PIL petition pointing out the vagueness in the procedure for removal of Election Commissioners, saying it affects the Election Commission's autonomy.

### What is the issue?

- ✎ Article 324(5) does not provide similar protection to the Election Commissioners from arbitrary removal.
- ✎ The same constitutional provision is silent about the procedure for removal of the two Election Commissioners. It only provides that they cannot be removed from office except on the recommendation of the CEC.

### Constitutional provisions:

- ☑ The Election Commission of India (ECI) is a **permanent constitutional body** established in 1950 and **consists of the CEC and two Election Commissioners**.
- ☑ The proviso to **Article 324 (5) of the Constitution safeguards the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) from arbitrary removal**.

- ☑ The CEC and the Election Commissioners have a **tenure of six years, or up to the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier**, and enjoy the **same status and receive salary and perks as available to apex court judges**.
- ☑ The CEC and the ECs enjoy the **same decision-making powers** which is suggestive of the fact that their powers are at par with each other.
- ☑ The CEC can **be removed from office only by the order of the President, just like a judge of the Supreme Court**.

#### **What the petition seeks?**

- ✍ The petition has sought to provide same and similar protection to both the Election Commissioners so that they shall not be removed from their office except in the like manner and on the like grounds as the Chief Election Commissioner.
- ✍ The petition has also sought directions to the Centre to take appropriate steps to confer rule-making authority status on the ECI, similar to the powers vested in the apex court, to empower it to make election-related rules and code of conduct.
- ✍ The petition also pointed out that the protection granted to the CEC was to ensure autonomy to the ECI from external pressure.
- ✍ The PIL has also sought direction to the Centre to provide an independent secretariat to the Election Commission of India (ECI) and declare its expenditure as charged from the Consolidated Fund of India.

**Source: The Hindu**



## International Relations, Indian & The World and International Affairs

### India, Australia hold first '2+2 dialogue' on strategic, defence ties

#### Why in news?

India and Australia reviewed all aspects of bilateral ties during the inaugural '2+2 dialogue' model which includes the foreign and defense secretaries of both sides.

#### Need for 'open' Asia-Pacific zone:

Both sides agreed that a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region serves the long-term interests of all countries in the region and of the world at large.

#### India and "2+2" dialogues:

- ◆ India has a "2+2" dialogue with very few countries—Japan and South Korea being two examples.
- ◆ New Delhi and Washington are slated to hold a "2+2" dialogue between their ministers of foreign affairs and defence and secretaries of state and defence in 2018.

#### India-Australia bilateral relations:

- ◆ India and Australia share warm bilateral relations based on shared democratic values and pluralism.
- ◆ There is a growing convergence of strategic perspectives between the two countries.
- ◆ India and Australia were two members of the four-nation "quad" of major democracies in the Indo-Pacific region — also regarded as the possible nucleus of a probable new security architecture in Asia.
- ◆ India conducts the Malabar naval exercises with the US and last year it was expanded to include Japan. Australia—which was part of the Malabar exercises in 2007—could rejoin the drill next year.



#### Geostrategic term "Indo-Pacific":

- ◆ The exchanges come as the geostrategic term "Indo-Pacific" as opposed to "Asia-Pacific" has been gaining currency, thanks to increased use by US administration officials to refer to a large swathe of sea and land stretching from the US Pacific coast to Australia and beyond to India.
- ◆ More recently, US President Donald Trump referred to the term several times when he spoke to a group of business representatives from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) grouping in Da Nang in Vietnam.

#### About Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC):

- ✍ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a **forum for 21 Pacific Rim member economies** that promotes free trade throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

- ✎ It was established in 1989 in response to the growing interdependence of Asia-Pacific economies and the advent of regional trade blocs in other parts of the world.

### What does APEC Do?

- ✎ APEC ensures that goods, services, investment and people move easily across borders.
- ✎ Members facilitate this trade through faster customs procedures at borders; more favorable business climates behind the border; and aligning regulations and standards across the region.
- ✎ APEC works to help all residents of the Asia-Pacific participate in the growing economy. For example, APEC projects provide digital skills training for rural communities and help indigenous women export their products abroad.
- ✎ Recognizing the impacts of climate change, APEC members also implement initiatives to increase energy efficiency and promote sustainable management of forest and marine resources.
- ✎ The forum adapts to allow members to deal with important new challenges to the region's economic well-being. This includes ensuring disaster resilience, planning for pandemics, and addressing terrorism.

**Source: The Hindu**

## UAE and Saudis form new partnership separate from GCC

### Why in news?

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia have formed new economic and partnership group named **Joint Cooperation Committee**, separate from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

### Background:

This move that could undermine six-member GCC amid Saudi led Arab countries diplomatic crisis with Qatar as half of countries members are boycotting Qatar, accusing it for supporting and funding terrorism.

### About the newly formed Joint Cooperation Committee:

- ✎ The new committee is assigned to cooperate and coordinate between UAE and Saudi Arabia in all military, political, economic, trade and cultural fields, as well as others in the interest of the two countries.
- ✎ It will be headed by Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, crown prince of Abu Dhabi and Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE's deputy prime minister and minister of presidential affairs, will serve as the Deputy Chairman of the committee.

### About the ongoing crisis:

- ✎ Since June, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt have enforced a land, sea and air blockade against Qatar, accusing the tiny Gulf nation of supporting "terrorism".
- ✎ Qatar has denied the allegations and accused the neighbouring countries of attempting to infringe on its sovereignty.

### About Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC):

GCC is a political and economic alliance of **six countries in Arabian Peninsula: Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE.**

The Charter of GCC was signed in 1981, formally establishing the institution. Its headquarter is in Riyadh, capital city of Saudi Arabia.

### What it does?

- ✎ It promotes economic, security, cultural and social cooperation between the six states and holds annual summit to discuss cooperation and regional affairs.

- ✎ Due to their geographic proximity, similar political systems and common sociocultural stances, the immediate goal was for these countries to protect themselves from threats after the Iran-Iraq War.

### Members:

All current member states of GCC are monarchies, including three constitutional monarchies (Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain), two absolute monarchies (Oman and Saudi Arabia) and one federal monarchy (UAE which is composed of seven member states, each of which is absolute monarchy with its own emir).

### Composition:

- ☑ The GCC comprises six main branches that carry out various tasks, from the preparation of meetings to the implementation of policies.
- ☑ They are- Supreme Council, Ministerial Council, Secretariat-General, Consultative Commission, Commission for the Settlement of Disputes and the Secretary-General.

### Role of GCC in changing scenario:

- ✓ Whether the GCC still has a relevant function and role in the region is questionable.
- ✓ Though it was created for the purpose of solidifying union ranks, the blockade imposed on Qatar by its neighbours has largely annulled these principles.
- ✓ The Gulf states have in the past differed in their views on several issues that have unfolded in the region over the past two decades.
- ✓ The role of the GCC has also been diminishing ever since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, with the six states illustrating various approaches to the war and its consequences. This has been enhanced during the wave of protests that swept the Middle East in 2011, known as the Arab Spring.
- ✓ This has shed light on Saudi Arabia's dominant role within the GCC.

**Source: The Hindu**

## 22nd AHWP conference

### Why in news?

The 22nd conference of Asian Harmonization Working Party (AHWP) was recently inaugurated at New Delhi.

### Key facts:

- ◆ The conference is being conducted by Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) and National Drug Regulatory Authority (NDRA) of India in collaboration with Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- ◆ The key objective of the event is to develop and recommend approaches for the convergence and harmonization of medical device regulations in Asia and beyond and to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise amongst regulators and the industry.

### About Asian Harmonization Working Party (AHWP)

AHWP was established in 1999 as a voluntary non-profit organization of the 30 national regulators of member countries and industry members.

- ✎ It was established with a goal to promote regulatory harmonization on medical device regulations in Asia and other regions in accordance with the guidance issued by International Medical Device Regulators Forums (IMDRF).
- ✎ The AHWP works in collaboration with related international organizations such as IMDRF, WHO, International Organization for Standardization (ISO), etc.

### About International Medical Device Regulators Forum (IMDRF):

- ✎ IMDRF was conceived in February 2011 as a forum to discuss future directions in medical device regulatory harmonization.

- ✎ It is a voluntary group of medical device regulators from around the world who have come together to build on the strong foundational work of the Global Harmonization Task Force on Medical Devices (GHTF), and to accelerate international medical device regulatory harmonization and convergence.

**Source: PIB**

## **Sri Lanka formally hands over Hambantota Port to Chinese firms on 99-Year Lease**

### **Why in news?**

Sri Lanka has formally handed over its southern strategic port of Hambantota to China on 99-year lease.

### **About Hambantota:**

- ✎ Hambantota is the main town in Hambantota District, Southern Province, Sri Lanka.
- ✎ Hambantota is right in the middle of vital energy supply lines in the Indian Ocean, connecting the Middle East and East Asia.
- ✎ This underdeveloped area was hit hard by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and is underwent a number of major development projects including the construction of a new sea port and international airport.

### **Background:**

- ☑ Sri Lanka, in July 2017, cleared a revised deal for the Chinese-built port in Hambantota. The modified agreement is believed to be more profitable to Sri Lanka and also addresses security concerns raised by other countries.
- ☑ As per the deal, while the Chinese would manage port operations, no naval ship, including Chinese ones, can call at Hambantota without Sri Lanka's permission.

### **Significance of Port**

- ✓ For China, Hambantota port is linchpin of its One Belt One Road project, which aims to build new Silk Road of trade routes between China and more than 60 countries in Asia, Africa, Middle East and Europe.
- ✓ That project is underpinned by network of harbours across world that has put China in position to challenge US as the world's most important maritime superpower. Other similar developments in region include Gwadar port in Pakistan, which is centrepiece of \$55 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

### **India's concerns:**

- ✓ The Hambantota port is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. India's apprehensions about the apparently growing Chinese presence in the island are well known, given the two countries' competing strategic interests in the island.
- ✓ Chinese control of Hambantota, which is part of its modern-day "Silk Route" across Asia and beyond, as well as a plan to acquire 15,000 acres (23 sq miles) to develop an industrial zone next door, had raised fears that it could also be used for Chinese naval vessels.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **India re-elected to International Maritime Organisation Council**

### **Why in news?**

Recently, India has been re-elected to the Council of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) under Category "B" at the recently held 30th session of the Assembly of the IMO in London.

- ◆ With re-election in IMO, India will continue to engage with the international maritime community to further her maritime interests and promote the welfare of her citizens.

### About International Maritime Organization (IMO):

The International Maritime Organization (IMO), known as the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO) until 1982, is a specialised agency of the United Nations responsible for regulating shipping.

- ✎ The IMO was established in Geneva in 1948 and came into force ten years later, meeting for the first time in 1959.
- ✎ Headquartered in London, United Kingdom, the IMO has 171 Member States and three Associate Members.
- ✎ The IMO's primary purpose is to develop and maintain a comprehensive regulatory framework for shipping and its remit today includes safety, environmental concerns, legal matters, technical co-operation, maritime security and the efficiency of shipping.
- ✎ IMO is **governed by an assembly of members** and is **financially administered by a council of members elected from the assembly**.
- ✎ The IMO's structure comprises the Assembly, the Council, the Maritime Safety Committee, the Marine Environment Protection Committee, the Legal Committee, the Technical Cooperation Committee, and the secretariat, headed by a Secretary-General.
- ✎ Member organizations of the UN organizational family may observe the proceedings of the IMO. Observer status is granted to qualified non-governmental organizations.

### IMO council:

- ☑ The IMO Council has a crucial role to play in deciding various matters in relation to the global shipping industry, including its work programme strategy and budget.
- ☑ Members of the Council consist of 40 member states, elected by its Assembly including 10 members in category A with the largest interest in providing international shipping services; 10 members in category B with the largest interest in international seaborne trade and 20 members in category C with special interests in maritime transport or navigation.

### India and IMO:

- ☑ India has been one of the earliest members of the IMO, having ratified its Convention and joined it as a member-state in the year 1959.
- ☑ India has had the privilege of being elected to and serving the Council of the IMO, ever since it started functioning, and till date, except for two years for the period 1983-1984.

**Source: PIB**

## India-Russia Multi-Modal Transportation Route all set to open next month

### Why in news?

The **International North South Transportation Corridor (INSTC)** connecting Mumbai with St Petersburg and beyond – which has been 17 years in the making – is set to be operationalised from the middle of next month with the first consignment from India to Russia.

### About International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)

INSTC is an ambitious multimodal transport system established in 2000 by Iran, Russia and India to promote transportation cooperation.

- ✎ It is aimed to provide the shortest multi-model transportation route linking the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran and St Petersburg.
- ✎ The objective of the corridor is to increase trade connectivity between major cities such as Mumbai, Moscow, Tehran, Baku, Bandar Abbas, Astrakhan, Bandar Anzali and etc.
- ✎ The estimated capacity of the corridor is 20-30 million tonnes of goods per year.

**Route**

- ☑ It is planned to connect the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea through Iran and then onwards to St. Petersburg and northern Europe through Russia.
- ☑ The route primarily involves moving freight from India, Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia via ship, rail and road.

**Significance of the INSTC:**

- ☑ The project will help India and Russia to increase bilateral trade to the targeted USD 30 billion over the next 10 years.
- ☑ Conceived well before China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), INSTC will not only help cut down on costs and time taken for transfer of goods from India to Russia and Europe via Iran but also provide an alternative connectivity initiative to countries in the Eurasian region.
- ☑ It will be India's second corridor after the Chabahar Port to access resource rich Central Asia and its market.
- ☑ The project will let cargo from India travel to Chabahar Port in Iran and then to Russia and Eastern Europe via central Asian countries. Currently, a cargo is carried on freight ships via the Red Sea, Suez Canal, Mediterranean Sea, the English Channel and then the Baltic Sea.
- ☑ The port, which is being developed by India, is also seen as a rival to the Chinese-built Gwadar port in Pakistan. The Gwadar port acts as one of the ends of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in China's Belt and Road Initiative (OBOR).
- ☑ For India, the INSTC will be strategically important trade corridor of tremendous promise that could help to develop its economic and strategic importance in Eurasia and Central Asia.

**Need for such corridor:**

- ✓ The absence of viable surface transport connectivity is a serious impediment to trade with the Eurasian region.
- ✓ Currently, transport of goods between India and Russia mostly takes place through the sea route via Rotterdam to St Petersburg.
- ✓ In the case of the Central Asian region, goods are routed through China, Europe or Iran. The routes through China and Europe are long, expensive and time-consuming.

Therefore, there is a need to have a logistics route that would be shorter, cheaper and faster.

**Source: The Hindu, Indian Express**

**India votes against Buenos Aires Declaration on Women and Trade****Why in news?**

At the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires in Argentina, 119 of the 164 members of the agency backed a non-binding declaration that sought women's economic empowerment by speedily removing barriers to trade.

- ◆ However, India voted against a declaration of the World Trade Organisation that supported gender equality in trade.

**What is Buenos Aires Declaration on Women and Trade?**

- ✎ The Buenos Aires Women and Trade Declaration was **spearheaded by the governments of Iceland and Sierra Leone, as well as the International Trade Centre.**
- ✎ It stemmed from efforts made by the Trade Impact Group of the International Gender Champions, a leadership network that brings female and male decision-makers together to break down gender barriers.

- ✎ **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)** participated in the conception and drafting of the declaration through the Trade Impact Group of the International Gender Champions initiative, and provided extensive support for its adoption.

#### **Significance of this declaration:**

- ☑ Actions outlined in the Declaration will ultimately boost economic growth worldwide and provide more and better paid jobs for women.
- ☑ These actions will also contribute to UN Global Development Goals, including the Sustainable Development Goal to achieve gender equality through the empowerment of women and girls (SDG 5).

#### **Why India voted against?**

- ✎ India, an influential WTO member, was among the minority group that chose not to endorse the move saying that while it supports gender equality, gender is not a trade-related subject.
- ✎ India argued that developed countries could use their high standards of gender equity to curb exports from the developing world, but also indirectly restrict developing countries from incentivising their women citizens as part of measures to address developmental challenges.
- ✎ India said gender-related concerns should be discussed at appropriate fora, and that this precedent would bring in other non-trade subjects, such as labour and environment standards, into the WTO's purview.

#### **Other criticism:**

- ☑ An alliance of more than 160 women's rights and allied organisations criticised the declaration.
- ☑ They had called on member nations not to adopt it as they said the declaration failed to "address the adverse impact of WTO rules on women and instead appears to be designed to mask the failures of the WTO and its role in deepening inequality and exploitation".

#### **Background: Women in Trade**

- ☑ Currently, many women worldwide stand on the sidelines of the economy. While women comprise about half of the global population, they generate only 37% of gross domestic product (GDP) and run only about a third of small and medium-sized enterprises.
- ☑ In some developing countries, female business ownership can dip as low as 3-6%. An International Trade Centre survey in 20 countries found that just one in five exporting companies is owned by women.
- ☑ In more than 155 countries, there is at least one law impeding economic opportunities for women.
- ☑ No country has managed to close the gender gap on economic participation and opportunity; progress is so slow it would take, at the current rate, 170 years to reach gender equality.
- ☑ It is also apparent that international trade and trade agreements affect women and men differently.

**Source: The Hindu**

### **MEA launches SAMEEP**

#### **Why in news?**

The Union Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has launched SAMEEP (Students and MEA Engagement Program).

#### **What is SAMEEP?**

SAMEEP is an outreach mission that aims to take Indian foreign policy and its global engagements to students across country and also to look at diplomacy as a career option.

**Objective of SAMEEP:**

- ☑ The objective of outreach program is to familiarise school and college students in India about functioning of the MEA.
- ☑ It also seeks to introduce them to key elements of India's foreign policy and its success stories.

**How this program will work?**

- ☒ It is a voluntary programme for MEA officials, undersecretary and above with option of going back to any school or college in their hometown or to their alma mater.
- ☒ Under it, MEA officials will go to their hometowns and particularly their alma mater while on leave to engage and interact with students in schools and colleges.
- ☒ The officers will convey how MEA works, India's foreign policy, how they do diplomacy so that student consider about this as a career option.
- ☒ The MEA will provide its officials standardized presentation for this outreach programme and officials will be free to make changes for betterment of it can add their personal experiences.

**Source: The Hindu**

## India-Swiss deal inked on data sharing

**Why in news?**

In a move aimed at combating black money stashed abroad, India has signed an agreement with Switzerland that would allow automatic sharing of tax-related information from January 1st 2018.

**Present scenario:**

So far, India had to ask Switzerland for specific bits of information by proving that a valid inquiry was on against the account holder. The Swiss could delay or deny the information altogether.

**Background:**

- ☑ A joint declaration for the implementation of Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI) was signed last month between the two sides and it provided that both countries would start collecting data in accordance with the global standards in 2018 and exchange it from 2019 onwards.
- ☑ The AEOI conforms to a norm set by global economic body the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for tax transparency.
- ☑ While Switzerland has conformed to the global standards on automatic exchange of information with the signing of the declaration, India, on its part, has promised to safeguard the confidentiality of the data.

**Significance of this move:**

- ☑ Confidentiality and data protection requirements are to be strictly followed under the automatic information exchange framework. This process ensures the signatory always maintains control over its exchange partners and the treatment of the data exchanged, as per OECD.
- ☑ The automatic exchange of information will also discourage Indians from stashing black money in Swiss banks. However, Indian deposits in Swiss banks have been falling already.
- ☑ Though the deal will do little by way of bringing back black money from Swiss accounts, it will have a deterrent effect. The black money hoarders will be under pressure with one big safe haven gone off their list.

**Need for such move:**

Switzerland, which has always been at the centre of the debate on black money allegedly stashed by Indians abroad, used to be known for very strong secrecy walls till a few years ago around its banking practices. A huge global pressure has resulted in Switzerland relenting on the tough secrecy clauses its local laws gave to the banks.

**Source: The Hindu**

## India and Myanmar sign MoU for development of Rakhine state

### Why in news?

India and Myanmar signed memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at developing Myanmar's Rakhine state.

### About the MoU:

- ✎ Under the signed MoU, India will provide Myanmar with \$25 million for development projects including prefabricated houses in troubled Rakhine state to enable the return of Rohingya Muslims who have fled the area.
- ✎ This support is intended to help the Government of Myanmar achieve its objective of restoration of normalcy in Rakhine State and enable the return of displaced persons.
- ✎ Under this MoU, Government of India proposes to take up, among others, a project to build prefabricated housing in Rakhine State so as to meet the immediate needs of returning people.
- ✎ Besides housing, the proposals include building schools, healthcare facilities and building bridges and roads.

### Background:

- ☑ As per United Nations, more than 600,000 Rohingya have escaped to Bangladesh after attacks by insurgents on Myanmar security forces in August triggered a military crackdown that the United Nations has called ethnic cleansing.
- ☑ The international community demands the Rohingya be allowed to go home in safety, and Bangladesh and Myanmar have begun talks on repatriation, but huge doubts remain about the Rohingya ever being able to return in peace to rebuild homes and till fields.
- ☑ India, which is concerned about the influx of the refugees into its territory, has stressed economic development of the Rakhine region as a way to help lower tensions.

### India's assistance to Myanmar:

India has been trying to promote economic cooperation with Myanmar to try to push back against China's expansive involvement in infrastructure development across south Asia.

### China's assistance to Myanmar:

Beijing has also stepped into the Rohingya crisis and proposed a three-phase plan including a ceasefire, bilateral talks and then tackling poverty long-term.

### What is the significance of Rakhine state for India?

Rakhine is critical to strategic objectives of India in the region.

- ✎ Kaladan multimodal project, India's dream connectivity project in region, originates from restive state.
- ✎ In addition, number of ongoing friendship projects also includes Sittwe port (capital of Rakhine province) and road from Paletwa-Zorinpui.
- ✎ Other key projects that are being built by India are Rhi-Tiddim road project, India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway road from Kalewa to Yargyi, project to build 69 bridges on Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa road, Yamethin Police Training Centre and hospital projects.

**Source: The Hindu**

## Pact on Rohingyas

### Why in news?

Bangladesh and Myanmar recently signed a Memorandum of Agreement to begin the repatriation of more than 6,20,000 Rohingya refugees who have fled to Bangladesh in the past few months.

Further, a joint working group including officials from Bangladesh, Myanmar and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) will be set up in three weeks, and Myanmar would begin to repatriate the refugees within two months, by January 23, 2018.

### What had led to the exodus?

- ✎ Since August, when the Myanmar military began a crackdown on Rohingya villages in Rakhine after a series of terror strikes on army camps, the numbers that have escaped burning homes and alleged atrocities by the authorities, have risen rapidly, with most seeking shelter across the border in Kutupalong camp of Bangladesh's Cox's Bazaar.
- ✎ The UN has condemned the violence as a case of "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide", putting pressure on Myanmar's leadership to end it.

### How did China help?

- ✎ Talks between Bangladesh and Myanmar appear to have been guided not by international agencies, but by China.
- ✎ China had announced that it favoured a "three-step" solution, comprising a ceasefire in Rakhine, a bilateral repatriation deal for the Rohingya to Myanmar and long-term solutions including the economic development of the Rohingya areas.

### Why is China interested?

- ✎ Beijing has deep interests in Rakhine, especially in the Kyaukpyu Port, with oil and energy pipelines to Yunnan province forming part of a \$10 billion economic zone in its Belt and Road Initiative.
- ✎ While on the one hand, China has protected the Myanmar regime from international sanctions at the UN thus far, it has tied itself to the success or failure of the repatriation agreement, on which the fate of the Rohingya now rest.

### What is Myanmar's stand?

- ✎ The signing came as a surprise to many because the Myanmar government led by the National League for Democracy as well as its military leadership have thus far been categorical about not accepting more repatriation, and have denied any wrongdoing by the security forces.
- ✎ The signing of the deal also came at a time when Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi faced international criticism for not stopping the violence, and several awards and honours given to her for her work in restoring democracy have been revoked over the past month.

### What lies ahead?

- ✎ According to the deal, Myanmar has committed not to delay sending those repatriated back to their original homes, but this task will be made more difficult by the fact that many of the Rohingya villages have been burnt down.
- ✎ Also of concern is the stipulation that those who will be accepted by Myanmar must show their Myanmar-issued identity cards, not just their Bangladesh-issued refugee cards.
- ✎ Finally, international human rights agencies have warned that refugees cannot be forced to return while threat of violence against them persists, even as they process the trauma borne of the atrocities they fled from.

**Source: The Hindu, Indian Express**

## India joins Wassenaar Arrangement

### Why in news?

In a significant victory for India's non-proliferation track record, India has finally joined the multi-nation Wassenaar Arrangement (WA), which monitors and controls the export of arms and dual-use technologies by global powers.

- ◆ With this, **India becomes the 42nd member of the WA.**

**Background:**

India was trying to become part of the arrangement for the last two years, but was blocked by Italy, owing to the dip in bilateral relations.

**What is Wassenaar Agreement?**

- ✎ The Wassenaar Arrangement is an elite club of countries which subscribe to arms export controls, similar to the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Missile Technology Control Regime.
- ✎ The body came into being in 1996 to succeed the Cold War-era Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls.
- ✎ The name comes from Wassenaar, a suburb of The Hague, where the agreement to start such a multi-lateral cooperation was reached in 1995.

**Who are all members of the Wassenaar Arrangement?**

The WA has 42 members, the latest entrant being India. With the exception of China, all the other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council are signatories of the WA, which is headquartered in Vienna.

**How does it operate?**

- ✎ Each state is to have national policies that govern the transfer of dual-use and military items.
- ✎ All nations generate a standard list of items that require special clearances or export controls by the federal government. India drew up this list of items in 2015, as part of its efforts to join WA.
- ✎ The idea is to prevent an unauthorised transfer of all such items. All nations report the arms and dual-technology transfers to the WA every six months.

**What are Wassenaar Control Lists?**

- ✎ The Arrangement works according to what it calls WA Control Lists. The controls are subject to ratification by the participants.
- ✎ WA members agree to exchange information on sensitive dual-use goods and technologies and report on such transfers and denials of controlled items to non-participants.

**Critics of WA:**

- ☑ Critics see WA simply as a Cold War instrument with a different name. According to them Arrangement perpetuates a digital divide by restricting western companies and governments from supplying crucial technologies to emerging markets.
- ☑ Computer scientists and policy analysts have also expressed concern about developed economies using less developed countries as Guinea Pigs for their cyber security research by supplying them with intrusive technologies that could be used for mass surveillance.
- ☑ The Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital rights group, has accused the United States of going for even narrower restrictions on technology transfer.

