

**Current Affairs  
March-2018**



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**A-1 Chandra House, Top Floor, (Opp. ICICI Bank), Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi-09**

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## EDITORIAL

### India, Iran: New priorities drive an old, up-down relationship

✎ Iran's President Rouhani's India visit, which included bilateral talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, comes 10 years after President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad travelled to India in 2008. India-Iran ties were testy then - from New Delhi's voting behaviour at the International Atomic Energy Agency, Tehran perceived it to be closer to the US and EU, which were mounting pressure on Iran's nuclear programme. Things are different now — and the two countries have crucial common strategic interests. In their engagement, the sides will be mindful both of their shared cultural and historical ties, and of the several ups and downs the bilateral relationship has witnessed.

#### A long history of ties

- ✎ Diplomatic ties were established on March 15, 1950, and before the 1979 Revolution, the Shah of Iran visited India twice (March 1956 and February 1978). Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and Morarji Desai travelled to Iran in 1959, April 1974, and June 1977, respectively.
- ✎ After the Revolution, following Rao's visit to Iran in 1993 and Rafsanjani's to India in 1995, Vice President K R Narayanan visited Iran in October 1996. In April 2001, during Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Tehran, the two countries signed the Tehran Declaration that laid out a framework of possible cooperation. The Delhi Declaration, signed during the visit of President Mohammad Khatami, who was the Chief Guest at Republic Day, 2003, described the vision of a strategic partnership.
- ✎ A long hiatus followed, until Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Iran for the 16th Non-Aligned Movement Summit in August 2012. He met Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad. After the conclusion of the P5+1 talks with Iran in 2015, Western sanctions were formally lifted in January 2016. In May that year, Modi visited Tehran to unlock the potential of the bilateral relationship.
- ✎ Rouhani's visit, in the second term of his presidency, comes at a time when the administration of President Donald Trump has taken a belligerent line on Iran, and threatens to reimpose sanctions.

#### Connective, energy, strategy

- ✎ For India, with the passage of time, priorities of engagement with Iran, too, have changed. Now, the main pillar of engagement is connectivity. The Chabahar port in southeastern Iran is the lynchpin of that engagement, because the port gives India alternative access to Afghanistan and onwards to Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan.
- ✎ India then, has a vital interest in operationalising Chabahar to its "full potential". The first consignment of Indian wheat was sent to Afghanistan through Chabahar in October-November last year, and the first phase of the port was formally inaugurated by President Rouhani in December. Full operationalisation is likely by the end of this year.
- ✎ India is also working with Iran to operationalise the ambitious International North South Transport Corridor, which will connect Mumbai with Central Asia, through the port of Bandar Abbas on the Strait of Hormuz, and then through rail and road links to the Eurasian region.
- ✎ The other major pillar driving the engagement is energy. India imports almost 60% of its crude from West Asia and the Gulf, and Iran is one of the major suppliers. New Delhi is keen to lift the relationship to a comprehensive partnership by developing the Farzad B offshore oilfields in the Persian Gulf.



Indian companies can now invest in rupees in Iran - Bhutan and Nepal are the other two countries that get such treatment - and President Rouhani is likely to make a pitch for Indian businesses to come to Iran.

### **Chabahar Port: A regional tug of war with Pakistan**

- ✎ On top of President Rouhani's agenda in his India visit is the early operationalisation of the Chabahar port on Iran's Arabian Sea coast — a major initiative between India and Iran and a long-planned Indian investment towards its development. The project has been central to India's hopes to open a new transport corridor for Indian exports into Central Asia and Afghanistan that would bypass Pakistan. It is viewed as India's counterfoil to China's development of Pakistan's Gwadar port, which lies barely 100 km east of Chabahar, on Pakistani territory.
- ✎ During Modi's Tehran visit in 2016, India, Iran and Afghanistan came together to sign the Trilateral Transit Agreement (TTA) that established the trade corridor that would link the Chabahar port to Afghanistan. Therein too, India proposed ambitious investment plans for Chabahar's development. The deal was of interest to landlocked Afghanistan as the TTA would provide it with an alternative route to the sea, and hence reduce its current dependence on Pakistan's Karachi port

### **Against One Belt One Road**

- ✎ In a pushback against China's ultra ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India has been collaborating with Japan to build the Freedom Corridor, which would create new road, rail and shipping routes that would stretch from South East Asia to Sri Lanka, Iran and Africa. Another major project is the proposed International North-South Transportation Corridor (INSTC) proposed by India, which would develop a network of ship, rail, and road routes for moving goods over 7,000 km from India's western ports up to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas and exit the country through its Caspian sea port Bandar Anzali, then up to the Russian port of Astrakhan and on to markets in Russia, Europe and Central Asia. The INSTC is expected to greatly reduce costs compared to the current shipping route which runs through the Suez Canal, the Strait of Gibraltar and around the top of northern Europe.
- ✎ Then there is the common interest in stabilising Afghanistan. But while Tehran views the US involvement in that country with suspicion, India believes that Washington's commitment on the ground is critical to stave off Pakistani power plays. It is important to address these divergences through honest and frank conversations between the two sides. There is also a strong case for improved people-to-people links. Restrictive visa regimes have ensured the Indian diaspora in Iran is small in comparison to other countries in the region, and the tourist traffic is low.

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

### Khajuraho Dance Festival 2018

#### Why in news?

- **Recently, 44th edition of Khajuraho dance festival was celebrated at Khajuraho temple, the UNESCO world heritage site.** The Dance Festival was organised by the culture department of the Madhya Pradesh government.

#### About Khajuraho Dance Festival:

- Khajuraho Dance Festival is annual cultural festival that highlights richness of various Indian classical dance styles.
- During the festival, dances were performed in an open- air auditorium, in front of Vishwanatha Temple dedicated to Lord Shiva and Chitragupta Temple dedicated to Sun God.
- The festival showcased classical dances including Kathak, Odissi, Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathakali and Mohiniattam.

#### About Khajuraho Temples:

- Khajuraho Temples is a group of Hindu and Jain Temples in Madhya Pradesh build by **Chandela Dynasty** between 950 and 1050 AD.
- They are listed as **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.
- The Khajuraho group of temples were built together but were dedicated to two religions, Hinduism and Jainism, suggesting a tradition of acceptance and respect for diverse religious views among Hindus and Jains in the region.
- The first recorded mention of the Khajuraho temples is in the accounts of Abu Rihan al Biruni in AD 1022 and the Arab traveler Ibn Battuta in AD 1335.

#### Architecture of Khajuraho Temples:

- The temples are famous for their nagara-style architectural symbolism and their erotic sculptures (about 10% of total sculptures).
- The temples at Khajuraho are all made of Sandstone.
- The largest temple at Khajuraho is the Kandariya Mahadeva temple which is attributed to king Ganda.
- All the towers or shikhara of temple rise high, upward in curved pyramidal fashion, emphasizing temple's vertical thrust ending in horizontal fluted disc called Amalaka topped with Kalasha or vase.
- The erotic expression of sculptures in these temples gives equal importance in human experience as a spiritual pursuit, and it is seen as a part of the larger cosmic whole.

Source: The Hindu, PIB

## First International Kala Mela

### Why in news?

- ✎ The first ever International Kala Mela was organized recently in New Delhi.

### Organizers:

- The International Kala Mela has been organised by the Lalit Kala Akademi in partnership with IGNCA of the Ministry of Culture.

### About the International Kala Mela:

- The central objective of Kala Mela is to focus on direct interaction between the artist and the connoisseur and also educating and raising awareness about art, which has been the mandate of Lalit Kala Akademi.
- This comprehensive outreach shall include the participation of National, International level Artists/ Art Critics of repute from all over the Globe.

### Significance of this festival:

- This is for the first time that the Akademi has planned the International Kala Mela at such a large scale. It is going to prove a boon to especially those artists who cannot afford to exhibit their works of art in the Art Galleries.
- More than 800 artists from across the world are taking part in the Festival. The festival serves as a platform for artists to showcase their art works.

### About Lalit Kala Akademi:

- Lalit Kala Akademi, the National Academy of Art, was set up by the Government of India on 5 August, 1954.
- In 1957, it was registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860.
- The organisation functions through its General Council, Executive Board and other Committees.
- Lalit Kala Akademi is the Government's **apex cultural body in the field of visual arts in India.**
- It is an **autonomous body, which is fully funded by the Ministry of Culture.**
- The Akademi is an independent organisation and functions at arm's length from the Government.
- It has substantial independence in making decisions related to national and international exhibitions, events and providing financial assistance to artists and art organisations through scholarships and grants.
- It is aimed to promote and propagate understanding of Indian art, both within and outside the country.
- It does so through providing scholarships, a fellow program, and sponsoring and organizing numerous exhibitions in India and overseas.

Source: PIB

## Mahamastakabhisheka

### Why in news?

- ✎ 88th Mahamastakabhisheka (head anointing ceremony) of the monolithic statue of Lord Bahubali has begun at Shravanabelagola, Karnataka.

### About Mahamastakabhisheka:

- ✓ The mastakabhisheka is held once in 12 years. One of the biggest festivals for the Jain community, it honors Lord Bahubali, a revered Jain icon.
- ✓ According to Jain texts, Bahubali attained liberation from the cycle of births and deaths (moksha) at Mount Kailash and is revered as a liberated soul (Siddha) by the Jains.
- ✓ Bahubali is also called Gommateshwara because of the Gommateshwara statue dedicated to him and as lord “Kammateswara” from an inscription.
- ✓ The Gommateshwara statue was built by the Ganga dynasty minister and commander Chavundaraya; it is a 57-foot monolith situated above a hill in Shravanabelagola in the Hassan district, Karnataka state, India.
- ✓ It was built in around 981 A.D. and is one of the largest free-standing statues in the world.

### Shravanabelagola

- ✓ Shravanabelagola is a small township located 51 km (32 miles) southeast of Hassan District in the state of Karnataka, which sits at an altitude of about 3,350 feet above sea level. There are excellent roads to Shravanabelagola from both Bangalore and Mysore.
- ✓ Shravanabelagola, nestled by the Vindhyagiri and Chandragiri Hills, protected by the monolith Bhagwan Bahubali, and home to over 2,300 years of Jain heritage, is a veritable picture postcard of our history and heritage spanning the centuries.
- ✓ In the town of Shravanabelagola, stands a colossal rock-cut statue of Lord Gommateshwara Shri Bahubali.

### About Bahubali Statue

- ✓ The image of Gommateshwara has curly hair ringlets and large ears. The eyes are open as if he is viewing the world with detachment. His facial features are perfectly chiselled with a faint touch of a smile at the corner of the lips that embody a calm inner peace and vitality. His shoulders are broad, the arms stretch straight down and the figure has no support from the thigh upwards.
- ✓ There is an anthill in the background which signifies his incessant penance. From this anthill, emerge a snake and a creeper which twine around both the legs and arms culminating as a cluster of flowers and berries at the upper portion of the arms. The entire figure stands on an open lotus signifying the totality attained in installing this unique statue.
- ✓ On either side of Gommateshwara stands two tall and majestic chauri bearers in the service of the Lord. One of them is a yaksh and the other one is a yakshi. These richly ornamented and beautifully carved figures complement the main figure. Carved on the rear side of the anthill is also a trough for collecting water and other ritual ingredients used for the sacred bath of the image.

Source: PIB

## Revitalising Infrastructure and Systems in Education (RISE), an initiative to step up research investments

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### Why in news?

- ✎ In his Budget 2018 speech, the Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley unveiled a new scheme called Revitalising Infrastructure and Systems in Education (RISE).

### Key Facts

- The RISE scheme will be **financed via a restructured higher education financing agency (HEFA)** that is functioning for the last two months as a non-banking financial company.
- It aims to lend low-cost funds to government higher educational institutions.
- While HEFA was granted a budgetary allocation of Rs250 crore in the fiscal year 2018, in FY19, the lending body will be provided a budget of Rs2,750 crore.
- Presently, HEFA is looking to raise Rs20,000 crore and Budget announcement hiked this number to Rs1 trillion. HEFA will have a total investment of Rs 1,00,000-crore in the next four years.

### Key features of the HEFA:

- The HEFA would be jointly promoted by the identified Promoter and the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) with an authorised capital of Rs. 2,000 crore. The Government equity would be Rs. 1,000 crore.
- The HEFA would be formed as a SPV within a PSU Bank/ Government-owned-NBFC (Promoter). It would leverage the equity to raise up to Rs. 20,000 crore for funding projects for infrastructure and development of world class Labs in IITs/IIMs/NITs and such other institutions.
- The HEFA would also mobilise CSR funds from PSUs/Corporates, which would in turn be released for promoting research and innovation in these institutions on grant basis.
- The HEFA would finance the civil and lab infrastructure projects through a 10-year loan.
- The principal portion of the loan will be repaid through the 'internal accruals' (earned through the fee receipts, research earnings etc.) of the institutions. The Government would service the interest portion through the regular Plan assistance.
- All the Centrally Funded Higher Educational Institutions would be eligible for joining as members of the HEFA.
- For joining as members, the Institution should agree to escrow a specific amount from their internal accruals to HEFA for a period of 10 years. This secured future flows would be securitised by the HEFA for mobilising the funds from the market.
- Each member institution would be eligible for a credit limit as decided by HEFA based on the amount agreed to be escrowed from the internal accruals.

Source: PIB, The Hindu

## Cabinet approves expansion of Ujjwala Yojana beneficiary cover to 8cr

### Why in news?

- Recently, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved to enhance target base of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) from 5 crore to 8 crore.
  - The revised target of PMUY will be achieved by 2020 with an additional allocation of Rs. 4,800 crore.
  - The increase in the target for the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana meant to provide LPG connections to rural women.
  - The decision comes in the wake of huge response to PMUY from the women particularly in rural areas and to cover such households not having LPG connection.

### Targeting of poor households:

- Besides, expanding target base of scheme, Cabinet also approved proposal to expand scheme to cover all SC/ST households, beneficiaries of Antyoday Anna Yojana (AAY), PMAY (Gramin), forest dwellers, most backward classes (MBC), Tea and Ex-Tea Garden Tribes, people residing in Islands and rivers etc. in addition to SECC identified households.
- This move will address practical difficulty faced in implementation of PMUY, namely, targeting genuinely poor households left out of Socio Economic Caste Survey (SECC) list.

### About Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana aims to provide five crore LPG connections to women in Below Poverty Line (BPL) households over the next three financial years, at a cost of Rs. 8,000 crore.
  - The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
  - It is first social welfare scheme implemented by Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
  - The scheme will be partially funded from the savings accruing to the government from LPG users who gave up their subsidy as part of the Give It Up programme.
  - The new users who receive LPG connections under the scheme will not have to pay the security deposit, while the Rs. 1,600 administrative costs, cost of pressure regulator booklet and safety hose will be borne by the government.
  - The households will be selected using the socio-economic and caste census data. Consumers will have the option to purchase gas stove and refills on EMI.

### Why should one opt for LPG?

- About 75 crore Indians, especially women and girls, are exposed to severe household air pollution (HAP) from the use of solid fuels such as biomass, dung cakes and coal for cooking.
- A report from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare places HAP as the second leading risk factor contributing to India's disease burden.
- According to the World Health Organization, solid fuel use is responsible for about 13% of all mortality and morbidity in India (measured as Disability-Adjusted Life Years), and causes about 40% of all pulmonary disorders, nearly 30% of cataract incidences, and over 20% each of ischemic heart disease, lung cancer and lower respiratory infection.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

## President hosts 'LPG Panchayat'

### Why in news?

- Recently, President Ram Nath Kovind hosted an 'LPG Panchayat' at Rashtrapati Bhavan. It was organised by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjawala Yojana (PMUY).

### About LPG Panchayat scheme:

- ✓ The LPG Panchayat aims to provide a platform for LPG consumers to interact with each other, promote mutual learning and share experiences.
- ✓ It also aims at spreading awareness among LPG users about how to properly use clean fuel and its useful benefits.
- ✓ It will provide platform to trigger discussion through sharing of personal experiences on benefits of use of clean fuel compared to traditional fuels like cowdung, charcoal or wood.
- ✓ It also aims to connect with beneficiaries of Ujjawala Yojana to resolve issues and wrong traditional beliefs among people through officials of oil PSUs, NGOs, Asha workers and social workers.

### Some Significant Provisions

- Under it, one lakh LPG Panchayats will be activated across country to deal with issue of safe use of LPG as well as discuss its various benefits on environment, health and how it empowers women.
- LPG Panchayat will serve as an interactive platform between those who received LPG cylinders under PMUY.
- One panchayat will have around 100 LPG customers of nearby areas, to discuss safe and sustainable usage of LPG, its benefits and the link between clean fuel for cooking and women's empowerment.
- The panchayats discuss issues such as safe practices, quality of service provided by distributors and availability of refill cylinders.