**How will this membership help India?**

- ✎ India's entry into the export control regime would enhance its credentials in the field of non-proliferation despite not being a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
- ✎ The WA membership is also expected to build up a strong case for India's entry into the 48-member Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- ✎ Further, since India has low reserves of uranium required for its civil nuclear energy programmes, the country entry to the Export Control regimes will help secure the supply of nuclear fuel more easily.
- ✎ It will also facilitate high technology tie-ups with Indian industry and ease access to high-tech items for our defence and space programmes.

- ✎ It will also create grounds for realignment of India in export control policy framework of other WA members, including eligibility for certain licensing exceptions.
- ✎ India will gain from joining WA, as Indian companies will now be able to undertake exports and get a boost in their effort to be a part of the global supply chain on defence products.

**Source: The Hindu, Indian Express**

## **BIMSTEC Member States discuss draft text of Coastal Shipping Agreement**

### **Why in news?**

Member States of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) recently met in New Delhi to discuss modalities for promoting coastal shipping in the region.

- ◆ In this first meeting of the Working Group member countries discussed the draft text of BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement drafted by the Ministry of Shipping, Government of India.

### **Background**

The meeting of Working Group is follow up of BIMSTEC leaders' call at Retreat hosted by India in Goa in October 2016 to enhance connectivity in region on sidelines of BRICS Summit. India is lead country in BIMSTEC for cooperation in transport and communication.

### **About BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement**

- ✎ The objective of agreement is to facilitate coastal shipping in region to give boost to trade between member countries.
- ✎ It will apply to coastal shipping that is shipping within 20 nautical miles of coastline.
- ✎ Once agreement is ratified by member countries and becomes operational, it will facilitate lot of cargo movement between member countries which can be done through cost effective, environment friendly and faster coastal shipping route.

### **Need for Agreement**

The requirements for movement of vessels within 20 nautical miles of coastline are different from standard requirements of deep sea shipping. Coastal ship movements require smaller vessels and lesser draft, and therefore, involve lower costs.

### **About BIMSTEC:**

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization comprising seven Member States lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity.

It came into being in 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration.

- ✎ It constitutes seven Member States: Five deriving from South Asia: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka and Two from Southeast Asia: Myanmar and Thailand.
- ✎ The main objective of BIMSTEC is technological and economic cooperation among South Asian and South East Asian countries along the coast of the Bay of Bengal.
- ✎ The headquarters of BIMSTEC is in Dhaka.
- ✎ Unlike many other regional groupings, BIMSTEC is a sector-driven cooperative organization. Starting with six sectors including trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism and fisheries for sectoral cooperation in the late 1997, it expanded to embrace nine more sectors including agriculture, public health, poverty alleviation, counter-terrorism, environment, culture, people to people contact and climate change in 2008.
- ✎ The whole region which constitutes the BIMSTEC is home to over 1.5 billion people. The population counts for around 22 percent of the total world population. These countries have a combined GDP of \$2.7 trillion.

**Source: PIB**

## US pulls out of UN's Global Compact on Migration

### Why in news?

The United States has withdrawn itself from a United Nations pact to improve the handling of migrant and refugee situations deeming it 'inconsistent' with its policies.

### New York declaration

In September 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted a non-binding political declaration, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, pledging to uphold the rights of refugees, help them resettle and ensure they have access to education.

### Why US pulled out of the UN Global Compact on Migration?

- ✎ US under Trump administration has held that New York Declaration contains numerous provisions that are inconsistent with US immigration and refugee policies and Trump Administration's immigration principles.
- ✎ Moreover, the global approach in New York Declaration is simply not compatible with US sovereignty.

### Background:

US under Trump administration has pulled out of several global commitments including UNESCO, UN cultural and educational body and 2015 Paris climate change agreement. US participation in Global Compact on Migration process was started in 2016 following Obama Administration's decision to join UN's New York Declaration on Migration.

### Evolution of Global Compact for Migration:

- ☑ In adopting the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the 193 UN Member States recognized the need for a comprehensive approach to human mobility and enhanced cooperation at the global level.
- ☑ Annex II of the New York Declaration set in motion a process of intergovernmental consultations and negotiations culminating in the planned adoption of the global compact for migration at an intergovernmental conference on international migration in 2018.
- ☑ The process to develop this global compact for migration was started in April 2017. It was to reach international consensus at the UN in 2018.

### About Global Compact for Migration:

- ✎ UN Global Compact on Migration will be the first inter-governmentally negotiated agreement under auspices of UN to cover all dimensions of international migration in holistic and comprehensive manner.
- ✎ The purpose of Global compact of migration is to provide significant opportunity to improve governance on migration, address challenges associated with today's migration, and strengthen contribution of migrants and migration to sustainable development.
- ✎ The global compact is framed consistent with **target 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** in which member States committed to cooperate internationally to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration and its scope is defined in Annex II of the New York Declaration.

**Source: The Hindu**

## US recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's capital

### Why in news?

In a major announcement, United States President Donald Trump officially recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

- ◆ He directed the State Department to initiate the process of moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which many Arab leaders warn can trigger an upheaval in the already volatile Middle East.

**Key Facts**

- ◆ Jerusalem is home to nearly one million residents. West Jerusalem's population of some 330,000 is almost entirely Jewish.
- ◆ The eastern half of the city, which comprises the Old City, Palestinian neighborhoods, and refugee camps, along with some newer Jewish settlements, is home to about 320,000 Arabs and 212,000 Jews.
- ◆ Unlike Palestinians who live elsewhere in Israel, most Palestinian East Jerusalemites have permanent residency, but not citizenship, since they do not recognize Israeli sovereignty over the city.

**Why is recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital so contentious?**

- ✎ Of all the issues at the heart of the enduring conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, none is as sensitive as the status of Jerusalem. The holy city has been at the centre of peace-making efforts for decades.
- ✎ Seventy years ago, when the UN voted to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, Jerusalem was defined as a separate entity under international supervision. In the war of 1948 it was divided, like Berlin in the cold war, into western and eastern sectors under Israeli and Jordanian control respectively. Nineteen years later, in June 1967, Israel captured the eastern side, expanded the city's boundaries and annexed it – an act that was never recognised internationally.
- ✎ Israel routinely describes the city, with its Jewish, Muslim and Christian holy places, as its “united and eternal” capital. For their part, the Palestinians say East Jerusalem must be the capital of a future independent Palestinian state. The unequivocal international view, accepted by all previous US administrations, is that the city's status must be addressed in peace negotiations.
- ✎ Recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital puts the US out of step with the rest of the world, and legitimises Israeli settlement-building in the east – considered illegal under international law.

**What will be the international response?**

Regional powers have already registered strong protests. The Islamic world is outraged.

- ✎ Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has warned of “dangerous consequences”.
- ✎ Jordan's King Abdullah II and Saudi King Salman have cautioned the US.
- ✎ Turkey has threatened to cut ties with Israel.
- ✎ Iran has declared that “the Palestinian nation will achieve victory”.
- ✎ China has said it “could sharpen regional conflict”.
- ✎ Egypt, the Arab League and several European nations have expressed grave reservations.
- ✎ Hamas has threatened an intifada, and Hezbollah could react aggressively.
- ✎ The Pope has pleaded for status quo.

**India's response:**

India differed with the US on recognition of Jerusalem as capital of Israel. Indian foreign ministry stated that India's position on Palestine is independent and consistent. It is shaped by our views and interests, and not determined by any third country.

**Source: Indian Express**

**ASEAN-India Connectivity Summit (AICS)****Why in news?**

The ASEAN-India (Association of Southeast Asian Nations-India) Connectivity Summit (AICS) was held in New Delhi.

**Key facts:**

- ◆ The theme of summit was **'Powering Digital and Physical Linkages for Asia in the 21st Century'**.
- ◆ It was **organized by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in collaboration with AIC (ASEAN-India Centre) and CII (Confederation of Indian Industry)**.

**About AICS:**

- ✍ The AICS aims to accelerate existing connectivity prospects, identify issues of concern, evolve suitable policy recommendations and develop strategies to enhance economic, industrial and trade relations between ASEAN and India.
- ✍ Its focus areas are infrastructure, roadways, shipping, digital, finance, energy and aviation.
- ✍ The AICS would be bringing together policymakers, senior officials from the government, investors, industry leaders, representatives of trade associations and entrepreneurs on the same platform.

**About ASEAN:**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional organisation comprising ten Southeast Asian states which promotes intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic integration amongst its members.

- ✍ It came into existence on August 8, 1967 after ASEAN declaration (also known as Bangkok declaration).
- ✍ Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines and Thailand were founder countries.
- ✍ Later 5 more countries Brunei Darussalam, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam were added.
- ✍ Its headquarters is in Jakarta, Indonesia.
- ✍ Its principal aims are:
  - ✓ To accelerate economic growth, social progress, and sociocultural evolution among its members.
  - ✓ To protect of regional stability and the provision of a mechanism for member countries to resolve differences peacefully.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **India fights to maintain developing country status**

**Why in news?**

India's continued eligibility for special and differential treatment (S&DT) at the World Trade Organization (WTO) hangs in the balance.

**What is the issue?**

- ✍ In the Doha Declaration, members agreed that all S&D provisions are an integral part of the WTO agreements, and should be reviewed.
- ✍ US and the EU have now hinted at the need to curtail the special and differential (S&D) facility for developing countries, now even the least developed countries (LDCs) are challenging this flexibility.
- ✍ A group of more than 70 LDCs and developing countries have proposed separate S&D guidelines for the two kinds of nations.
- ✍ The G-90 group, including LDCs, the African group and the ACP (African, Caribbean, Pacific) proposal asks for stricter notification requirements for developing countries compared with LDCs or those developing countries that face capacity constraints.

Under these scenario, there is no clarity over whether India will continue to be covered under the S&DT provision being reviewed at the WTO in ten specific areas proposed by the G-90 group. India is trying to push for its continuation, but many members are not so eager.

### What is S&DT in WTO law?

- ✎ Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) in the WTO usually refers to a category of legal provisions in existing WTO agreements that give developing countries greater flexibility with regards to the application of commitments and use of policy instruments and developed countries the right to treat developing countries more favourably.
- ✎ These provisions are aimed at helping poor farmers in developing countries through subsidies.
- ✎ With S&DT, WTO members recognize the different economic situations of developing countries and their needs in implementing the obligations of WTO agreements.

### S&DT provisions:

S&DT provisions are usually grouped into four categories:

- ✓ longer time periods for implementing agreements and commitments,
- ✓ measures to increase trading opportunities for these countries,
- ✓ provisions requiring all WTO members to safeguard the trade interests of developing countries,
- ✓ support to help developing countries build the infrastructure for WTO work, handle disputes, and implement technical standards.

In addition to S&DT for all developing countries, some WTO agreements also contain special provisions for least developed countries (LDC). These special conditions for LDC include longer timeframes or exemptions (partial of full) for commitments.

**Source: The Hindu**

## World Migration Report 2018

### Why in news?

**The International Organisation for Migration, the United Nations migration agency**, has recently released the World Migration Report 2018.

### Highlights of the World Migration Report 2018:

#### **Definition of international migrants:**

- ☑ The definition of international migrants used in the report is broad, taking into account anyone living in a country other their own and includes refugees and economic migrants, both those immigrating officially and those who do so “irregularly”.
- ☑ The numbers are not a count of people by national origin or ethnicity and, therefore, do not include children of migrants born in the countries their parents went to.

#### **India related facts:**

- ☑ **The Indian diaspora is the world’s largest**, with slightly more than 15.6 million people from India living overseas.
- ☑ The Indian diaspora constitutes **6% of the total number of international migrants** (people living outside the country of their birth), which was estimated at 243 million in 2015.
- ☑ Because the country has the largest number of migrants abroad, India also receives the highest amount in remittances (\$68.91 billion).
- ☑ The **largest migration corridor is from India to UAE**, where 3.5 million Indians were residing in 2015. Second is **Saudi Arabia**.

#### **Global scenario:**

- ☑ The global migrants figure has risen by 10% over that recorded in 2010. In other words, out of global population of 7.3 billion, one of every 30 people was migrant in 2015. However, if computed

as percentage of world's population, the growth of diaspora has been largely static, from 3.2% in 2010 to 3.3% in 2015.

- ☑ After India, **Mexico has the second largest diaspora.**
- ☑ **The United States remained the top destination for migrants in the world in 2015**, with 46.6 million migrants moving to the US in that year. However, that was much before Donald Trump took over as president.
- ☑ Nearly half of all the international migrants worldwide in 2015 were born in Asia, primarily originating from India, China and other South Asian countries.
- ☑ **The number of migrants to the Gulf has dipped drastically in recent years**, owing to economic conditions and the protectionist measures adopted by these countries.
- ☑ A disturbing fact is that those under 18 years of age made up 51 percent of refugees in 2016.

#### **About International Organisation for Migration (IOM):**

IOM is an intergovernmental organization that provides services and advice concerning migration to governments and migrants, including refugees, internally displaced persons and migrant workers.

- ✍ IOM was established in 1951 as Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) to help resettle people displaced by World War II.
- ✍ In 1992, it was granted Permanent Observer status to UN General Assembly.
- ✍ Cooperation agreement between IOM and the UN was signed in 1996.

#### **Focus areas:**

IOM works in four broad areas of migration management: (a) Migration and development, (b) Facilitating migration, (c) Regulating migration and (d) Forced migration.

#### **Members:**

It has 166 member states, a further 8 states holding observer status and offices in over 100 countries.

**Source: Times of India**

## **UN imposes new sanctions on North Korea**

### **Why in news?**

The UN Security Council unanimously imposed new sanctions on North Korea for its recent intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test.

### **Why these sanctions?**

The idea behind the sanctions is to squeeze North Korea as tightly as possible to reduce its income, reduce its revenues, and in that way hopefully drive it to the negotiating table and also for it to stop its missile development process.

### **Need for sanctions on North Korea:**

- ✓ North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's government has conducted several missile tests this year, which have drawn condemnation from the international community.
- ✓ Recently, in November 2017, it had successfully conducted a new **intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM)** capable of reaching the US mainland. The missile is said to be the "most powerful ICBM" yet to be tested by the country. It was the third test of an ICBM by North Korea this year.

### **About the sanctions:**

- ✍ The imposed sanctions seek to limit North Korea's access to refined petroleum products and crude oil and its earnings from workers abroad.
- ✍ The UN resolution seeks to ban nearly 90% of refined petroleum exports to North Korea by capping them at 500,000 barrels a year.

- ✎ The resolution also orders North Koreans who work abroad to return to the country within 24 months.
- ✎ The new sanctions also ban the export of food products, machinery, electrical equipment, earth and stones, wood and vessels from North Korea. And it bans all countries from exporting industrial equipment, machinery, transportation vehicles and industrial metals to the country.
- ✎ The resolution also contains a commitment to the resumption of “six-party talks”, leaving the door open for possible diplomatic negotiations.

### What are six-party talks?

- ✎ The six-party talks are a diplomatic effort, which aim to find a peaceful solution to security concerns in the Korean Peninsula.
- ✎ They involve North Korea, South Korea and the US, along with regional powers China, Japan and Russia.
- ✎ The last six-party talks were held in 2009.

### Previous sanctions:

- ☑ Last month, the US unveiled fresh sanctions against North Korea which it said were designed to limit the funding for its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. The measures targeted North Korean shipping operations and Chinese companies that trade with Pyongyang.
- ☑ The UN also approved new sanctions following North Korea’s nuclear test on 3 September. These measures restricted oil imports and banned textile exports – an attempt to starve the North of fuel and income for its weapons programmes.

### Global reactions:

- ✓ **North Korea** fully rejects the UN sanctions and termed them as a violent breach of its republic’s sovereignty. It also blamed it as an act of war that destroys the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula and a wider region.
- ✓ **South Korea** welcomed the sanctions and called on North Korea to “immediately cease reckless provocations, and take the path of dialogue for denuclearisation”.
- ✓ Both **Russia and China** supported the new sanctions, despite previously raising concerns that not enough was being done to promote diplomatic resolutions to tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

**Source: The Hindu**

## India plans to commence BBIN motor pact with Nepal, Bangladesh

### Why in news?

Pending ratification from Bhutan, India plans to operationalise BBIN motor vehicle agreement (MVA) with Bangladesh and Nepal for seamless movement of passenger and cargo vehicles.

### Background:

- ☑ India proposed a SAARC Motor Vehicle Agreement during the SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in November 2014.
- ☑ Due to objections from Pakistan, an agreement could not be reached. India instead pursued a similar motor vehicle agreement with the BBIN. The Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicles Agreement was signed on 15 June 2015.
- ☑ Bhutan has not yet ratified the pact for its entry to come into force. However, Bhutan has given its consent for the BBIN MVA to enter into force amongst the other 3 countries i.e. Bangladesh, India and Nepal, who have already ratified it.

### About the BBIN agreement:

- ✎ The Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) was signed at the BBIN transport ministers meeting in Thimpu, Bhutan, on 15 June 2015.

- ✎ It is aimed to facilitate cross border movement of both passengers and cargo vehicles.
- ✎ Protocols to implement the agreement are being negotiated by the four countries for passengers and cargo vehicles separately.
- ✎ The four South Asian nations had already signed the BBIN Agreement in June 2016. Despite ratifications by three partner countries, Bhutan's Upper House has not yet ratified the deal, citing environmental as well as livelihood concerns.

**Source: Economic Times**

## UN resolution against US' Jerusalem move

### Why in news?

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has overwhelmingly adopted resolution declaring United States of America (USA) recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital as 'null and void'.

### Key facts:

- ◆ The resolution was **moved by Turkey and Yemen**.
- ◆ 128 countries including **India voted in favour of the resolution**, nine against and 35 abstained.

### About the resolution:

- ✎ The UNGA resolution stressed that Jerusalem was final status issue to be resolved through negotiations.
- ✎ It demanded that all States comply with UNSC resolutions regarding Jerusalem, and not recognise any actions or measures contrary to those resolutions.
- ✎ Countries voting in favour of resolution also disregarded US President Trump's threat to cut off financial aid to countries that backed the draft resolution.

### India's response on the issue:

India differed with the US on recognition of Jerusalem as capital of Israel. Indian foreign ministry stated that India's position on Palestine is independent and consistent. It is shaped by our views and interests, and not determined by any third country.

**Source: The Hindu**



## Indian Economy & Economic Development

### DARPAN launched for financial inclusion of rural population

#### Why in news?

The Union Ministry of Communications has launched **DARPAN – “Digital Advancement of Rural Post Office for A New India” Project** to improve the quality of service, add value to services and achieve “financial inclusion” of un-banked rural population.

#### What is DARPAN Project?

DARPAN is Information Technology (IT) modernisation project aimed at realising financial inclusion of un-banked rural population. It offers core banking services to the account holders.

#### Aims and objectives of DARPAN Project:

- ✎ The project intends to provide low power technology solution to each branch postmaster (BPM). This will enable each of approximately 1.29 lakhs branch post offices (BOs) to improve service delivery.
- ✎ It aims to increase rural reach of Department of Posts (DoP) and enable BOs to increase traffic of all financial remittances, savings accounts, Rural Postal Life Insurance and Cash Certificates.
- ✎ It also aims to improve mail operations processes by allowing for automated booking and delivery of accountable article.



#### Significance of the project:

The Project shall Increase the rural reach of the Department of Posts and enable BOs to increase traffic of all financial remittances, savings accounts, Rural Postal Life Insurance, and Cash Certificates;

- ☑ Improve mail operations processes by allowing for automated booking and delivery of accountable article;
- ☑ Increase revenue using retail post business;
- ☑ Provide third party applications; and
- ☑ Make disbursements for social security schemes such as MGNREGS.
- ☑ So far, 43,171 Branch Post Offices have migrated under the “DARPAN” project with the aim of financial inclusion to rural population and it is targeted to complete the project by March, 2018.

**Source: PIB**

### IBBI issues norms for handling grievances under IBC

#### Why in news?

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has notified the regulations for handling of grievances and complaints against Insolvency-related service providers.

**Highlights of the regulations:**

- ✎ The regulations enable a stakeholder, namely, debtor, creditor, claimant, service provider, resolution applicant or any other person having an interest in an insolvency resolution, liquidation or bankruptcy transaction to file a grievance or a complaint against service provider.
- ✎ The service provider could be an insolvency professional agency, Insolvency professional, Insolvency professional entity or information utility.
- ✎ The regulations provide for an objective and transparent procedure for disposal of grievances and complaints by the IBBI.
- ✎ The regulations do not spare a mischievous service provider. At the same time, they don't also harass an innocent service provider.

**About Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI):**

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) was established on October 1, 2016 in accordance with the provisions of The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.

- ✎ It has been set up by the code to regulate professionals, information utilities (IUs) and agencies engaged in the resolution of insolvencies of companies.
- ✎ It is a unique regulator: regulates a profession as well as transactions.
- ✎ It **functions under Ministry of Commerce.**

**Members:**

It has a chairman and 10 members. Present chairman is M S Sahoo. Following is the structure of the IBBI.

- ✓ One Chairperson
- ✓ Three members from Central Government officers not below the rank of Joint Secretary or equivalent.
- ✓ One nominated member from the RBI.
- ✓ Five members nominated by the Central Government; of these, three shall be whole-time members.

More than half of the directors of its board shall be independent directors.

**Functions:**

- ✓ It provides a market-determined and time bound mechanism for orderly resolution of insolvency, wherever possible, and orderly exit, wherever required.
- ✓ It writes and enforces rules for transactions, namely, corporate insolvency resolution, corporate liquidation, individual insolvency resolution and individual bankruptcy under the Code.
- ✓ It seeks to consolidate and amend laws relating to reorganisation as well as insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals in a time-bound manner.

**Source: PIB**

**Government to bear MDR charges on digital transactions up to Rs 2,000****Why in news?**

In a major push towards making India a less-cash economy, the Union Cabinet decided to bear the **merchant discount rate (MDR)** applicable on digital payments up to Rs2,000 made through debit cards, BHIM UPI or Aadhaar-enabled payment systems (AePS).

- ◆ A value of Rs 2,000 will be borne by the government for a period of two years with effect from 1 January.

**Background:**

- ☑ According to recent RBI notification, from January 1 2018, small merchants (turnover upto Rs.20 lakh) will pay a maximum MDR of 0.40% of bill value and larger merchants (turnover greater than Rs.20 lakh) will shell out 0.90%.

- ☑ RBI has also set monetary cap at Rs.200 per bill for small merchants and Rs.1,000 for large ones.
- ☑ As per RBI rules, merchant has to pay MDR out of his own pocket and cannot pass it on to the customer.

#### **Significance of this relaxation:**

- ☑ As a result of this approval, consumer and merchant will not suffer any additional burden in form of MDR thereby leading to greater adoption of digital payment modes for such transactions.
- ☑ It will help to move towards less cash economy, since such transactions account for sizeable percentage of transaction volume.

#### **What is merchant discount rate (MDR)?**

MDR is the charge paid by a merchant to a bank for accepting payment from customers via credit or debit cards. It is expressed as a percentage of the transaction amount.

- ☒ In India, the RBI specifies maximum MDR charges that can be levied on every card transaction.



#### **Wrong usages of MDR:**

##### **Over-charging MDR:**

Sometimes, merchants charging even more than the MDR, thereby gaining extra money than the price or the bill presented to the client. It can be reasonably argued that this is defrauding the customer and is illegal and should be prohibited.

##### **Customer pays more without being known:**

In the case of petrol pump outlets, at the time of payment, the customer pays only the cost of the fuel and no additional fees are added to the transaction. However, on receiving the statement of the card, it can be seen that the amount charged for the transaction at the petrol pump is more than the amount swiped for. The additional amount is the surcharge or MDR which is added to the total transaction value and is charged to the customer. This is unfortunate as the customer does not know that he will be paying the extra charge.

**Source: Business Standard**

## **FRDI Bill clauses aimed at protecting depositors' interests: Government**

#### **Why in news?**

Defending the provisions of the Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance Bill 2017, or FRDI Bill, the government said the clauses in the legislation are aimed at protecting the interests of depositors.

#### **Background:**

- ☑ The Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance Bill, 2017 (FRDI Bill), was introduced in the Lok Sabha on August 11, 2017.
- ☑ The bill is presently under consideration of the Joint Committee of Parliament. The Joint Committee is consulting all the stakeholders on the provisions of the FRDI Bill.
- ☑ The committee is now set to invite the RBI governor Urjit Patel to brief the members.
- ☑ The bill was opposed by the bank unions who have also requested the Finance Minister Arun Jaitley to withdraw this legislation. The bill has been criticized for some of its controversial provisions, including a "bail-in" clause which suggests that depositor money could be used by failing financial institutions to stay afloat.

#### **About the bill:**

- ☒ The Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance Bill, 2017, seeks to give comfort to consumers of financial service providers in financial distress.
- ☒ It also aims to inculcate discipline among financial service providers in the event of financial crises by limiting the use of public money to bail out distressed entities.

- ✎ The Bill, when enacted, will pave the way for setting up of a resolution corporation.
- ✎ The Bill would provide for a comprehensive resolution framework for specified financial sector entities to deal with bankruptcy situation in banks, insurance companies and financial sector entities.
- ✎ It would lead to repeal or amendment of resolution-related provisions in sectoral Acts as listed in the schedules of the Bill.
- ✎ It will also result in the repeal of the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation Act, 1961, to transfer deposit insurance powers and responsibilities to the resolution corporation.
- ✎ The resolution corporation would protect the stability and resilience of the financial system; protecting the consumers of covered obligations up to a reasonable limit; and protecting public funds, to the extent possible.

### **Significance of the Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance Bill, 2017:**

- ☑ The FRDI Bill is far more depositor friendly than many other jurisdictions, which provide for statutory bail-in, where consent of creditors / depositors is not required for bail-in.
- ☑ The FRDI Bill does not propose in any way to limit the scope of powers for the Government to extend financing and resolution support to banks, including Public Sector Banks. The Government's implicit guarantee for Public Sector Banks remains unaffected.
- ☑ It would help in maintaining financial stability in the economy by ensuring adequate preventive measures, while at the same time providing the necessary instruments for dealing with an event of crisis.
- ☑ The Bill aims to strengthen and streamline the current framework of deposit insurance for the benefit of a large number of retail depositors. Further, this Bill seeks to decrease the time and costs involved in resolving distressed financial entities.

**Source: Business Standard, Live Mint**

## **BPO Promotion Schemes put small towns on Global Digital Map**

### **Why in news?**

The government has so far allotted over 35,000 out of 48,300 seats under **India BPO promotion scheme** that aims to put smaller towns on the global digital map, and is likely to meet the full target in six months.

### **About India BPO Promotion Scheme (IBPS):**

IBPS was envisaged under Digital India Programme.

#### **Aim:**

- ✓ IBPS aims to incentivize establishment of **48,300 seats** in respect of BPO/ITES operations across the country [excluding certain Cities and the States in North East Region (NER)].
- ✓ It is **distributed among each State in proportion of State's population** with an outlay of Rs. 493 Crore.



### **Salient Features of the scheme:**

- ✓ Financial Support: Up to 50% of expenditure incurred on BPO/ITES operations towards capital expenditure (CAPEX) and/or operational expenditure (OPEX) on admissible items, subject to an upper ceiling of **1 Lakh/Seat in the form of Viability Gap Funding (VGF)**.
- ✓ Under the IBPS, the quantum of financial support shall be determined through an open bid system, subject to overall ceiling of Rs. 1 lakh per seat.
- ✓ Special incentives toward employment of women & specially enabled persons.
- ✓ Incentive for generating employment beyond target & wider dispersal within state including rural areas.

- ✓ Encouragement for local entrepreneurs.
- ✓ Special consideration for Hilly states of HP, J&K and UK.

#### **Significance of the scheme:**

- ✓ This scheme has potential to create employment opportunities of around 1.5 lakh direct jobs considering three shift operations. It may also create good number of indirect jobs.
- ✓ IBPS would help in capacity building in smaller cities in terms of infra & manpower and would become basis for next wave of IT/ITES led growth.

#### **About North East BPO Promotion Scheme (NEBPS):**

- ✎ The North East BPO Promotion Scheme (NEBPS), envisaged under Digital India Programme, seeks to incentivize establishment of 5,000 seats in respect of BPO/ITES operations in North East Region (NER).
- ✎ It offers to create employment opportunities for about 15,000 persons considering three shifts BPO/ITES operations.
- ✎ The NEBPS is to be **implemented in all the eight (8) States of NER viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura.**

#### **Background:**

BPOs in small towns or even rural areas may help India retain its cost arbitrage – many BPOs have already migrated its voice processes to cheaper countries.

**Source: PIB**

## **India opposes e-commerce talks at WTO**

### **Why in news?**

India has for the first time submitted a formal document opposing any negotiations on e-commerce at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

### **Key Facts**

- ◆ India has said that it would continue the work under the work programme on e-commerce based on the existing guidelines.
- ◆ In the submission, India asked the General Council, the highest decision-making body of WTO, for periodic reviews based on reports made by agencies responsible for implementation of the work programme and “report to the next session of the ministerial conference”.

### **What is the issue?**

E-commerce entered the WTO in 1998, when member countries agreed not to impose customs duties on electronic transmissions, and the moratorium has been extended periodically.

- ✎ However, since last year, many countries have made submissions on various aspects of digital trade such as cross-border data flows, server localisation, technology transfer, source code, consumer protection, intellectual property rights and trade facilitation aspects of e-commerce.
- ✎ While the United States last year floated a proposal on e-commerce prohibiting digital customs duties, enabling cross-border data flows, promoting a free and open internet and preventing localisation barriers, China wants easier norms for goods ordered over the internet but physically delivered.
- ✎ The European Union, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Nigeria and Singapore too want outcomes in e-commerce disciplines.
- ✎ Intense efforts are now being made by some countries to secure a mandate to initiate comprehensive negotiations on e-commerce.



- ✎ In the run-up to the ministerial conference in Buenos Aires, some countries wanted to convert this temporary moratorium on customs duty on electronic transmissions into a permanent one. According to experts, this could result in considerable leakage of revenue as more products and services get delivered through electronic transmissions.
- ✎ With rapid developments in manufacturing through 3-D printing, absence of customs duty could have severe adverse impact on the domestic manufacturing sector.

#### **Evolution of work programme on e-commerce:**

- ☑ At the Second Ministerial Conference in May 1998, ministers, recognizing that global electronic commerce was growing and creating new opportunities for trade, adopted the Declaration on Global Electronic Commerce.
- ☑ This called for the establishment of a work programme on e-commerce, which was adopted in September 1998.

#### **About work programme on e-commerce:**

- ✎ The work programme on e-commerce was adopted by the WTO countries in 1998.
- ✎ Periodic reviews of the programme are conducted by the General Council based on reports from the WTO bodies responsible for implementing the programme.
- ✎ The WTO Work Programme on Electronic Commerce covers all issues related to trade arising from global e-commerce, including enhancing internet connectivity and access to information and telecommunications technologies and public internet sites, the growth of mobile commerce, electronically delivered software, cloud computing, the protection of confidential data, privacy and consumer protection.
- ✎ The programme also explores the economic development opportunities afforded by e-commerce for developing countries, particularly least-developed countries.

#### **Who are responsible of carrying out the work programme?**

Four WTO bodies are charged with the responsibility of carrying out the work programme:

1. The Council for Trade in Services,
2. The Council for Trade in Goods,
3. The Council for TRIPS and
4. The Committee on Trade and Development.

**Source: Economic Times**

### **Techno-commercial agreement signed with Spain for three RRTS corridors**

#### **Why in news?**

Recently, **India and Spain have signed Techno-commercial agreement to provide institutional mechanism for mutual cooperation in field of urban transport and for construction of the three Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS).**

- ◆ The agreement will enable availability of technical advice on specific issues, besides providing training and collaboration in technical areas of track, signalling, rolling stock, multi-modal integration, safety, station design etc.
- ◆ It will also provide institutional mechanism for mutual cooperation in field of urban transport and especially in implementation of RRTS project.



#### **About RRTS:**

- ✎ The Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) is semi-high speed rail system proposed by the National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB) to connect Delhi with its distant suburbs corridors with trains running at a max speed of 180 km/hr.

- ✎ It will use state-of-the-art technologies for track structure, rolling stock and signalling system.
- ✎ The objective of this system is to reduce dependence of commuters on road based transportation and enhance regional connectivity within the National Capital Region.

#### Significance of the RRTS:

- ◆ RRTS will significantly reduce the travel time between important NCR towns.
- ◆ On completion, RRTS will emerge as the fastest, comfortable and safe mode of transport in NCR.

#### Corridors in first phase:

RRTS consists of three corridors viz., Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut, Delhi-Gurgaon-Alwar and Delhi-Panipat sections with a total length of 380 kms.

#### Implementing agency:

**National Capital Region Transport Corporation**, a joint venture between Union Government and state governments of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi is mandated to design, construct, operate and maintain rail based RRTS in National Capital Region (NCR).

*Source: Indian Express*

## WTO Buenos Aires meet ends with no consensus on key issues

#### Why in news?

The 11th ministerial conference (MC11) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) ended without any substantial outcome as consensus eluded the 164-member body.

- ◆ The meeting ended in stalemate after U.S. criticism and member country vetoes, raising questions about the body's ability to govern increasingly disputed global trade.



#### India's achievements at MC11:

- ☑ The outcome of the conference was a positive one for India as the country was able to secure the interests of its farmers as well food security for the poor.
- ☑ India was successful stopping any of the new issues like investment facilitation and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) from entering the ambit of the WTO.
- ☑ India became the second largest proponent of issues after the EU as it submitted proposals on six issues — **public stock-holding**, special safeguards mechanism, domestic regulation, domestic support, trade facilitation in services, and eCommerce.
- ☑ India has managed to score a diplomatic win at MC11 by ensuring there is no dilution in the **peace clause** extending protection to all minimum support price (MSP) programmes for foodgrains, no commitments to curb fisheries subsidies and no fast-tracking of e-commerce talks.

#### What is 'Peace Clause'?

- ✎ Currently, an interim mechanism called the 'Peace Clause' is in place, as per which WTO members had agreed not to challenge developing nations at the WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism if they breached the cap of the product-specific domestic support (which is 10% of the value of production).
- ✎ The 'Peace Clause' is available to developing nations, including India, till a permanent solution is found to public stockholding for food security purposes.

#### Why is it difficult to invoke?

- ✎ The 'Peace Clause' is difficult to invoke even in its current form because prior to using it, the country concerned will have to first admit that it 'is breaching' or 'is about to breach' the ceiling entitlement to give product-specific domestic support.

- ✎ Also, the 'Peace Clause' can be used only for public stockholding programmes that have been in existence on the date at which it was agreed upon at the Bali Ministerial Conference in December 2013, and not for new programmes on public stockholding for food security purposes.

**Source: The Hindu, Indian Express**

## **6th International Tourism Mart**

### **Why in news?**

Recently, the 6th International Tourism Mart (ITM) was organized by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, in association with the North Eastern States in Guwahati, Assam.

### **About International Tourism Marts:**

The International Tourism Marts is an annual event organised in the North Eastern region with the objective of highlighting the tourism potential of the region in the domestic and international markets.

- ✎ It brings together the tourism business fraternity and entrepreneurs from the eight North Eastern States.
- ✎ The International Tourism Marts are organised in the North Eastern States on rotation basis.
- ✎ The earlier editions of this mart have been held in Guwahati, Tawang, Shillong, Gangtok and Imphal.

### **Focus areas of the 6th ITM:**

The 6th International Tourism Mart, will put the spotlight on India's "Act East Policy", blossoming ties with ASEAN and the larger East Asia region, home to the world's rapidly growing economies and India's emerging tourism markets.

### **Scope of tourism in North East Region:**

- ☑ The North East Region of India comprising the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim, is endowed with diverse tourist attractions and products.
- ☑ The varied topography of the region, its flora and fauna, the ethnic communities with their rich heritage of ancient traditions and lifestyles, its festivals, arts and crafts, make it a holiday destination waiting to be explored.

**Source: PIB**

## **'World Economic Situation and Prospects 2018' report**

### **Why in news?**

The World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2018 report was recently released. The report was **unveiled by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)**.

### **Highlights of the report:**

#### **Global scenario:**

- ✓ At the global level, growth is expected to remain steady at 3% in 2018 and 2019.
- ✓ Overall, economic outlook for South Asia is seen largely favourable and steady for the short term, notwithstanding significant medium-term challenges.
- ✓ The world economy also faces longer-term challenges – increasing economic diversification, reducing inequality, supporting long-term investment and tackling institutional deficiencies.
- ✓ Few least developed countries (LDCs) are expected to reach the Sustainable Development Goal target for GDP growth of at least 7 per cent in the near term.
- ✓ Environmental sustainability Preliminary estimates suggest that the level of CO2 emissions increased in 2017.

**India related facts:**

- ✓ India's economy is likely to expand by 7.2 per cent in 2018 and go up further to 7.4 per cent in the following year on the back of strong private consumption, public investment and the ongoing structural reforms.
- ✓ The report has projected India with a positive outlook despite the slowdown in 2017 and the lasting effects of demonetisation.
- ✓ Though the credit growth is restrained despite monetary easing, however bank recapitalisation and the Indian Bankruptcy Code (IBC) have the potential to revive credit growth.

**About United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA):**

UN DESA is **part of the United Nations Secretariat**.

- ✎ It is responsible for the follow-up to major United Nations Summits and Conferences.
- ✎ Specifically, UN DESA is tasked with supporting deliberations in two major UN charter bodies: **the UN General Assembly** and **UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**, including ECOSOC's subsidiary bodies.
- ✎ It assists countries around the world in agenda-setting and decision-making with the goal of meeting their economic, social and environmental challenges and promoting development for all.
- ✎ It supports international cooperation to promote sustainable development for all, having as a foundation the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015.
- ✎ It is also a member of the United Nations Development Group.

**Source: Live Mint**

## **Government inks \$250 million Loan Agreement with World Bank for SANKALP Project**

**Why in news?**

The Union Government has signed US \$250 million loan agreement with World Bank for **"Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion" (SANKALP) Project** to support livelihood. World Bank's financing arm International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) will provide this loan.

**SANKALP Project:**

- ☑ SANKALP is a Centrally sponsored outcome focused scheme marking shift in government's implementation strategy in vocational education and training from inputs to results.
- ☑ SANKALP will provide market relevant training to 3.5 crore youth.

**Objectives of the Project:**

- ☑ The Objective of the project is to enhance institutional mechanisms for skills development and increase access to quality and market-relevant training for the work force.
- ☑ It is aimed at institutional reforms and improving quality & market relevance of skill development training programs in long and short term Vocational Education and Training (VET).
- ☑ It is also aimed at channelizing energy of youth in proper education, skill and jobs.
- ☑ It will provide market relevant training to youths and enhance their employability potential to maximum extent possible.
- ☑ The scheme will provide the required impetus to National Skill Development Mission, 2015 and its various sub missions. It is aligned to flagship programs of Government such as Make in India and Swachhta Abhiyan and aim at developing globally competitive workforce for domestic and overseas requirements.

**Key result areas for project:**

Institutional Strengthening at National and State Levels for Planning, Improved Quality and Market Relevance of Skills Development Programs; Delivering, and Monitoring High-Quality Market-Relevant Training; Improved access to and completion of skills training for female trainees and other disadvantaged groups and Expanding skills training through private-public partnerships (PPPs).

**Source: PIB**

**India's first National Rail and Transportation University at Vadodara****Why in news?**

The Union Cabinet has approved proposal of Ministry of Railways to set up first ever National Rail and Transport University (NRTU) in Vadodara to skill its human resources and build capability.

**Key facts:**

- ◆ The University will be set up as Deemed to Be University under de novo category as per UGC (Institutions Deemed to be Universities) Regulations, 2016.
- ◆ The Ministry of Railways will set up a not-for-profit Company under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013 as Managing Company of proposed university.
- ◆ The company will provide financial and infrastructural support to the university and appoint Chancellor and Pro-Chancellor of the university.
- ◆ Board of Management of the company will comprise of professionals and academics. It will be independent of Managing Company with full autonomy to perform its academic and administrative responsibilities.
- ◆ The funding of the new University will entirely come from Ministry of Railways.

**Need for such university:**

Indian Railways has embarked ambitious projects such as High Speed Trains (popularly known as bullet train) between Mumbai and Ahmedabad. It will include massive infrastructure modernisation, Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs), highest focus on safety etc.

- ✓ Indian Railways will require high level of proficiency and skills.
- ✓ Further, factors such as unprecedented growth in the transportation sector in India, increased requirement of qualified manpower and upgradation of skills and capability required to drive the transformation of Indian Railways have necessitated a world-class training hub.

**Significance:**

- ☑ This university will support 'Startup India' and 'Skill India' by channeling technology and delivering knowhow, and foster entrepreneurship, generating large scale employment opportunities.
- ☑ This will help for transformation of railway and transportation sector and enable faster movement of people and goods.
- ☑ It will have 'Centres of Excellence' showcasing high-end, niche technology like High Speed Train

**Source: PIB**

**India ranks 100 in global prosperity index, closes gap up with China****Why in news?**

India was ranked 100th among 149 countries on the list of prosperous countries released as part of The **Legatum Prosperity Index 2017**.

**What is Legatum Prosperity Index?**

- ☒ Legatum Prosperity Index is **an annual ranking developed by the London-based Legatum Institute**.

- ✎ It is **world's leading global measure of economic and social wellbeing that studies 104 indicators** under these categories: Economic Quality, Governance, Business Environment, Personal Freedom, Safety and Security, Social Capital, Education, Health and Natural Environment.
- ✎ The Index offers a unique insight into how prosperity is forming and changing across the world.

### **Highlights of the Legatum Prosperity Index 2017:**

- ✎ World prosperity increased in 2017 and now sits at its highest level in the last decade. It is now 2.6% higher than in 2007.
- ✎ Furthermore, prosperity growth has been faster from 2012 to 2017 than it was from 2007 to 2012.
- ✎ However, the gap between the highest and lowest scores in the Index has increased for five straight years and the spread between nations is growing, indicating that while prosperity as a whole may be increasing, not all countries are yet benefiting from the increase.
- ✎ While prosperity improved around the world in 2017, no region grew as fast as Asia-Pacific.
- ✎ Gains came through a fast-improving Business Environment, especially in the population centres of India (100th), China (90th), Pakistan (137th) and Indonesia (59th).
- ✎ It is now easier to access credit, and intellectual property rights have improved.
- ✎ The gap between China and India's prosperity has narrowed by four ranks since 2016 and to quarter of what it was in 2012.

### **Improved government accountability:**

- ✓ Every region in the world improved in Governance in 2017, with Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa rising fastest.
- ✓ Across the world judiciaries became more independent from state interference and the process of challenging governmental regulation became easier.
- ✓ People also became more confident in the outcome of elections.

### **Decreasing Safety and Security in the MENA region:**

- ✓ Despite gains in Social Capital and a strengthening Business Environment, overall prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has suffered in recent years through worsening Safety and Security.
- ✓ Casualties from both war and terrorism have increased, along with a rise in state-sponsored violence.

### **Significance of this ranking**

The rising trend in India's prosperity is significant in view of fact that India registered lower economic growth following demonetisation and implementation of goods and services tax (GST) reform in 2017.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **Tuirial power project**

### **Why in news?**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has formally dedicated the 60 MW Tuirial Hydro Electric Power Project (HEPP) to the nation.

### **About Tuirial HEPP:**

Tuirial HEPP is the biggest power project **located in the State of Mizoram**.

- ✎ It will feed the entire energy to be generated to the home State, which will facilitate all-round development of the State and achieving Government of India's ambitious and flagship Mission '24x7 Affordable Clean Power for All'.

- ✎ Tuirial HEPP has been constructed as a central sector project and implemented by North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO), under the administrative control of the Ministry of Power, Government of India.

### **Significance of Tuirial HEPP:**

Mizoram's current demand of electricity is only 87 MW and this is being met by State's mini power projects and availability of its share of power from central sector projects.

- ☑ With the additional 60 MW of electricity from the project, the State of Mizoram will now be the third power-surplus State in North East India after Sikkim and Tripura.
- ☑ Apart from attaining self-sufficiency in electric power, the project will fetch other spin-off benefits to the State of Mizoram like employment generation, navigation, water supply, pisciculture and wild life conservation, tourism etc.

**Source: PIB**

## **Cabinet approves new skill development scheme for textile sector**

### **Why in news?**

The Union Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved a new skill development scheme – Scheme for Capacity Building in Textiles Sector (SCBTS).

### **About the scheme:**

The Scheme for Capacity Building in Textiles Sector (SCBTS) will have National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) compliant training courses with funding norms as per the common norms notified by Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

- ◆ The scheme covers the textile sector's entire value chain excluding spinning and weaving in the organised sector, from 2017-18 to 2019-20 at an outlay of Rs 1,300 crore.

### **Objectives:**

- ✓ The objectives of the scheme are to provide demand driven, placement oriented skilling programme to incentivise the efforts of the industry in creating jobs in the organised textile and related sectors.
- ✓ The scheme aims to promote skilling and skill up-gradation in the traditional sectors through respective sectoral divisions/organisations of Ministry of Textiles; and to provide livelihood to all sections of the society across the country.

### **Implementation:**

- ✓ The skilling programmes would be implemented through textile Industry /Units, reputed training institutions and Institutions of Ministry of Textiles /State Governments having placement tie-ups with textile industry/units.

### **Beneficiaries:**

- ✓ The scheme will be implemented for the benefit of all sections of the society across the country including rural, remote, LWE affected, North East, J&K by imparting skills in the identified job roles.
- ✓ Preference will be given to various social groups, SC, ST, differently abled, minorities and other vulnerable groups.
- ✓ Around 10 lakh people are expected to be skilled and certified in various segments of textile sector through the scheme, including about one lakh in traditional sectors.

**Source: PIB**

## **World Bank provides loans of \$125 m for STRIVE project**

### **Why in news?**

India has inked Financing Agreement with World Bank for International Development Association (IDA) Credit of US \$125 million (equivalent) for Skills Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement Operation (STRIVE) Project.

**What is STRIVE project?**

- ✎ The Skill Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement (STRIVE) project is an outcome focused scheme marking shift in government's implementation strategy in vocational education and training from inputs to results.
- ✎ STRIVE will focus to improve on the quality and the market relevance of vocational training provided in ITIs and strengthen the apprenticeship programme through industry-cluster approach.

**Objective of project**

- ☑ To improve access to quality and market-driven vocational training and apprenticeships. The closing date for the project is 30th November, 2022.

**Result areas for project include**

- ✓ Improved Teaching and Learning
- ✓ Improved and Broadened Apprenticeship Training.
- ✓ Improved Performance of Industrial Training Institutes.
- ✓ Increased Capacities of State Governments to Support Industrial Training Institutes and Apprenticeship Training.

**About International Development Association (IDA):**

The International Development Association (IDA) is the part of the World Bank that helps the world's poorest countries.

- ✎ Overseen by 173 shareholder nations, IDA aims to reduce poverty by providing loans (called "credits") and grants for programs that boost economic growth, reduce inequalities, and improve people's living conditions.
- ✎ IDA is one of the largest sources of assistance for the world's 771 poorest countries, 39 of which are in Africa, and is the single largest source of donor funds for basic social services in these countries.

**IDA and IBRD:**

- ✓ IDA complements the World Bank's original lending arm—the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).
- ✓ IBRD was established to function as a self-sustaining business and provides loans and advice to middle-income and credit-worthy poor countries.
- ✓ IBRD and IDA share the same staff and headquarters and evaluate projects with the same rigorous standards.

**Functions of the IDA:**

- ✓ IDA lends money on concessional terms. This means that IDA credits have a zero or very low interest charge and repayments are stretched over 25 to 40 years, including a 5- to 10-year grace period. IDA also provides grants to countries at risk of debt distress.
- ✓ In addition to concessional loans and grants, IDA provides significant levels of debt relief through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative and the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI).

**Source: The Hindu**



## Ecology & Environment

### Bali declares 'garbage emergency' amid sea of waste

#### Why in news?

The Indonesian island of Bali recently declared a “garbage emergency” in response to the overwhelming amount of plastic waste that has floated ashore and spoiled pristine beaches.

- ◆ A 3.6-mile stretch of beach on the island’s western coast was declared an emergency zone after authorities realised that the volume of plastic being washed up was endangering the tourist trade.

#### Background:

- ☑ Indonesia is the world’s second largest contributor to marine debris, outdone only by China, the most populous country in the world.
- ☑ In addition to degrading the beaches, plastic waste blocks waterways, impacting transportation and increasing flooding risk, while posing a risk to marine animals.
- ☑ Indonesia is one of nearly 40 countries that are **part of UN Environment’s Clean Seas campaign**, which aims to halt the tide of plastic trash polluting the oceans.

#### What is Clean Seas campaign?

**UN Environment launched Clean Seas** in February 2017, with the aim of engaging governments, the general public, civil society and the private sector in the **fight against marine plastic litter**.

- ✎ The campaign aims to counter the torrents of plastic trash that are degrading our oceans and endangering the life they sustain.
- ✎ Nearly 40 countries from Kenya to Canada and Indonesia to Brazil have joined the CleanSeas campaign. These countries account for more than half of the world’s coastline.
- ✎ The campaign contributes to the goals of the **Global Partnership on Marine Litter**, a voluntary open-ended partnership for international agencies, governments, businesses, academia, local authorities and non-governmental organizations **hosted by UN Environment**.
- ✎ It is related to **Sustainable Development Goal 14** – “By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.”

In recent past, four more countries — Chile, Oman, Sri Lanka and South Africa joined this campaign.

*Source: The Hindu*

### Environment Ministry launches a Regional Project to Tackle Stubble Burning

#### Why in news?

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has approved a **regional project on ‘Climate Resilience Building among Farmers through Crop Residue Management’** under the **National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC)**.

**Key facts:**

- ◆ The first phase of the project has been approved at a cost of approximately Rs. 100 Crore for the States of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.
- ◆ The project will leverage approximately three times the approved amount with contribution from the States as well as farmers.
- ◆ The project not only aims to mitigate climate change impacts and enhance adaptive capacity, but will also counter the adverse environmental impacts that arise from burning.
- ◆ The project will be implemented following a phased approach. Initially, awareness generation and capacity building activities will be undertaken to encourage farmers to adopt alternate practices which would also help diversify livelihood options and enhance farmer's income.
- ◆ A slew of technological interventions will be undertaken for timely management of crop residue in addition to effective utilisation of existing machineries.
- ◆ Implementable and sustainable entrepreneurship models will be created in rural areas through upscaling successful initiatives and innovative ideas.

**Problem of crop residue burning in India:**

- ☑ The problem of crop residue burning has been intensifying over the years, with Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh being the major burning hotspots.
- ☑ Increased mechanization, declining number of livestock, long period required for composting and no economically viable alternate use of residues are some of the reasons for residues being burnt in field.
- ☑ This not only has implications for global warming, but also has an adverse impact on air quality, soil health and human health.

**About the NAFCC:**

Launched in 2015, the National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC) is a **flagship Scheme of Union Government, which provides 100 per cent grant to the State Governments for implementing climate change adaptation projects.**

- ✎ The Scheme **is designed to fulfil the objectives of National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and to operationalize the State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs).**
- ✎ The **National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is National Implementing Entity (NIE)** responsible for implementation of adaptation projects under NAFCC.
- ✎ The objective of NAFCC is to assist states/UTs that are particularly vulnerable to adverse effects of climate change in meeting the cost of adaptation.
- ✎ The projects address vulnerabilities in climate sensitive sectors like agriculture, animal husbandry, water, forests and coasts among others.
- ✎ The project outcomes are expected to increase resilience and adaptive capacity of vulnerable communities and ecosystems against climate change impacts.
- ✎ Under this scheme, Union Government is encouraging States to come up with innovative and scalable projects to develop resilience against climate change and mainstream it in the planning processes.

**Key facts:**

NABARD has been accredited as National Implementing Entity (NIE) for Adaptation Fund under Kyoto Protocol in July 2012 and is the only NIE for India.

**Source: PIB**

## New night frog species discovered in Western Ghats

### Why in news?

Scientists have discovered a new frog species from **Kozhikode's Malabar Wildlife Sanctuary**.

- ✎ The frog species, named **Mewa Singh's Night frog**, belongs to a genus endemic to the Western Ghats.
- ✎ The frog has been named after wildlife scientist Mewa Singh, in honour of his contributions to behavioural ecology and primate studies.

### About Mewa Singh's Night frog:

- ✎ It belongs to genus *Nyctibatrachus* (commonly known as night frogs) endemic only to Western Ghats mountain range.
- ✎ The frog's genetically closest relatives are the Athirappilly night frog (found south of the Palakkad Gap in Thrissur and Idukki) and the Kempholey night frog (found in the northern Western Ghats of Kerala and Karnataka).
- ✎ Currently, it is known only from Peruvannamuzhi in Malabar Wildlife Sanctuary in a small stream running along Peruvannamuzhi dam.

### Significance of this discovery:

Frogs in the genus *Nyctibatrachus*, commonly known as night frogs, are found only in the Western Ghats mountain range. The addition of the Mewa Singh's night frog to this group brings the total number of night frogs to 36.