Source: PIB

## 8th edition of Theatre Olympics

### Why in news?

- India recently hosted the 8th Edition of Theatre Olympics 'The Biggest Theatre Celebration of the World'.
  - The event was organised by National School of Drama (NSD) under Ministry of Culture.
  - The theme of the festival is – "Flag of Friendship".

### About the Theatre Olympics:

- The Theatre Olympics was established in 1993 in Delphi, Greece, as the first international theatre festival.
- With the tagline 'Crossing Millennia', this is an initiative to connect the cultural past with the present and future, bringing the richness and diversity of theatre heritage to the experiments and research of contemporary theatre.
- The first country to host the Theatre Olympics was Greece in 1995.
- In 2016, the 7th Theatre Olympics were held in Wroclaw, Poland.

### About National School of Drama (NSD):

- ✓ NSD is a theatre training institute situated at New Delhi.
- ✓ It is an autonomous organization under Ministry of Culture, Government of India.
- ✓ It was set up in 1959 by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, and became an independent school in 1975.
- ✓ In 2005 it was granted deemed university status, but in 2011 it was revoked on the institute's request.

Source: PIB

### More than 40 Indian languages will soon be extinct

#### Why in news?

- ✎ According to a new report of the Census Directorate, 42 Indian languages are said to be endangered. Due to the small numbers who speak the languages are expected to soon be extinct.
  - These 42 languages are considered endangered because they are spoken by less than 10,000 people.
  - The languages include dialects as well.

#### What is the difference between a Dialect and a Language?

- Distinction between the two can be made based on the concept of Mutual intelligibility.
- Two languages where speakers can understand each other are considered dialects of the same language, whereas two languages where the speakers cannot understand each other are separate languages.
- Historically two dialects with close enough continuous contact will remain mutually intelligible. With enough separation in time and space dialects will eventually turn into separate languages.

#### Efforts to protect these languages:

- The Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore is working for protection and preservation of these languages under **central scheme Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages of India**.
- Under the programme, grammatical descriptions, monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, language primers, anthologies of folklore, encyclopedias of all languages or dialects that are endangered are being prepared.
- According to UNESCO, promoting idea of language is an inalienable cultural right. It has already built it into charter of sustainable development goals (SDGs). India is a formal signatory to charter. It is the state's obligation to secure and protect the community's right to its language.

#### Key facts:

- According to report of Census Directorate, there are 22 scheduled languages and 100 non-scheduled languages in country, which are spoken by large number of people — one lakh or more.
- Apart from the 22 scheduled languages, there are 31 other languages which were given the status of official language by state governments and Union territories.

#### Background:

- From 1971 onwards, the Census is disclosing names only of those languages which have more than 10,000 speakers. It has resulted decline in list of languages to 108 languages in 1971 Census, as against the 1,652 a decade ago.



The 2001 language data from Census have mixed list of 22 scheduled languages and hundred other languages. The 2011 Census data have been not disclosed yet.

#### 42 Endangered languages:

### THE ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

Here is a table of the number of endangered languages with the states that they are spoken in.

Indian states	No. of languages	Endangered Languages
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	11	Great Andamanese, Jarawa, Lamongse, Luro, Muot, Onge, Pu, Sanenyo, Sentilese, Shompen and Takahanyilang
Manipur	7	Aimol, Aka, Koiren, Lamgang, Langrong, Purum and Tarao
Himachal Pradesh	4	Baghati, Handuri, Pangvali and Sirmaudi
Odisha	3	Manda, Parji and Pengo
Karnataka	2	Koraga and Kuruba
Andhra Pradesh	2	Gadaba and Naiki
Tamil Nadu	2	Kota and Toda
Arunachal Pradesh	2	Mra and Na
Assam	2	Tai Nora and Tai Rong
Uttarakhand	1	Bangani
Jharkhand	1	Birhor
Maharashtra	1	Nihali
Meghalaya	1	Ruga
West Bengal	1	Toto

Source: The Hindu, Wiki

### Gender Ratio Woes in India

#### Why in news?

- Economic Survey 2017-18 has pointed out Meta preference and fertility stopping rule for skewed sex-ratio of the last child (SRLC).

#### What is the status of gender ratio in India?

- The sex-ratio of the last child (SRLC) born in Indian families is excessively slanted.
- At national level, it is around 9.5 per cent worse than it should be, compared to other countries at similar levels of development.
- In Gujarat, Punjab and Rajasthan, the SRLC is 2,100 boys for every 1,000 girls, In Haryana, it is even worse at 2,300 boys: 1,000 girls.

- The male child preference is highest in Punjab and Haryana and lowest in Meghalaya.
- While India has shown improvement in several parameters related to women's empowerment, the preference for a son has not diminished.

### What are the reasons for this condition?

- An average Indian family prefers to have two children, there are instances where families have more than five children if the last child is not a male.
- Indian families carry on having kids until there is a boy and then, they stop having kids.
- The Survey calls this as “meta preference” and a “fertility stopping rule” by making an inference that there are 21 million unwanted girls of age group 0-25 were born because their parents wanted a boy.
- More than 2 million women go missing across age groups every year either due to sex-selective abortion, disease, neglect, or inadequate nutrition, according to the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS).
- Reasons behind preferring a male child are found to be compulsion of a woman to move to her husband's house post marriage, inheritance of property, rituals performed by sons, and dowry, among others.
- More women are educated, employed and earning than a decade ago they still do not have control over their earnings and childbirth.

### What are the suggestions from the government in this regard?

- The government had introduced schemes Beti Bachao -Beti Padhao, Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, enhanced maternity leave and mandatory Crèches in workplaces for supporting female children and child births.
- Economic Survey recommended that the nation must confront the societal preference for male offspring.
- It has also called for a stronger commitment on the gender front similar to the government's push for Ease of Doing Business.
- Equal participation by women in the labour force could push up the gross domestic product by 27 per cent.
- It's axiomatic that women's empowerment, education and agency in terms of deployment of their income, travel, etc. can lead to a big leap forward

Source: Business standard, The Hindu

## Government sets up the “NITI Forum for Northeast”

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Union Government has issued order setting up the ‘NITI Forum for North-East’.

### About NITI Forum for Northeast:

- ‘NITI Forum for North-East’ has been set up to identify constraints and recommend suitable interventions for speedy and sustainable growth in northeast region.

### Composition of the Forum:

- Members of the Forum will include Secretaries of Ministries of Road Transport & Highways, Railways, Power, Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation, New & Renewable Energy, Health & Family Welfare, Human Resource Development, Environment, Forest & Climate Change.
- Chief Secretaries of Northeastern states of Assam, Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram will also be members of the Forum. Secretary, North East Council (NEC), Shillong will be Member Secretary. Joint Secretary (NE), MHA, besides a number of experts from various fields will also be members of the Forum.
- The forum will be co-chaired by the Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog and Minister of State (I/C), Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region (DoNER).

### Functions of the Forum:

- ✎ The NITI Forum for Northeast is tasked
  - To identify various constraints on the way of accelerated, inclusive and sustainable economic growth in the North East Region of the country
  - To recommend suitable interventions for addressing identified constraints.
  - To review the development status in the NER.
- ✎ The forum may also examine and address any other issues which are of importance but not specifically spelt out in its Terms of Reference. It may devise its own procedure to conduct its business, meetings, field visits or constitution of Sub-Groups etc.

Source: PIB

### Ganga Gram, New Swajal Project and Gangotri Swachh Iconic Place launched

#### Why in news?

- ✎ Recently, government has launched the Bagori Ganga Gram project, New Swajal Project at Bagori and Gangotri as Swachh Iconic Place at Dunda village in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand.
  - These both projects will create cleanliness, provide basic amenities to the people of Ganga bank villages and will also generate employment.

#### Bagori Ganga Gram project:

- Bagori Ganga Gram project is a solid and liquid waste management scheme with a total expense of Rs 11.88 lakh.
- Open Defecation Free village Bagori is one of the 24 pilot Ganga Villages picked up to be transformed into Ganga Grams this year.

#### New Swajal Project:

- Swajal is a community owned drinking water programme for sustained drinking water supply.
  - The project was inaugurated at Bagori.
  - It has budgetary support of more than Rs. 32 lakh.
- Currently, Swajal scheme is successfully running in village Sadag since 1996.

### Gangotri as Swachh Iconic Places:

- The project aims to make Gangotri as Swachh Iconic Place (SIP). For this, CSR funds of Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) will be used for making Gangotri SIP.
- The SIP project is coordinated by Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation (MDWS), in collaboration with Union Ministries of Housing & Urban Affairs, Tourism, Culture, state governments, municipal and local agencies.

Source: Indian Express, PIB

### Cabinet approves creation of National Urban Housing Fund

#### Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet has approved creation of Rs. 60,000 crores National Urban Housing Fund (NUHF) to finance Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) which aims to build 1.2 crore affordable houses in urban areas by 2022.

#### About National Urban Housing Fund (NUHF):

- NUHF will be placed under aegis of Building Materials and Technology Promotion Council (BMTPC).
- It will be raised from non-budgetary sources and will tap into existing government entities such as Housing and Urban Development Corp. (Hudco).
- NUHF will facilitate raising requisite funds in next four years and plug any budgetary shortfalls.
- It will smoothly sustain construction of houses to address gap in Urban Sector progresses by maintaining flow of Central Assistance under different verticals i.e. Affordable Housing in Partnership (AHP), Beneficiary Linked Construction (BLC), In-Situ Slum Redevelopment (ISSR) and Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS).

#### About Building Materials and Technology Promotion Council (BMTPC):

- BMTPC is an autonomous body under Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- It is registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- Its primary task is to mainstream new construction technologies.
- It is responsible to undertake research, development and large scale application of new building material technologies.

#### Efforts by government to improve Urban housing:

- With an estimated slum population of about 65 million and another 0.9 million homeless people in urban India, the Housing for All / Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY-HFA), which aims to provide a home to all urban poor by 2022, is an important urban policy thrust.
- The government has so far sanctioned 39.4 lakh houses under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban).

Source: PIB

## Cabinet approves Silkyara Bend-Barkot Tunnel as part of 'Chardham Mahamarg Pariyojana'

### Why in news?

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved Silkyara Bend-Barkot Tunnel in Uttarakhand as part of 'Chardham Mahamarg Pariyojana'.

### About the Silkyara Bend-Barkot Tunnel:

- The project will be falling along NH-134 (old NH-94) in the State of Uttarakhand.
- The project will be built under Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Mode.
- This is funded under NH (O) Scheme of Ministry of RT&H and forms part of ambitious Chardham Plan.
- The project will be implemented by Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH), through National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd. (NHIDCL). NHIDCL is wholly state owned company, established in 2014 for development of highways in states on the international borders.

### Significance of the Silkyara Bend-Barkot Tunnel:

- The construction of Silkyara Bend-Barkot Tunnel will provide all weather connectivity to Yamunotri, one of dham on Chardham Yatra.
- It will encourage regional socio-economic development, trade and tourism within country.
- It will reduce travel distance from Dharasu to Yamunotri by about 20 km and travel time by about hour.
- It will save number of trees that would have been required to be removed in road improvement if original alignment had been followed.

### About the Chardham Mahamarg Vikas Pariyojna:

- In December 2016, PM Narendra Modi has laid the foundation stone for the Chardham highway development project in Uttarakhand's Dehradun.
- The project is an ambitious initiative to improve connectivity to the four main Himalayan pilgrimage centres in Uttarakhand, called Char Dham.
- The project's main objective is to develop around 900 km of national highways.
- These highways will be built in Uttarakhand at an approximate cost of Rs 12,000 crore.
- The project will make travel to the Char Dham (Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath) safer and more convenient.
- The project involves widening the existing, geometrically deficient highway that connects the four abodes.
- Apart from widening, the road transport and highways ministry plans to improve the stretches to two-lane carriageway with paved shoulders, protect landslide hazard zones, construct bypasses, long bridges, tunnels and elevated corridors to ensure safety for the users.
- It will have proper slope stabilisation to ensure protection against landslides.
- The project is expected to be completed by 2018.

### Significance of the project:

- The project will benefit people visiting holy shrines in Uttarakhand.
- It will generate additional employment for the local population and will change the economy of the State as it will give strong boost to connectivity and tourism.
- The roads leading to Gangotri and Badrinath are also equally important from a strategic point of view as these roads are used for supply and deployment to the defence establishments along the Indo-China border areas in Uttarakhand.

Source: The Hindu

### Blue coloured 'Bal Aadhaar' launched

#### Why in news?

- ✎ Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), the nodal authority for issuing Aadhaar cards has rollout 'Bal Aadhaar', meant for kids under 5 years of age.

#### Key features of Bal Aadhaar:

- Bal Aadhaar will have blue colour to differentiate it with regular Aadhaar.
- It will be linked with one of parent's Aadhaar card.
- No biometric details will be captured like fingerprints and iris scan. However, once the kid crosses 5 years of age, then regular Aadhaar will be issued, which will have the biometric details.
- Bal Aadhaar will not be necessary per se, but it may be required when kid grows up, and applies for Government scholarships or grants for higher education.
- Aadhaar rules mandate compulsory conversion of all Bal Aadhaar cards into proper Aadhaar card with biometric details once the kid turns 5 years.

#### About Aadhaar:

- Aadhaar is 12-digit number which acts as proof of identity and address anywhere in the country.
- It is considered as world's largest national identification project.
- It collects biometric and demographic data of residents and stores them in a centralised database.
- It is issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI).

#### Is Aadhar compulsory?

- Aadhar is a compulsory identity card. However, it is not mandatory for children under 5 to get an Aadhaar card.
- It is needed for attending educational programmes overseas and availing of government scholarships.

Source: The Hindu

## Polity & Governance, Social Justice, Social Development

### Decades-old Cauvery Water Dispute comes to an end

#### Why in news?

- ✎ The Supreme Court verdict on Cauvery water dispute is out, and it has come as a big relief for Karnataka. Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have been at loggerhead for their 'due share' of Cauvery river.

#### What is the verdict?

- The apex court directed the Karnataka government to release 177.25 TMC of water to Tamil Nadu, 14.75 TMC lesser than what was allotted by the tribunal in 2007.
- Karnataka will now get 284.75 TMC and Tamil Nadu will get 404.25 TMC of Cauvery water.
- The apex court also made it clear that increase in the share of Cauvery water for Karnataka has been done keeping in view the fact that there is an increased demand of drinking water by Bengaluru and also for many industrial activities.

#### About Cauvery Water Dispute:

- The water sharing of Cauvery River has been a major source of conflict between the states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- The origin of this conflict can be traced back to two agreements in 1892 and 1924, which had taken place between the then Madras Presidency and the Kingdom of Mysore.
- The 802 km long Cauvery River has 44,000 km<sup>2</sup> basin area in Tamil Nadu and 32,000 km<sup>2</sup> basin area in Karnataka.
- Based on inflow Karnataka has been demanding its due share of water from the river. It stated that the pre-independence agreements were invalid and majorly favour the Madras Presidency, and demanded a renegotiated settlement based on equitable sharing of the waters.
- Tamil Nadu, on the other hand, stated that it has already developed almost 3,000,000 acres (12,000 km<sup>2</sup>) of land and as a result has come to depend very heavily on the existing pattern of usage and any change in the pattern will adversely affect the livelihood of millions of farmers in the state.
- The Government of India constituted a tribunal in 1990 to look into the matter. After hearing arguments of all the parties involved for the next 16 years, the tribunal delivered its final verdict on February 5, 2007.

#### Tribunal order:

- The Tribunal found the total water of the river 740 thousand million cubic feet (TMC) which it divided (majorly) in Karnataka (270) and Tamil Nadu (419 TMC).
- Rest of the water was divided into two other states and several other basins. It gave Kerala: 30 TMC, Kabini sub-basin: 21 TMC, Bhavani sub-basin: 6 TMC, Pambar sub-basin: 3 TMC, the Union Territory of Pondicherry: 7 TMC.
- The Tribunal also awarded 10 TMC for environmental protection and 4 TMC for inevitable escapages into the sea.

## Background:

- The CWDT had directed Karnataka to release 192 TMC of Cauvery water in normal monsoon year. Karnataka government wasn't satisfied with the Tribunal's order. It moved to the Supreme Court claiming for 312 TMC of water.
- Karnataka had recently moved a review petition in the apex court against its three orders on the issue. It said grave miscarriage of justice was caused to it following the three apex court orders of September 20, 27 and 30, 2016. In all these orders, Karnataka was directed to release Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu.