**Source: The Hindu**

## Protection of Majuli Island

### Why in news?

A new scheme for protection of Majuli Island in Assam from flood and erosion of river Brahmaputra has been launched.

### About the scheme:

- ✎ The scheme was sanctioned by Government of India in March, 2017.
- ✎ The scheme has been **framed by Brahmaputra Board** based on the recommendations of the high level Expert Committee of the Government of India that visits the island at least twice a year to monitor and recommend anti-erosion measures.

### Funding:

The funding for the project **would be from Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER)**.

### Components:

The major components of the scheme include

- ✓ Bank revetment with geo bags filled with earth / sand for a reach length of 27 km in 14 locations
- ✓ RCC porcupine works in 41 locations
- ✓ Construction of a sluice and
- ✓ Construction of a Pilot channel for a length of 3.50 km.



### Need for protection of Majuli Island:

- ✓ The area of Majuli island was 734 sq km in 1914 whereas, the minimum area was recorded to be 502 sq km in 2004. As per Survey of India topo-sheets and satellite imagery data, area lost by the Island is 206.7 sqkm from the year 1949 upto the year 2004.

- ✓ Geomorphologically, the entire Majuli island is a part of the alluvial flood plains of the Brahmaputra river. The Island is formed of soil consisting mainly of silt deposits. The soil is without cohesion and thus, susceptible to erosion. The problem of erosion has been severe after the disastrous earthquake of 1950.
- ✓ Although some measures were taken in the form of embankment and anti-erosion work by Government of Assam, the problem of erosion and flood remained mostly uncontained. The embankments built during the 60s were in poor condition.

### About Majuli:

The biggest river island in the world, Majuli is located on the river Brahmaputra in Assam and is formed by Brahmaputra in the south and the Kherkutia Xuti joined by the river Subansiri in the north.

- ✎ The river island covering an area of around 880 sqkm.
- ✎ Majuli, inhabited mostly by Mishing tribal people, has been the hub of Assamese neo-Vaishnavite culture that 15th century saint-reformer Srimanta Sankardeva had initiated.
- ✎ The island had some 65 satras or monasteries adhering to Vaishnavism, but a large number relocated to the mainland after being washed away.
- ✎ The main surviving satras include Dakhinpat, Garamurh, Auniati, Kamalabari and Bengenaati.

### Key facts:

- ◆ In June 2016, Assam Government had officially declared the island as the district making it India's first island district.
- ◆ The island has been nominated for the World Heritage Site status. It has been included in the tentative list by UNESCO.
- ◆ The Guinness World Records has officially designed Majuli Island on the Brahmaputra in Assam as the largest river island in the world. It has **toppled previous record held by Brazil's Marajo island in the Amazon river.**
- ◆ It is noteworthy that Brahmaputra is one of the most difficult rivers to tackle as it is very dynamic with morphology changing continuously. Measures adopted elsewhere may not be applicable in this river which is 3rd largest in the world and carries highest silt amongst the rivers of its size.

**Source:PIB**

## Arunachal Pradesh declared open defecation-free State

### Why in news

Arunachal Pradesh emerged as the **second state in the Northeast, after Sikkim, to be declared Open Defecation Free.**

- ✎ Overall Arunachal Pradesh became **the fifth state after Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and Haryana to be declared ODF state.**
- ✎ With this, Arunachal has 21 districts and the state attained the feat much before the national deadline of October 2, 2019.

### Background:

- ☑ Arunachal Pradesh has managed to do this before the deadline of October 2, 2019.
- ☑ The state government had cut short the national ODF target by one year and ten months ahead of the national target and set 31 December, 2017, as the final target to achieve ODF status in Arunachal Pradesh.

### About Swachh Bharat Mission:

- ✎ Swachh Bharat Mission is a massive mass movement that seeks to create a Clean India by 2019.

- ✎ The father of our nation Mr. Mahatma Gandhi always puts the emphasis on swachhta as swachhta leads to healthy and prosperous life. Keeping this in mind, the Indian government has decided to launch the swachh bharat mission on October 2, 2014.
- ✎ The mission will **cover all rural and urban areas**.
- ✎ The **urban component** of the mission will be implemented **by the Ministry of Urban Development**, and the **rural component by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation**.

#### Major components of the goal:

- ☑ Elimination of open defecation, conversion of insanitary toilets to pour flush toilets, eradicating of manual scavenging and Municipal Solid Waste Management (MSWM).
- ☑ Construction of individual sanitary latrines for households below the poverty line with subsidy (80 percent) where demand exists
- ☑ Conversion of dry latrines into low-cost sanitary latrines
- ☑ Construction of exclusive village sanitary complexes for women providing facilities for hand pumping, bathing, sanitation and washing on a selective basis where there is not adequate land or space within houses and where village panchayats are willing to maintain the facilities.
- ☑ Setting up of sanitary marts
- ☑ Total sanitation of villages through the construction of drains, soakage pits, solid and liquid waste disposal
- ☑ Intensive campaign for awareness generation and health education to create a felt need for personal, household and environmental sanitation facilities.

#### Significance of Swachh Bharat Mission:

- ☑ Open defecation is an important factor for causing various diseases like intestinal worm infections, diarrhoea, polio, hepatitis etc. These diseases kill hundreds of thousands of children each year, and stunt the physical and cognitive development of those who survive.
- ☑ Announcing a goal of accelerating the reduction in open defecation was a great idea, articulating a worthy goal for serious public policy efforts.

*Source: Indian Express*

### Centre releases draft action plan to tackle air pollution in Delhi

#### Why in news?

A high-level task force headed by Nripendra Misra, principal secretary to the Prime Minister, released a 12-point draft plan to tackle pollution in Delhi NCR.

#### Background:

- ☑ The task force was formed after a severe spell of pollution in the region in November when air quality remained at hazardous levels for almost two weeks.
- ☑ The centre and the Union environment ministry faced flak for failing to coordinate actions across states that impacted Delhi NCR's air quality.
- ☑ The environment secretary is tasked with ensuring implementation of the measures, while the task force will step in occasionally to monitor progress. The direct intervention by the PMO would give the action plan more heft.



#### About the 12-point 'Air Action Plan – Abatement of Air Pollution:

##### 1. Crop stubble burning, monitoring and interstate coordination:

- ✓ Coordinated action to combat stubble burning in Punjab, Haryana and UP.
- ✓ Implement roll out of the agreed plan for managing crop stubble.
- ✓ Monitor agreed enforcement measures to reduce crop stubble burning.

- ✓ Ensure that independent data on crop stubble burning is available in real time.
- 2. Pollution monitoring and source attribution:**
- ✓ Ensure that Delhi/ NCR has an adequate network of air quality monitoring stations
  - ✓ Commission and validate source attribution studies for the National Capital Region (annually).
  - ✓ Set up an anti-Pollution Help-Line in NCR Districts to register complaints of specific violations.
  - ✓ A pollution app should also be prepared wherein citizens can take a picture of the violation and upload it for quick remedial action.
- 3. Reducing pollution from power plants and other polluting industries:**
- ✓ NO<sub>x</sub> curtailment measures in all power plants in NCR region in a time bound manner by NTPC and other operators.
  - ✓ MoEF to develop a dashboard of all the Red Category polluting units in NCR. Each of these units to install a certified pollution meter within their premises.
  - ✓ Strict action should be taken regarding brick kilns operating in NCR.
  - ✓ Enforce all brick-kilns to migrate to **zig-zag technology** [A technology which bricks are arranged to allow hot air to travel in a zigzag path. This reduces coal consumption to about 20%].
  - ✓ State and municipal actions required to reduce air pollution.
- 4. Solid waste management:**
- ✓ MCDs to increase decentralized processing of bio-degradable waste, to fill the gap between waste collected and processed.
  - ✓ An independent verification mechanism should be set up to check whether 100% solid waste is actually being collected– with specific focus on poor communities such as slums and JJ clusters.
- 5. Managing and remediating sanitary landfills:**
- ✓ Steps must be taken to ensure that there are no fires at sanitary landfills. Municipal Bodies must access special expertise to douse landfill fires.
  - ✓ Remediation measures for the all three sanitary landfill sites should be initiated in 6 months.
- 6. Construction and demolition (C&D) waste:**
- ✓ Large construction Agencies like NBCC and CPWD that are working in the National Capital Region should set up their own facilities for processing C&D waste and reuse the products in their own projects.
- 7. Mechanized road sweeping and managing road dust:**
- ✓ At present, it is reported that about 15% of road sweeping in Delhi is mechanized. This should increase to at least 40% in the next 4 months.
  - ✓ Delhi PWD, Irrigation Department and MCDs to take up greening or green paving of central verges, roadside berms, sides of drains, etc. over the next one year with monitorable targets.
  - ✓ Watering roadsides (pavement) and parking places by all the Municipal Corporations in Delhi to reduce dust as per agreed schedule.
  - ✓ Ensure SoPs [standard operating procedures] are followed at construction sites in terms of curtaining and sprinkling water to reduce dust.
  - ✓ Municipal Corporations, UD Department have to implement a strong behaviour change campaign involving Resident Welfare Associations and Market Trader Associations on proper management of solid waste to improve air quality.
- 8. Improving public transport:**
- ✓ Procurement of additional buses and improvement of last mile connectivity.
  - ✓ Increase number of metro coaches

- ✓ Journey Planner app integrating Metro, DIMTS and DTC services
  - ✓ Integrated ticketing across DTC, Cluster and Metro in six months
  - ✓ Ensure that non- destined trucks do not enter Delhi. Ensuring compliance of the Toll and Municipal charges for entering of trucks in Delhi.
- 9. Solid waste management in other NCR cities**
- ✓ The respective Divisional Commissioners will assess the management of Municipal solid waste in their jurisdictions, and, within 15 days, prepare a plan to ensure 100% collection and processing. The plan must have monitorable timelines and an independent verification mechanism.
  - ✓ Steps will be taken to combat road dust and dust arising from construction activities, broadly following the model set by Delhi.
- 10. Completion of Eastern and Western Peripheral Expressways within target dates.**
- 11. Encouraging electric vehicles and promoting shared and connected mobility:**
- ✓ Policy support to encourage Electric Vehicles, prioritising the use of EVs for public transport and promoting shared and connected mobility.
- 12. Reducing congestion:**
- ✓ In collaboration with the traffic police, identify choke points and take up projects to reduce congestion at these points; Similar exercise may be done in respect of Meerut, Rohtak and Gurugram divisions.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Biodiversity under alien attack

### Why in news?

The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has for the first time compiled a list of alien invasive animal species, totalling 157.

Of the 157 species, 58 are found on land and in freshwater habitats, while 99 are in the marine ecosystem.

This compilation was announced on the sidelines of the **National Conference on the Status of Invasive Alien Species in India, organised by the ZSI and the Botanical Survey of India (BSI).**

### What are Invasive Alien Species (IAS)?

Alien species is a species introduced by humans – either intentionally or accidentally – outside their natural areas, where they out-compete the native species and upset the ecological balance.

### Few examples of invasive alien species:

- ☑ **Paracoccus marginatus** (Papaya Mealy Bug), which belongs to Mexico and Central America but is **believed to have destroyed huge crops of papaya in Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.**
- ☑ **Phenacoccus solenopsis** (Cotton Mealybug) is a native of North America but has severely **affected cotton crops in the Deccan.**
- ☑ **Pterygoplichthys pardalis** (Amazon sailfin catfish) has been **destroying fish populations in the wetlands of Kolkata.**
- ☑ **Achatina fulica** (African apple snail) is said to be **most invasive among all alien fauna.** It is a mollusc and was first reported in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. But today it is found all across the country and is threatening the habitats of several native species.

### Impacts:

#### *Impacts on biodiversity*

- ✓ Invasive alien species are a major driver of biodiversity loss. In fact, an analysis of the IUCN Red List shows that they are the second most common threat associated with species that have

gone completely extinct, and are the most common threat associated with extinctions of amphibians, reptiles and mammals.

- ✓ Invasive alien species can also lead to changes in the structure and composition of ecosystems leading to significant detrimental impacts to ecosystem services, affecting economies and human wellbeing.
- ✓ Invasive alien species have invaded and affected native biota in almost every ecosystem type on Earth, and have affected all major taxonomic groups.

#### **Impacts on economy:**

- ✓ In economic terms, the costs of invasive alien species are significant.
- ✓ Total annual costs, including losses to crops, pastures and forests, as well as environmental damages and control costs, have been conservatively estimated to be in the hundreds of billions of dollars and possibly more than one trillion.
- ✓ This does not include valuation of species extinctions, losses in biodiversity, ecosystem services and aesthetics.

#### **What is being done?**

- ✎ In 2010, almost all of the world's governments adopted the Convention on Biological Diversity Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, which included 20 headline 'targets' referred to as the Aichi Targets. One of these targets (9) is specifically related to IAS.
- ✎ "Target 9: By 2020, invasive alien species and pathways are identified and prioritized, priority species are controlled or eradicated and measures are in place to manage pathways to prevent their introduction and establishment".
- ✎ This international commitment to addressing IAS was re-affirmed in 2015 through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which includes 17 goals (SDGs) each with specific targets. The SDGs have nature woven throughout acknowledging that nature is fundamental to human well-being. One of the SDGs #15 Life on land, has a target focusing specifically on IAS.
- ✎ "By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species".

#### **What needs to be done?**

Invasive alien species (IAS) are a global issue that requires international cooperation and actions.

- ✎ Preventing international movement of IAS and rapid detection at borders are less costly than control and eradication.
- ✎ Preventing the entry of IAS is carried out through inspections of international shipments, customs checks and proper quarantine regulations.
- ✎ Prevention requires collaboration among governments, economic sectors and non-governmental and international organizations.

**Source: The Hindu**

### **'Ganga Gram' project launched**

#### **Why in News?**

The Union Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation has formally launched 'Ganga Gram' project at the Ganga Gram Swachata Sammelan held in New Delhi.

- ◆ The project was launched under the Clean Ganga mission-Namami Gange Programme for holistic sanitation development in villages on the banks of River Ganga.

#### **What is Ganga Gram Project?**

- ✎ Ganga Gram project is an integrated approach for holistic development of villages situated on the banks of the holy River Ganga with active participation of villagers.

- ✎ The objectives of project include solid and liquid waste management, water conservation projects, renovation of ponds and water resources, organic farming, horticulture, and promotion of medicinal plants.

#### About Ganga Swachhata Manch:

- ✎ Ganga Swachhata Manch, a forum of individuals, academicians, civil society organisations and the like was also launched on the sidelines of Gram Swachhata Sannelan.
- ✎ It has been formed upon initiative of Minister for Drinking Water and Sanitation Uma Bharati.
- ✎ It has been created for awareness creation, knowledge sharing, learning and advocacy for Ganga Gram Project.



#### Background:

In August 2017, Centre had declared all 4,470 villages on the banks of River Ganga, located in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, open defecation-free (ODF). Of these villages, Centre and state governments have identified 24 villages to be taken up under pilot project to transform them into 'Ganga Grams'.

#### About Namami Gange Programme:

'Namami Gange' Programme, is a flagship programme of Government of India with a renewed impetus to decrease river pollution and conserve the revered river 'Ganga'.

- ✎ The Union government approved "Namami Gange" Program in May 2015.
- ✎ In this connection, the Indian Government solicited support from various countries to rejuvenate the Ganga.
- ✎ The program would be implemented by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), and its state counterpart organizations i.e., State Program Management Groups (SPMGs).
- ✎ According to the program, rejuvenation implies restoring the "wholesomeness" of the river and that includes three things: Aviral dhara (continuous flow), nirmal dhara (unpolluted flow) and ecological and geological integrity.
- ✎ Among other things, the programme will focus on pollution abatement interventions namely Interception, diversion & treatment of wastewater flowing through the open drains through bio-remediation / appropriate in-situ treatment / use of innovative technologies.
- ✎ Under this programme, the focus of the Government is to involve people living on the banks of the river to attain sustainable results.
- ✎ The programme also focuses on involving the States and grassroots level institutions such as Urban Local Bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions in implementation.

**Source: The Hindu**

### New scorpion species discovered in Tripura

#### Why in news?

A new scorpion species namely **Schaller's wood scorpion or Liocheles schalleri** was identified by researchers in **Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary of Tripura**.

- ◆ This new species was named in honour of celebrated wildlife biologist **George Schaller**, who has studied wildlife across the world, including the snow leopards of the Himalayas and central India's tigers.

#### About wood scorpions:

- ✎ Unlike the large scorpions, wood scorpions or dwarf scorpions are only about three cm long and live in small burrows on the ground, making them very difficult to spot.

- ✎ They also have fairly large and powerful pincers with which they crush their prey.

#### About the news species:

- ✎ Schaller's wood scorpion is the eleventh wood scorpion species to be discovered in India. 9 of India's 11 wood scorpions are endemic to the country. India is home to more than 125 species of scorpions.
- ✎ Schaller's wood scorpion is distinctly different from other recorded wood scorpions — the mid-portion of their pincers was differently-shaped as was the placement of their eyes, and they were far darker (a glossy black).

#### Where can the new species be found?

- ✎ The new species, *Liocheles schalleri* **occurs in the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot**, a region that has been poorly explored for its arachnid diversity.
- ✎ Schaller's wood scorpion is found in low elevations in parts of Tripura, including Trishna and Bison National Park.
- ✎ It is likely to be found in Bangladesh too, which is three km away from Tripura border.

#### About Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary:

- ✎ It is situated in South Tripura District of Tripura.
- ✎ The great attraction of this Wildlife Sanctuary is a sizeable population of **Gaur or Indian Bison**.
- ✎ It is also the habitat of and home to highly endangered **only ape species of Indian subcontinent i.e, the Hoolock Gibbon and primates like Capped Langur and Golden Langur**.
- ✎ One species of bamboo, locally known as **Kailliai** is found in this sanctuary. This bamboo is said to be endemic.
- ✎ **Rajbari (Bison) National Park** is a national park in the Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary.

**Source: The Hindu**

## India unveils anti-smog cannon in fight against Delhi pollution

### Why in news?

To combat pollution in the capital, the Delhi government plans to use an anti-smog cannon machine that sprays water into the air.

- ◆ The Delhi government has tested 'anti-smog guns' in the capital to deal with the winter smog.

### What is anti-smog gun?

- ✎ The anti-smog gun or fog cannon is a canon that sprays atomized water 50 metres into the air to bring down suspended pollutants.
- ✎ The device is connected to a water tank and it can be taken to different parts of the city on a vehicle.



### How it operates?

- ✎ The anti-smog cannon comprises a cylindrical drum with a tank to store water and a high-velocity exhaust fan. The water is pumped from the tank to the exhaust fan which blows out water in the form of micro droplets.
- ✎ The theory is that the sprayed water will cling on to the pollutants — particularly particulate matter PM2.5 and PM10 — and wash it down creating the effect of rain. The current trials will be used to find if the theory holds true.

The use of anti-smog gun in Delhi is inspired by the Chinese water cannons that were used by the authorities there with some success. The idea is that it reduces air pollution by binding dust and other particulate matter, and bring them down to the ground level. This could be of use in an arid place like Delhi. The plan has been made by looking at the three major sources of pollution—transport, industry, and road dust and fugitive emissions.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **New frog species identified in Arunachal**

### **Why in news?**

Scientists have discovered a new frog species in the **fast flowing streams in Arunachal Pradesh's Talley Valley Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) Lower Subansiri district.**

- ◆ The new species has been named after the state Arunachal Pradesh as *Odorrana arunachalensis*.
- ◆ The new species is **one of the five discovered in India in the recent times and the 59th in the world.** There are over 50 species of frogs belonging to the genus *Odorrana*.

### **About Frog species *Odorrana Arunachalensis*:**

- ✎ *Odorrana* (commonly known as the odorous frog) is a genus of true frogs (*Ranidae*) from East Asia and surrounding regions including India.
- ✎ It is a medium-sized green frog adapted for a life in torrential waters of Arunachal Pradesh.
- ✎ The presence of a black band-like mark between the eyes is a distinguishing character of the *Odorrana arunachalensis* that separates it from all the other frog species of this genus.
- ✎ This new species dwells in moss and fern covered rocky section along the hill streams in mixed wet tropical forest type.
- ✎ The *Odorrana Arunachalensis* species is majorly sighted during the wet season from April to September. They are not seen in the dry seasons.
- ✎ Currently, they are being sighted within and outskirts of the Talley Valley WLS but are expected to be found in a wider range due to the availability of similar habitats of this species in other parts of the state.

### **About Talley Valley Wildlife Sanctuary:**

- ✎ It is a **wildlife sanctuary as well as a bio-diversity hotspot located in Arunachal Pradesh.**
- ✎ It is situated at the altitude of 2400 metres with **rivers like Pange, Sipu, Karing and Subansiri** flowing through the Reserved Forest and Sanctuary.
- ✎ **Talley is plateau with dense forest** of silver fir trees, pine clad plateau of beautiful grandeur, and vast wasteland.
- ✎ It mainly comprises sub-tropical and alpine forests and has variety of flora and fauna, many of which are endangered. It is home to highly endangered species like **clouded leopard.**
- ✎ ***Pleioblastus simone*** is a bamboo variety only found in Talley Valley.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **Kaleshwaram irrigation project gets environmental nod**

### **Why in news?**

The Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) of Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has accorded environmental clearance for Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP) in Telangana.

- ◆ The project is to build at estimated to cost about Rs. 80,499.7 crore and proposed to be completed in three years. It is the costliest irrigation project to be taken up by any state in the country.

**About Kaleshwaram irrigation project:**

The Kaleshwaram project is an off-shoot of the original Pranahitha-Chevella Lift Irrigation Scheme taken up by the Congress government in 2007 when Andhra Pradesh was not divided.

- ✎ After the formation of Telangana in 2014, the TRS government redesigned the project on the ground that the original plan had too many environmental obstacles and had very low water storage provision — only about 16.5 tmc ft.
- ✎ After conducting a highly advanced Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey for a couple of months, the government separated the original component serving the Adilabad area as the Pranahitha project and renamed the rest as Kaleshwaram by redesigning the head works, storage capacity and the canal system based on the data of availability of water at different locations along the course of the Godavari and its tributaries.
- ✎ The Kaleshwaram project has provision for the storage of about 148 tmc ft with plans of utilising 180 tmc ft by lifting at least 2 tmc ft water every day for 90 flood days.
- ✎ The project is designed to irrigate 7,38,851 hectares (over 18.47 lakh acres) uplands in the erstwhile districts of Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Warangal, Medak, Nalgonda and Ranga Reddy.

KLIP has many unique features, including the longest tunnel to carry water in Asia, running up to 81 km, between the Yellampally barrage and the Mallannasagar reservoir. The project would also utilise the highest capacity pumps, up to 139 MW, in the country to lift water.

**Source: The Hindu**

**Methanol Economy Fund****Why in news?**

NITI Aayog is planning to set up a Methanol Economy Fund worth Rs 4,000-5,000 crore to promote production and use of the clean fuel.

- ◆ The fund will be utilized for generation of cheaper, safer and pollution free methanol fuel by converting high ash content coal and stranded gas assets into methanol.
- ◆ NITI Aayog plans to move a Cabinet note soon on the methanol economy and the plans to set up production plants. It expects that two plants can be commissioned in the next 3-4 years. The first coal-based methanol plant will be set up in West Bengal by world's largest coal miner Coal India Ltd (CIL).

**About Methanol:**

- ✎ Methanol is a clean-burning fuel that produces fewer smog-causing emissions — such as sulphur oxides (SOx), nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulate matter — and can improve air quality and related human health issues.
- ✎ Methanol is most commonly produced on a commercial scale from natural gas. It can also be produced from renewable sources such as biomass and recycled carbon dioxide.
- ✎ As a high-octane vehicle fuel, methanol offers excellent acceleration and power. It also improves vehicle efficiency.

China is currently world's largest producer of methanol. India's current installed capacity of methanol production is 0.47 million tonne and total domestic production is 0.2 million tonne.

**Methanol as an alternative fuel:**

- ☑ Methanol is a promising fuel for waterways as it is clean, cheaper than fossil fuels and a good substitute for heavy fuels.
- ☑ Methanol can be blended with gasoline in low-quantities and used in existing road vehicles, or it can be used in high-proportion blends such as M85-M100 in flex-fuel or dedicated methanol-fueled vehicles. Technology is also being commercialized to use methanol as a diesel substitute.

- ☑ India imports methanol from Saudi Arabia and Iran at present. Across the world, methanol is emerging as a clean, sustainable transportation fuel of the future.
- ☑ **The Bureau of Indian Standards has certified Methanol as a fuel.**

*Source: The Hindu*

## **UN warns of severe health risks from electronic/electrical waste in India**

### **Why in news?**

In its latest report- **Global E-waste Monitor 2017**, the **UN** has warned about the health and environmental dangers from the processing of e-waste — the discarded electronic and electrical material — by the informal sector in India without proper safeguards.

- ◆ The report is a collaborative effort of the **United Nations University (UNU)**, the **International Telecommunication Union** and the **International Solid Waste Association**.

### **Highlights of the Global E-waste Monitor 2017 report:**

- ✎ The amounts of e-waste continue to grow, while too little is recycled. By 2016, the world generated 44.7 million metric tonnes of e-waste and only 20 percent was recycled through appropriate channels. In 2016, China was the top e-waste producer in the world, generating 7.2 Mt.

### **India related facts:**

- ✓ According to the report, severe health risks and environmental damage are “widespread” in India due to “very low” literacy levels of the country’s over one million people involved in manual e-waste recycling operations.
- ✓ In the Southern and South-Eastern Asia region, India plays an important role in the domestic generation of e-waste (2 Mt in 2016) due to the large population, but the country also imports from developed countries.
- ✓ India’s electronics industry is one of the world’s fastest growing industries and plays an “important role” in the domestic generation of e-waste, producing 2 metric tonnes (Mt) in 2016.
- ✓ The formal e-waste recycling sector in India is currently being developed in major cities.
- ✓ However, informal recycling operations have been in place for a long time, with over 1 million poor people in India involved in manual recycling operations. Most of these people have very low literacy levels with little awareness of the dangers of the operations

### **E-waste legislation in India:**

- ☑ India has had the e-waste rules in effect since 2011.
- ☑ The rule mandates producers to be responsible for the collection and financing of systems according to the **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) concept**.

### **Where did India go wrong?**

- ✎ Majority of the brands operating in India do not have a tangible EPR in place for taking back or managing their end of life electrical and electronic equipment (EEE).
- ✎ Customer care representatives do not have inkling about any take back or recycling programme and even if they have set up collection centres, they are simply not enough for a geographically vast country like India.
- ✎ India being a vast country, setting up collection mechanism is a big challenge. If any of the brands try individually to reach out to all corners of the country, it will economically not be sustainable or feasible.
- ✎ Another major question in e-waste management in India is how to include thousands of producers and importers under the ambit of regulation.

### **Way ahead:**

Looking ahead, the report said that the problem could become more acute with cheaper cell phones and other equipment becoming available. This means that more people will be able to afford purchasing

new equipment, and that more equipment will eventually be discarded. Therefore, there is need for developing systems to safely handle the e-waste and recycle it.

**Source: Indian Express, Down to Earth**

## **NDMA to conduct Training of Trainers for Sendai Framework**

### **Why in news?**

National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is conducting the first national-level Training of Trainers programme to sensitise various Central Ministries and Departments on utilisation of Sendai Monitor for developing action plans for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).

### **Organizers:**

The programme is being **organised by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** in collaboration with the **United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction-Global Education and Training Institute (UNISDR-GETI)**.

### **Significance of this training:**

- ☑ This training programme will build the capacity of the participants to utilise defined indicators to monitor the progress of the Sendai targets.
- ☑ Training modules at the programme will also enable them to lead consultations and train others on the monitoring of the Sendai Framework Targets.

### **Background:**

- ☑ In June 2016, **India became one of the first countries to align its National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) with the SFDRR**, which clearly identifies regional, national and local targets along with short, medium and long-term timelines.
- ☑ Various activities are being undertaken across the country to achieve the targets identified in the SFDRR.

### **About Sendai Framework:**

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) is an international Treaty which was adopted during the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) held in Sendai, Japan in March, 2015.

- ✎ It is the successor agreement to the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005–2015), which had been the most encompassing international accord to date on disaster risk reduction.
- ✎ It is the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda, with seven targets and four priorities for action.
- ✎ The Framework is for 15-year.
- ✎ It is a voluntary and non-binding agreement which recognizes that the State has the primary role to reduce disaster risk but that responsibility should be shared with other stakeholders including local government, the private sector and other stakeholders.
- ✎ The implementation of the Sendai Framework involves adopting integrated and inclusive institutional measures so as to work towards preventing vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response and recovery and strengthen resilience.

### **Priorities for action:**

The Sendai Framework sets four specific priorities for action:

1. Understanding disaster risk;
2. Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk;
3. Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience;
4. Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

**The Seven Global Targets:**

To support the assessment of global progress in achieving the outcome and goal of the Sendai Framework, seven global targets have been agreed:

- ☑ Substantially reduce global disaster mortality by 2030, aiming to lower average per 100,000 global mortality rate in the decade 2020-2030 compared to the period 2005-2015.
- ☑ Substantially reduce the number of affected people globally by 2030, aiming to lower average global figure per 100,000 in the decade 2020 -2030 compared to the period 2005-2015.
- ☑ Reduce direct disaster economic loss in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2030.
- ☑ Substantially reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, among them health and educational facilities, including through developing their resilience by 2030.
- ☑ Substantially increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020.
- ☑ Substantially enhance international cooperation to developing countries through adequate and sustainable support to complement their national actions for implementation of this Framework by 2030.
- ☑ Substantially increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments to the people by 2030.

**About UNISDR:**

The UN General Assembly adopted the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction in December 1999 and established **United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)**, the secretariat to ensure its implementation.

- ✎ UNISDR is **part of the United Nations Secretariat**. Its headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland.
- ✎ Its **mandate was expanded in 2001** to serve as the focal point in the United Nations system to ensure coordination and synergies among disaster risk reduction activities of the United Nations system and regional organizations and activities in socio-economic and humanitarian fields.
- ✎ As the UN office for disaster risk reduction, UNISDR supports the implementation, **follow-up and review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030**.
- ✎ Its core areas of work includes ensuring disaster risk reduction (DRR) is applied to climate change adaptation, increasing investments for DRR, building disaster-resilient cities, schools and hospitals, and strengthening the international system for DRR.
- ✎ UNISDR leads the preparation and follow-up of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction established in 2006.

**Source: PIB**

**India's battle with air pollution: UNICEF report****Why in news?**

A UNICEF report titled '*Danger in the air: How air pollution can affect brain development in young children*', has once again set alarm bells ringing about high levels of air pollution and its likely impact on brain development among infants.

**UNICEF report : Highlights**

- ✎ Air pollution-related ailments has led to the deaths of over 920,000 children under the age of five every year.
- ✎ Nearly 17 million infants worldwide live in areas where outdoor air pollution is at least six times higher than international limits. These babies are at a risk of suffering brain damage.

- ✎ The threat is much higher in Asia. Nearly 16 million infants belong to Asia. Moreover, 75% of them live in the Indian subcontinent, which has three of the world's 10 most populated countries in the world — India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. In fact, India topped the list of countries with babies at risk, followed by China, the most populated country in the world.
- ✎ Focusing on the adverse effect on the development of brain among infants, the UNICEF report has found a direct relationship between exposure to air pollution and cognitive outcomes.
- ✎ Affected infants faced problems of low verbal and nonverbal IQ and memory, reduced test scores, grade point averages among school children, along with neurological behavioral issues.
- ✎ As per the report, Ultrafine pollution particles (particulate matter that is equal or less than 2.5 microns in diameter) pose an especially high risk because they can more easily enter the blood stream and travel through the body to the brain.
- ✎ The report also notes that harmful particles from magnetite, a form of an ore, is a leading cause for pollution in urban areas. As its particles are small, they easily penetrate humans through olfactory nerves and the gut.
- ✎ Magnetite nano particles are highly toxic to the brain due to their magnetic charge and their ability to help create oxidative stress – which is often the cause of neurodegenerative diseases.
- ✎ The report said that poly-cyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), a kind of pollutants formed from fossil fuel combustion is responsible for loss of or damage to white matter in infant brains.
- ✎ As PAHs are commonly found in areas of high automobile traffic, the UNICEF report believed that urbanisation without adequate protection and pollution reduction measures will put more children at risk.

#### **Solutions offered by the UNICEF:**

- ☑ The UNICEF report urged citizens, especially in the developing world — South Asia and China — to be aware of the quality of air they breathe, and protect children from exposure to unhealthy air through protective masks or air filtration systems.
- ☑ Putting the onus of safety on the parents, the report urged them to provide their children with healthy and balanced diets to mitigate the threat from air pollution. But while parents can provide the first line of defence to vulnerable children, the UNICEF report also urged macro-level measures to tackle the menace of air pollution.
- ☑ In an apparent signal to municipal and political authorities to take action against the issue, the report also said that reducing air pollution means replacing fossil fuel combustion with cleaner, renewable sources of energy, including appropriate use of solar, wind and thermal sources.
- ☑ The report also urged modern-day town planners to focus on creating new models of urbanisation, which will take care of the rising pollution levels.
- ☑ Rapidly urbanising areas have an opportunity to bypass some of the older planning models and take advantage of sustainable, cleaner innovations. They can also lay the right foundations from the onset.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **ISA becomes a Treaty-based International Intergovernmental organization**

### **Why in news?**

With 19 countries ratifying its framework agreement, the International Solar Alliance (ISA) has become the first treaty-based international government organisation to be based in India.

### **Key facts:**

- ◆ The ISA now has become a treaty based inter-governmental international organisation and it will be recognized by UN legally to become fully functional.
- ◆ Guinea became the 15th country to ratify this agreement.
- ◆ So far, 46 countries have signed and 19 ratified Framework Agreement of ISA

**Background:**

- ☑ This marks the culmination of India's efforts, which had taken a lead role in setting up the ISA—an alliance of 121 sunshine countries situated between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.
- ☑ ISA also signals that New Delhi would employ it as a foreign policy tool to cement its leadership among developing countries.

**About International Solar Alliance:**

ISA was launched, on the sidelines of COP-21, at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in November, 2015 by Modi and French President Francois Hollande.



- ✎ The alliance, headquartered in India, aims to bring together countries situated between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn which receive abundant sunshine for around 300 days a year.
- ✎ ISA aims to invite solar rich 121 countries located fully or partly between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn to join the alliance.
- ✎ International Steering Committee was establishment under the mandate of the Paris Declaration of ISA to provide the guidance and direction to establish the ISA.
- ✎ It will function from the Gurgaon, Haryana based **National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE)**.
- ✎ India has offered a contribution of Rs 175 crore for creating ISA corpus fund and for meeting the cost of ISA secretariat for initial five years.
- ✎ Alliance seeks to share common platform to reduce the cost of finance and technology that is needed to deploy solar power widely.
- ✎ Alliance would pursue cooperation in training, building institutions, regulatory issues, common standards, and investment including joint ventures.

*Source: PIB, Live Mint*

## **NITI Aayog and EU delegation to India release the Strategy on Resource Efficiency (RE)**

**Why in news?**

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

- ◆ The strategy aims to promote resource efficiency in India.

**About the Strategy on Resource Efficiency:**

The Strategy on Resource Efficiency is the first policy document to emphasize resource productivity in the country.

- ✎ The Strategy emphasizes on Sustainable Public Procurement (SSP) as an action agenda which will be the market transformation tool to transform to a resource efficient economy.
- ✎ The document is developed with the recommendations from the Indian Resource Efficiency Programme (IREP), launched by the Indian Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and Indian Resource Panel (InRP) in April 2017.

**What is Resource Efficiency?**

Resource efficiency very simply put is making more with fewer materials. In practice, through a life-cycle approach, it leads to minimizing impact on environment & the associated societal burdens, transforming 'waste' into 'resources' fostering circular economy, and strengthening resource security.

## Need of Resource Efficiency

Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy are important goals and central principles for achieving sustainable development. Sustainability is a global priority and SDGs commitment and 11th Five year plan also clearly enunciate importance of Resource efficiency (RE).

### About Indian Resource Panel (InRP):

- ✎ The new Indian Resource Panel (InRP) was officially unveiled in 2016, making India one of the first emerging economies to set up a national advisory body on resource efficiency.
- ✎ The InRP was created with support from the International Climate Initiative as part of the project 'Resource efficiency and secondary raw materials management as a contribution to climate change mitigation'.
- ✎ The InRP will issue recommendations to Indian businesses and policy-makers on improving the general conditions for resource efficiency.

### Background:

- ☑ India's large population, rapid urbanization and expanding industrial production have led to exploitation of available limited natural resources with concerns regarding resource depletion and future availability becoming more pronounced.
- ☑ Ensuring resource security requires an integrated, concerted and collaborative approach in order to fulfill the needs of a vast and growing population.
- ☑ Also, the environmental burdens emanating due to resource extraction, utilization and disposal, including land degradation, biodiversity loss, as well as air and water pollution remain of great concern.
- ☑ Enhancing resource efficiency (RE) and promoting the use of secondary raw materials (SRM) is a pertinent strategy to address these challenges and reduce dependence on primary resource.

**Source: PIB**

## Cyclone Ockhi

### Why in news?

The deep depression which had formed in the Bay of Bengal near Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu, bordering Kerala, was intensified into a cyclonic storm named Ockhi.

- ◆ The name Ockhi was given by Bangladesh which in Bengali means 'eye'.

### Why cyclones are named?

- ✎ The practice of naming storms (tropical cyclones) began years ago in order to help in the quick identification of storms in warning messages because names are presumed to be far easier to remember than numbers and technical terms.
- ✎ Many agree that appending names to storms makes it easier for the media to report on tropical cyclones, heightens interest in warnings and increases community preparedness.



### How are cyclones named?

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) started the tropical cyclone naming system in 2000.

- ✎ Tropical cyclones are named to provide ease of communication between forecasters and the general public regarding forecasts, watches, and warnings.

The Cyclones worldwide are named by 9 regions —

1. North Atlantic

2. Eastern North Pacific
3. Central North Pacific
4. Western North Pacific
5. North Indian Ocean
6. South West Indian Ocean
7. Australian
8. Southern Pacific
9. South Atlantic

#### **Naming in North Indian Ocean:**

- ☑ Cyclones in the North Indian Ocean basin are named by the Indian Meteorological Department and the first tropical cyclone was named in 2004 as Onil (given by Bangladesh).
- ☑ Eight north Indian Ocean countries — Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand, gave eight names each which was combined into a list of 64 names. One name from each country is picked in an order to name the cyclones.
- ☑ The previous storm Mora that caused severe flooding across Northeast India in May was named by Thailand. Mora is the name of one of the healing stones and also means star of the sea. The next cyclone will be named Sagar — a name given by India.

**Source: The Hindu**

### **Clean Sea-2017**

#### **Why in news?**

The Regional Level Marine Oil Pollution Response Exercise titled 'Clean Sea – 2017', was recently conducted at sea off Port Blair.

- ◆ It was conducted by the Indian Coast Guard (ICG).

#### **Objective of the exercise:**

The objective of exercise was to ascertain preparedness of ICG, resource agencies and other stakeholders in responding to major oil spill in line with provisions of National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOS-DCP).

#### **Need for exercise:**

The Great Channel between Nicobar Islands and Northern Sumatra that leads into Malacca Straits is marine drive of high seas. Almost 200 ships cross 160-km wide Straits daily making it among busiest sea routes of world. Considering, high intensity of oil tanker traffic through this route, the area is highly vulnerable to oil spills. So, there is need for robust national system for oil spill response is critical

#### **Background:**

- ☑ Indian Coast Guard is responsible for marine environment protection in the maritime zones of India and is the coordinating authority for response to oil spills in Indian waters.
- ☑ The Force has drawn up a **National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOSDCP)** and has established three pollution response centres at Mumbai, Chennai and Port Blair.

#### **About National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOSDCP)**

- ☒ The National oil spill Disaster contingency plan (NOS-DCP) was originally promulgated in July 1996 and subsequently updated in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002 and 2006 to include additional information.
- ☒ Coast guard was designated as central coordination authority.

**Objectives of the plan are:**

- ☑ To develop appropriate and effective systems for the detection and reporting of spillage of oil.
- ☑ To ensure prompt response to prevent, control, and combat oil pollution.
- ☑ To ensure that adequate protection is provided to the public health and welfare, and the marine environment.
- ☑ To ensure that appropriate response techniques are employed to prevent, control, and combat oil pollution, and dispose off recovered material in an environmentally accepted
- ☑ To ensure that complete and accurate records are maintained of all expenditure to facilitate cost of recovery.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **India Awarded Certificate of Commendation for Its Effort to Combat Illegal Wildlife Trade**

**Why in news?**

India has been awarded with the Certificate of Commendation for its exemplary enforcement action in its regional and global effort to combat illegal wildlife trade.

**Key facts**

- ◆ India was the only recipient of the Certificate of Commendation at the recently held 69th Standing Committee meeting of CITES at Geneva.
- ◆ The award has been given to Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) by the Secretary General of **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)**.
- ◆ The award was given to Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) for its efforts in conducting and coordinating species-specific wildlife enforcement operation, codenamed '**Operation Save Kurma**'.
- ◆ It recognises exemplary enforcement action of WCCB's regional and global effort to combat illegal wildlife trade.

**Operation Save Kurma**

- ☑ The operation was conducted to combat the proliferating illegal trade of live turtles and its parts from the country to destinations abroad.
- ☑ The operation was also aimed to invite attention of the enforcement agencies towards such illegal trade.
- ☑ During the operation conducted from December 15, 2016 to January 30, 2017, approximately 16,000 live turtles and tortoises were seized and released back into the wild. WCCB had worked in close collaboration with regional law enforcement agencies of different states.

**About Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB):**

WCCB is **statutory multi-disciplinary body under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** to combat organized wildlife crime in the country.

- ✎ It was established in June 2007 by amending the Wildlife (Protection) Act (WLPA), 1972, a special Act to protect the wildlife and fauna in the country.
- ✎ It is headquartered in New Delhi and has five regional offices at Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and Jabalpur; three sub-regional offices at Amritsar, Guwahati, and Cochin; and five borders.

**Functions of WCCB:**

- ☑ Under Section 38 (Z) of WLPA, 1972, it is mandated to collect and collate intelligence related to organized wildlife crime and disseminate it to state and other enforcement agencies for immediate action.

- ☑ It assists foreign authorities and international organization concerned to facilitate co-ordination and universal action for wildlife crime control.
- ☑ It is tasked with capacity building of the wildlife crime enforcement agencies for scientific and professional investigation into wildlife crimes and assist states to ensure success in wildlife crimes prosecutions.
- ☑ It advises Union Government on issues relating to wildlife crimes having national and international ramifications, relevant policy and laws.
- ☑ It also assists and advises the Customs authorities in inspection of the consignments of flora & fauna as per the provisions of Wild Life Protection Act, CITES and EXIM Policy governing such an item.

**About CITES:**

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is international agreement to regulate worldwide commercial trade in wild animal and plant species.

- ☑ Its aim is to ensure that international trade does not threaten the survival of the species in the wild.
- ☑ It was drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It entered into force in July 1975.
- ☑ CITES is legally binding on state parties to the convention, which are obliged to adopt their own domestic legislation to implement its goals.
- ☑ It classifies plants and animals according to three categories, or appendices, based on how threatened. They are:

**Appendix I species:**

- ✓ It lists species that are in danger of extinction. It prohibits commercial trade of these plants and animals except in extraordinary situations for scientific or educational reasons.

**Appendix II species:**

- ✓ They are those that are not threatened with extinction but that might suffer a serious decline in number if trade is not restricted. Their trade is regulated by permit.

**Appendix III species:**

- ✓ They are protected in at least one country that is a CITES member states and that has petitioned others for help in controlling international trade in that species.
- ✓ In addition, CITES also restricts trade in items made from such plants and animals, such as food, clothing, medicine, and souvenirs.

**Source: PIB, Wiki**



## Science & Technology, Defence & Health

### India has decided to crank up its crackdown against Bitcoins

#### Why in news?

As the most popular cryptocurrency touches new highs, the income tax department began its nationwide crackdown on Bitcoin exchanges.

#### Why India has decided to crank up its crackdown against Bitcoins?

- ✎ Bitcoin can be an easy way to evade tax or snare unsuspecting small investors in ponzi schemes. The regulators are worried about their use for illicit and illegal activities, subjecting the users to an unintentional breach of laws against money laundering and terror finance.
- ✎ Concerns also emanate from some unscrupulous entities indulging in illicit money-pooling activities—commonly known as ponzi schemes—with the promise of huge returns from investment in bitcoins and other variants, which they claim are minted through blockchain, a distributed ledger technology that was created to mint bitcoins and comprises of extremely complex algorithms with several thousand nodes for each chain.
- ✎ There is a suspicion that some so-called cryptocurrencies and bitcoin investments may actually have nothing to do with any blockchain-developed virtual currency and are just new ways devised by scamsters to ride the wave and what they may be offering could be ‘e-ponzi’ schemes.
- ✎ The financial regulators are worried that a complete lack of regulatory regime for such cryptocurrencies may give rise to ‘e-ponzi’ schemes.

#### What are the regulations?

- ✎ Bitcoins are currently unregulated in India. There are no specific legal frameworks for Bitcoins and cryptocurrencies in India yet.
- ✎ In December 2013, RBI issued a warning with caution to “users, holders and traders of virtual currencies, including Bitcoins, about the potential financial, operational, legal, customer protection and security related risks that they are exposing themselves to”.

While some of the countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan have declared Bitcoins as a means of payment illegal and in violation of the state law, a majority are yet to take a stand on it.

**Source: Economic Times**

### India and Cuba ink MoU for enhanced cooperation in Health Sector

#### Why in news?

India and Cuba signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for enhanced cooperation in the health sector.

#### The objective of this MoU is to:

Establish comprehensive inter-ministerial and inter-institutional cooperation between the two countries in the field of health by pooling technical, scientific, financial and human resources with the

ultimate goal of upgrading the quality and reach of human, material and infrastructural resources involved in health care, medical education & training, and research in both countries.

### Significance of the MoU:

The MoU is important for exchanges in the health sector and to develop institutional framework for cooperation in the health sector between the two countries.

### About Cuba:

- ✍ Cuba is **located in the northern Caribbean where the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic Ocean meet.**
- ✍ It is south of both the U.S. state of Florida and the Bahamas, west of Haiti, and north of Jamaica.
- ✍ Cuba is a country comprising the island of Cuba as well as Isla de la Juventud and several minor archipelagos.
- ✍ **Havana is the largest city and capital.**
- ✍ The country is one of the world's last planned economies and its economy is dominated by the exports of sugar, tobacco, coffee and skilled labor.
- ✍ According to the Human Development Index, Cuba has high human development and is ranked the eighth highest in North America, though 67th in the world.
- ✍ It also ranks highly in some metrics of national performance, including health care and education, and is the **only country in the world to receive WWF's definition of sustainable development.**

**Source: PIB**

## National Nutrition Mission

### Why in news?

The Union cabinet has approved the setting up of a National Nutrition Mission (NNM) with a three-year budget of Rs 9,046.17 crore, to rein in malnourishment and stunted growth.

### About National Nutrition Mission (NNM):

NNM will address three aspects—the food that should be given to rein in stunting, undernourishment, low birthweight and anaemia; the delivery system required for it; and monitoring of the entire process.

### Implementation:

- ☑ Under NNM, the ministries of women and child development, health and family welfare, and water and sanitation will work together.
- ☑ The mission will form an apex body under Ministry of Women and Child Development that would fix targets and monitor, supervise and guide nutrition-related interventions across the ministries.
- ☑ It will monitor various schemes contributing towards addressing malnutrition.
- ☑ It will be rolled out in three phases from 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- ☑ Its implementation strategy will be based on intense monitoring and Convergence Action Plan right upto grass root level.

### Targets:

- ☑ NNM will set targets to reduce stunting, under-nutrition, anemia among young children, women and adolescent girls and reduce low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively.
- ☑ Though NNM has set target to reduce stunting is atleast 2% per annum, but it will strive to achieve reduction in stunting to 25% by 2022 (Mission 25 by 2022) from 38.4% (NFHS-4).

### Function of NNM

- ☑ NNM through set targets will strive to reduce level of anemi, stunting, under-nutrition and low birth weight babies.

- ☑ It will also create synergy, issue alerts for timely action, ensure better monitoring, and encourage States/UTs to perform, supervise Ministries and States/UTs to achieve targeted goals.
- ☑ Introducing a very robust convergence mechanism including ICT based Real Time Monitoring system, NNM will incentivize states/UTs for meeting the targets.
- ☑ It will also incentivize Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) for using IT based tools. It will eliminate registers used by AWWs.
- ☑ It will introduce measurement of height of children at the Anganwadi Centres (AWCs).
- ☑ It will aid to conduct Social Audits. It will set-up Nutrition Resource Centres, involving masses through Jan Andolan for their participation on nutrition through various activities, among others.

### Beneficiaries

- ☑ All States and districts will be covered in phased manner i.e. 315 districts in 2017-18, 235 districts in 2018-19 and remaining districts in 2019-20.
- ☑ More than 10 crore people will be benefitted by this programme.

### Fund:

- ☑ NNM has been set with total amount of Rs. 9046.17 crore that will be expended for three years commencing from 2017-18.
- ☑ It will be funded by Government Budgetary Support (50%) and 50% by International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD aka World Bank) or other MDB.
- ☑ Government budgetary support would be 60:40 between Centre and States/UTs, 90:10 for Northeast region and Himalayan States and 100% for UTs without legislature.
- ☑ Total Union Government share over period of three years would be Rs. 2849.54 crore.

### Need for such mission:

- ✓ It is very important to invest in nutrition in India because balanced diet and healthy nutrition plays a pivotal role in overall development of women and children. Healthy women deliver healthy children and nurture a good society, and healthy and nourished children are the country's future. Therefore, to tackle under nutrition problem in the country, various ministries need to work in convergence and not silos and NNM will be a platform to do so. NNM will ensure convergence, and lead to better results.
- ✓ There are number of schemes directly and indirectly affecting nutritional status of children (0-6 years age) and pregnant women and lactating mothers. In spite of these, level of malnutrition and related problems in country is high. There are number of schemes but there is lack in creating synergy and linking between schemes to achieve common goal. NNM through robust convergence mechanism and other components will strive to create synergy.

**Source: The Hindu, PIB**

## State opposes NITI Aayog's prescription

### Why in news?

NITI Aayog's prescription for the State — to bring private sector players in a big way into the functioning of public hospitals in districts — has been met with strong opposition in Karnataka.

### What's the issue?

- ✎ Karnataka, which has been selected for the SATH (Sustainable Action for Transforming Human capital) programme in the health sector, has opposed the aayog's proposal to privatise well-functioning district hospitals in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities for treatment of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).
- ✎ The state has sternly opposed any terms and conditions for entering into an agreement with McKinsey & Company, consultants for implementation of the model. It is of the view that the proposal will have adverse implications for the public healthcare system of the State.

**Background:**

- ☑ NITI Aayog selected the three states through a three stage challenge-process – expression of interest, presentations by the states and assessment of commitment to health sector reforms.
- ☑ Finally, three states: Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka were chosen based on objective assessment criteria affecting the potential for impact and likelihood of success.
- ☑ A consortium of reputed technical consultants are closely working with NITI Aayog and the states to conceptualize the initiatives and provide support in the implementation process.

**About SATH initiative:**

Furthering the agenda for cooperative federalism, NITI Aayog has launched SATH, a program providing ‘Sustainable Action for Transforming Human capital’ with the State Governments.

- ✎ The vision of the program is to initiate transformation in the education and health sectors.
- ✎ SATH aims to identify and build three future ‘role model’ states for health systems.
- ✎ The program will be implemented by NITI Aayog along with McKinsey & Company and IPE Global consortium, who were selected through a competitive bidding process.
- ✎ Under it, NITI will work in close collaboration with state machinery to design a robust roadmap of intervention, develop governance structure, set up monitoring and tracking mechanisms and provide support on a range of institutional measures to achieve the end objectives.
- ✎ The SATH program embodies the philosophy of co-operative federalism.

**Source: The Hindu**

**‘Hamesha Vijayee’ Exercise****Why in news?**

The Southern Command of Indian Army conducted major army exercise called ‘Hamesha Vijayee’ in deserts of Rajasthan from December 16 to 22, 2017.

- ◆ The purpose of the exercise was to evaluate capability of armed forces to strike deep into enemy territory in an integrated air-land battle.

**Key Facts:**

- ◆ The ‘Hamesha Vijayee’ exercise was conducted in battle like conditions that aimed at fine tuning surveillance and destruction mechanisms to support precision strikes and manoeuvres by network enabled forces.
- ◆ The Southern Command (headquarters Pune) undertakes such exercises at regular intervals to ensure high degree of battle readiness as well as validation of operational plans using modern weapons and equipment.
- ◆ The exercise showcased high degree of synergy between Indian Army and Air Force along with new generation aviation assets of army which were reviewed to obtain inputs for further refinement of operational procedures.
- ◆ With emphasis on joint operations, the exercise would test robust sensor to shooter grids by employing a vast array of surveillance and air assets networked with land based strategic and tactical vectors.