## About Cauvery river:

- ✎ Cauvery or Kaveri, by covering a distance of about 765 km, flows through the state of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and emptying into the Bay of Bengal through two principal mouths in Poompuhar, Tamil Nadu.
  - The Cauvery basin covers about 81155 sq km area. Out of this 43,856 sq km is in **Tamil Nadu**, 34,273 sq km in **Karnataka**, 2866 sq km in **Kerala** and 160 sq km in **Puducherry**.
  - **Talacauvery** (located in Kodagu District of Karnataka) is considered the source of the Cauvery.
  - At the source of the Cauvery there is a temple where every year on Tula sankramana thousands of pilgrims gather to pay their respects to the Cauvery.
  - On its journey to the Bay of Bengal, the river is joined by its tributaries, which include Shimsa, Hemavathi, Honnuhole, Arkavathi, Kapila, Lakshmana Theertha, Kabini, Lokapavani, Bhavani, Noyil and Amaravathy.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

## Tribunal to settle Mahanadi water dispute

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Union Cabinet has approved the setting up of a tribunal to settle a row between Odisha and Chhattisgarh on sharing the waters of the river Mahanadi.

### Background:

- This is in keeping with the recent Supreme Court order directing the Centre to set up a tribunal in response to a plea by the Odisha government to stop the Chhattisgarh government from constructing several weirs on the river.

### Composition of the tribunal:

- With a chairperson and two other members, the tribunal will be formed according to the provisions of the Inter-State River Water Disputes (ISRWD), 1956.
- The Chief Justice of India would nominate the chairperson and members for the tribunal from among the judges of the apex court or high courts.

### Mandate of the tribunal:

- As per provisions of the ISRWD Act, 1956 the Tribunal is required to submit its report and decision within a period of 3 years which can be extended to a further period not exceeding 2 years due to unavoidable reasons.



## About the Mahanadi water dispute:

- The 850km length of the Mahanadi river is divided almost equally between Chhattisgarh, where it is born, and downstream Odisha. Last year Odisha government opposed barrages that Chhattisgarh has been constructing.
- Odisha government alleges that these barrages are meant to feed industrial projects and will block the flow of water into Odisha whose dependence on the river is greater. Chhattisgarh has denied this allegation pointing out that much of the river in Odisha flows untapped and straight into the sea.
- The committee has been set up with reference to complaint of State of Odisha under section 3 of the ISRWD Act, 1956 regarding utilisation of waters of Mahandi Basin.

## About Mahanadi river:

- Mahanadi is major river in East Central India.
- It originates from highlands of Chhattisgarh through collection of array of streams.
- It flows through Chhattisgarh and Odisha and reaches Bay of Bengal.
- It drains an area of around 141,600 square kilometres and has total course of 858 kilometres.
- Its left bank tributaries are Shivnath, Mand, Ib, Hasdeo and right bank are Ong, parry river, Jonk, Telen.

Source: The Hindu

## Prison reforms: SC seeks details of jails having over 150% occupancy

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Supreme Court has asked the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) to look into the issue of overcrowding of prisons and furnish figures before it regarding the population in the jails where occupancy was over 150 per cent as on December 31 last year.

### Key facts:

- Supreme Court is hearing a matter relating to inhuman conditions prevailing in 1,382 prisons across the country.
- The management of prisons falls exclusively under the domain of the state government, as per the seventh schedule of the constitution.
- In every state, the prison administrative machinery works under the chief of prisons who is a senior ranking IPS officer.
- The apex court further agreed to hear issues related to standard operating procedure for Under Trial Review Committees (UTRCs) and responses received from States and Union Territories on open jails.

### What are UTRCs?

- The UTRCs, set up in every district, deliberates and recommends the release of undertrial prisoners and convicts who have completed their sentences or are entitled to be released from jail due to bail or remission granted to them.

## What are open prisons?

- Semi-open prisons or open prisons allow convicts to work outside the jail premises and earn a livelihood and return in the evening.
- The concept was brought in to assimilate the convicts with society and reduce the psychological pressure and lack of confidence they faced lack of confidence in returning to lives outside prison.

## About NALSA:

- National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) provides for free legal aid to the poor and weaker sections of the society. It has been constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987.
- Its aim is to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reasons of economic or other disabilities.

## Functions of NALSA:

- NALSA identifies specific categories of marginalised and excluded groups and formulates various schemes for implementation of legal service programmes.
- It provides services of free legal aid in civil and criminal matters for the poor and marginalised people who cannot afford the services of a lawyer in any court or tribunal.
- It also organises Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes.
- It works in close coordination with various State Legal Services Authorities, District Legal Services Authorities and other agencies.

Source: The Hindu

## 21<sup>st</sup> National Conference on e-Governance

### Why in news?

- ✎ The 21st National Conference on e-Governance was held in Hyderabad (capital city of Telangana).

### Theme:

- This year, theme of the conference was ‘Technology for accelerating Development’.

### Sub themes:

- Building User experience.
- Universalization and Replication.
- Governing e – Governance.
- Emerging technologies.
- e-Governance good/best practices.

### Organisers:

- It was organised by Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), along with Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeITY) in association with Telangana.

### Key Facts:

- The Conference served as forum in which Secretaries, Administrative Reforms and Secretaries of Information Technology of State Governments, IT Managers of Central Governments, Software

Solution providers, industry, etc. participated and interacted, exchanged opinions, views, discuss issues, problems and also analyze various solution frameworks.

- The Conference also showcased best practices, innovative technologies and ICT solutions.
- The **National e-Governance Awards** recognising and promoting excellence in implementation of e-Governance initiatives by various government departments and also initiatives of PSUs and Non- Government Institutions were given.

### What is e governance?

- e-Governance is generally understood as the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) at all the level of the Government in order to provide services to the citizens, interaction with business enterprises and communication and exchange of information between different agencies of the Government in a speedy, convenient efficient and transparent manner.

### Background:

- E-Governance is one of the subjects allocated to DARPG Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions under II Schedule to the Allocation of Business Rules, 1961.
- DARPG has been entrusted role to promote e-Governance activities in consonance with the overall national objectivities and priorities.
- Whereas, DeitY's, under Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeITY) mandate is to encourage e-Governance to empower citizens, promote inclusive and sustainable growth of Electronics, IT & ITeS industries.

Source: PIB

### Supreme Court accepts interim mechanism for appointments across tribunals

#### Why in news?

- ✎ Recently, the Supreme Court effectively stayed the applicability of provisions of the **Central Tribunal, Appellate Tribunal and other Authorities (Qualification, experience and other conditions of service of members) Rules, 2017** which gave the government primacy in making key appointments to tribunals, including CAT and NGT.

#### What is the issue?

- The apex court was hearing a batch of cases challenging the constitutional validity of the amended draft rules under the Finance Act, 2017, which would govern the procedure of appointment, removal and service conditions of the chairperson and other members of as many as 19 tribunal across the country.
- Several petitioners, including Member of Parliament from Rajya Sabha Jairam Ramesh, moved the apex court challenging the constitutional validity of the Finance Act, 2017 and the rules under it, claiming that if they were adopted, it would destroy the independent functioning of tribunals.
- It is argued that the new rules would give primacy to the executive in deciding matters of appointments, constitution, and removal of members across tribunals.
- The petitioners have also alleged that the new rules would undermine judicial independence and impinge upon the principle of separation of powers.

### Interim search-cum-selection committee:

- The court has asked the government to form an interim search-cum-selection committee during the pendency of the petitions to appoint judicial and administrative members in tribunals.
- All appointments to be made pursuant to the selection made by the interim search-cum-selection committee shall abide by the conditions of service as per the old Acts and the Rules.

### What would be the members of the search panel?

- The search panel would be headed by the CJI or his nominee.
- The chairpersons of tribunals to which appointments will be made and two secretaries, nominated by the central government, would be the members of the committee.
- Appointment to the post of chairman (of tribunals) will be made by nomination by the CJI.

### About Central Administrative Tribunal:

- ✎ The Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) was established by an Act of Parliament namely Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985 as sequel to the 42nd amendment of the Constitution of India inserting Article 323 A.
- The Principal seat of Central Administrative Tribunal is at New Delhi and it has 16 Outlying Benches scattered all over the Country.

### Composition of CAT:

- The Tribunal is headed by the Chairman and 65 Members, 33 from Judicial (including Chairman) and 33 from the Administrative stream.
- The Chairman is normally a retired Chief Justice of a High Court.

### Functions of CAT:

- The tribunal adjudicates disputes and complaints with respect to Recruitment and Conditions of Service of the persons appointed to the Public Services and Posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or any State or of any other Local Authorities within the territory of India or under the control of the Government of India.
- Apart from above the Tribunal also has the jurisdiction on the employees of 208 Public Sector Undertakings/Organizations notified by the Government.

Source: The Hindu

### Gobar-Dhan Yojana: a 'waste to energy' conversion scheme

#### Why in news

- ✎ The government is planning to create an online platform for trading cow dung and agricultural waste under its recently announced waste to wealth scheme, **GOBAR-DHAN (Galvanising Organic Bio Agro Resources) scheme**.

#### What is the GOBAR-Dhan Yojana?

- The Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan (GOBAR-DHAN) scheme was first announced by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley during his budget speech on February 1.
- The scheme would focus on managing and converting cattle dung and solid waste in farms to compost, biogas and bio-CNG. It will help in keeping the village clean while increasing the income of farmers and cattle herders.

## Significance of the GOBAR-Dhan Yojana:

- The scheme will be hugely beneficial for country as India is home to highest cattle population in world (around 300 million in number) which produces around 3 million tonnes of dung.
- It will encourage farmers to consider dung and other waste not just as waste but as source of income.
- The scheme will provide many benefits to rural people by keeping villages clean and sanitized, improving livestock health and increasing farm yields.
- Under it, biogas generation will help to increase self-reliance in energy utilized for cooking and lighting.
- The scheme will augment income of farmers and cattle herders. It will create new opportunities for jobs linked to waste collection, transportation, biogas sales etc.
- It will also provide stable fuel supply in market for oil companies and accessible credit in market through government schemes and banks for entrepreneurs.
- Under it, villagers will be mobilized to create self-help groups (SHGs) and creative societies that will help in clean energy and green jobs initiative.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

## Panel recommends Separate Flag for Karnataka

### Why in news?

- ✎ A committee formed by the Karnataka government has recommended a separate flag for the state, discounting any constitutional or legal hurdles for it.
  - The committee submitted report on designing separate flag for the state and providing a legal standing for it.

### The New flag:

- The committee has recommended new tricolour having yellow (at top), white (in middle) and red (at bottom) colorus, with state's emblem Gandaberunda (a two-headed mythological bird) in centre.
- It has changed pattern of earlier unofficial flag having yellow and red which is unofficially used now.
- The white colour in new flag symbolizes peace and captures Karnataka's image the best, while other two colours are synonymous with Kannada identity.

### Centres Approval

- After getting formal state Cabinet approval, state government will make a formal application to Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) under whose purview the issue falls to amend the Flag Code 2002.
- If the Centre gives its nod to the said amendment, Karnataka will be the second state in the country to have its own flag after Jammu and Kashmir, which is allowed the same under Article 370 of the Constitution.

### Are states permitted to have their own flags?

- ✎ In S.R. Bommai v/s Union of India (Supreme Court 1994) case, the Supreme Court has declared that federalism is a basic feature of the Constitution and States are supreme in their sphere.

- This being the Constitutional position, there is no prohibition in the Constitution for the State to have its own flag.
  - However, the manner in which the State flag is hoisted should not dishonour the national flag. It has to be always below the national flag.
  - The national flag code specifically authorises use of other flags subject to the regulation by the court. So, State flag is not unauthorised.
- ✎ At present, there is no provision allowing or disallowing state to have separate flag, even there has been no precedent.

### Is Karnataka's move justified?

- Democracy and federalism are essential features of the Constitution and are part of its basic structure. It is the democratic right of Karnataka to assert its identity through a separate name, emblem and flag.
- All the 50 States in the U.S. have separate and distinct flags, apart from the national flag. In the U.K., the political units of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have their own flags without offending or affecting the integrity of the U.K. Karnataka is justified and constitutionally empowered to adopt its own flag to uphold the pride of the State without infringing the law.

### Background:

- The committee had requested state government to design a separate flag for 'Kannada Naadu' and accord it legal standing.
- Currently, unofficial yellow and red 'Kannada flag' is hoisted in state on 1 November every year to commemorate state formation day. It was designed by Veera Senani Ma.Ramamurthy in the 1960s.

### J&K state flag:

- Jammu and Kashmir is the only state having its own flag as it enjoys special powers under Article 370 of Constitution. It had adopted its own flag in 2015.
- Under Article 144 of J&K Constitution, the state flag is red in colour with three equidistant white vertical strips of equal width next to staff and white plough in middle with handle facing the strips.

Source: Indian Express

### Kerala to get MGNREGS assets geo- tagged

#### Why in news?

- ✎ Kerala state Rural Development Department is planning to get assets generated under MGNREGS geo- tagged and perhaps become the first state to achieve this distinction.
- Over 1 lakh assets have already been geo- tagged in the state.

#### Need for geotagging:

- The scale of rural assets created under MGNREGA is very large. Since the inception of the programme in financial year 2006-07, about 2.82 Crore assets have been created under the programme.
- On an average, about 30 Lakh Assets are created annually which includes a variety of works such as water harvesting structures, plantations, rural infrastructure, flood control measures, individual assets for sustainable livelihood, community infrastructure and so on.

## Background:

- Geotagging of assets created under MGNREGA was started after Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised the need for online recording and monitoring of assets to check leakages.
- Subsequently, on June 24, 2016, the Ministry of Rural development signed a MoU with National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), ISRO and National Informatics Centre to geotag MGNREGA assets created under each village panchayats.
- The geotagging exercise commenced from 1st September 2016. Gram Rozgar Sahayak or a junior engineer uploads the photos of assets on the Bhuvan web portal run by ISRO's National Remote Sensing Centre via a mobile app.
- The time and location of the asset get automatically encrypted at the time of upload of the photos. In this way, within a span of seven months, one crore assets have been geotagged and shared in public domain.
- In January 2017, Kangra district (Himachal Pradesh) became the first district in the country to geotag all the assets created under MGNREGA.

## What does Geotagging mean?

- Geotagging is the process of adding geographical information to various media in the form of metadata.
- The data usually consists of coordinates like latitude and longitude, but may even include bearing, altitude, distance and place names.

## Applications of the geotagging:

- Geotagging is most commonly used for photographs and can help people get a lot of specific information about where the picture was taken or the exact location of a friend who logged on to a service.
- Geotagging location services can be used to find location-specific websites, news and other information. It is based on positions and coordinates and is often directly taken from a global positioning system (GPS).
- Some social networking sites and services give out the location of their users, which allows users to know exactly where their friends are as they are logged on to that website (or check-in to the service).

Source: The Hindu

## UGC forms N Gopalswami committee to select 20 'institutes of eminence'

### Why in news?

- ✎ Government has constituted Empowered Expert Committee (EEC) to select 20 Institutions of Eminence from among 104 institutions (public or private) that have applied for the status.
  - The committee will be headed by former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) N Gopalswami.

### About the scheme of Institutions of Eminence:

- The scheme of Institutions of Eminence was rolled out by University Grants Commission (UGC).
- It aims to help 20 higher education (10 public and 10 private) institutions from country break into top 500 global rankings in 10 years, and then eventually break into top 100 over time.

### Facilities provided to these institutes:

- These selected institutions are proposed to have greater autonomy compared to other higher education institutions.
- They will be free to decide their fee for domestic and foreign students and have flexible course duration and structure.
- They will be exempted from approvals of government or UGC for academic collaborations with foreign institutions, except institutions in MEA and MHA's list of negative countries.

### Procedure of selection:

- Once identified, the target for Institutions of Eminence will be to break into top 100 bracket in one internationally reputed ranking framework in 10 years.
- The 10 government institutions selected will also get Rs 1,000 crore each from HRD Ministry to achieve world-class status. There will be no financial assistance to the private institutions.

### Who can apply?

- Only higher education institutions, currently placed in the top 500 of global rankings or top 50 of National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), are eligible to apply for eminence tag.
- The private Institutions of Eminence can also come up as greenfield ventures provided sponsoring organisation submits convincing perspective plan for 15 years.

### Need for world-class institutes in India:

- India today educates only half as many young people from the university age group as China and ranks well behind most Latin American and other middle-income countries.
- India lacks world-class universities according to international rankings, and Indian academics, compared internationally, are rather poorly paid.
- Students also suffer an immense shortage of places in top academic institutions and throughout the higher education system.