**Source: The Hindu**

**1st December: World AIDS Day 2017****Why in news?**

Every year on December 1 since 1988, World AIDS Day is being observed to raise awareness of the AIDS pandemic caused by the spread of HIV infection and to mourn those who have died of the disease.

- ◆ The theme of World AIDS Day for the year 2017 is “Right to health.”
- ◆ WHO under slogan “Everybody counts” will advocate for access to safe, effective, quality and affordable medicines, including diagnostics and other health commodities.

#### About AIDS:

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) is a spectrum of conditions caused by infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). It may also be referred to as HIV disease or HIV infection.

### World AIDS Day 2017



Together We Remember, Hope, and Act.

#### Diagnosis:

- ☑ Serological tests, such as RDTs or enzyme immunoassays (EIAs), detect the presence or absence of antibodies to HIV-1/2 and/or HIV p24 antigen.
- ☑ No single HIV test can provide an HIV-positive diagnosis. It is important that these tests are used in combination and in a specific order.

#### HIV/AIDS

- ☑ HIV/AIDS is a pandemic disease caused due to the infection of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system. If untreated, person's immune system will eventually be completely destroyed.
- ☑ AIDS refers to set of symptoms and illnesses that occur at very final stage of HIV infection.

#### Common reasons for getting infected with AIDS:

- ✓ Unprotected sexual intercourse.
- ✓ Contaminated blood transfusions.
- ✓ Hypodermic needles.
- ✓ From mother to child during pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding.
- ✓ Some bodily fluids, such as saliva and tears, do not transmit HIV.

#### Importance of World AIDS Day:

- ☑ Globally, there are an estimated 36.7 million people who have the virus.
- ☑ Despite the virus only being identified in 1984, more than 35 million people have died of HIV or AIDS, making it one of the most destructive pandemics in history.
- ☑ Today, scientific advances have been made in HIV treatment, there are laws to protect people living with HIV and we understand so much more about the condition.
- ☑ Despite this, many people do not know the facts about how to protect themselves and others, and stigma and discrimination remain a reality for many people living with the condition.

World AIDS Day is important because it reminds the public and government that HIV has not gone away – there is still a vital need to raise money, increase awareness, fight prejudice and improve education.

**Source: PIB**

### National Strategic Plan (2017-24) and Mission “SAMPARK”

#### Why in news?

On the occasion of World AIDS Day (1st December), the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched the National Strategic Plan 2017-24 and Mission SAMPARK.

#### About Mission SAMPARK:

- ☒ Mission SAMPARK was launched to trace those who are Left to Follow Up and are to be brought under Antiretroviral therapy (ART) services.

- ✎ Mission SAMPARK will further aid to will help in fast-tracking the identification of all who were HIV positive and subsequently linking to ART programme.

#### **Need for such mission:**

Presently, about 11.5 lakh People Living with HIV (PLHIVs) are taking free ART through 536 ART centres in the country. It is big challenge to trace those who are Left to Follow Up and needed to be brought under ART services.

#### **About National Strategic Plan 2017-24:**

The National Strategic Plan 2017-24 will pave a roadmap not only for achieving the target of 90:90:90 Strategy but also strive along with partners towards fast track strategy of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

#### **What is 90:90:90 Strategy?**

It is a new HIV treatment narrative of UNAIDS programme which has set targets of 90% of all people living with HIV will know their HIV status (90% diagnosed), 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection will receive sustained antiretroviral therapy (90% on HIV treatment) and 90% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy will have viral suppression (90% suppressed).

**Source: PIB**

### **National Trachoma Survey Report (2014-17) released**

#### **Why in news?**

Union Health Ministry has recently released the National Trachoma Survey Report 2014-17.

#### **Key Facts**

- ◆ The Ministry also declared that **India is now free from 'Infective Trachoma', a contagious bacterial infection of the eye.**
- ◆ With this, **India met the goal of trachoma elimination as specified by the WHO under its GET2020 program.**

#### **Highlights of the National Trachoma Survey Report 2014-17**

- ✎ The survey findings indicate that the active trachoma infection has been eliminated among children in all the survey districts with overall prevalence of only 0.7 per cent.
- ✎ This is much below the elimination criteria of infective trachoma as defined by the WHO. As per WHO, Trachoma is considered eliminated if the prevalence of active infection among children below 10 years is less than 5 per cent.
- ✎ The Survey results indicate that active trachoma is no longer a public health problem in India.
- ✎ This has been possible due to decades of inter-sectoral interventions and efforts that included provision of antibiotic eye drops, personal hygiene, availability of safe water, improved environmental sanitation, availability of surgical facilities for chronic trachoma.
- ✎ States which still report cases of active trachoma, need to develop a strategy for community-based case finding of patients of trachomatoustrichiasis (TT).
- ✎ These cases must be provided free entropion surgery/ treatment in local hospitals.
- ✎ Adequate surveillance of the disease must be done all over the country in order to certify India as trachoma free.

#### **What is Trachoma?**

Trachoma is a **chronic infective disease of the eye and is the leading cause of infective blindness globally.**

- ✎ Trachoma is an outcome of poor environmental and personal hygiene and inadequate access to water and sanitation.

- ✎ It **affects the conjunctiva under the eyelids.**
- ✎ Repeated infections cause scarring leading to in-turning of the eyelashes and eyelids which further causes damage to the cornea and blindness.

#### **Trachoma in India:**

- ☑ Trachoma was found affecting the population in certain States of North India like Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Nicobar Islands.
- ☑ Trachoma infection of the eyes was the most important cause of blindness in India in 1950s and over 50% population was affected in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh.
- ☑ It was the most important cause of corneal blindness in India, affecting young children.

**Source: PIB**

### **Supreme Court refers fixed dose combination drugs issue to the expert body**

#### **Why in news?**

The Supreme Court referred the issue of fixed dose combination (FDC) drugs to the government's expert body, Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB), for a fresh review of their safety, efficacy and therapeutic justification before recommending action.

#### **Course of action:**

- ☑ After the examination by the DTAB or a sub-committee constituted by it and hearing all stakeholders concerned, the expert body will be required to forward its report to the government for action within six months.
- ☑ As per the SC's order the government can order a drug off the market shelf if it is found to be unsafe, without having the issue first examined by the Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB).
- ☑ The government can take a product off the market if there are reports that it has been banned in other countries or there are reports within the country that the product was unsafe.
- ☑ The pharmaceutical industry that had stressed on the need for DTAB's evaluation before an FDC was banned.

#### **Background:**

In an attempt to address the issue, the Centre had the Kokate committee look into it. The panel had termed 963 FDCs "irrational", posing health threats. The government finally banned 344 FDCs last year. But with pharmaceutical companies arguing against the order, the case landed up at the Supreme Court.

#### **What are fixed dose combination (FDC) medicines?**

- ✎ A fixed dose combination (FDC) is one that contains two or more drugs combined in a fixed ratio of doses and available in a single dosage form.
- ✎ They are widely used to improve patient compliance as it is easier for them to take one drug than several.
- ✎ They are acceptable only when the drugs so combined have a therapeutic advantage.

India is one of the world's largest markets for FDC drugs that make up almost half the market share.

#### **Concerns:**

- ✓ Rampant introduction of irrational FDCs not only exposes the patients to unnecessary risk of adverse drug reactions but also creates health problem in larger groups of people.
- ✓ Most of these FDCs are available in India as over-the-counter products.

**Source: The Hindu**

## Government launches door-to-door campaign against TB

### Why in news?

On the lines of its anti-polio drive, the health ministry has launched a 15-day door-to-door campaign across the country for early detection, diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis to eliminate the disease.

### About the campaign

Under the campaign, health department workers, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and TB supervisors will make door-to-door visits to find TB patients and give them free medical treatment till they are cured.

### Objectives of this campaign

- ☑ As per the WHO (World Health Organisation), approximately 2.8 million cases of tuberculosis (TB) occur in India every year, out of which only 1.7 million cases are reported. Therefore, around one million cases of TB get missed every year. The aim is to detect these missed out cases by going to every household.
- ☑ The government aims to decrease incidences of tuberculosis by 90% by 2025 and reduce mortality due to the disease by 95% by 2030 under the Revised National TB Control Programme (RNTCP).

### TB cases in India:

- ☑ According to the Government's data, the TB incidence was estimated to be 217 per lakh population in 2015 which reduced to 211 per lakh population in 2016.
- ☑ According to a new global report, despite all the reduction, India topped the list of seven countries, accounting for 64% of the 10.4 million new TB cases worldwide in 2016.
- ☑ Also, India along with Russia and China accounted for almost about half of the 490,000, multidrug-resistant TB (MDR- TB) cases registered in 2016.
- ☑ According to the report, under diagnosis and under-reporting of the tuberculosis cases continue to be a challenge, especially in countries with large unregulated private sectors and weak health systems.

### About Revised National TB Control Program (RNTCP):

The large scale implementation of the Indian government's **Revised National TB Control Program (RNTCP) (sometimes known as RNTCP 1) was started in 1997.**

- ✎ The RNTCP was then expanded across India until the entire nation was covered by the RNTCP in March 2006. At this time the RNTCP also became known as RNTCP II.
- ✎ RNTCP II was designed to consolidate the gains achieved in RNTCP I, and to initiate services to address TB/HIV, MDR-TB and to extend RNTCP to the private sector.
- ✎ RNTCP uses the **World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DOTS) strategy** and reaches over a billion people in 632 districts/reporting units.
- ✎ The RNTCP is responsible for carrying out the Government of India five year TB National Strategic Plans.
- ✎ With the RNTCP both diagnosis and treatment of TB are free. There is also, at least in theory, no waiting period for patients seeking treatment and TB drugs.

### The initial objectives of the RNTCP in India were:

- ✓ to achieve and maintain a TB treatment success rate of at least 85% among **new sputum positive (NSP) patients.**
- ✓ to achieve and maintain detection of at least 70% of the estimated new sputum positive people in the community.

### Who are new sputum positive (NSP) patients?

New sputum positive patients are those people who have never received TB treatment before, or who have taken TB drugs for less than a month. They have also had a positive result to a sputum test, which diagnoses them as having TB.

### Active Case Finding (ACF):

Under the **3rd phase of RNTCP called Active Case Finding (ACF)**, government has identified 186 high-risk districts with the help of states. Besides, government rolled out the daily drug course of therapy recently to combat the disease across the country.

**Source: The Hindu**

## Laqshya- A Labour Room Quality Improvement Initiative

### Why in news?

Recently, Government launched a country-wide initiative, **Laqshya- A Labour Room Quality Improvement Initiative**, to ensure proper implementation of the existing labour room protocols in order to reduce maternal and newborn mortality.

### About Laqshya:

Under the 'Lakshya', labour room teams will be financially rewarded if they meet the strict benchmarks and achieve targets in a time-bound manner as defined in the labour room guidelines.

### Aim & Objective:

- ✓ It objective is to improve quality of care provided to pregnant mother in Labour Room and Maternity Operation Theatres (OTs), thereby preventing undesirable adverse outcomes associated with childbirth.
- ✓ It aims to reduce preventable maternal and new-born mortality, morbidity and stillbirths associated with care around delivery in Labour room and Maternity OTs.

### How will it be implemented?

It will be implemented in government Medical Colleges (MCs), District Hospitals (DHs), high delivery load Sub- District Hospitals (SDHs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs).

### Guidelines under Laqshya:

Ensuring privacy to the mother-to-be, stressing a comfortable position during delivery, no-tolerance policy for any verbal or physical abuse of the woman and no demand for gratuitous payment by staff are some of the guidelines under the programme 'Lakshya'.

**Source: PIB**

## Department of pharmaceuticals sets up high level panel to assist on pricing, launch of new drugs

### Why in news?

Recently, the department of pharmaceuticals (DoP), under the ministry of chemicals and fertilizers, has set up a high-level committee comprising experts to assist on matters of pricing and launch of new drugs to help resolve issues in a time-bound manner.

- ◆ The committee will work on issues between the industry and the government.

### Composition of the committee:

- ☑ The committee will have member secretary of National Pharmaceutical Pricing authority (NPPA) as its convener.
- ☑ It will also have representatives from Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), Department of Health Research/Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and NIPER as members.

**Background:**

In view of the experience gained from implementation of Drugs (Prices control) order 2013, it has been decided to constitute a single multi-disciplinary committee of experts for consultation on all technical issues related to pricing, launch of new drugs etc where more clarity may be required and opine on matters referred to it by NPPA on discharge of its functions.

**Terms of reference of the committee:**

- ☑ The committee is mandated to recommend its opinion on claims of pharma companies about any additional therapeutic features associated with any formulation.
- ☑ It will also recommend separate ceiling price of scheduled formulations or retail price of any new drug with specified therapeutic rationale.
- ☑ It will also give its opinion on claims of pharma firms about additional pharmacoeconomics features associated with any formulation/Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API).
- ☑ Besides, it will also give opinion on technical related issues such as whether a drug is scheduled or non-scheduled on basis of ingredients used in formulation.
- ☑ It will give opinion on technical issues and claims by pharma companies about novelty associated with indigenous research and development of their products, for granting exemption from price control order for period of 5 years.
- ☑ The committee will be empowered to invite or co-opt any other specialist depending on exigencies of circumstances requiring resolution of any specific matter arising out of implementation of various provisions of DPCO 2013.
- ☑ The recommendations of committee will be considered by NPPA which will pass reasoned order on it.

**Source: Economic Times**

**International Conference cum Exhibition on AYUSH and Wellness****Why in news?**

Recently, the first International Exhibition and Conference on AYUSH and Wellness sector- **AROGYA 2017** was held in New Delhi.

- ◆ The theme of the conference was: **'Enhancing the global potential of AYUSH'**

**Organizers:**

The three-day exhibition cum conference was organised by Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in collaboration with Union Ministry of AYUSH and Ministry of Commerce & Industry and Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council (Pharmexcil).

**Participants:**

AROGYA 2017 witnessed participation of thousands of delegates from India as well as abroad including delegates from over 60 countries across the world. More than 250 manufacturers of alternative medicine also showcased their products and services at the exhibition.

**Objectives of AROGYA 2017:**

- ✓ Showcase strengths and scientific validation of Indian System of Medicine in global context.
- ✓ Promote and strengthen awareness and interest about AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa and Homoeopathy).
- ✓ Facilitate international promotion, development and recognition of AYUSH.
- ✓ Foster interaction of stakeholders and market development of AYUSH at international level.
- ✓ Give boost to AYUSH Products in International Market.
- ✓ Exhibit research and latest developments in AYUSH sector and harness its potential.

**Key facts:**

YUSH is acronym of tradition medical systems that are being practiced in India such as Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy.

**Background:**

- ☑ India is the second largest exporter of Ayurvedic and alternate medicine to the world and has a potential to generate 3 million job opportunities.
- ☑ The Indian herbal market is valued at around Rs 5,000 crore currently, with an annual growth rate of 14%.

**Source: PIB**

## National vehicle registry VAHAN unveiled

**Why in news?**

The Union government has unveiled 'VAHAN', a national vehicle registry with a database of vehicles in the country.

**What is 'Vahan'?**

- ☒ 'Vahan' is the name of the national vehicle registry, which intends to collate all the information available with road transport authorities for easy access by both citizens and regulators.
- ☒ Data available with over 90% of all road transport authorities including RTOs and district transport offices have been computerised so far.
- ☒ As a result, Vahan now contains about 21.68 crore vehicle records in its repository.
- ☒ Vahan allows access to all details related to vehicles such as registration number, chassis/engine number, body/fuel type, colour, manufacturer and model and provides various online services to citizens.
- ☒ Driving Licence and related data are automated through a separate application called '**Sarathi**'.

**Following are the benefits of Vahan:**

- ☑ Vahan has been designed to capture all the information mandated by the Central Motor Vehicle Act 1988 as well as State Motor Vehicle Rules. It has been customised to suit the varied requirements of all States and Union Territories. This way, the system ensures access to such information from anywhere.
- ☑ Besides, centralisation of data through the creation of the State and National Registries under Vahan also helps address the needs of RTOs, police and motor insurers.
- ☑ The Police Department will also have access to the registry. The information available online can help in resolving crimes such as theft of vehicles and usage of fake registration numbers.
- ☑ Traffic-check points can cross-check the validity of the documents such as licences presented by motorists through hand-held devices.
- ☑ Enforcement activities such as issue of challan and settlement of penalty amount can also be carried out through Vahan.
- ☑ Banks, which may have given out loans for vehicle purchases, will also have access to the National/State Registry to track the status of vehicles under lien.
- ☑ Lately, motor insurance companies have also been encouraged to upload data of insured vehicles on Vahan. When the process is completed, it will help in tracking vehicles that have not obtained an insurance cover or vehicles that have not renewed their covers.
- ☑ With Vahan, multiple visits to the RTO, extensive paperwork, queues, middlemen and bribes, all of which are today a part of package if you own a vehicle, will be a thing of the past.
- ☑ Vahan helps carry out most of the RTO related transactions including payments, online. Other services such as transfer of ownership, change of address, issue and renewal of permits and fitness certificates are also available at the click of the mouse.

- ☑ The need for 'No objection certificate' for transfers will be eliminated since all RTOs will have access to the centralised data.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **Disparities between States on diseases**

### **Why in news?**

The India State-Level Disease Burden report, a first-of-its-kind assessment of causes for diseases in each State from 1990 to 2016, was released recently.

### **About the report**

- ✎ It was the result of collaboration between the Indian Council of Medical Research, the Public Health Foundation of India, and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, and senior experts and stakeholders from about 100 institutions across India.
- ✎ The report is the result of two years of intense scientific work and collaborative effort.
- ✎ The Global Burden of Disease methodology was used for this analysis, which is the most widely used disease burden estimation approach globally.

### **Key facts:**

- ◆ A team of scientists evaluated the diseases causing the most premature deaths and ill-health in each State. It found out, for instance, that life expectancy at birth in the country has improved significantly.
- ◆ However, the report indicated many health inequalities among States, noting that while there was a fall in the under-five mortality in every State there was also a four-fold difference in the rate of improvement among them. The per person burden from many of the leading infectious and non-communicable diseases varied 5-10 times between States.
- ◆ In the most developed States this transition took place about 30 years ago, but in the poorest States this transition has taken place only over the past few years.
- ◆ The report explained that infectious and childhood diseases continue to be significant problems in **the poor Empowered Action Group States of north India (Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand and Assam)**, which still contributes 37-43% of the total disease burden.
- ◆ These diseases are responsible for the inordinately high burden of premature deaths and morbidity suffered by children under five years of age in these States.
- ◆ The results show that non-communicable disease and injuries have together overtaken infectious and childhood diseases in terms of disease burden in every State, but the magnitude of this transition varies markedly between the poor States and the more developed States.

### **How will this report help?**

- ✎ The India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative will update estimates annually for each State based on new data that become available.
- ✎ It will also provide more detailed findings: for example, next year it plans to report the rural-urban differences in disease burden for each State.
- ✎ Detailed topic-specific reports and publications will be produced for major diseases and risk factors for deeper insights to plan their control.
- ✎ The policy applications of these findings include planning of State health budgets, prioritisation of interventions relevant to each State, informing the government's Health Assurance Mission in each State, monitoring of health-related Sustainable Development Goals targets, and assessing the impact of large-scale interventions based on time trends of disease burden.

- ✎ In addition, the data gaps identified in this estimation process will inform which areas of the health information system of India need to be strengthened.

The report is now being used as an important tool for health planners in India to improve health of the people more effectively.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **Cabinet approves continuation of National AYUSH Mission till March 2020**

### **Why in news?**

The Union Cabinet approved the continuation of centrally sponsored scheme of National Ayush Mission (NAM) till March 31, 2020, with an outlay of Rs 2,400 crore over the period.

### **About National AYUSH Mission (NAM):**

Department of AYUSH, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India has launched National AYUSH Mission (NAM) during 12th Plan (in September 2014) for implementing through States/UTs.

- ✎ Now, The NAM is being **implemented by Ministry of AYUSH.**

### **Aim of NAM:**

- ✓ The NAM aims to address the gaps in health services through supporting the efforts of State/UT Governments for providing AYUSH health services/education in the country, particularly in vulnerable and far-flung areas.

### **Objective of NAM:**

- ✓ To provide cost effective AYUSH Services, with a universal access through upgrading AYUSH Hospitals and Dispensaries, co-location of AYUSH facilities at Primary Health Centres (PHCs), Community Health Centres (CHCs) and District Hospitals (DHs).
- ✓ To strengthen institutional capacity at the state level through upgrading AYUSH educational institutions, State Govt. ASU&H Pharmacies, Drug Testing Laboratories and ASU & H enforcement mechanism.
- ✓ Support cultivation of medicinal plants by adopting Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) so as to provide sustained supply of quality raw-materials and support certification mechanism for quality standards, Good Agricultural/Collection/Storage Practices.
- ✓ Support setting up of clusters through convergence of cultivation, warehousing, value addition and marketing and development of infrastructure for entrepreneurs.

### **Focus:**

- ✓ Under the mission, special focus is given to the specific needs of such areas and for allocation of higher resources in their Annual Plans.

### **Expected outcomes of the Mission:**

- ✓ Better access to AYUSH healthcare services through an increased number of healthcare facilities offering AYUSH services and better availability of medicines and trained manpower.
- ✓ Improvement in AYUSH education through a well-equipped enhanced number of AYUSH Educational institutions.
- ✓ Improved availability of quality AYUSH drugs by increased number of quality pharmacies and Drug Testing Laboratories coupled with a stringent enforcement mechanism.
- ✓ Increased awareness and acceptance of the Yoga & Naturopathy as promotive and preventive health-care systems.
- ✓ To meet the increasing domestic demand for herbal raw-materials and also to promote export.

### **The Way Ahead:**

- ✓ The National AYUSH Mission intends to build on India's unmatched heritage represented by its ancient systems of medicine like Ayurveda, Sidhha, Unani & Homeopathy (ASU&H) which are a treasure house of knowledge for preventive and promotive healthcare.

- ✓ The positive features of the Indian systems of medicine namely their diversity and flexibility; accessibility; affordability, a broad acceptance by a large section of the general public; comparatively lesser cost and growing economic value, have great potential to make them providers of healthcare that the large sections of our people need.

**Source: PIB**

## **EKuverin Exercise 2017**

### **Why in news?**

The eighth edition of **India, Maldives bilateral EKUVERIN Exercise 2017** began at Belagavi, Karnataka.

### **Key facts:**

- ◆ Starting 2009, Indian Army and the Maldives National Defence Force have been holding Exercise **Ekuverin, meaning 'friends' in the Maldivian language**, in their countries **on alternate years**.
- ◆ The **seventh edition** of the exercise was held at Kadhdhoo, Lammu Atoll, Maldives in December, 2016.
- ◆ The aim of the exercise is to conduct military training with emphasis on amphibious & counter insurgency/ counter terrorism operations with a view to enhance interoperability between the two armies.
- ◆ The focus of the exercise is to acquaint both armies with each other's operating procedures in the backdrop of a counter-insurgency or counter-terrorist operations in an urban or semi-urban environment under the United Nations (UN) Charter.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **Cabinet approves National Medical Commission Bill, 2017**

### **Why in news?**

The Union Cabinet has cleared the National Medical Commission Bill, 2017.

### **Key Facts**

- ◆ The bill does away with the Medical Council of India (MCI) and replaces it with a regulator that will do away with "heavy handed regulatory control" (red tape) over medical institutions.
- ◆ It will also bring in a national licentiate examination.

### **Highlights of the National Medical Commission Bill, 2017:**

#### **National Medical Council (NMC):**

- ✓ The bill replaces existing apex medical education regulator Medical Council of India (MCI) with National Medical Council (NMC), a new body to ensure transparency.
- ✓ It empowers NMC to lay down policies for maintaining high quality and high standards in medical education and make necessary regulations in this behalf and ensure coordination among Autonomous Boards.

#### **Four autonomous boards:**

- ✓ The bill provides for the constitution of four autonomous boards entrusted with conducting undergraduate and postgraduate education, assessment and accreditation of medical institutions and registration of practitioners under the National Medical Commission.

#### **Composition of the commission:**

- ✓ The commission will have 25-members including Chairman and Member Secretary. It will have 12 ex-officio members and 11-part-time members of which five will be doctors elected to the commission.

- ✓ The selected members will be picked by a search committee headed by Cabinet Secretary.

#### **Entrance Examinations:**

- ✓ The bill proposes a common entrance exam and national licentiate examination which every candidate, who completes five years of MMBS course need to clear to become medical practitioner or get entry into post-graduation studies.
- ✓ This examination will also bring those students who do medical education from abroad at par with those who graduate from Indian institutions.

#### **PG courses:**

- ✓ Recognised medical institutions don't need the regulator's permission to add more seats or start PG course. It will reduce the discretionary powers of the regulator.

#### **Powers of the regulator:**

- ✓ Earlier, medical colleges required the MCI's approval for establishment, recognition, renewal of the yearly permission or recognition of degrees, and even increase the number of students they admitted. Under the new bill, the powers of the regulator are reduced to establishment and recognition. This means less red tape, but also less scrutiny of medical colleges.

#### **Significance of the bill:**

- ✓ The bill aims to move towards outcome-based regulation of medical education rather than process oriented.
- ✓ It will ensure proper separation of functions within regulator by having autonomous boards, create accountable and transparent procedures for maintaining standards in Medical Education.

#### **About MCI:**

Medical Council of India (MCI) is a statutory body for establishing uniform and high standards of medical education in India.

- ✎ The Medical Council of India was first established in 1934 under the Indian Medical Council Act, 1933. This Act was repealed and replaced with a new Act in 1956. This was further modified in 1964, 1993 and 2001.

#### **The objectives of the Council are as follows:**

- ✓ Maintenance of uniform standards of medical education, both undergraduate and postgraduate.
- ✓ Recommendation for recognition/de-recognition of medical qualifications of medical institutions of India or foreign countries.
- ✓ Permanent registration/provisional registration of doctors with recognized medical qualifications.
- ✓ Reciprocity with foreign countries in the matter of mutual recognition of medical qualifications.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **Soil Health Card Mobile App launched**

### **Why in news?**

On the occasion of World Soil Day, Soil Health Card mobile App has been launched by the government to help the farmers.

### **About the app:**

- ✎ The app will benefit field-level workers as it will automatically capture GIS coordinates while registering sample details at the time of sample collection in the field and indicate the location from where the sample has been collected.
- ✎ This app works like other Geotagging apps developed for the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana. The app contains farmers' details including name, Aadhaar card number, mobile number, gender, address, crop details, etc.