Source: The Hindu

## New Constitution Bench to examine Citizenship Act

### Why in news?

✎ The Supreme Court decided to refer to a fresh Constitution Bench pleas to examine the validity of various aspects of a provision of the Citizenship Act 1955, including the cut-off date for awarding citizenship to Bangladeshi immigrants in Assam.

- Section 6A of the Act relates to provisions for citizenship of people covered by the **Assam Accord**.

### Background:

- In December 2014, a two-judge Bench of the apex court had framed 13 questions, for deliberation by a larger Bench, which included whether Section 6A violates the Articles of the Constitution by diluting the political rights of residents of Assam.
- It had also framed a question about the scope of fundamental right contained in Article 29(1), relating to the right to conserve a distinct language, script or culture, and also about the meaning of expressions 'culture' and 'conserve.'



## Assam Movement:

- The Assam Movement (or Assam Agitation) was a popular movement between 1979 and 1985 against undocumented immigrants in Assam. The movement was led by All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the 'All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad' (AAGSP). The agitation leaders formed a political party, Asom Gana Parishad, which came to power in 1985 and 1996.

## What is Assam Accord?

- The Assam Accord (1985) was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985.
- The years between 1979 and 1985 witnessed huge political instability, collapse of state government, president's rule and unprecedented ethnic violence in Assam.
- The elections conducted by the government were totally boycotted and violence based on linguistic and communal identities killed thousands in the state. Finally, to cope up with the situation, the then Rajiv Gandhi government signed a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) with the leaders of the movement on 15 August 1985 called Assam Accord.
- All those foreigners who had entered Assam between 1951 and 1961 were to be given full citizenship including the right to vote.
- Migrants those who had done so after 1971 were to be deported.
- Those who entered between 1961 and 1971 were to be denied voting rights for ten years but would enjoy all other rights of citizenship.

Source: The Hindu

## Rationalization of Autonomous Bodies under Department of Health & Family Welfare

### Why in news?

- ✘ The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for closure of Autonomous Bodies, namely, Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi (RAN) and Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh (JSK).
  - The functions of these bodies are proposed to be vested in Department of Health & Family Welfare (DoHFW).
  - The rationalization of Autonomous Bodies under Department of Health & Family Welfare will involve inter-ministerial consultations and review of existing bye laws of these bodies.
  - The time frame for implementation is one year.

### About Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi (RAN):

- It was set up as a registered society to provide financial medical assistance to poor patients receiving treatment in designated central government hospitals.
- An advance is placed with the Medical Superintendents of such hospitals who then provide assistance on a case to case basis.
- Since the DoHFW provides funds to the hospitals, the grants can be given from the Department to the hospital directly.

- RAN functions can, therefore, be vested in DoHFW. Managing Committee of RAN Society will meet to dissolve the Autonomous Body (AB) as per provisions of Societies Registration Act, 1860 (SRA).
- In addition to this, Health Minister's Cancer Patient Fund (HMCPF) shall also be transferred to the Department. The timeline required for this is one year.

### About Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh (JSK):

- ✎ The Government of India had set up a **National Population Stabilization Fund (NPSF)** in the year 2004-05 with a one-time grant of Rs.100 crore in the form of a corpus fund.
  - This is now known as **Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh (JSK)**. To empower the NPSF, Government of India has set up Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh (JSK).
  - This is an autonomous body registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. JSK can take all the policy related decisions.
  - It can raise contributions from organisations and individuals that support population stabilisation.
  - JSK implements two schemes, namely, **Santushti** and **Prerna**.
- 1. Santushti is a strategy of Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh (JSK) for the highly populated states of India viz Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh & Odisha. Under this strategy, Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh, invites private sector gynaecologists and vasectomy surgeons to conduct sterilization operations in Public Private Partnership mode.
- 2. In order to help push up the age of marriage of girls and space the birth of children in the interest of health of young mothers and infants, Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh (National Population Stabilization Fund) has launched PRERNA, a Responsible Parenthood Strategy in seven focus states namely Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Rajasthan.

### Why closure of JSK?

- There has been no continuous funding to JSK from the Ministry. Population stabilization strategies require private and corporate funding, which can be accessed through JSK.
- Although, JSK will continue to play a significant role in population stabilization strategies, its existence as an Autonomous Body is not necessary. Hence, JSK as an Autonomous Body can be closed as it can be administered by the Department as a fund.

Source: PIB

### Parliament adopts motion of thanks to President's Address

#### Why in news?

- ✎ Recently, the Parliament passed the Motion of Thanks to the President's Speech after a reply by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in both the houses.

#### What is "Motion of Thanks"?

- President's Address and Motion of Thanks are governed by Articles 86 (1) and 87 (1) of the Constitution and Rules 16 to 24 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha.
- The President makes an address to a joint sitting of Parliament at the start of the Budget session, which is prepared by the government and lists its achievements.

- The President's speech is a statement of the legislative and policy achievements of the government during the preceding year and gives a broad indication of the agenda for the year ahead.
- The address is followed by a motion of thanks moved in each House by ruling party MPs.
- During the session, political parties discuss the motion of thanks also suggesting amendments.

### **Amendments to the "Motion of Thanks":**

- Notices of amendments to Motion of Thanks on the President's Address can be tabled after the President has delivered his Address.
- Amendments may refer to matters contained in the Address as well as to matters, in the opinion of the member, the Address has failed to mention.
- Amendments can be moved to the Motion of Thanks in such form as may be considered appropriate by the Speaker.

### **Constraints:**

- The only limitations are that members cannot refer to matters which are not the direct responsibility of the Central Government and that the name of the President cannot be brought in during the debate since the Government and not the President is responsible for the contents of the Address.

Source: The Hindu, Business Standard

## **President approves Bill allowing Kambala in Karnataka**

### **Why in news?**

- ✎ President Ram Nath Kovind has approved the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Karnataka Amendment) Bill making Kambala a legal rural sport in Karnataka.
  - With this, all apprehensions and obstacles that were preventing kambala have been cleared.

### **Background:**

- The Karnataka state government passed an ordinance amending the Prevention of Cruelty Act to allow Kambala and received the green signal from the President for its Prevention of Cruelty to Animal (Karnataka Amendment) Ordinance 20173 on July 3 this year.
- The Karnataka HC had stayed these traditional sports in view of Supreme Court's ban on jallikattu, a traditional bull taming sport of Tamil Nadu.

### **What is Kambala?**

- Kambala is an annual Buffalo Race held traditionally under the auspices of local land lords and households or Patel of village, in coastal Karnataka, India.
- The Kambala season generally starts in November and lasts until March.
- The contest generally takes place between two pairs of buffaloes, each pair raced in wet rice fields, controlled by a whip-lashing farmer.
- The 'track' used for Kambala is a paddy field filled with slush and mud.
- The "Kambala Committee" is formed and it usually arranges Kambala in several categories.
- People place massive bets on the buffaloes to win and one can witness more than 20,000 spectators in a well-organised Kambala, egging on and cheering the buffaloes to complete the race.

- In traditional form of Kambala, racing is non-competitive, and buffalo pairs run one by one in paddy fields.
- A ritualistic approach is also there, as some agriculturists race their buffaloes for thanks giving (to god) for protecting their animals from diseases.
- The buffaloes developed for the race are carefully fed and some owners of the buffaloes have even built separate swimming pool for competing buffaloes.

### What is the controversy over kambala?

- This age-old tradition of buffalo race is a cause of concern for animal lovers and animal activists.
- Animal rights activists are objecting to the traditional sport, claiming it tortures the buffaloes, whose anatomy is not made for racing.

Source: The Times of India

## SC refers pleas against Jallikattu to Constitution bench

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Supreme Court has referred to a Constitution Bench to decide whether the people of Tamil Nadu can preserve jallikattu as their cultural heritage under Article 29 (1) of the Constitution and demand its protection.

### What's the issue?

- The decision came based on petitions filed by activists to strike down the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act of 2017 and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Conduct of Jallikattu) Rules of 2017.
- Activists contended that the amended laws had opened the gates for the conduct of the popular bull-taming sport in the name of culture and tradition despite a 2014 ban by the Supreme Court.
- Activists contend that the 2017 Jallikattu Act and Rules violate the five internationally recognised freedoms - the freedom from hunger, malnutrition and thirst; freedom from fear and distress; freedom from physical and thermal discomfort; freedom from pain, injury and disease; and freedom to express normal patterns of behaviour.

### Significance of this decision:

- It is for the first time the Supreme Court is considering the question of granting constitutional protection to jallikattu as a collective cultural right under Article 29 (1).

### What Article 29(1) says?

- Article 29(1) is a fundamental right guaranteed under Part III of the Constitution to protect the educational and cultural rights of citizens.
- Though commonly used to protect the interests of minorities, Article 29(1) mandates that “any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same”.

### What is Jallikattu?

- Jallikattu is an ancient bull taming blood sport played in Tamil Nadu. It's a part of Pongal celebrations on Mattu Pongal day.

- According to experts, the term Jallikattu is derived from the term calli kacu (coins) and kattu (meaning a package) tied to the horns of the bulls as the prize money.
- One of the oldest blood sport, Jallikattu is held in the villages of Tamil Nadu as a part of the village festival.
- 'Jellicut' are the bulls bred specifically for the Jallikattu sporting event.

### Why is it so controversial?

- It is controversial because the blood sport often results in major injuries and deaths
- Reportedly, from 2010 to 2014, there were approximately 1,100 injuries and 17 deaths as a result of Jallikattu events
- Over 200 people have died from the blood sport over the past two decades.
- The court held that use of bulls in such events severely harmed the animals and constituted an offence under the Prevention of Cruelty to the Animals Act.
- PETA India has protested against the blood sport over the years for animal cruelty.

Source: The Hindu

### Ekalavya schools for tribal children planned

#### Why in news?

- ✎ The government has proposed to establish Ekalavya Residential School in each block of the country where tribal people constitute a majority of the population.
  - It has been decided that by the year 2022, every block with more than 50% ST population and at least 20,000 tribal persons, will have an Ekalavya Model Residential School.

#### About Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS):

- Eklavya Model Residential School Scheme was started in 1998 and first school was started in the year 2000 in Maharashtra.
- EMRSs have been functioning as institutions of excellence for tribal students.
- A total of 259 schools have been sanctioned during the last 17 years, out of which, 72 EMRS were sanctioned during last three years.
- As per existing EMRS Guidelines of 2010, at least one EMRS is to be set up in each Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) / Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) having 50% ST population in the area.
- The capital cost for setting up the school complex, including hostels and staff quarters etc. has been earmarked at Rs. 12 crore with a provision to go up to Rs. 16 crore in hill areas, deserts and islands.
- Recurring cost during the first year for these schools would be Rs. 42000/-per child, with a provision of raising it by 10% every second year to compensate for inflation etc.

#### Objectives of EMRS:

- ✎ The objective of EMRS is to provide quality middle and high level education to Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in remote areas, not only to enable them to avail of reservation in high and professional

educational courses and as jobs in government and public and private sectors but also to have access to the best opportunities in education at par with the non ST population.

**How it will be achieved?**

- Comprehensive physical, mental and socially relevant development of all students enrolled in each and every EMRS. Students will be empowered to be change agent, beginning in their school, in their homes, in their village and finally in a larger context.
- Focus differentially on the educational support to be made available to those in Standards XI and XII, and those in standards VI to X, so that their distinctive needs can be met,
- Support the annual running expenses in a manner that offers reasonable remuneration to the staff and upkeep of the facilities.
- Support the construction of infrastructure that provides education, physical, environmental and cultural needs of student life.

Source: The Hindu

## Bilateral and International Relations, India & the World and International Affairs

### India-bound gas pipeline TAPI breaks ground on Afghan section

#### Why in news?

- ✎ Turkmenistan announced the start of construction work on the Afghan section of an \$8 billion natural gas pipeline that will link the energy-rich Central Asian nation to Pakistan and India.

#### About Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline:

- ✎ The Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline (TAPI), also known as Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline, is a natural gas pipeline project.
  - It is being developed by the Asian Development Bank.
  - This 1800-kilometre-long pipeline will transport Caspian Sea natural gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan into Pakistan and then to India.
  - The TAPI pipeline will have a capacity to carry 90 million standard cubic metres a day (mmscmd) gas for a 30-year period.
  - India and Pakistan will get 38 mmscmd each, while the remaining 14 mmscmd will be supplied to Afghanistan.
  - The project will be operational by December 2019.

#### Significance of the TAPI gas pipeline project:

- TAPI gas pipeline project is considered as an important initiative of these four countries as it connects energy rich Central Asia with energy starved South Asia.
- It will enhance economic engagement through regional connectivity by economically integrating region stretching from the Bay of Bengal to the Caspian Sea.
- It will not just be a commercial project, but also help in providing peace and security in the region.
- From India's perspective, TAPI Project will provide an alternative supply source of gas with dependable reserves leading to enhanced energy security.
- It will further diversify the fuel basket to the benefit of Indian economy as it would be used mainly in power, fertilizer and city gas sectors.

#### Challenges

- The TAPI project crosses Afghanistan and Pakistan, the former deeply unstable and of uncertain future, the latter plagued by terrorist incidents and infested with militant groups that may find a gas pipeline easy pickings. Ensuring the security of those involved in the construction of the pipeline and then extending that security along its length once operational is going to be a challenge for all the signatories.
- After its completion, maintenance in the presence of terrorist elements in Afghanistan and in the restive areas of Pakistan will also be a challenge.
- Another critical issue is the fraught relations of Pakistan with India and Afghanistan.

Source: The Hindu, Indian express

## Iran, India reinforce economic ties with Chabahar Deal

### Why in news?

- ✎ India and Iran have signed a significant pact which gives New Delhi operational control of a part of the strategically located Chabahar port on the Gulf of Oman for 18 months.
  - The first phase of the Chabahar port was inaugurated in December last, opening a new strategic route connecting Iran, India and Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan.

### Where is Chabahar port located?

- ✓ The port of Chabahar is located on the Makran coast of Sistan and Baluchistan Province, next to the Gulf of Oman and at the mouth of Strait of Hormuz.
- ✓ It is the only Iranian port with direct access to the Indian Ocean.
- ✓ Being close to Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan etc., it has been termed the "Golden Gate" to these land-locked countries.
- ✓ The Chabahar port was **partially developed by India in the 1990s**.

### Why Chabahar Port is crucial for India?

- The first and foremost significance of the Chabahar port is the fact that **India can bypass Pakistan in transporting goods to Afghanistan**.
- Chabahar port will boost India's access to Iran, the key gateway to the **International North-South Transport Corridor** that has sea, rail and road routes between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.
- Chabahar port will be **beneficial to India in countering Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea** which China is trying to ensure by helping Pakistan develop the Gwadar port. Gwadar port is less than 400 km from Chabahar by road and 100 km by sea.
- With Chabahar port being developed and operated by India, **Iran also becomes a military ally to India**. Chabahar could be used in case China decides to flex its navy muscles by stationing ships in Gwadar port to reckon its upper hand in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Middle East.
- With Chabahar port becoming functional, there **will be a significant boost in the import of iron ore, sugar and rice to India**. The import cost of oil to India will also see a considerable decline. India has already increased its crude purchase from Iran since the West imposed ban on Iran was lifted.
- Chabahar port **will ensure in the establishment of a politically sustainable connectivity between India and Afghanistan**. This is will, in turn, lead to better economic ties between the two countries.

### A major boost to India's efforts to connect with Central Asia

- The use of Chabahar port is seen as a major boost to India's efforts to connect with Central Asia and Russia, and it could facilitate Indian imports of iron ore, sugar and rice as well as crude oil from Iran.
- From a diplomatic perspective, Chabahar port **could be used as a point from where humanitarian operations could be coordinated**.
- The Zaranj-Delaram road constructed by India in 2009 can give access to Afghanistan's Garland Highway, setting up road access to four major cities in Afghanistan – Herat, Kandahar, Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif.

Source: The Hindu, Business Standard



## Pakistan to deploy troops in Saudi Arabia

### Why in news?

- ✎ In a major policy shift, Pakistan has decided to deploy troops in Saudi Arabia under bilateral security cooperation with the kingdom which is involved in the ongoing civil war in neighbouring Yemen.
  - The troops have been deployed for training and advise mission. They will not be employed outside Saudi Arabia.

### Background:

- The move comes three years after Pakistan decided against sending soldiers to join the Saudi-led military intervention in strife-torn Yemen.
- Already around 1,000 Pakistani troops are deployed in Saudi Arabia, a close ally of Islamabad, in various advisory and training roles.
- Saudi Arabia has been pushing fellow Sunni-majority Pakistan to provide troops since 2015 when it joined Yemen's civil war but Pakistan steadily refused, saying it would not become party to any regional conflict.
- The civil war in Yemen stalemated and the situation has aggravated with the rebels firing missiles at regular intervals towards the kingdom.
- The Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAFT) set up by Saudi Arabia and led by former Pakistan Army Chief Gen. Raheel Sharif is also still in an early stage to play any role in the conflict.

### Implications of the move:

- Pakistan is treading a fine line in maintaining relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Qatar and other regional players and the decision of deploying troops may annoy Saudi Arabia's rivals like Iran and Qatar.
- The decision may also create tension in Pakistan's internal politics as parliament had passed a resolution at the start of the Yemen crisis that said Pakistan would stay neutral in the conflict.

### About IMAFT:

- ✎ The Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAFT) was created by Saudi Arabia in December 2015 to combat the Islamic State and other groups.
  - Currently, it has 39 members, including Turkey and Malaysia.
  - It is based at a command centre in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia).
  - The coalition was envisaged to serve as a platform for security cooperation, including provision of training, equipment and troops, and involvement of religious scholars for dealing with extremism.
  - The coalition includes countries like Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Tunisia, Sudan, Malaysia, Egypt, Yemen among others.
  - It has been established in pursuance with objectives and principles of the charter of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).
  - Member countries of this alliance will coordinate and support military operations against terrorism in Iraq, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan and Egypt.

- Saudi Arabia's arch rival (for influence in the Arab world) Iran was not named as member of the IMAFT. Currently both regional powers are engaged proxy sectarian conflicts in Syria to Yemen.

### **Pakistan & IMAFT:**

- Pakistan initially had taken aback for being part of IMAFT, after Saudi Arabia had announced Pakistan also part of the alliance. However, Pakistan later confirmed its participation in the alliance but has not committed itself to providing troops for any possible military operations.

Source: The Hindu

## **Global Corruption Perception Index 2017: India slips in ranking**

### **Why in news?**

- India has been ranked 81st among 180 countries in **Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2017 released by NGO Transparency International.**

### **About the CPI:**

- The index ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption.
- CPI ranks countries on a scale of zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean) based on their perceived levels of corruption in the public sector.
- The index is compiled by using data of World Bank, World Economic Forum (WEF) and other institutions,

### **Highlights of CPI 2017:**

#### **Performance of various countries:**

- New Zealand and Denmark were ranked as the cleanest countries in the 2017 list as in 2016, with scores of 89 and 88, respectively.
- Syria, South Sudan and Somalia were ranked as the most corrupt countries with scores of 14, 12 and 9, respectively.
- Pakistan with a score of 32 and China with 41 are perceived to be more corrupt than India.
- Russia is more corrupt than all three countries with a score of 29. South Africa is at 71st, having dropped seven places from 2016.
- Countries with the poorest protection for press and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also tended to have the lowest ranks on the index.

### **India's performance:**

- India has been ranked 81st. While it maintained its score at 40 on a 100-point scale where anything below 30 is considered seriously corrupt, its ranking changed from 79th last year partly because Vanuatu, one of the countries added to the rankings this year, was rated higher and partly because others improved.
- The index also characterised India as “**among the worst regional offenders**” in the Asia Pacific region on grounds of journalists, activists, opposition leaders and even staff of law enforcement or watchdog agencies being threatened or even murdered. In this, it was clubbed with the Philippines and Maldives.

Source: The Hindu

## India invites Saudi Arabia to invest in oil, gas sector

### Why in news?

- ✎ India has invited Saudi Arabia to participate in the **Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) Programme**.

### Background:

- Saudi Arabia is among India's largest energy suppliers being the second largest supplier of crude oil and LPG
- In 2016-17, India's crude oil import from Saudi Arabia was 18.5 per cent of total imports or 39.5 million tonnes out of total imports of 214 million tonnes.
- In January 2016, India signed a deal with the United Arab Emirates that allows the Gulf OPEC country to fill half of the underground crude oil storage facility of ISPRL at Mangalore. Therefore, the UAE's Abu Dhabi National Oil Company will store about 6 million barrels of oil at Mangalore.

### About India's SPR programme:

- To ensure energy security, the Government of India had decided to set up 5 million metric tons (MMT) of strategic crude oil storages at three locations namely, Visakhapatnam, Mangalore and Padur (near Udipi).
- These strategic storages would be in addition to the existing storages of crude oil and petroleum products with the oil companies and would serve as a cushion during any external supply disruptions.
- In the 2017-18 budget, it was announced that two more such caverns will be set up Chandikhole in Jajpur district of Odisha and Bikaner in Rajasthan as part of the second phase.
- The construction of the Strategic Crude Oil Storage facilities is being managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL), a Special Purpose Vehicle, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB) under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.

### India's need for strategic oil reserves:

- In 1990, as the Gulf war engulfed West Asia, India was in the throes of a major energy crisis. By all accounts India's oil reserves at the time were adequate for only three days.
- While India managed to avert the crisis then, the threat of energy disruption continues to present a real danger even today.
- It is unlikely that India's energy needs will dramatically move away from fossil fuels in the near future.
- Over 80% of these fuels come from imports, a majority of which is sourced from West Asia. This is a major strategic risk and poses a massive financial drain for an embattled economy and its growing current account deficit.

Source: Business Standard

## Pakistan added to FATF grey-list

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global anti-money laundering watchdog, in its just concluded meet at Paris, has added Pakistan's name to the grey-list of terror-financing watch list.
  - Pakistan was previously on the list for three years until 2015.

### Implications of this move:

- Pakistani analysts say being put on the FATF watchlist could deal a blow to Pakistan's economy, making it harder for foreign investors and companies to do business in the country.
- It would be counterproductive to put Pakistan on the watch list as it would hurt its capability to fight terrorism.
- Also, being put back on the grey list would heighten Pakistan's risk profile and some financial institutions would be wary of transacting with Pakistani banks and counterparties.

### What does it mean when a country be placed on FATF watchlist?

- Being placed on the FATF watchlist carries no direct legal implications but brings extra scrutiny from regulators and financial institutions that can chill trade and investment and increase transaction costs.

### About Financial Action Task Force (FATF):

- FATF is an inter governmental policy making body with ministerial mandate to establish international standards for combating money laundering and terrorist financing.
- The FATF was created in 1989 at the behest of the G7, and is headquartered In Paris.

### Objectives:

- Its objectives are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to integrity of international financial system.

### Functions:

- The FATF monitors the progress of its members in implementing necessary measures, reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures, and promotes the adoption and implementation of appropriate measures globally.
- In collaboration with other international stakeholders, the FATF works to identify national-level vulnerabilities with the aim of protecting the international financial system from misuse.

### Participants:

- A large number of international organizations participate in the FATF as observers, each of which has some involvement in anti-money laundering activities.
- Organizations such as **Interpol**, the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, **Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)**, and **World Bank** are observers.

### Key facts:

- Initially it was only dealing with developing policies to combat money laundering. But in 2001 its purpose was expanded to act against terrorism financing.
- Currently, it comprises two regional organisations (the EU and the Gulf Co-operation Council) and 35 member jurisdictions, including India, UK, US, China and the European Commission.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

## 2,300 Army personnel to join UN peace keeping mission in South Sudan

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Indian Army, one of the largest contributors to United Nations Peacekeeping Missions, is contributing approximately 2300 personnel to support United Nations Peacekeeping Missions to South Sudan (UNMISS) in order to bring peace and normalcy in the war-torn country.

### Key Facts:

- It includes deployment of seven Garhwal Rifles Infantry battalion group of the Indian Army.
- The deployment of Indian peacekeepers in South Sudan is under Chapter VII which entails Peace Enforcement.

### India and UNMISS:

- The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) is newest UN Peacekeeping Mission. India, with 2,237 troops, is the highest contributor in terms of troops to UNMISS. In addition to India, 53 nations from around the world have contributed troops to the peacekeeping mission.

### Background:

- In November 2017, the UN Commander in South Sudan had commended the efforts of the Maratha Light Infantry for their bravery and professionalism. The Indian Army unit assumed operational responsibility in South Sudan, the newest country in the world, on November 16, 2016.

### About UN Peacekeeping:

- United Nations Peacekeeping was created in 1948. Its first mission involved the establishment of the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), which served to observe and maintain ceasefire during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.
- UN Peacekeeping maintains three basic principles:
  1. Consent of the parties,
  2. Impartiality and non-use of Force except in self-defence and
  3. Defence of the mandate.
- The UN Peacekeepers are led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DKPO).
- There are currently 17 UN peace operations deployed on four continents.
- UN Peacekeepers are from diverse backgrounds, from areas all around the world. They include police, military and civilian personnel. They are often referred to as Blue Berets or Blue Helmets because of their light blue berets or helmets.
- The UN Peacekeeping Force won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1988.
- The United Nations Charter gives the United Nations Security Council the power and responsibility to take collective action to maintain international peace and security. For this reason, the international community usually looks to the Security Council to authorize peacekeeping operations.

### About South Sudan:

- ✎ South Sudan is a landlocked country in East-Central Africa.
  - It gained its independence from (North) Sudan in 2011. Its capital and largest city is Juba.

- South Sudan is bordered by Sudan to the north, Ethiopia to the east, Kenya to the southeast, Uganda to the south, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the southwest, and the Central African Republic to the west.
- It includes the vast swamp region of the Sudd, formed by the White Nile and known locally as the Bahr al Jabal.
- With **Nilotic peoples** forming the majority of its population, the nation is also referred to as the Nilotic Republic, as a homeland and supposedly the place of origin for the Nilotic race.
- South Sudan has suffered ethnic violence and has been in a civil war since 2013. As of 2017, despite not being ranked bottom in the latest World Happiness Report, it had the highest score on the Fragile States Index (formerly, the Failed States Index), surpassing Somalia.

Source: Economic Times

### Jogighopa to become India's new gateway to South-East Asia

#### Why in news?

- ✎ Jogighopa, a small town in Assam, is set to become India's gateway to South-East Asia as well as the rest of the North-East with the road ministry gearing up to develop a multimodal logistics park (MMLP) there with road, rail, waterways and air transport facilities.

#### Where is Jogighopa located?

- Jogighopa is a small town located on the banks of the Brahmaputra River in the Bongaigaon district in the state of Assam.
- Within the city are the remains of the five rock cut rock-cut caves, examples of **Salasthambha period architecture**.

#### What's the project?

- Under the project, all four types of transportation—road, rail, air and waterways—will be available.
- The development includes railway sidings, container terminals, warehousing, non-cargo processing, a truck terminal, common facilities, support infrastructure and equipment.
- A special purpose vehicle, backed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), will be created to execute the project, which will be executed in two phases.

#### Need for alternative route:

- The current transit corridors from mainland India to the North-East region pass through an area known as the "**Chicken's Neck**"—**a narrow tract of land in India between the borders with Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan**. Since it is close to these borders and cannot be expanded, the North-East region requires an alternative route for providing connectivity to the rest of India—a route with adequate expansion potential. The Indo-Bangladesh road route, along with the National Waterways-2, provides such an option.

#### Significance:

- The move comes at a time when India's neighbours are gearing up for trade. For example, Bangladesh's development of the Khulna-Dhaka-Sylhet Economic Corridor and the Banglabandha-Dhaka-Chittagong-Cox's Bazar Economic Corridor—to promote industrial development in the region.

- These initiatives are expected to drive freight movement in the region and facilitate trade between India and Bangladesh, and between Bangladesh and Bhutan through India.

### Way ahead:

- North-East is one of the regions which has played a pivotal role in terms of logistics connectivity with the international and national corridors of India. And Asean's (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) strong bond with the North-East region will act as a mascot for the entire region and for the rest of the businesses in India.

Source: The Hindu

## 21st February: International Mother Language Day

### Why in news?

- ✎ The International Mother Language Day (IMLD) was observed across the world on 21 February to promote awareness of linguistic, multilingualism and cultural diversity.
  - The theme of 2018 International Mother Language Day is 'Linguistic diversity and multilingualism count for sustainable development'.

### About the International Mother Language Day (IMLD):

- The International Mother Language Day was instituted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) by passing resolution 61/266 in 2007.
- The resolution had called upon member states "to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world.
- Since 2007, it is observed annually by member states to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.
- The day was first proclaimed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in November 1999 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.

### SDG4:

- Observance of this day also supports target 6 of Goal 4 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which states that ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

### Special significance:

- The day, February 21 in 1952 assumes special significance in Bangladesh where scores of people (activists), mostly students and teachers of the Dhaka University, were mercilessly shot down by the Pakistani army when Bangladesh was East Pakistan.
- The activists had protested against imposition of Urdu as the national language side-stepping Bengali – their mother tongue and the protest came to be known as Language Movement.

Source: UN

## India gets access to strategic Oman port Duqm for military use

### Why in news?

- ✎ In a strategic move to expand its footprint in the Indian Ocean region, India has secured access to the key Port of Duqm in Oman for military use and logistical support.
  - Following this pact, the services of Duqm port and dry dock will be available for maintenance of Indian military vessels.
  - This was one of the key takeaways of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Oman.

### About the Port of Duqm:

- The Port of Duqm is situated on the southeastern seaboard of Oman, overlooking the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.
- It is strategically located, in close proximity to the Chabahar port in Iran.

### Strategic significance of Port of Duqm for India:

- With the Assumption Island being developed in Seychelles and Agalega in Mauritius, Duqm fits into India's proactive maritime security roadmap.
- The Port of Duqm also has a special economic zone, where about \$1.8 billion investments are being made by some Indian companies.
- This is also part of India's maritime strategy to counter Chinese influence and activities in the region.

### Location of Oman:

- Oman is an Arab country on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula in Western Asia.
- Holding a strategically important position at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, the country shares land borders with the United Arab Emirates to the northwest, Saudi Arabia to the west, and Yemen to the southwest, and shares marine borders with Iran and Pakistan.
- The coast is formed by the Arabian Sea on the southeast and the Gulf of Oman on the northeast.
- The Madha and Musandam exclaves are surrounded by the UAE on their land borders, with the Strait of Hormuz (which it shares with Iran) and Gulf of Oman forming Musandam's coastal boundaries.

### About India-Oman bilateral relations:

- ✓ Oman is a strategic partner for India in the Gulf. It accords a high priority to its ties with India.
- ✓ Both countries across Arabian Sea are linked by geography, history and culture. They enjoy warm and cordial relations and have had trade and people-to-people ties for several millennia
- ✓ It is India's important trading partner. In 2010, bilateral trade between India and Oman was \$4.5 billion. India.
- ✓ Oman was second largest destination of India's non-oil exports and its fourth largest source for imports.
- ✓ Indian and Omani firms have undertaken joint ventures in wide range of sectors including fertilisers, pharmaceuticals, energy and engineering.
- ✓ Oman is first Gulf nation to have formalised defence relations with India. Both countries conducted joint military exercises in 2006 and subsequently signed defence agreement.



- ✓ Indian Navy has berthing rights in Oman, and has been utilising Oman's ports as bases for conducting anti-piracy operations in Gulf of Aden.
- ✓ Oman is home to a large Indian expatriate community. India is major destination for Omani students pursuing higher studies and also medical tourists.

Source: Indian Express, The Hindu

## India, Palestine sign six infrastructure agreements

### Why in news?

- ✎ India and Palestine signed six Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) for cooperation in the field of infrastructural development in Palestine.
  - The MoUs were signed during PM Narendra Modi's 3-hour visit to Palestine. This was the first ever visit by an Indian Prime Minister in 30 years.

### Mous signed are:

- MOU between India and Palestine for setting up India-Palestine Super-specialty hospital at Beit Sahour in Bethelhem Governorate at a cost of USD 30 million.
- MOU between India and Palestine for construction of India Palestine Centre for Empowering women 'Turathi' at a cost of USD 5 million.
- MOU between India and Palestine for setting up of new National Printing Press at Ramallah at a cost of USD 5 million.
- MOU between India and Palestine for construction of school in Muthalth Al Shuhada Village at a cost of USD 1 million.
- MOU between India and Palestine on construction of school in Tamoon village in Tubas Governorate in Palestine at a cost of USD 1.1 million.
- MOU between India and Palestine for assistance of USD 0.25 million for construction of additional floor to Jawahar Lal Nehru School for Boys at Abu Dees.

### About Palestine:

- Palestine is a de jure sovereign state in the Middle East claiming the West Bank (bordering Israel and Jordan) and Gaza Strip (bordering Israel and Egypt) with East Jerusalem as the designated capital although its administrative center is located in Ramallah.
- Most of the areas claimed by the State of Palestine have been occupied by Israel since 1967 in the consequence of the Six-Day War.