### About the Soil Health Card Scheme:

In February 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had launched the Soil Health Card Scheme.

- ✎ **It is a scheme to provide every farmer a Soil Health Card in a Mission mode.**
- ✎ It is a scheme under which the Central Government provides assistance to State Governments for setting up Soil Testing Laboratories for issuing Soil Health Cards to farmers.
- ✎ The scheme will be implemented in all states to promote soil testing services, issue of soil health cards and development of nutrient management practices.
- ✎ Under the scheme, State Governments should adopt innovative practices like involvement of agricultural students, NGOs and private sector in soil testing, determining average soil health of villages, etc., to issue Soil Health Cards.
- ✎ Under the scheme, the state governments are also required to prepare yearly action plan on the issue and the cost will be shared in the ratio of 75:25 between the Centre and states.

### What is soil health card?

The soil health card studies and reviews the health of soil or rather we can say a complete evaluation of the quality of soil right from its functional characteristics, to water and nutrients content and other biological properties. It will also contain corrective measures that a farmer should adopt to obtain a better yield.

### How does it help the farmers?

- ✎ With the issue of the card, the farmers will get a well-monitored report of the soil which is chosen for cultivation of crops.
- ✎ The monitoring will be done on a regular basis.
- ✎ The farmers will be guided by experts to come up with solutions to improve the quality of the soil.
- ✎ Regular monitoring will help the farmers to get a long-term soil health record and accordingly can study and evaluate the results of different soil management practices.
- ✎ This card can become most helpful and effective when filled out regularly by the same person over a period of time.
- ✎ The idea is not to compare the varied soil types but to find out methods to improve soil fertility, to access the different types of soil and their ability to support crop production in spite of their limitations and as per their abilities.
- ✎ The soil card will help the farmers to get an idea on the crop-wise recommendations of nutrients and fertilizers required in each type of soil. This can help in increasing the crop yield.

**Source: PIB**

## India successfully test-fires surface-to-air Akash missile

### Why in news?

Supersonic surface-to-air missile- Akash with indigenous radio frequency seeker was recently test fired from a test range in Odisha.

- ◆ With the successful test firing, India has achieved the capability of making any type of surface to air missile.

### About Akash Missile:

The Akash missile is **India's first indigenously designed, developed and produced air defence surface-to-air missile system.**

- ✎ Akash is a supersonic short range surface-to-air missile capable of neutralising aerial threats.

- ✎ The asset of this missile system is its capability to neutralise multiple aerial targets coming from different directions at the same time.
- ✎ The maximum range of this missile is 25 kilometres and can neutralise targets at a maximum altitude of 20 kilometres. It is meant for neutralising medium range air targets flying at low or medium height.
- ✎ It has supersonic speeds ranging from Mach 2.8 to 3.5.
- ✎ An Akash missile regiment has six launchers with three missiles each.
- ✎ It carries a 55- kg fragmentation warhead that is triggered by proximity fuse.
- ✎ This defence system consists of surveillance and tracking radars, control centres and ground support systems.
- ✎ It uses state-of-the-art integral Ramjet-rocket propulsion system (RRPS) and the onboard digital autopilot ensures stability and control.
- ✎ Electro-pneumatic servo actuation system controls cruciform wings for agile response and thermal batteries provide onboard power supply.
- ✎ This all-weather missile system can work from both static and mobile platforms.
- ✎ Akash is a result of 96% indigenisation, with the design being developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation under Integrated Guided-Missile Development Programme (IGMDP) and built by Bharat Dynamics Limited along with the involvement of Bharat Electronics Limited.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **Health Ministry and Rotary India sign MoU for achieving immunization target**

### **Why in news?**

The Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) and Rotary India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for intensive efforts towards achieving the immunization target.

### **The key areas for collaboration**

- ◆ Social mobilization of beneficiaries, especially in urban slums and undeserved areas having no mobilizers.
- ◆ Support to the members of NCC, NYK, NSS etc. in their efforts of community mobilization through incentives like refreshments/mementoes during the sessions.
- ◆ Advocacy and generating awareness through innovative approaches and involving private practitioners and local leaders for Polio Eradication Programme, Routine Immunization including Mission Indradhanush, Intensified Mission Indradhanush and Measles-Rubella.

### **Significance of the MoU:**

The collaboration between Rotary International India National Polio Plus Committee in India and the Health Ministry will support the efforts of the states and the districts for advocacy and community mobilization for Polio Eradication Programme, Routine Immunization including Mission Indradhanush, Intensified Mission Indradhanush and Measles-Rubella.

### **About Rotary International's India National PolioPlus Committee**

- ✎ In 1988, the Rotary International established a committee called the India National PolioPlus Society (INPPS) for polio eradication efforts in the country.
- ✎ Based in Delhi, the Committee organizes large teams of committed Rotary volunteers who help in vaccine delivery to infants and children and ensure social mobilization around the cause.
- ✎ It works in close cooperation with the Indian government, the WHO, the UNICEF and other bodies such as the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

**Source: PIB**

## Border Protection Grid to be set up in Border States

### Why in news?

Recently, the Government has announced plans to formulate a unified command called 'Border Protection Grid' (BPG) to check illegal immigration from Bangladesh into five northeastern and eastern states.

### What is Border Protection Grid (BPG)?

Border Protection Grid (BPG) is a multi-pronged and foolproof mechanism to secure border.

- ✎ The grid will comprise of various elements namely physical barriers, non-physical barriers, surveillance system, Intelligence agencies, State Police, BSF and other State and Central agencies.
- ✎ BPG will be supervised by a State level Standing Committee under the Chairmanship of respective Chief Secretaries.

### Need for BPG:

#### **Facilitate legitimate trade and commerce**

India has friendly relations with Bangladesh and there is a need to facilitate genuine trade and legitimate cross-border movement of people while curbing radicalization, illegal migration, and smuggling of cattle, fake Indian currency notes and drugs etc. BPG will ensure greater help for the States in the overall border security. Border security is important to facilitate legitimate trade and commerce between the countries.

#### **Prevent entry of illegal migrants**

Secure borders are also necessary to prevent entry of illegal migrants some of whom have links with extremist groups for furthering anti-national activities with ulterior motives and posing threat to internal security.

### About Indo-Bangladesh Border:

- ✎ India shares 4096.7 Km of its land border with Bangladesh.
- ✎ **West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram** are the States which share the border with Bangladesh.
- ✎ The entire stretch consists of plain, riverine, hilly/jungle and with hardly any natural obstacles. The area is heavily populated, and at many stretches the cultivation is carried out till the last inch of the border.

### The State-wise length of the borders is as under:

- ✓ West Bengal – 2216.70 Km
- ✓ Assam – 263.00 Km
- ✓ Meghalaya 443.00 Km
- ✓ Tripura 856.00 Km
- ✓ Mizoram 318.00 Km

### Background:

- ☑ Out of 4,096 km-long border with Bangladesh, fencing, roads, floodlights and border outposts are already completed in 3,006 km of the border.
- ☑ Out of the remaining 1090 km-long border, 684 km border will be secured with fence and remaining 406 km of borders along rivers and nullahs will be secured with radars, day-night cameras and various types of sensors.
- ☑ Although bulk of the infrastructure is in place or under construction, construction in some parts is yet to commence mainly due to land acquisition issues.

**Source: Indian Express, PIB**

## NASA's 'SuperTIGER' balloon to study cosmic particles

### Why in news?

NASA scientists in Antarctica are set to launch SuperTIGER Balloon, a balloon-borne instrument to collect information on cosmic rays, high-energy particles from beyond the solar system that enters Earth's atmosphere every day.

- ◆ This isn't SuperTIGER's first flight—the giant space balloon flew for 55 days during its first mission in 2012 and 2013.

### About SuperTIGER Balloon:

- ✎ The instrument, called the **Super Trans-Iron Galactic Element Recorder (SuperTIGER)**, is designed to study rare heavy nuclei, which hold clues about where and how cosmic rays attain speeds up to nearly the speed of light.
- ✎ With the help of SuperTIGER, researchers look forward for the rarest of the rare ultra-heavy cosmic ray nuclei beyond iron, from cobalt to barium.

### About cosmic ray particles:

'Cosmic rays' is a general term for all sorts of particles that hit Earth.

- ✎ The most common cosmic ray particles are protons or hydrogen nuclei, making up roughly 90 per cent of the particles, followed by helium nuclei (8 per cent) and electrons (1 per cent).
- ✎ But a tiny portion of those are the cores of other, much heavier atoms, which are born during gigantic celestial fireworks.
- ✎ When a cosmic ray strikes the nucleus of a molecule of atmospheric gas, both explode triggering a cascade of particle collisions.
- ✎ Some of these secondary particles reach detectors on the ground, providing information that can be used by scientists to infer the properties of the original cosmic ray.
- ✎ They also produce an interfering background which get reduced by flying instruments on scientific balloons that reach altitudes of nearly 130000 feet and float above 99.5 per cent of atmosphere.
- ✎ Only 20 per cent of cosmic rays were thought to arise from massive stars and supernova debris, while 80 per cent came from interstellar dust and gas.

### Two types of celestial fireworks:

There are two types of fireworks involved: supernovae, which occur when a large star explodes, and neutron star collisions, when two products of supernovae then merge with each other.

### About Neutron stars:

Neutron stars are the densest objects scientists can study directly. Neutron stars orbiting each other in binary systems emit gravitational waves, which are ripples in space-time predicted by Einstein's general theory of relativity.

**Source: Business Standard**

## New form of matter 'excitonium' discovered

### Why in News?

Physicists from the University of Illinois have discovered a new form of matter called **excitonium**.

- ◆ The existence of this matter was first theorized almost 50 years ago.

### How this was discovered?

- ✎ To prove existence of excitons, scientists had studied **crystals doped with dichalcogenide titanium diselenide (1T-TiSe<sub>2</sub>)**, a transition metal. This material is made up of a kind of boson, a composite particle that could allow matter to act as a superfluid, superconductor, or even as an insulating electronic crystal.

- ✎ Scientists were able to observe existence of excitonium using novel technique called **momentum-resolved electron energy-loss spectroscopy (M-EELS)**.

### What is Excitonium?

Excitonium is a condensate made up of excitons and exhibits macroscopic quantum phenomena just like a superconductor.

### What are Excitons?

Excitons are particles that are formed in a very strange quantum mechanical pairing. They are obtained by combining escaped electrons and “holes”.

### Significance of this discovery:

Excitonium exhibits macroscopic quantum phenomena, like a superconductor. As a superconductor and superfluid, this material can be used to further existing technologies.

- ✓ This finding holds great promise for unlocking further quantum mechanical mysteries.
- ✓ It could also shed light on the metal-insulator transition in band solids, in which exciton condensation is believed to play a part. Beyond that, possible technological applications of excitonium are purely speculative.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Government sets up NIC-CERT centre to detect, prevent cyberattacks

### Why in news?

The Centre has unveiled the NIC-CERT centre that would monitor and help in early detection and mitigation of cyberattacks on government networks.

### About NIC-CERT:

- ✎ NIC-CERT is a dedicated body to detect, prevent and mitigate the impact of cyber attacks on the National Informatics Centre (NIC).

### What will NIC-CERT do?

- ✎ NIC-CERT will work to ensure early detection and immediate mitigation of cyber attacks by monitoring data across the NIC platform, including communication between all the levels of government and between governments to citizens.
- ✎ NIC-CERT will operate in close coordination and collaboration with sectoral CERTs and more so with CERT-IN.
- ✎ Using advance tools, NIC-CERT team will correlate events that would help in generating canvas of attack surface and identify vulnerabilities and possible exploits.

### National Informatics Centre (NIC):

- ☑ Established in 1976, the NIC is premier science & technology organisation of Government in informatics services and information and communication technology (ICT) applications.
- ☑ It is a **part of MeitY's Department of Electronics & Information Technology**.
- ☑ It plays a pivotal role in steering e-governance applications in governmental departments at national, state and district levels, thus enabling improvement and wider transparency in government services.
- ☑ **Almost all Indian-government websites are developed and managed by NIC.**

### About the CERT-In:

CERT-In is nodal government agency that deals with cyber security threats like hacking and phishing in India.

- ✎ It is **nodal department under the aegis of Union Ministry of Communications and Information Technology**.

- ✎ According to the provisions of the Information Technology Amendment Act 2008, CERT-In is responsible for overseeing administration of the Act.

### **Objectives of the CERT-In:**

#### **Its objectives are to:**

- ✓ Protect Indian cyberspace and software infrastructure against destructive and hacking activities.
- ✓ Strengthen security-related defence of the Indian Internet domain. Issue guidelines, vulnerability notes, advisories, and whitepapers regarding to information security practices, prevention, procedures, response and reporting of cyber security incidents.

**Source: The Hindu, PIB**

## **SC leaves it to government to regulate ads on pre-natal sex tests on internet**

### **Why in news?**

Recently, the Supreme Court has now washed its hands of the matter and left it to the government to take care of such issues in consultation with the search engines.

### **What is the issue?**

- ✎ The case had begun in 2008, when an activist filed a public interest litigation (PIL) to get the search engines to abide by local law which bans such tests to arrest the falling sex ratio in the country.
- ✎ The government had then set up a nodal body to act as the interface with the search engines on such complaints.
- ✎ The court had passed umpteen orders in which the court warned the engines that they should either follow local law or shut shop.

### **About PCPNDT Act, 1994:**

Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994 is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted to stop female foeticides and arrest the declining sex ratio in India. The act banned prenatal sex determination.

- ✎ The main purpose of enacting the act is to ban the use of sex selection techniques before or after conception and prevent the misuse of prenatal diagnostic technique for sex selective abortion.
- ✎ Offences under this act include conducting or helping in the conduct of prenatal diagnostic technique in the unregistered units, sex selection on a man or woman, conducting PND test for any purpose other than the one mentioned in the act, sale, distribution, supply, renting etc. of any ultra sound machine or any other equipment capable of detecting sex of the foetus.

### **Main provisions in the act are:**

- ☑ The Act provides for the prohibition of sex selection, before or after conception.
- ☑ It regulates the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques, like ultrasound and amniocentesis by allowing them their use only to detect:
  1. Genetic abnormalities
  2. Metabolic disorders
  3. Chromosomal abnormalities
  4. Certain congenital malformations
  5. Haemoglobinopathies
  6. Sex linked disorders.
- ☑ No laboratory or centre or clinic will conduct any test including ultrasonography for the purpose of determining the sex of the foetus.

- ☑ No person, including the one who is conducting the procedure as per the law, will communicate the sex of the foetus to the pregnant woman or her relatives by words, signs or any other method.
- ☑ Any person who puts an advertisement for pre-natal and pre-conception sex determination facilities in the form of a notice, circular, label, wrapper or any document, or advertises through interior or other media in electronic or print form or engages in any visible representation made by means of hoarding, wall painting, signal, light, sound, smoke or gas, can be imprisoned for up to three years and fined Rs. 10,000.
- ☑ The Act mandates compulsory registration of all diagnostic laboratories, all genetic counselling centres, genetic laboratories, genetic clinics and ultrasound clinics.

#### **Act amended in 2003:**

Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 (PNDT), was amended in 2003 to The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition Of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT Act) to improve the regulation of the technology used in sex selection.

#### **Implications of the amendment are**

- ✓ Amendment of the act mainly covered bringing the technique of pre conception sex selection within the ambit of the act
- ✓ Bringing ultrasound within its ambit
- ✓ Empowering the central supervisory board, constitution of state level supervisory board
- ✓ Provision for more stringent punishments
- ✓ Empowering appropriate authorities with the power of civil court for search, seizure and sealing the machines and equipments of the violators
- ✓ Regulating the sale of the ultrasound machines only to registered bodies.

**Source: The Hindu**

### **Scorpene-class submarine Kalvari inducted into Navy**

#### **Why in news?**

India's first modern conventional submarine, INS Kalvari, was inducted into the Navy, a first in almost two decades.

#### **Features of INS Kalvari:**

- ☑ INS Kalvari is a class of diesel-electric attack submarine. These submarines are based on the Scorpene-class submarine being built for the Indian Navy.
- ☑ Kalvari is named after a deep-sea tiger shark. The Scorpene is part of the ambitious **Project 75 of Indian Navy's submarine programme.**
- ☑ While INS Kalvari is designed by French naval defence and energy company DCNS, they are being manufactured by Mazagon Dock Limited in Mumbai.
- ☑ All six Kalvari class submarines being built in India will be equipped with anti-ship missiles.
- ☑ It is stealth submarine difficult to be detected by the enemy and is designed to operate in all theatres including the tropics.
- ☑ It can undertake various operations including multifarious warfare, Anti-submarine warfare, Intelligence gathering, mine laying, area surveillance etc.
- ☑ It can launch attack on the enemy using precision guided weapons and attack can be launched from underwater or on surface.
- ☑ It can launch attack on the enemy using precision guided weapons and attack can be launched from underwater or on surface.
- ☑ These missiles will provide the submarines the ability to neutralise surface threats at extended ranges and boost India's maritime security.

**Source: The Hindu**

## Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) ICGS Sujay Commissioned

### Why in news?

An Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) named ICGS Sujay was recently commissioned into Indian Coast Guard (ICG).

### About ICGS Sujay:

- ✎ It has been designed and built by Goa Shipyard Limited.
- ✎ It is 105 meter OPV fitted with state-of-the-art navigation and communication equipment, sensors and machineries.
- ✎ It can also carry pollution response equipment to contain oil spill at sea. It has latest and modern equipment and systems that provides ship capability to perform role of Command platform to accomplish all ICG charter of duties.

### Deployment of ICGS Sujay:

- ☑ ICGS (Indian Coast Guard Ship) Sujay (meaning Great Victory) will based at Paradip, Odisha under operational and administrative control of Commander Coast Guard Region (North-East).
- ☑ It will be deployed extensively for EEZ surveillance and other duties as enshrined in Coast Guard Charter, to safeguard maritime interests of India.

### Significance:

- ☑ The commissioning of ICGS Sujay will enhance ICG's operational capability to discharge multifarious maritime tasks.
- ☑ It will also give fillip to maritime protection of India's vast coastline of Eastern Seaboard in general and maritime state of Odisha and West Bengal in particular.

**Source: PIB**

## India to have its own gravitational wave detector in 2025

### Why in news?

A new Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) gravitational wave detector to measure ripples in the fabric of space and time is set to be built in India by 2025, in collaboration with universities from across the globe.

- ◆ The new LIGO detector will add to the two already operational in the US.
- ◆ A third LIGO detector will help pinpoint the origin of the gravitational waves that are detected in future.

### Background:

The LIGO detectors discovered the first gravitational waves produced by two giant merging blackholes last year. The research won a Nobel Prize in Physics this year.

### What are Gravitational Waves?

Gravitational waves are 'ripples' or disturbances in the fabric of space-time.

- ✎ They are produced when whole black holes collide and stars explode. These waves are sound track of cosmos.
- ✎ They transport energy as gravitational radiation and pass through matter without interacting with it.
- ✎ Gravitational waves were **first predicted in 1916 by Albert Einstein** on the basis of his Theory of General Relativity which are now confirmed and detected by the **Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO)**— specialised laboratories in Louisiana and Washington in the US.

- ✎ Discovery of gravitational waves would represent a scientific landmark, opening the door to an entirely new way to observe the cosmos and unlock secrets about the early universe and mysterious objects like black holes and neutron stars.
- ✎ Gravitational waves could also help physicists understand the fundamental laws of the universe.
- ✎ Gravitational waves are important in telling about the early universe.

#### **About LIGO:**

LIGO is world's largest gravitational wave observatory.

- ✎ The observatory, described as "the most precise measuring device ever built," is actually two facilities in Livingston, Louisiana, and Hanford, Washington.
- ✎ They were built and operated with funding from the National Science Foundation, which has spent \$1.1 billion on LIGO over the course of several decades.
- ✎ The project is led by scientists from the California Institute of Technology and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and is supported by an international consortium of scientists and institutions.
- ✎ It comprises two enormous laser interferometers located thousands of kilometers apart.
- ✎ It helps to detect and understand the origins of gravitational waves.
- ✎ The Interferometers used in LIGO work by merging two or more sources of light to create interference pattern, which can be measured and analyzed.

**Source: The Hindu**

### **25th National Children's Science Congress held in Gujarat**

#### **Why in news?**

The 25th edition of National Children Science Congress (NCSC-2017) was held at Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

- ◆ The theme of the five-day Congress this was 'Science and Innovation for Sustainable Development' with the special focus on persons with disabilities.

#### **About National Children's Science Congress (NCSC):**

- ✎ NCSC is a nationwide Science Communication programme started in the year 1993.
- ✎ It is a flagship programme of National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC), Department of Science and Technology, Government of India organised nationally by NCSTC-Network, New Delhi.

#### **Objective:**

The primary objective of the Children's Science Congress is

- ✓ to make a forum available to children of the age-group of 10-17 years, both from formal school system as well as from out of school,
- ✓ to exhibit their creativity and innovativeness and more particularly their ability to solve a societal problem experienced locally using the method of science.

#### **Significance:**

- ✓ The NCSC is ideal and innovative programme for children to inspire, empower and expand their minds to world.
- ✓ It encourages a sense of discovery.
- ✓ It emboldens the participants to question many aspects of our progress and development and express their findings in their vernacular.

**Source: The Hindu**

## NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission

### Why in news?

ISRO and NASA are jointly working on the **NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission** to co-develop and launch a dual frequency (L&S band) synthetic aperture radar (SAR) satellite by 2021.

- ◆ The satellite will be the world's most expensive earth-imaging satellite till date, costing around \$1.5 billion.
- ◆ It aims to study global environmental change and natural disasters.

### Background:

- ☑ ISRO and NASA have a framework agreement for cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes signed in 2008.
- ☑ Under this framework agreement, ISRO and NASA have executed an implementing arrangement for cooperation in NISAR mission, which is valid until 2034 and provides scope for joint activities on science & applications of NISAR data after the launch.

### About the NISAR mission:

- ✎ NISAR is a dual frequency (L & S Band) Radar Imaging Satellite.
- ✎ It will be the first radar imaging satellite to use dual frequency.
- ✎ It is planned to be used for remote sensing to observe and understand natural processes of the Earth.
- ✎ The satellite is planned to be launched into a **Sun-synchronous dawn to dusk orbit** and ISRO will also be responsible for the in-orbit operations.
- ✎ It is designed to observe and take measurements of some of the planet's most complex processes, including ecosystem disturbances, natural hazards such as earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes and landslides.

### Usage of the L and S band microwave data:

The L and S band microwave data obtained from this satellite will be useful for variety of applications, which include

- ✓ Natural resources mapping & monitoring;
- ✓ Estimating agricultural biomass over full duration of crop cycle;
- ✓ Assessing soil moisture;
- ✓ Monitoring of floods and oil slicks;
- ✓ Coastal erosion, coastline changes and variation of winds in coastal waters;
- ✓ Assessment of mangroves; surface deformation studies and others.

### Significance of the mission:

The mission will establish a general pathway for future joint missions between ISRO and NASA for Mars exploration. It will also further strengthen the Indo-US ties.

**Source: PIB**

## Endo-atmospheric interceptor missile

### Why in news?

India successfully test-fired an Advanced Air Defence (AAD) interceptor missile, capable of destroying enemy ballistic missiles at low altitude, from a test range at Abdul Kalam Island off the Odisha coast.

### Key facts:

- ◆ The AAD interceptor missile has been indigenously developed by DRDO.

- ◆ The missile is being developed as part the **Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system** and it was the third successful test this year.
- ◆ The endo-atmospheric interceptor made a direct hit with the incoming missile at an altitude of 15 km, completely destroying it.
- ◆ The official stated that shooting down an incoming missile at lower altitudes is more complicated than shooting at higher altitudes due to the higher velocity of the missile.

**Background:**

- ☑ The Research Centre Imarat (RCI) of the DRDO has played pivotal role in the development of all strategic missiles, spearheaded under the India's double-layered ballistic missile defence (BMD) programme.
- ☑ The BMD consists of two interceptor missiles, Advanced Area Defence (AAD) missile for endo-atmosphere or lower altitudes and Prithvi Defence Vehicle for exo-atmospheric ranges.
- ☑ The DRDO expects deployment of BMD shield by 2022.
- ☑ India will be fourth country in the world after the US, Russia and Israel to successfully built effective anti-ballistic missile system.
- ☑ Earlier in February 2017, DRDO had successfully carried out test of the exo-atmospheric Prithvi interceptor missile destroying the target outside the earth's atmosphere at an altitude of over 85 km.

**Source: The Hindu**



## 2017 Sahitya Akademi Award winners

The Sahitya Academy has announced the names of 24 poets and authors who will be conferred the prestigious 2017 Sahitya Akademi Award.

- ◆ Seven books of novels, five of poetry, five of short stories, five of literary criticism and one of play and essays have won the Sahitya Akademi Awards 2017

### Some of the winners of the 2017 Sahitya Akademi Award:

#### Play:

- ✓ Rajen Toijamba (Manipuri)

#### Essay:

- ✓ Jagdish Lachhani (Sindhi)

#### Criticism:

- ✓ Ramesh Kuntal Megh (Hindi) (for his literary criticism work Vishw Mithak Sarit Sagar)
- ✓ Urmi Ghanshyam Desai (Gujarati),
- ✓ TP Ashoka (Kannada),
- ✓ Bina Hangkhim (Nepali) and
- ✓ Neeraj Daiya (Rajasthani).

#### Short stories:

- ✓ Autar Krishen Rahbar (Kashmiri),
- ✓ Shiv Mehta (Dogri),
- ✓ Gajanan Jog (Konkani),
- ✓ Gayatri Saraf (Odia) and
- ✓ Baig Ehsas (Urdu).

#### Poetry:

- ✓ Udaya Narayana Singh (Maithili),
- ✓ Bhujanga Tudu (Santali),
- ✓ Shrikant Deshmukh (Marathi),
- ✓ Inqulab (Tamil) and
- ✓ Devipriya (Telugu).

#### About the award:

- ✎ Sahitya Akademi Award is conferred annually on writers of outstanding works in one of the **twenty-four major Indian languages (22 Scheduled Languages+ English and Rajasthani)**.
- ✎ The award consists of a casket containing an engraved copper-plaque, a shawl and a cheque of 1 Lakh rupees.

## Losar Festival

- ✍ Losar festival, which has its origin in the 15th century, celebrates the **Ladakhi or Tibetan New Year**.
- ✍ Losar **celebrations in Jammu and Kashmir, in the Ladakh district** can be regarded as the most elaborate and convoluted of the different social and religious events and festivals of Ladakh.
- ✍ In Ladakh, Losar is regarded as the most important socio-religious event.
- ✍ The festival is marked by making offerings to the Gods, both in Gompas and their shrines.