Source: Economic Times

## Tanzania withdraws from UN refugee programme

### Why in news?

- ✎ Tanzania has decided to withdraw from UN refugee programme for reasons of security and lack of funds.
  - Tanzania has long been considered a safe haven for refugees, particularly from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

### About UN Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF):

- ✓ New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, also known as New York Declaration, calls upon UNHCR to develop and initiate the application of CRRF in particular situations, in close coordination with relevant States, other UN agencies and stakeholders.
- ✓ Adopted by all 193 Member States of the United Nations in September 2016, it contains historic and wide-ranging commitments that reaffirm the commitment by Member States to respect the human rights of refugees and migrants and to support the countries that welcome them.
- ✓ The CRRF provides lasting solutions for refugees, including integration into host communities.
- ✓ Its approach is based on the idea that refugees should be included in their host communities.
- ✓ According to framework, once refugees get access to education and right to work legally, they can develop their own skills and be more self-reliant, contributing to local economy.

### Key elements:

- The CRRF specifies key elements for a comprehensive response to any large movement of refugees. These include rapid and well-supported reception and admissions; assistance for local and national institutions and communities receiving refugees; support for immediate and on-going needs (e.g. protection, health, education) and expanded opportunities for solutions.

### Location of Tanzania:

- Tanzania is a sovereign state in eastern Africa within the African Great Lakes region.
- It borders Kenya and Uganda to the north; Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west; Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique to the south; and the Indian Ocean to the east. Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain, is in north-eastern Tanzania.

Source: The Hindu

### Protocol amending accord between India, China for DTAA approved

#### Why in news?

- ✎ Recently, the Union Cabinet accorded approval to the protocol amending the agreement between India and China for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income.

#### Key facts:

- The protocol amending Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) aims to update the provisions on exchange of information of the DTAA to the latest international standards.
- Further, the Protocol will incorporate changes required to implement treaty related minimum standards under the Action reports of Base Erosion and Profit shifting (BEPS) Project, in which India had participated on an equal footing.

#### Background:

- In 2016, India signed a multilateral convention to implement measures to prevent shifting of profits by companies to low-tax nations as a way to avoid paying taxes.
- The convention is an outcome of the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)/G20 Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) project.**

- The convention will tackle base erosion and profit shifting through tax planning strategies that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules to artificially shift profits to low or no-tax locations where there is little or no economic activity, resulting in little or no overall corporate tax being paid, the statement said.
- The Final BEPS Project identified 15 actions to address BEPS in a comprehensive manner.
- Implementation of the Final BEPS Package requires changes to more than 3,000 bilateral tax treaties which will be burdensome and time consuming.
- In view of this, the convention was conceived as a multilateral instrument which would swiftly modify all covered bilateral tax treaties to implement BEPS measures.
- The convention implements two minimum standards related to prevention of treaty abuse and dispute resolution through mutual agreement procedure.

Source: Business Standard

## **Cabinet approves New Instrument adopted by International Labour Organization (ILO)**

### **Why in news?**

- ✘ Cabinet has recently approved new recommendation adopted by International Labour Organization (ILO) concerning “The Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience (Recommendation No-205).

### **About the Recommendation No.- 205:**

- ✘ The Recommendation No.-205 was adopted at 106th Session of International Labour Conference of ILO in Geneva in June, 2015.
  - The Recommendation provides guidance to member States on the measures to be taken to generate employment and decent work for the purposes of prevention, recovery, peace and resilience with respect to crisis situations arising from conflicts and disasters.
  - India also had supported the adoption of Recommendation. Its adoption and placing for information of Parliament does not create any immediate obligation on countries.
  - ILO Recommendations are non-binding instrument which seeks to serve as guiding principle for national policy process.

### **Applicability:**

- It is applicable to all workers and jobseekers and employers in all sectors of economy affected by crisis situations arising from conflicts and disasters and to workers engaged in crisis response, including in the immediate response.

### **Approach:**

- It emphasizes need to ensure respect all human rights and rule of law, including respect for fundamental principles and rights at work.
- It calls adhering to international labour standards in particular those rights and principles relevant to employment and decent work.
- It affirms need to develop and strengthen measures of social protection, as a means of preventing crises, enabling recovery and building resilience.

### Obligations on members:

- Member states should adopt phased multi-track approach implementing coherent and comprehensive strategies for promoting peace, preventing crises, enabling recovery and building resilience.
- The approach must include promoting local economic recovery for employment and decent work opportunities and socio-economic reintegration, social protection and social inclusion, sustainable development.
- It also calls for creation of sustainable enterprises in particular small and medium-sized enterprises and ensures consultation and encourage active participation of employers' and workers' organizations in planning, implementing and monitoring measures for recovery and resilience.

### About International Labour Organisation (ILO):

- The ILO is a United Nations agency dealing with labour issues, particularly international labour standards, social protection, and work opportunities for all.
- It was established in 1919 as an agency of the League of Nations and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- India is a founder member of the ILO. At present, it has 187 members.
- The principal means of action in the ILO is the setting up of International standards in the form of Conventions, Recommendations and Protocol.
- So far India has ratified 45 Conventions, out of which 42 are in force. Out of these 4 are Core or Fundamental or Conventions.

Source: PIB, The Hindu

### Maldives Declares Political Emergency

#### What is the issue?

- While the Supreme Court has ordered the release of many jailed opposition leaders, Maldives government has openly refused to comply.
- Contrarily, it has declared a state of emergency for 15 days, and government forces have also taken over the Supreme Court complex.

#### What were the fallouts?

- The recently political storm started by the Supreme Court's surprise verdict to release some opposition leaders has been spiralling out of control.
- The government has been openly refusing to comply and has started repressive action against opposing voices.
- **Emergency** - President Abdulla's Yameen declared a state of emergency in Maldives, which is the 2nd such declaration since he came to power in 2013.
- The 1st was in 2015, when an alleged attempt on Yameen's life seemed to have warranted such a declaration.
- The president has clarified that while certain rights will be restricted, general movements, services and businesses will not be affected.

- **Gayoom's Arrest** – Former President Moumoon Abdul Gayoom, who reigned for 30 years till democracy was established in 2008, was also arrested.
- Notably, 80 year old Gayoom is the half brother of Yameen and of late, he has openly sided with the dissenting opposition for toppling the government.
- Also, troops stormed the Supreme Court premises and taken procession.
- **Parliament Suspended** - The President is required to inform the Parliament about the declaration of emergency within two days.
- But to circumvent this, Yameen has suspended the parliament indefinitely.
- Notably, as the Supreme Court had also restored 12 MPs who had defected from Mr. Yameen's party, the majority is effectively with the opposition.
- This thereby increases the vulnerability of the president to be subjected to impeachment in the 85-member parliament.

### How has the reactions been?

- Restricting fundamental freedoms and suspending of the Supreme Court can only happen during martial law, and is illegal in the current situation.
- Hence, opposition leaders have voiced that emergency was a blatant violation and an indication of Mr. Yameen's desperation to hold on to power.
- They've appealed to the masses to demonstrate against these actions and the international community has also largely criticised Mr. Yameen's actions.

### What are the options for India?

- **Histoic Prespective** - India has committed itself to the principle of "non-intervention" in the internal affairs of other countires country.
- It is also strongly against external strings in its domestic politics and has regularly criticised western powers for interventions in developing countries.
- But despite this, India has made multiple interventions in its neighbourhood when pressing concerns have called for such action.
- The Bangladesh liberation of 1971, Sri Lankan intervention in the late 1980s, and more recently, in shaping the Nepali constitution are some examples.
- **Maldivian Case** - When the former president Nasheed was ousted from office in a coup in 2012, India had backed him strongly.
- But the subsequent rise of Nasheed's nemesis and the current president Yameen, India was forced to recalibrate its stands.
- This was partly due to Yameen's strong Islamic diplomacy with the Arab world and his ties with China which is backed by high-profile infrastructure projects.
- **Current Situation** - Yameen is currently looking towards China to secure his position, despite mounting international pressure.
- Hence, India has the option to either remain neutral or put its weight delicately behind the opposition to rally for a regime change.

- While the former is the safer option, an intervention can be beneficial but would inherently invite the ire of China and holds with it the risk of failure.
- India needs to make its move after weighing all the stakes involved.

Source: The Hindu

## 6<sup>th</sup> World Government Summit (WGS)

### Why in news?

- ✎ The sixth Edition of World Government Summit was recently held in in Dubai, UAE.

### About World Government Summit:

- The World Government Summit is a global platform dedicated to shaping the future of government worldwide.
- Each year, the Summit sets the agenda for the next generation of governments with a focus on how they can harness innovation and technology to solve universal challenges facing humanity.

### What is the significance of the summit?

- The World Government Summit is a knowledge exchange center at the intersection between government, futurism, technology, and innovation.
- It functions as a thought leadership platform and networking hub for policymakers, experts, and pioneers in human development.
- The Summit is a gateway to the future as it functions as a stage for analysis of the future trends, issues, and opportunities facing humanity.
- It is also an arena to showcase innovations, best practice, and smart solutions to inspire creativity to tackle these future challenges.
- **India's Aadhaar and Umang App have won awards at 6th World Government Summit 2018 in Dubai.** Umang App won in Best m-Government Service Award for Accessible Government Category and Aadhaar won in the Best Government Emerging Technologies Award.

### Key features of UMANG App

- The UMANG App provides a unified approach where you can install one application to avail multiple government services.
- It contains 162 services of 33 departments or applications and 4 States.
- It is a single mobile app that have an access to 1200 services of various government offices from Centre, State and utility services.
- It provides all pan India e-Gov services like Aadhaar and Digilocker on one single platform.
- Whether one needs to pay utility bills, file income tax, book a gas cylinder, know about your Provident fund account or have Aadhaar related query, UMANG provides all these services.

Source: The Hindu

## India contributes \$1 mn to UN Development Partnership Fund

### Why in news?

India has contributed additional \$1 million to India-UN Development Partnership Fund, earmarked for South-South cooperation.

- The contribution aims to intensify its partnerships with other developing countries in south.

### Background:

- India has pledged multi-year contribution of \$100 million to the fund established in June 2017.
- India has already provided \$6 million within the seven months since launch of fund.

### About the India-UN Development Partnership Fund:

- The India-UN Development Partnership Fund will implement country-level projects that are catalytic towards achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.
- The initiative is aimed at reducing poverty and hunger, improving health, education and equality, and expanding access to clean water, energy and livelihoods.
- The fund will focus on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
- Initially, the fund will start with an initial contribution of USD 1 million for its first project Climate Early Warning System in Pacific Island Countries (CEWSPIC).
- CEWSPIC Project was formulated by India and the UN Development Programme in consultation with the governments of Cook Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Solomon Islands and Tonga. The project will increase resilience to natural disasters in these seven Pacific island countries.

### About UNOSSC:

The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) was established with an objective to promote, coordinate and support South-South and triangular cooperation across the world and within the United Nations system.

- UNOSSC has its genesis in 1974 when the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the establishment of a special unit to promote technical cooperation among developing countries within the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- In 2012, the special unit was given the name United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) by the General Assembly through a resolution.
- UNOSSC receives policy directives and guidance from the General Assembly and through its subsidiary body, the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation.
- UNOSSC submits its strategic planning frameworks to the UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS Executive Board for approval and funding.
- The Director reports to the UNDP Administrator and has also been appointed Envoy of the Secretary-General on South-South Cooperation.

Source: The Hindu

## India joins Ashgabat agreement

### Why in news?

- Recently, India has been admitted to Agreement on the Establishment of an International Transport and Transit Corridor” between Iran, Oman, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan signed on April 25, 2011, known as the Ashgabat Agreement.
  - All the four founding members have consented to the accession of India.
  - India’s accession to the Agreement will enter into force on February 3, 2018.

### Significance of this accession:

- Accession to the Agreement would diversify India’s connectivity options with Central Asia and have a positive influence on India’s trade and commercial ties with the region.
- It also assumes significance given Beijing’s One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative of which the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), that leads to Gwadar port in Pakistan passing through Pakistan-administered Kashmir, is a major part.
- India’s stand has been that while it is all for connectivity, such initiatives should respect the territorial integrity of other countries.

### About Ashgabat Agreement:

- The Agreement is an international transport and transit corridor facilitating transportation of goods between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf.
  - The Ashgabat Agreement, which aims to develop a shortest trade route between Central Asian countries and Iranian and Omani ports, was initially signed among Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Oman and Qatar back in April 2011 and was given additional support in 2014 when a Memorandum of Understanding was signed.
  - Whilst Oman called for early completion of basic technical requirements so that the corridor can be operational by 2015, Qatar withdrew from the agreement in 2013. However, Kazakhstan promised to join instead, which will increase the project’s significance and extend it further into Central Asia.
  - The Iran-Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan (ITK) railway line will be the major route according to the Ashgabat Agreement, which became operational in December 2014 and was also included as part of India-funded North-South international transport corridor (NSITC).

### Location of Ashgabat:

- Ashgabat is the capital and the largest city of Turkmenistan in Central Asia, situated between the Karakum Desert and the Kopet Dag mountain range.
- It is known as Poltoratsk between 1919 and 1927.

Source: Indian Express, The Hindu

## Sweden commits record \$370 million of aid to UN World Food Programme

### Why in news?

- Sweden and the United Nations World Food Programme have signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement committing an unprecedented \$370 million dollars to WFP over the next four years i.e. 2018-2021.



- The contribution is the biggest ever made by a donor within a WFP Strategic Partnership Agreement.
- Sweden has been the largest donor of flexible and predictable funds to WFP for almost a decade.

### Background:

- The Swedish contribution comes at time of record need as the world is facing worst humanitarian crisis since the end of World War II with multiple large-scale hunger emergencies occurring across the planet.
- For the first time in decade, the number of hungry people in world is increasing and majority of them now live in countries affected by conflict. Ten of the 13 largest food crises on the planet are driven mainly by conflict.

### About World Food Programme:

- The World Food Programme (WFP) is the food assistance branch of the United Nations and the world's largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger and promoting food security.
- The WFP strives to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, with the ultimate goal in mind of eliminating the need for food aid itself.
- It is a member of the United Nations Development Group and part of its Executive Committee.
- Born in 1961, WFP pursues a vision of the world in which every man, woman and child has access at all times to the food needed for an active and healthy life.
- The WFP is governed by an Executive Board which consists of representatives from member states.
- The WFP operations are funded by voluntary donations from world governments, corporations and private donors.
- WFP food aid is also directed to fight micronutrient deficiencies, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, and combat disease, including HIV and AIDS.

Source: The Hindu

### Fifth South Asia Region Public Procurement Conference

#### Why in news?

- ✎ The Fifth edition of South Asia Region Public Procurement Conference was held recently in New Delhi.

#### Key facts:

- It was hosted by Public Procurement Division (PPD) of Ministry of Finance and All India Management Association (AIMA).
- It was held under auspices of South Asia Region Public Procurement Network (SARPPN), which is sponsored and facilitated by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Islamic Development Bank.
- The theme of the Fifth Conference is: "Public Procurement and Service Delivery".
- The Fifth Conference will deliberate upon key aspects of public procurement that help ensure delivery of these services; and identify and address areas that need improvement.

**About the Conference:**

- The Conference aims to strive to improve public procurement of member countries to ensure timely and quality delivery of public services.
- Its objective was to enable heads of Public Procurement and other key stakeholders in **8 South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan)** to meet and learn from one another and from experts in field of public procurement.
- It will help South Asian Governments to consider enhancements and innovations in their public procurement systems, enable efficient utilization of public resources, ensure quality and timeliness in delivery of services.

**Background:**

- The First Conference was held in Kathmandu in 2010, second in Islamabad (2014), third in Dhaka (2015) and fourth in Sri Lanka (2017).
- All eight SAR countries spend approximately \$550 billion equivalent on public procurement of goods, works and services, which eventually convert to public services.

Source: PIB

## Indian Economy and Economic Development

### RBI launches Ombudsman scheme for NBFCs

#### Why in news?

- ✎ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has launched Ombudsman Scheme for non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) for redressal of complaints against NBFCs registered with RBI under section 45-IA of the RBI Act, 1934.
  - The scheme will provide cost-free and expeditious complaint redressal mechanism relating to deficiency in services by non-banking financial companies covered under the scheme.

#### Ombudsman Scheme for NBFCs

#### Who can file the complaint?

- Under this scheme, any customer or person can file complaint with ombudsman on various grounds.