### Lalji Singh, 'father of DNA fingerprinting in India,' passes away

Eminent scientist and 'father of DNA fingerprinting in India' Lalji Singh died at an age of 70.

#### Contributions of Lalji Singh:

- ☑ Singh was **one of the leaders instrumental in making DNA fingerprinting mainstream in India**, both at the level of research as well as for forensic applications.
- ☑ This was after techniques advanced by him led to DNA profiling being used to establish parentage as well as solve some high-profile crime cases in India.
- ☑ Based on his work he was tasked by the government — in the late 1990s — to establish the Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics (CDFD) with a mandate of making it a nodal centre for DNA fingerprinting and diagnostics for all species and several diseases.
- ☑ He also set up a slew of dedicated labs that worked on several aspects of genetics such as population biology, structural biology and transgenic research.
- ☑ Singh was also the **recipient of the prestigious Padma Shri award**.

#### What is DNA profiling?

- ✍ **DNA fingerprinting or DNA profiling** is method of isolating and identifying variable elements within the base-pair sequence of DNA.
- ✍ DNA fingerprinting technology is utilised by police all over the world for fool-proof identification of criminals who leave their traces at crime scene while committing crime.
- ✍ The technology plays a crucial role in solving crimes as it has potential to link a series of crimes by placing the suspects by linking them with the crime scene.

#### Significance of DNA profiling:

- ☑ DNA profiling plays a crucial role not only in solving crimes but also has a potential to link a series of crimes by placing the suspects at the scene of crime by linking the suspects with the crime scene while also helping to prove their innocence.
- ☑ It can also be used to resolve disputes of paternity and maternity.
- ☑ It can establish the identity of missing children and baby-swapping cases in hospitals.

### 12th December: Universal Health Coverage Day

- ✍ UHC Day is observed every year on 12 December.
- ✍ To commemorate first unanimous United Nations resolution calling for countries to provide affordable, quality health care to every person, everywhere.
- ✍ UHC aims at ensuring equitable access for all to affordable, accountable, appropriate health services of assured quality.

### December 10: World Human Rights Day

The World Human Rights Day (WHRD) is observed every year on December 10.

- ◆ The 2017 theme: **'Let's stand up for equality, justice and human dignity'**.

**Key facts:**

- ◆ This year, Human Rights Day kicks off a year-long campaign to mark the upcoming **70th anniversary of Universal Declaration of Human Rights**.
- ◆ On this day (10th Dec) in 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**.

**About Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a historic document that was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its third session on 10 December 1948 as Resolution 217 at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, France.

- ☑ The Declaration consists of 30 articles affirming an individual's rights. These rights **not legally binding** in themselves.
- ☑ The rights have been elaborated in subsequent international treaties, economic transfers, regional human rights instruments, national constitutions, and other laws.
- ☑ The Declaration was the first step in the process of formulating the **International Bill of Human Rights**, which was completed in 1966, and came into force in 1976, after a sufficient number of countries had ratified them.
- ☑ UDHR is **the most translated document in the world**, available in more than 500 languages.

**ICAN receives Nobel Peace Prize**

The 2017 Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to **International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)**.

**About ICAN:**

- ✍ ICAN is a coalition of non-governmental organisations from over 100 countries around the globe.
- ✍ It was officially launched in Vienna in 2007.
- ✍ It is working to promote adherence to and full implementation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The campaign helped bring about this treaty.

**Vyas Samman 2017**

Eminent Hindi writer Mamta Kalia will be honoured with literary award Vyas Samman for year 2017 for her novel "Dukkham Sukkham".

- ◆ She has earlier received "Yashpal Katha Samman" from Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan, "Sahitya Bhushan Samman" and "Ram Manohar Lohia Samman".

**About Vyas Samman:**

- ✍ **Instituted by the K K Birla Foundation**, the award carries an amount of Rs 2.50 lakh and is **given to outstanding literary work in Hindi authored by an Indian citizen**.
- ✍ The Foundation has **also instituted other awards like the Saraswati Samman, given every year for an outstanding literary work written in any of the Indian languages**.

**Previous Vyas Samman awardees:**

- ☑ Eminent literary critic and poet **Ram Vilas Sharma** is the first recipient of this award in 1991.
- ☑ Hindi scholar and writer **Sunita Jain's poetry collection "Kshama"** has been selected for the prestigious Vyas Samman 2015.
- ☑ Renowned Hindi writer **Surinder Verma** was awarded "Vyas Samman" for 2016, for his novel **"Kaatna shami ka vriksha padma-pankhuri ki dhar se"**.

## SAICON 2017

- ☑ The 1st International Conference of Sports Science (SAICON) 2017 was inaugurated in Delhi.
- ☑ Organized by Sports Authority of India, the 3-day conference is being attended by about 1000 national and international delegates.
- ☑ SAICON 2017 will promote scientific temperament in the country and inspire students, researchers and educationists alike to take up sports science and research to the next level.

### Paytm's founder named UN Environment's Patron for Clean Air

Paytm founder and CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma has been named the UN Environment's 'Patron for Clean Air'.

- ✎ He will help drive greater environmental action and awareness, and advocate for the goals of **UN Environment's global BreatheLife campaign**.
- ✎ The campaign will work on promoting policy and citizen action for better air quality for people.

### Navy Day 2017

- ✎ India celebrates Navy Day on 4th December to celebrate Navy's role in 1971 Indo-Pakistan war when missile boats carried out a daring attack on Karachi harbour.
- ✎ The mission titled as Operation Trident commenced on the same date. Operation Trident had also resulted in first use of anti-ship missiles in the Arabian Sea region.
- ✎ Indian Navy is one of most potent maritime forces in the world and the most lethal in Indian Ocean.

### 5 December: World Soil Day

The World Soil Day is celebrated every year on 5th of December by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

- ✎ The Theme for year 2017 is '**Caring for the Planet starts from the Ground**'.
- ✎ The observance of the day aims to communicate messages on the importance of soil quality for food security, healthy ecosystems and human well-being.

### 7 December: International Civil Aviation Day

- ✎ International Civil Aviation Day was observed on 7 December 2017 with the theme '**Working Together to Ensure No Country is Left Behind**'.
- ✎ The main aim of the day is to help generate and reinforce worldwide awareness of the importance of international civil aviation to the social and economic development of States and of the unique role of the **International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)** in helping States to cooperate and realize a truly global rapid transit network at the service of all mankind.
- ✎ The current theme was selected by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) council for a period of four years from 2015 to 2018.

#### Background:

- ☑ In 1944, participants from 54 nations gathered in Chicago, USA and signed the Convention on International Civil Aviation, also known more popularly as the 'Chicago Convention'. The agreement has since then permitted the global civil aviation system to develop peacefully, in a manner benefitting all nations across the world.

### Naseem-Al-Bahr 2017

- ✎ The 11th edition of **Naseem-Al-Bahr (also called 'Sea Breeze')** 2017 **Naval exercise between India and Oman** was held at Said Bin Sultan Naval Base, Wudam in Oman.
- ✎ The first exercise Indian Navy with Royal Navy of Oman was conducted in 1993 and this year marks 24 years of Indian Navy -Royal Navy of Oman bilateral exercises.



## Summary of the Monthly Journals

### Consumer protection: Sine Qua Non for Good Governance

The Constitution prescribes certain Directive Principles of State Policy, which though not justiciable, are 'fundamental in governance of the country and it is the duty of the State to strive to promote the welfare of people by securing and protecting as effectively as possible a social order in which justice social, economic and political shall form the basis in all institutions of national life'. The concern in the Indian Constitution for protection and promotion of an individual's rights, and for the dignity and welfare of the citizen makes it imperative to provide for the welfare of the individual as a consumer, a client and a customer.

The concern of consumer protection is to ensure fair trade practices; quality of goods and efficient services with information to the consumer with regard to quality, quantity, potency, composition and price for their choice of purchase.

One of the most important milestones in the area of consumer protection/consumer movement in India has been the enactment of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. It is one of the most progressive and comprehensive pieces of umbrella legislation covering all goods and services. Unlike other laws, which are basically punitive or preventive in nature, the provisions of the Act are also compensatory.

Under section 6 of the Consumer Protection Act, there has been an effort to empower consumers by giving them six basic rights. These consumer rights are as follows.

- 1) **Right to Safety:** Consumers are authorized to protect themselves against the marketing of services and goods which are hazardous for life and property. If the particular service or goods is hazardous and dangerous to the life and property, consumers must be informed and instructed clearly about the mode for use of service and goods.
- 2) **Right to Information:** Consumers have every right to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of service or goods, with a view to protect the consumers against unfair trade practices. Adequate information should be provided to consumers so that they may choose exactly what fits in their budget, life-style and fashion.
- 3) **Right to Choose:** Consumers are authorized to get access to variety of services and goods at competitive prices. Moreover, fair competition must be promoted so as to provide the widest range of services or goods at the lowest and competitive price to the consumers.
- 4) **Right to be Heard:** This right is the crux of the Consumer Protection Act, because under this right, consumers are assured that if something goes wrong with the consumers, their interest will receive due care in the appropriate Consumer Forum.
- 5) **Right to Redressal:** If a consumer has suffered loss or injury due to unfair trade practice or restrictive trade practice and allegations made in the complaint have been proved, the appropriate Forum, where complaint has been made, will indemnify and compensate the consumer.
- 6) **Right to Education:** This right informs the consumer about the practice prevalent in the market and what remedies can be availed of against them. For spreading this education, media, or school curriculum and cultural activities may be exercised as medium.

The Act provides for an exclusive three tier redressal machinery as an alternative to the civil court and other legal remedies available in the country, wherein an aggrieved consumer can seek redressal against any defect in the goods purchased or deficiencies in services availed, including restrictive/ unfair trade practices adopted by such manufacturer and trader of goods/ service provider. The Act is intended to provide simple, speedy and inexpensive redressal to the consumers' grievances. It also provides relief of a specific nature and awards compensation, wherever appropriate, to the consumer.

A free market economy can only function effectively with the support of an educated consumer. Consumer Education is a way to balance the power between producers and consumers. Education helps a consumer in making cogent choices and protects him from trade and business-related abuses. To create an increased level of awareness of consumer rights, consumers have to be educated about rights and responsibilities through concerted publicity and awareness campaigns, with special emphasis given to vulnerable groups such as women and children, students, farmers and rural families and the working class.

India being a large country of 1.25 Billion population, with majority living in rural areas, Government has been conducting a countrywide multimedia awareness campaign educating consumers on various issues related to consumer rights and responsibilities across diverse subjects. "**Jago Grahak Jago**" has today become a household maxim.

More recently, joint publicity campaigns have been launched in partnership with the related Government Departments/ Organizations that serve with a mass consumer clientele. For instance, on food, with the Food Safety & Standard Standards Authority of India (FSSAI); on financial services with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI); and on medicines with the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) through various electronic and print media such as Television, Radio, Newspapers and outdoor advertising. The consumer awareness campaign is implemented through the Directorate of Audio and visual Publicity (DAVP). In order to create awareness among the people living in rural and backward areas, the Government has decided to take part in important fairs/festivals of various states/UTs, in view of the fact that such fairs/festivals draw a large number of people from rural and backward areas.

All of us are consumers. The consumer today is changing very rapidly. Ever since the mid-twentieth century consumers have faced major changes in their lifestyles and consumption habits due to different cultural, social, economic and technical influences and factors. The increasing mobility of populations, production of new items and services, new purchasing methods and information availability modify perceptions and alter loyalties.

But due to the immense amount of products and services available with variation in the quality of products and services, consumers may not always be able to make an effective choice that meets their personal needs. Moreover, commercial development promotes new artificial needs. Not all consumers will critically filter messages from industry and from the advertising sector. Consumers need to develop an awareness of the difference between real and perceived needs and they need the skills to be selective to truly obtain products and services which match their needs. In addition, rapid changes and potential risks in consumption make it essential for the consumer to consider the consequences of their consumption.

Business should see improved consumer education not as a threat but as a source of commercial benefit. Consumers make better choices and because of their higher expectations, there is a positive effect on competitiveness as companies improve their products and services.

Although implementation of the Consumer Protection Act can be viewed as a success, there are still serious shortfalls in achieving the desired level of consumer welfare because of various factors such as deficiencies in quality infrastructure, regulatory deficit in many products and services which impact health, safety and environment and lack of mandatory standards for many products.

### **SOME INITIATIVES TOWARDS CONSUMER PROTECTION**

**INGRAM:** An Integrated Grievance Redress Mechanism (INGRAM) portal was launched for bringing all stakeholders such as consumers, Central and State Government Agencies, private companies, regulators, Ombudsmen and call centers etc. on to a single platform. The portal helps in creating awareness among consumers to protect their rights and inform them of their responsibilities. Consumers can register their grievances online through this portal.

The National Consumer Helpline is accessible now through this portal. As value added services, a mobile application and easy to remember five-digit short code 14404 has been launched for consumers from across the country to access National Consumer Helpline.

**State Consumer Helplines:** State Consumer Helplines have been set up by State (provincial) Governments with the objective to encourage Alternate Consumer Disputes Redressal mechanism at State level and help in resolving cases through mediation.

**Smart Consumer Application:** The Government has launched a mobile application “Smart Consumer” to enable the consumer to scan the bar code of the product and get all details of the product such as name of the product, details of manufacturer, year and month of manufacture, net content and consumer care details for making a complaint in case of any defect.

**GAMA:** In its endeavor to address the problem of misleading advertisements, the Government has launched a portal called “Grievances Against Misleading Advertisements (GAMA)”. for registering complaints online. A Consumer can register a complaint along with a copy / video / audio of such advertisement through the web portal.

**Online Dispute Resolution:** An Online Consumer Mediation Centre, established at the National Law School of India University, Bengaluru under the aegis of Ministry Of Consumer Affairs, Government of India aims to provide for a state-of-the-art infrastructure for resolving consumer disputes both through physical as well as online mediation through its platform. The center will provide innovative technology for consumers and organisations to manage and resolve conflicts and to propel online mediation as a first choice to resolving consumer disputes. This is an innovative tool that affords consumers better access to justice through quick and easy redressal mechanism and at the same time provide opportunity for businesses to maintain good customer relations.

**Online Consumer Communities:** In association with the Local Circles, a social media platform, the Government has launched a platform ‘Online Consumer Communities’ for citizens to discuss and opine about governance and daily life issues. Through this, a citizen can get connected with their Government, City, Causes, Neighbourhood, Interest, needs and any other communities they are a part of.

**Campaign on Internet Safety:** India has currently one of the largest number of internet users. With the rapid increase in digitisation across all spheres, the message of internet safety needs to be integrated into the everyday tasks that the consumer undertakes online. Government in association with a Partner Company has initiated a year-long campaign organizing ‘Digital Literacy, Safety and Security’ workshops to educate users about the challenges of internet safety and security.

Consumer Protection movement to be effective and meaningful needs the proactive support of the government, business, organisations of Civil Society, Educational Institutions - Schools, Colleges, Universities and Research Institutions. Over and above, the support of every individual is a *sine qua non* for the Consumer movement to be purposeful. The policies, schemes and programmes of the Government of India through the Department of Consumer Affairs are no doubt useful but their effectiveness finally depend on the involvement of the institutions and the people at large. The need of the hour is for total commitment to the consumer cause and social responsiveness to consumer needs. This should, however, proceed in a harmonious manner so that our society becomes a better place for all of us to live in.

also the Finance Minister of Assam, said “there would be a constant endeavour to do away with the highest rate of taxation of 28 per cent slab”. The introduction of the GST by the government was to align the Indian taxation system with global standards and make ease of doing business with India easier than before. And at the domestic level the purpose behind GST was to replace the plethora of taxes such as sales tax < excise < octroi and others with a single uniform tax across the country and make the movement of goods pan India smoother. The long term benefits of GST would be enormous for the country and trad.

**Source: Yojana**

## Government Initiatives for Development of Rural Tourism

### Concept of Rural Tourism:

Government of India explains Rural Tourism as “Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefitting the local community, economically

and socially, as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism is essentially an activity that takes place in the countryside. It is multi-faceted and may entail farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism and eco-tourism. As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics like-it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is pre-dominantly in natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and tradition.”

Ministry of Tourism in India has laid a great deal of emphasis on the development of such rural tourism sites which boast of rich art, culture, handloom, heritage and crafts, these villages are affluent in both natural beauty and cultural splendour. Rural tourism is supposed to generate increasing benefits to rural areas in terms of rural productivity, conservation of rural environment and culture, local people’s involvement and a suitable way of adapting traditional beliefs and values to modern times.

#### **Major types of Rural Tourism in India:**

- ◆ **Agricultural Tourism:** To explore more about the agricultural industry and how farmers work with crops.
- ◆ **Cultural Tourism:** To allow tourists to be immersed in local culture related activities, like rituals and festivals.
- ◆ **Nature Tourism:** Responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.
- ◆ **Adventure Tourism:** Any constructive activity which tests the endurance of both a person and his equipment to its extreme limit is termed as adventure.
- ◆ **Food Routes:** Where wanderlust meets the variety that persists in our cuisine. This tourism is all about food and knowing more about different staples of different places.
- ◆ **Community Eco-tourism:** Where tourism is for a purpose. It is a rather responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improves the well-being of local people.
- ◆ **Ethno-tourism:** To expand the horizons to view different cultures. It is essentially to know more about various ethnic and cultural lifestyles and beliefs.

#### **Increasing Interest in Rural Tourism:**

- ◆ Rural tourism helps to garner knowledge on agriculture, farming, local governance, etc.
- ◆ Rural tourism helps to remove myths about rural lifestyle that may exist in urban minds like villages are unhygienic, rural life is unsafe, etc.
- ◆ Rural tourism will help a person to explore the vast diversity that breathe in the interiors of India.

#### **Different Schemes of the Government of India:**

Ministry of Tourism has identified many spots which are being developed as tourist destination in rural areas. These sites are still unexplored. To help in the holistic development of such tourist places, the Ministry has introduced certain schemes, which are detailed below:

#### **Swadesh Darshan- Scheme Guidelines for Integrated Development of Theme Based Circuits:**

India’s rich cultural, historical, religious and natural heritage provide a huge potential for development of tourism and job creation. In due recognition of this potential, the Union Government, in the Budget speech of 2014-15 decided to create tourist circuits around specific themes.

#### **PRASAD- Pilgrimage Rejuvenation for Spiritual Augmentation Drive:**

Pilgrimage tourism is a form of tourism motivated partly or wholly by religious sentiments. India is a land of many religions like Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, Cristianity, Jainism and Sufism, having their major pilgrimage centres in different parts of the country. Religion and spirituality are

common motivations for travel, with major tourist destinations having developed largely as a result of their connections to sacred places, persons and events.

### **Special tourism Zones:**

The Union Budget of 2017-18 has announced that Five Special Tourism Zones, anchored on SPVs, will be set up in partnership with the States. This would help in introducing Incredible India's second global campaign to strengthen India's position as an attractive tourist destination.

### **e-Tourist Visa Facility:**

To facilitate arrival of international tourists, Ministry of Tourism has been working very closely with Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of External Affairs for easing of the Visa Regime in the country over a period of time. In order to make rural tourism attractive, Ministry of Tourism is promoting Farm Tourism as niche products. Ministry is also encouraging Home Stay Facilities in rural areas.

### **Impact of Rural Tourism:**

#### **◆ Positive Impact**

The most important impact of increasing rural tourism is the impact on economy. With increased number of tourists visiting the countryside, there will be a boost in the income level of the people due to increased level of trade among the people. This will also generate jobs among the youths.

The traditional handloom and handicrafts of any place is matter of pride for the local people. Through tourism, the visitor can have the benefit of directly buying the finished products from the local people. This in turn will have a positive impact on the overall economy.

Exchange of ideas with the tourists will create a new idea among the villagers. This entails increasing interest in education, preventive health care, modern gadgets, etc. That will help in universal literacy.

With more tourists visiting the village, there will be improvement in the connectivity by means of roads, increase in public transports, etc.

Villages which are close to sanctuaries and reserve parks can teach the idea of preserving the nature to their urban counterparts. Living by the side of nature for centuries, they will have more knowledge about how to preserve nature. Tourists may develop an interest in the local religion and traditional rituals that act as catalyst for social harmony.

#### **◆ Negative Impact:**

However, rural tourism may have certain negative impacts. To facilitate tourism, there would be an increase in the infrastructure development of the countryside. This may lead to concretisation of rural area and may distort the natural beauty. Besides, influx of tourists may lead to exploitation of natural resources.

Tourism may have an adverse effect on the traditional livelihood of people. The village people may shift from agriculture and other traditional livelihoods to lucrative livelihoods related to tourism. This may, in turn have a negative impact on rural tourism.

### **Scope for Improvement:**

Every aspect of life has both positive as well as negative views. For sustainable development, it is essential to optimise the positive impacts and minimise the negative impacts. The same is true for popularising rural tourism also.

In order to make tourists feel comfortable while visiting any place, they may be provided detailed information regarding their place of visit in advance. They may also be informed about any particular custom prevalent in that region so that the tourists may prepare themselves accordingly.

There is a necessity for having good infrastructure and logistic support in villages. Roads connecting to the nearest railway station or highways would improve accessibility to the villages. That would improve accessibility to the villages. That would benefit both the tourists as well as the villagers. However, instead of having more hotels or guest houses in rural areas, it is better to encourage homestay. The tourist can have a taste of the traditional practices along with local recipes prevalent in rural India. This would help the tourists to connect to the villagers in less time.

Many states of India are blessed with medicinal herbs and other ayurvedic products which have strong medicinal values. The Government can develop suitable infrastructure to capture such tourists who can avail medicinal facilities in such villages of India.

The role of state Governments is very important when it comes to rural tourism. Each State has a different potential to attract tourists. Hence, it is necessary that State Governments identify this potential and work in close coordination with the Union Government to promote rural tourism. That will benefit the tourism sector of the country on the whole.

Tourists may be advised well in advance not to get involved into any local issues which may lead to law and order problems. The Government may conduct a survey among the tourists and get to know about their feelings regarding the place of their visit. Based on their feedbacks, measures may be adopted to improve tourism.

**Source: Kurukshetra**

## **India's Foreign Policy: Economic Challenges and Prospects**

Though India has been practicing a very high ethical position as far as its foreign policy is concerned because India believes in 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam' meaning the whole world is one family. The world situation changes every now and then and there is no matter in politics as dynamic as the foreign policy as it has to cope with the changing situation all around the world no doubt, Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam in mind. This fast changing situation leads to making new friends and foes and the policy has to transform itself to match the situation. It is a known fact that in the present world, economic matters have taken the prime position as grabbing land of other country to increase its might is no longer possible, thus might of a country is reflected in the way of economic strength. India in recent times faces many challenges in its foreign affairs which includes energy security, maritime security, trade related matters, neighbourhood affairs, militancy, NSG, Permanent membership in the UN Security Council, Climate Change and so forth.

### **India's Energy Security and Policy**

Growth of GDP is closely related with the growth of the demand for energy as no development work can be done without energy. That is why energy consumption per capita has become one of the prominent indicators of the economic development and the quality of life of the people.

Recently India has levelled the gap between demand and supply of energy particularly of electricity. India's power generation capacity is distributed in three different sectors- Central Sector, State Sector and the Private Sector. Coal production in India is low added by its low quality, cannot be an alternate source of energy and hence India has to depend on other sources of energy for example oil and gas and to some extent nuclear energy. Oil and natural gas play a vital role in Indian energy mix. As India is not so fortunate in the field of natural sources of gas and oil domestically, India has to increasingly rely on imports to meet future demand for oil. Almost all the amount of gas available in India is used for generation of electricity. One fortunate thing is that most of India's gas demand is met through domestic sources. This scenario of energy sector forces the country to have a matured and well dependable and thought out policy for the uninterrupted supply of energy. Oil being major source of energy in India, maintaining its supply is a huge challenge for government as domestic source is unable to meet the entire demand of oil. The country is left with no choice than to import it. India started negotiations with Turkmenistan for a pipeline known as "TAP line". ONGC has established partnership in south-East Asia with investments in Vietnamese offshore fields. India simultaneously is engaged with its two important neighbours, Nepal and Bangladesh as many rivers are commonly flowing in these countries and thus creating enormous prospect of developing hydro-electricity by making barrages on them. After signing Nuclear Agreement with the US, India is continuously engaged with the Nuclear Supplier's group for the supply of necessary fuel to generate nuclear power. Energy security of the country does not depend on one or the other source, rather it depends on various sources of energy, accordingly India is in continuous touch with other countries like Iran, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and others including ASEAN countries for the purpose.

### **Trade related issues**

In the present situation when the world economic outlook is positive and Americans are adopting protectionist policy as far as world trade is concerned, India is faced with increasing its share in the world trade. The job is tough and thus needs clear cut understanding and long lasting strategy which can help it achieve its objective particularly when the U.S is every day making it difficult to provide Visas to our IT professionals along with other skilled workers.

**Maritime Issues and Policies:**

Seas and Oceans around the world had been important whole through the history of the world but it has become a hot international matter of interest not because of the route of transporting goods from one country to the other, but because of the source of energy. It is estimated that the East China Sea and the South China Sea have enormous deposit of natural oil and gas. China has very little amount of indigenous sources of energy and thus it imports most of its requirements from the other countries. Not only China loses a great amount of foreign exchange but its security is also in vulnerable condition. If at all it wants it to be a super power it must be self-dependent as far as energy supply is concerned. This is the reason why China has captured these seas by making artificial islands. On the other hand, Japan is extremely vulnerable when it comes about energy supply. Japan does not have the source of energy at all and thus at present it hugely depends on nuclear power which has become controversial in recent times after Fukushima incident. China's presence in these waters prominently makes Japan's security a most vulnerable one as they are foes not friends.

**Conclusion**

India, with its enormous resources both natural and human, possesses the high ability to become a world power very soon. Persisting domestic problems like energy security not improving the size and share of foreign trade, ever increasing population and thereby unemployment, terrorism and militancy, and overall, inconsistent economic growth are bigger challenges which obstruct Indian way from becoming world power. With making the weapons, arms and ammunition, and particularly fighter planes, India will have to depend on both US and Russia every time. Since these countries have vested interest in this as India is the biggest market for military equipment from these countries, they will not allow India to develop its own weapons of mass destruction which was seen in the matter of Cryogenic Engine denied by Russia under the pressure of the US. Having aware of that India has brought its flagship programme of Make in India and under this, many countries like US, Russia, France and Israel have agreed to and already started producing sophisticated weapons F-16 war planes, Bramhos Missiles etc. Thus as the things are moving, it looks like in a decade India will emerge as a super power.