#### Conditions for filing complaint:

- Only written complaints or those in electronic format will be accepted.
- The complaint may be wrt non-payment or inordinate delay in payment of interest, non-repayment of deposits, lack of transparency in loan agreement, non-compliance with RBI directives on fair practices code for NBFCs, levying of charges without sufficient notice to customers and failure or delay in returning securities documents despite repayment of dues among others.

#### Appointment of the ombudsman:

- RBI will appoint one or more of its officers in rank of not less than General Manager (GM) to be known as Ombudsman to carry out functions.
- The appointment will for period not exceeding three years at time.
- The offices of NBFC Ombudsmen will function at four metro centres—Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata and New Delhi.
- They will handle complaints of customers in respective zones. To begin with, the scheme will cover all deposit-taking NBFCs.

#### Appeal:

- The schemes provide for Appellate mechanism under which complainant/NBFC will have option to appeal against decision of Ombudsman before Appellate Authority.

#### Settlement or Award:

- It will obligation of NBFC concerned to implement settlement arrived with complainant or Award passed by Ombudsman when it becomes final and send report in this regard to RBI within 15 days of award becoming final.
- In case of non-implementation of settlement or Award, the complainant may represent to RBI and RBI may initiate such action under provisions of RBI Act, 1934 as it deems fit.

#### Reporting:

- The ombudsman will be required to send a report to the RBI governor annually on 30 June containing general review of the activities of his office during the preceding financial year and other information required by the central bank.

## What is a Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC)?

- Non-bank financial companies (NBFCs) are financial institutions that provide banking services without meeting the legal definition of a bank, i.e. one that does not hold a banking license.
- A Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) is a company registered under the Companies Act, 1956.
- These institutions typically are **restricted from taking deposits from the public depending on the jurisdiction.**
- Nonetheless, operations of these institutions are often still covered under a country's banking regulations.

## Limitations to the functions of the NBFCs:

- Typically, NBFCs are restricted from taking deposits from the public depending on the jurisdiction. Nonetheless, operations of these institutions are often still covered under a country's banking regulations.
- NBFC cannot accept demand deposits.
- NBFCs do not form part of the payment and settlement system and cannot issue cheques drawn on itself.
- Deposit insurance facility of Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation is not available to depositors of NBFCs, unlike in case of banks.

Source: The Hindu, Economic Times

## Agriculture ministry adds six new features in e-NAM platform

### Why in news?

- Union Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare launched six new user friendly features of National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) platform to make it more users friendly.
  - The objective was to bring more transparency and competition and provide remunerative prices to farmers.

### Six new features include:

- e-NAM Mobile App
  - BHIM payment facility
  - New & improved website with eLearning module
  - MIS Dashboard
  - Grievance redressal management system
  - Integration with farmer database
- The eNAM website is now available in Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali and Odia besides Hindi and English, while the eNAM trading facility is available in six languages.

### About e-NAM:

- National Agriculture Market (NAM) is a pan-India electronic trading portal which networks the existing APMC mandis to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities.
- This e-platform aims to provide more options to farmers to sell their produce and is part of implementation of the roadmap for doubling income of the farmers by 2022.
- National Agriculture Market (NAM) has been incorporated by the Department of Agriculture & Cooperation.

- e-NAM was envisioned and launched in 21 Mandis on 14th April 2016 which has now reached 479 Mandis across 14 states and 1 Union Territory.

Source: The Hindu, Economic Times

## Cabinet clears private commercial mining in coal

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved methodology for auction of coal mines/blocks for sale of coal to private sector under Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015 and Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957.

### Implications of the move:

- The opening up of commercial coal mining for private sector is the most ambitious coal sector reform since the nationalisation of this sector in 1973.
- This decision opens coal sector to commercial mining by private entity, ending 41 year old monopoly of state owned Coal India Ltd (CIL).
- It will allow power cement and steel producers to source fuel more efficiently.

### Background:

- Supreme Court in its September 2014 order had cancelled 204 coal mines and blocks allocated to various Government and Private Companies since 1993 under the provisions of Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act, 1973.
- The pursuance of this order, Parliament had enacted Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015 to bring transparency and accountability for allocation of coal mines by way of auction and allotment for the sale of coal.

### About the new methodology:

- As per the new methodology, there will be no end use restriction or price restriction for the coal that is mined from these blocks. The blocks will be awarded through a forward auction.
- The amount accrued through the bids will be in addition to the royalty that the States get. All the revenue from the sale of these blocks will go into coffers of the States where they are located.
- It will incentivise these states to utilize this increased revenue for growth and development of backward areas and their inhabitants including tribals.

### Significance of this new methodology:

- The methodology gives highest priority to transparency, ease of doing business and ensuring that natural resources are used for national development.
- It opens commercial coal mining for private sector and will help in boosting the economy. It is most ambitious coal sector reform since the nationalisation of this sector in 1973.
- It will bring efficiency by moving coal mining from era of monopoly to competition and enable use of best possible technology.

- It will also attract higher investments and create more jobs in mining sector.
- It will also lead to the availability of low cost power as 70% of India's electricity is generated from thermal power plants.
- States in Eastern part of the country will be especially benefited from this new methodology.

Source: The Hindu

## PNB Banking Fraud Case

### Why in news?

- One of the branches of State-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB) has recently detected fraudulent transactions worth over Rs 11,000 crores.

### What has happened with PNB?

- PNB has alleged that two of its employees had “fraudulently” issued LoUs and transmitted SWIFT instructions to the overseas branches of Indian Banks.
- This was done to raise buyer's credit for the firm of a diamond merchant without making entries in the bank system.
- The bank has alleged that one such fraudulent LoU issuance took place on January 2018, the trail of which revealed the entire design.
- These LoUs were mostly issued to two Hong Kong branches of Indian Banks and was for the aforesaid diamond merchant.
- The details on whether LoUs were backed by collateral or the quantum of liability that the bank faces against these LoUs aren't out yet.

### What is Letter of Understanding (LoUs)?

- LoU is an assurance given by one bank to another to meet a liability on behalf of a customer.
- It is similar to a letter of credit or a guarantee.
- It is used for overseas import remittances and involves four parties — an issuing bank, a receiving bank, an importer and a beneficiary entity overseas.
- According to norms, they are usually valid for 180 days.
- LoUs are conveyed from bank to bank through “Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication” (SWIFT) instructions.
- Notably, till now, there is no record of a breach in SWIFT instructions anywhere in the world.

### The Impact:

- Hong Kong branches of Allahabad Bank and Axis Bank have given money to the beneficiary entity on behalf of Modi's firms.
- As a result, PNB will have to settle the LoUs with these branches according to the norms of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority.
- Market sentiment has already been impacted and PNB stock fell 9.81% in a single day, which consequently saw investors loose over Rs 3,000 crores.

- The bank may have to set aside higher provisioning in the next few quarters if it unable to recover the money from the accused firms.
- The fraud has been unearthed at a time when Indian banks are reeling under a pile of stressed assets of about Rs 10 lakh crore.
- Also, higher provisioning and a rise in bond yields, has resulted in losses for most public sector banks in the previous quarter.

### **What are its implications on PNB?**

- For India's second largest bank to be defrauded in the manner suggested is astounding, especially since regulatory oversight has tightened in recent years.
- Notably, the mounting stressed asserts has led to greater scrutiny of account books by - bank's audit committees and boards, as well as the central bank.
- The government, had recently unveiled a plan to infuse about Rs. 1 lakh crore into 21 capital-starved public sector banks this fiscal (recapitalisation).
- Of this, Rs. 5,473 crore is to be injected into PNB, which currently looks dwarfed in comparison to the amount that was swindled in the current scam.
- Hence, despite the proposed infusion, the capital adequacy ratio of PNB is expected to worsen due to the fraudulent leakage.
- Notably, PNB's market capitalisation has dropped by Rs. 8,077 crore over the past two days, with the share price falling over 20% since the news broke.

### **How have the various stakeholder reacted?**

- The bank's top brass has suspending around 10 officials and the CBI has booked one retired and one serving PNB employee so far.
- The bank has claimed that regulatory lapses are being probed, as a handful of junior employees couldn't have orchestrated such a massive fraud singularly.
- Enforcement Directorate has initiated a money laundering case against the main accused, billionaire-jeweller Nirav Modi, and his aides.
- Notably, the firms run by him had seen a meteoric rise and an IPO was also in the offing soon.

### **What is the way forward?**

- PNB has sought to blame overseas branches of other banks for not undertaking due diligence before accepting such transactions.
- But that may be too simplistic an explanation and an inquiry by the RBI must get to the bottom of the systemic lapses to fix accountability across the sector.
- While the banker-borrower nexus has plagued the banking system for years, this episode exposed that the nexus is a lot deeper than imagined.
- RBI and investigating agencies should act speedily to restore trust in the banking system in particular and also the larger financial setup.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express, Business Standard

## PNB fraud fallout: Banks told to link CBS with SWIFT system

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has directed banks to link SWIFT (Society for World Interbank Financial Telecommunication System platform) with their core banking solutions (CBS) by April 30, 2018.

### Key facts

- This decision is part of RBI's efforts to tighten internal controls in banks following Rs 11,400 crore fraud that was unearthed at Punjab National Bank (PNB).
- CBS is centralised software used to support bank's most common transactions.

### Need for SWIFT-CBS linking:

- Many banks are yet to establish the linkage. So, there is urgent need for banks to revisit their surveillance system and plug the loopholes.

### What is SWIFT?

- ✎ SWIFT is global financial messaging service that enables financial institutions worldwide to send and receive information about financial transactions in secure, standardized and reliable environment.
  - It is used to transmit messages relating to cross border financial transactions.
  - It was founded in 1973 by a group of 239 banks from 15 countries and is headquartered in La Hulpe, Belgium.
  - It is a cooperative society under Belgian law owned by its member financial institutions with offices around the world.
  - SWIFT does not facilitate funds transfer, rather, it sends payment orders, that must be settled by correspondent accounts that institutions have with each other.
  - On receiving this message through SWIFT, banks abroad, mostly branches of domestic banks abroad provide funds to the company.
  - Globally over 11,000 financial institutions in more than 200 countries use services of SWIFT.
  - It carries an average of approximately 26 million financial messages each day.
  - In order to use its messaging services, customers need to connect to the SWIFT environment.

Source: The Hindu, Business Standard

## Consider privatising public sector banks: FICCI to govt.

### Why in news?

- ✎ Industry body FICCI has called for privatisation of public sector banks (PSBs), saying that the recapitalisation efforts by the government have had little effect on improving their health.

### Why we should opt for privatisation?

- ✎ There is a continuous pressure on the government finances on account of the weak performance of the banks.
  - Privatisation would reduce the drain on the exchequer and the money saved could be used for developmental schemes and programmes of the government.



- Private banks will bring innovations in products, technology and customer servicing and a market-based discipline to lending.
- Private banks, knowing that they cannot count on government's protection, are unlikely to engage in the sort of risky lending that characterised public bank lending.
- Also, they will not be subject to the same pressure from politicians and others in government that has destroyed the public sector banks.

### Background:

- The public-sector banks, which constitute almost 70% of the Indian banking system, are saddled with burgeoning stressed assets.
- The government has already injected over ₹ 2.6 lakh crore in the public-sector banks through recapitalisation in the last eleven years, which has had limited impact in improving the health of public sector banks thus far.

### Way ahead:

- Recapitalisation of PSBs alone is not a permanent solution and will not be effective unless the inherent issues related to governance, productivity; risk management, talent, customer service, etc. are resolved.
- The government should shrink unproductive public sector banks and move forward with increasing private sector participation in the banking sector.

Source: The Hindu

## Food processing ministry begins work on Operation Greens

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Ministry of Food Processing Industries has started consultations with stakeholders to determine the contours of Operation Greens.

### What is Operation greens?

- ✎ Operation is essentially a price fixation scheme that aims to ensure farmers are given the right price for their produce.
  - Operation Greens aims to promote farmer producers organisations, agri-logistics, processing facilities and professional management.
  - The operation aims to aid farmers and help control and limit the erratic fluctuations in the prices of onions, potatoes and tomatoes.
  - Operation Greens will work to increase demand in the economy as well with its demand forecasting model.

### Significance of Operation greens:

- The idea behind Operation Greens is to double the income of farmers by the end of 2022.
- Operation Green (OG) wants to replicate the success story of Operation Flood, in fruits and vegetables, starting with three basic vegetables—tomatoes, onions and potatoes (TOP).
- The main objective of OG is to reduce price volatility in these commodities, and thereby helping farmers augment incomes on a sustainable basis, as also provide these basic vegetables to consumers at affordable prices.

## Way ahead:

- **India is the second largest producer of vegetables in the world** with about 180 MMT. But China produces four times more vegetables than India.
- The litmus test of the success of this OG would be if it can contain roller-coaster rides of booms and busts in prices, and avert scenes of farmers dumping potatoes and tomatoes on roads, as is happening in several parts of India today.
- Also, containing prices going through the roof compelling the government to put bans on exports, de-stocking or even having income-tax raids on traders.

Source: The Hindu, Economic Times, Indian Express

## India reviews anti-dumping duty on steel wheels from China

### Why in news?

- keeping in mind interest of domestic manufacturers, the **Directorate General of Anti-Dumping and Allied Duties (DGAD), an investigation arm of the commerce ministry**, has started a probe to review whether the existing anti-dumping duty on flat base steel wheels imported from China should continue.
- DGAD would also examine whether the expiry of the duty is likely to lead to continuation or recurrence of dumping and hurt the domestic industry.

### WTO Rules in this regard:

- As per the World Trade Organisation, if a company exports a product at a price lower than the price it normally charges on its own home market, it is said to be “dumping” the product.
- The WTO agreement also allows governments to act against dumping where there is genuine “material” injury to the competing domestic industry.

### Background:

- In 2013, the finance minister had imposed the duty for five years. The duty was up to USD 613 per tonne on import of the product from China.
- In December 2017, India has imposed anti-dumping duty on as many as 98 products imported from China. The products on which the duty was imposed include flax fabrics, vitamin C, certain fibres and chemicals.

### What is Anti-dumping duty?

- An anti-dumping duty is a protectionist tariff that a domestic government imposes on foreign imports that it believes are priced below fair market value.
- Countries initiate anti-dumping probes to determine if the domestic industry has been hurt by a surge in below-cost imports. To counter it they impose duties under the multi-lateral WTO regime.
- Anti-dumping steps are taken to ensure fair trade and provide a level-playing field to the domestic industry.
- They are not a measure to restrict imports or cause an unjustified increase in cost of products.
- The use of anti-dumping measure as an instrument of fair competition is permitted by the WTO.
- When a country exports its products to other countries with a selling price below the cost price of the same product in other countries then it is called as dumping of products. This harms the profitability of domestic companies.

- Anti-dumping steps are taken to ensure fair trade and provide a level-playing field to the domestic industry.

### **Mechanism for imposition:**

- Anti-Dumping Duty is imposed under the multilateral World Trade Organisation (WTO) regime and varies from product to product and from country to country.
- In India, anti-dumping duty is recommended by the Union Ministry of Commerce (i.e. by DGAD) and imposed by the Union Finance Ministry.

### **About the Directorate General of Anti-Dumping and Allied Duties (DGAD):**

- ✎ DGAD was constituted in April 1998 under Ministry of Commerce and Industry and is headed by the Designated Authority.
  - The role of DGAD is to ensure a level playing field to the Domestic Industry against the adverse impact of the unfair trade practices like dumping and actionable subsidies from any exporting country, by using Trade Remedial methods under relevant framework of WTO arrangements, Customs Tariff Act & Rules and other relevant laws and International agreements, in a transparent and time bound manner.
  - Thus, the responsibility of the Directorate extends to carrying out investigations and recommending, where required, the amount of Anti-dumping/Countervailing Duty on the identified articles as would be adequate to remove injury to the domestic industry, under the Customs Tariff Act and Rules.

### **Major Functions of DGAD:**

- ✎ The major Functions being carried out by DGAD are as given below:
  - Conducting Anti-Dumping investigations
  - Conducting Anti-subsidy (Countervailing Duty) investigations
  - Conducting Anti-Circumvention investigations
  - Defending Indian exporters from various countervailing duty investigations carried out by foreign agencies.

Source: The Hindu

## 12<sup>th</sup> February: National Productivity Day

### **Why in news?**

- ✎ The National Productivity Council observed National Productivity Day on February 12th. It is the 60th Anniversary of the National Productivity Council and is being celebrated as Diamond Jubilee Year.
  - “Industry 4.0 Leapfrog Opportunity for India” has been selected as the theme for the National Productivity Week -2018.

### **About Industry 4.0:**

- Industry 4.0 or the fourth industrial revolution as it is called, is emerging globally as a powerful force and is being called as the next industrial revolution.
- It is characterized by the increasing digitization and interconnection of products, value chains and business models. Industry.

- Industry 4.0 means convergence of real and virtual worlds. It is the next phase in bringing together conventional and modern technologies in manufacturing. It will result in “Smart Factory”, which is characterized by versatility, ergonomic design, resource efficiency and direct integration with business partners.

### Previous industrial revolutions

- The first industrial revolution was triggered by water and steam power to move to mechanical manufacturing from human labour.
- The second industrial revolution built on electric power for mass production.
- The third industrial revolution used electronic and information technology to automate manufacturing.

### About National Productivity Council (NPC):

- NPC is a national level organization to promote productivity culture in India.
- Established by the Ministry of Industry in 1958, it is an autonomous, multipartite, non-profit organization with equal representation from employers’ and workers’ organizations and the government.
- It is an autonomous body under Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion, Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
- NPC is a constituent of the Tokyo-based Asian Productivity Organisation (APO), an intergovernmental body, of which India is a founder member.

### Composition:

- The Union Minister for Industry is the President of the NPC, and the Secretary (Industrial Policy and Promotion) is its Chairman.

### Functions:

- NPC teams up with its clients to work out solutions towards accelerating productivity, enhancing competitiveness, increasing profits, augmenting safety and reliability and ensuring better quality.
- It provides reliable database for decision-making, improved systems and procedures, work culture as well as customer satisfaction both internal & external. The solutions can be all-encompassing or specific depending on the nature of the problem.
- The council also helps monitor, review and implement the identified strategies.

Source: The Hindu PIB

## Union Budget 2018: Govt must address anomaly of inverted duty structure

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Union Budget has reinforced the correction of the inverted duty structure (IDS) which has adversely impacted manufacturing for decades.

### What is Inverted duty structure?

- Inverted duty structure is a situation where import duty on finished goods is low compared to the import duty on raw materials that are used in the production of such finished goods.
- For example, suppose the tariff (import tax) on the import of tyres is 10% and the tariff on the imports of natural rubber which is used in the production of tyres is 20%; this is a case of inverted duty structure.

- An IDS means higher duty on intermediate as opposed to final/finished goods, with the latter often enjoying concessional custom duty under some schemes.

### What are the concerns associated with IDS?

- When the import duty on raw materials is high, it will be more difficult to produce the concerned good domestically at a competitive price. Several industries depend on imported raw materials and components. High tax on the raw materials compels them to raise price.
- On the other hand, foreign finished goods will be coming at a reduced price because of low tax advantage. In conclusion, manufactured goods by the domestic industry becomes uncompetitive against imported finished goods.
- The disadvantage of the inverted duty structure increases with the increased use of imported raw materials.
- An inverted duty structure discourages domestic value addition.

### Background:

- The Budget has raised customs duties significantly. The goods and services tax (GST), especially the IGST or Integrated GST component, has begun to erode the advantage that the IDS was giving to foreign exporters in Indian markets.
- Also, the Finance Minister, in Budget 2014, had announced the beginnings of a reversal of the IDS in electronics and has sustained that effort in subsequent Budgets.

Source: The Hindu

## Cabinet proposes new criteria for classifying MSMEs

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Union Cabinet has approved amendment to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act, 2006 for classifying MSMEs from current investment in plant and machinery criteria to annual turnover criteria.

### Purpose of amendment:

- The purpose of amendment to Section 7 of MSMED Act, 2006 is to encourage ease of doing business, make MSME classification norms growth oriented and align them to new indirect tax regime revolving around Goods & Services Tax (GST).
- This will define units producing goods and rendering services in terms of annual turnover.
- It will pave the way for increased direct and indirect employment in the MSME sector of the country.

### New Classification Criteria (based on turnover)

- **Micro enterprise:** It will be unit with annual turnover does not exceed Rs. 5 crore.
- **Small enterprise:** It will be unit with annual turnover is more than Rs. 5 crore but does not exceed Rs. 75 crore.
- **Medium enterprise:** It will be unit with annual turnover is more than Rs. 75 crore but does not exceed Rs. 250 crore.

- Additionally, the amendment empowers Central Government to vary turnover limits, provided not exceeding thrice the limits specified in Section 7 of MSMED Act by issuing notification.

### Significance of New Classification Criteria:

- The turnover criteria can be pegged with reliable available figures e.g. in GST Network (GSTN) and other methods of ascertaining. This will help in having non-discretionary, transparent and objective criteria.
- It will eliminate need for inspections and make classification system progressive and evolutionary.
- It will also help in overcoming uncertainties associated with classification based on investment in plant & machinery and equipment and employment. It will also improve ease of doing business.
- It will provide flexibility to Government to fine-tune classification of MSMEs in response to changing economic scenario without resorting to amendment of MSMED Act.

### Background:

- At present Section 7 of MSMED Act classifies MSMEs on the basis of investment in plant and machinery for manufacturing units and investment in equipment for service enterprises.
- The criterion of investment in plant and machinery stipulates self-declaration which in turn entails verification and leads to transaction costs.

Source: PIB

## Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) launches tools to rank states, UTs on startup ecosystem

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### Why in news?

- ✎ Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) under Commerce Ministry has launched three tools to rank states and union territories on the basis of measures taken by them to promote budding entrepreneurs.
  - They will help promote the start-up drive.

### These tools are:

#### 1. Startup States and UTs Ranking Framework

- The framework aims to foster competitiveness and propel states/UTS to act proactively in startup matters.
- This ranking will help states to bring progress made in their startup ecosystem and also make different states learn and replicate good practices.
- Its objective is to encourage States/UTs to take proactive steps towards strengthening Startup ecosystems at local level.
- It will also measure impact of each step initiated at local level for building strong Startup ecosystem. It will also enable continuous learning through the dissemination of good practices.
- It is based on feedback collected from Startup ecosystem stakeholders, which include startups, mentors, investors, accelerators, incubators and government bodies.

- The parameters of this feedback focus on all actions and initiatives undertaken by states on or before March 2018. These parameters include having startup cell or helpline and mobile or web portal for queries, size of startup mentor network created by state government and number of key incubators for incubation support to startups.
- It also gives greater thrust like seed funding support, women entrepreneurship.

## 2. Startup India Compendium of Good Practises

- It aims at promoting Startups in India and focuses on enriching startup ecosystem through ethical behaviours. It is currently followed by 18 States/UTs.
- It covers 95 good practises across 7 areas of intervention for evaluating the performance of startup ecosystem in states/UTs. These are distilled into 38 action points including Incubation Support, Seed Funding, Angel & Venture Funding, Startup Policy & Implementation, Simplified Regulations, Easing Public Procurement, Awareness & Outreach.

## 3. Startup India Kit

- It is primarily a one-stop guide on all Startup India offerings.
- It offers vital information, advice and assistance through website links, statistics, tools, templates, events, competitions and a glossary on startup terms.
- All the benefits available to startups from the Startup India initiative can be found in the kit.

### Startups in India:

- India is home to about 20,000 startups, with about 1,400 beginning operations every year.
- They are not only driving economic growth but also leading to technological innovations and employment generation in every state. Entrepreneurs are introducing new solutions everyday and also improving existing processes.
- To encourage and help startups the Govt of India has taken the lead in creating policies and a framework. Many States and UTs have a startup focussed environment with ease of doing business for startups.

Source: PIB

## E-way bill rollout deferred

### Why in news?

- ✎ With the E-way bill generation platform facing technical glitches, the Government has extended the trial period for e-way bill.
  - However, the government has not clarified how long the trial will run.

### What is an e-Way Bill?

- E-way is an electronic billing system for traders who are moving their goods for sale beyond 10 km radius.
- Under the system, transporters carrying goods worth Rs 50,000 will be required to get goods pre-registered before transporting them from one location to another.
- According to notified e-way bill rules, every registered supplier will require prior online registration on the e-way bill portal for the movement of these goods.

- Any supplier/recipient/transporter can generate an e-way bill.

### When Should e-Way Bill be issued?

- ✎ e-Way bill will be generated when there is a movement of goods in a vehicle/ conveyance of value more than Rs. 50,000 (either each Invoice or in aggregate of all Invoices in a vehicle/ Conveyance) –
  - In relation to a ‘supply’
  - For reasons other than a ‘supply’ (say a return)
  - Due to inward ‘supply’ from an unregistered person
- ✎ For this purpose, a supply may be either of the following:
  - A supply made for a consideration (payment) in the course of business
  - A supply made for a consideration (payment) which may not be in the course of business
  - A supply without consideration (without payment) In simpler terms, the term ‘supply’ usually means a:
    1. Sale – sale of goods and payment made
    2. Transfer – branch transfers for instance
    3. Barter/Exchange – where the payment is by goods instead of in money
- ✎ Therefore, e-Way Bills must be generated on the common portal for all these types of movements.
- ✎ For certain specified Goods, the e-way bill needs to be generated mandatorily even if the Value of the consignment of Goods is less than Rs. 50,000:
  1. Inter-State movement of Goods by the Principal to the Job-worker
  2. Inter-State Transport of Handicraft goods by a dealer exempted from GST registration

### How E-way bill works?

- E-way is valid for all-India movement and transporters can generate the bill electronically and in self-service mode. Under the system, there is no need to visit any tax office and check post.
- Transporters can generate e-way bill on the official website through the Mobile App, SMS and offline as well.
- Transporters can visit the portal ‘ewaybill.nic.in’ and generate the e-way bill by registering themselves by giving the GSTIN.
- Those who are not registered can get themselves registered on the website using Aadhaar or PAN card.
- E-way bill can be generated by entering vehicle number.
- In case of breakdown or transshipment, the traders can update the vehicle number using the same E-way bill.
- Once generated E-way bill, however, cannot be cancelled for 24 hours.
- The moment it is generated, there is no requirement to fill the information pertaining to goods in the GST return as it will be automated.
- A unique e-way bill number (EBN), as well as a QR code, will be generated for tracking.

### What is the current status at the state-level over the e-way bill?

- Ten states have started trial runs of the e-way bill system.



- Karnataka implemented the system in September 2017, followed by Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Kerala.
- Six more states - Haryana, Bihar, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Sikkim and Jharkhand — also started trial runs for e-way bills.

### Do any exemptions apply to e-way bills?

- The GST Council exempted 154 items of common use, such as meat, fish, curd, vegetables and some cereals, human blood, LPG for households and kerosene for the Public Distribution System (PDS).
- The system will not be applicable on goods being transported by non-motorised conveyance, and where goods are transported from the port, airport, air cargo complex and land Customs stations to an inland container depot or a container freight station for Customs clearance.

### Are there concerns from industry?

- Trade and industry have raised concerns about the system being a possible route for the re-emergence of supply chain bottlenecks, and discretionary power to tax officials.
- The industry views the e-way bill as a system that will check tax evasion to some extent but may not be able to stop it completely.
- Also, it adds another layer of compliances for GST payers and, in case of technical glitches, may result in supply chain bottlenecks.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express, Business Standard

## Cri Sid Ex – India’s First MSE Sentiment Index

### Why in news?

- ✎ The SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India) and ratings agency Crisil have launched CriSidEx, India’s first MSE Sentiment Index for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

### About CriSidEx:

- CRISIL-SIDBI MSE Sentiment Index (or CriSidEx) has been developed jointly by CRISIL and SIDBI.
- It is a composite index based on diffusion index of 8 parameters.
- It measures MSE business sentiment on a scale of 0 (extremely negative) to 200 (extremely positive).
- The parametric feedback for the index will be captured through a survey of 1100 MSEs.
- CriSidEx will have 2 indices, one for ‘survey quarter’ and another for ‘next quarter’. Once trend emerges after few rounds of survey, it will provide independent time series data.

### Significance of index

- The index will help to Indicate the current state and expected outlook on the MSME sector every quarter.
- Provide crucial insights into employment, business environment and foreign trade in MSME sector.
- Allow policy makers to take timely proactive steps, including those based on early warnings thrown up by survey of index.

- Provide intelligence and insights for regulators, trade bodies, lenders as well as economic and financial analysts.
- Help in forecasting business environment by capturing sentiment on various business parameters such as business situation, capacity utilisation, order book and margins.
- Flag potential headwinds and changes in production cycles in MSME sector and thus help in improving market efficiencies.

### Significance of MSME:

- MSME sector is backbone of the economy.
- It is one of the largest employer in the country and with the vast population where employment either in government or in the large industry itself has limited potential.
- This is one sector where people not only exhibit their entrepreneurial skills, become part of large value chains but also become job creators in the process. And that is the reason why a bulk of the jobs in manufacturing, trading have been created in this particular sector.

Source: PIB

### Long Term Capital gains Tax on Equity

#### Why in news?

- The government has re-introduced LTCG tax on equity shares.
- Investors have to pay 10% LTCG tax on gains exceeding Rs one lakh on the sale of shares or equity mutual funds held for more than one year. Previously, short-term capital gains (STCG) tax of 15% was levied.
- The Centre said if the gains exceeded <sup>1</sup> one lakh in a year, then 10% LTCG tax had to be paid without the benefit of indexation (adjusting the profit against inflation to compute the real taxable gains).

#### What is LTCG?

- LTCG or long-term capital gains refer to the gains made on any class of asset held for a particular period of time.
- In case of equity shares, it refers to the gains made on stocks held for more than one year.
- In other words, if the shares are bought and held for more than a year before selling, then the gains, if any, on the said sale are referred to as long term capital gains or LTCG.

#### Was the tax levied on stock market trades earlier?

- Such a tax existed until October 2004 when it was replaced by the securities transaction tax (STT) which was levied on all trades made on the stock exchanges.

#### How will LTCG tax be computed?

- Typically, when such a levy is introduced, it is structured in a manner so that prior investments get some kind of relief. In technical parlance, it is called the **grandfathering benefit**.
- The government, while reintroducing the LTCG tax, said all gains made prior to January 31 would be grandfathered.

- Here is how it works: for example, assume an entity bought shares in January 2017 at Rs100, which touched a high of Rs200 on January 31, 2018. Now, if he or she sells the shares at Rs300 in, say, May 2018, then his taxable gains would be Rs100. (Rs300-Rs200).

### Will all investors be subject to LTCG tax?

- All investors who trade on stock exchanges would be required to pay LTCG tax.
- Incidentally, the Centre has brought in LTCG tax while retaining STT as well. So, investors will have to pay both the taxes.
- However, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), who invest in India from places like Mauritius and Singapore, would not be subject to LTCG tax, courtesy tax avoidance treaties.

### LTCG tax is good for the following reasons:

- It corrects, somewhat, the prevailing imbalance on market investments because though investment instruments are taxed gains from holding shares for long are not. Even short-term capital gains – money made by selling shares after holding for less than a year – are taxed at 15%.
- Investors who park wealth in the stock markets would be encourage to deploy the capital in ways that are more economically productive, say, in manufacturing activities.
- It makes the government seem a little less pro-rich, little more benevolent towards the no-so-rich as much of the capital gains are collected by corporates, not individuals.

Source: The Hindu, Economic Times

### KUSUM scheme to encourage farmers for solar farming

#### Why in news?

- ✎ The Union Government has announced Rs.1.4 lakh-crore Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahaabhiyan (KUSUM) scheme.
  - The Union Budget 2018-19 has allocated Rs. 48,000 crore for the scheme for the ten-year period.

#### About KUSUM scheme:

- KUSUM scheme aims to promote solar farming i.e. decentralised solar power production of up to 28,250 MW to help farmers.
- It will start with building 10,000 MW solar plants on barren lands and providing 1.75 million off-grid agricultural solar pumps.
- It will provide extra income to farmers, by giving them an option to sell additional power to grid through solar power projects set up on their barren lands.
- It will help in de-dieselising the agriculture sector as India had about 30 million farm pumps that include 10 million pumps running on diesel.
- The surplus electricity generated by farmers will be bought by state electricity distribution companies (discoms). Thus it will help boost the country's emerging green economy.

#### Components of scheme

- Building 10,000 MW solar plants on barren lands
- Providing sops to DISCOMS to purchase the electricity produced,

- Solarising existing pumps of 7250 MW as well as government tube wells with a capacity of 8250 MW
  - Distributing 17.5 lakh solar pumps.
- ✎ Government will provide 60% subsidy on solar pumps to farmers. It will be shared between Centre and States while 30% will be provided through bank loans. The balance cost will be borne by farmers.

### Expected positive outcomes of the scheme:

- It will promote decentralised solar power production, reduce of transmission losses of discoms as well as provide support to improve financial health of DISCOMs by reducing subsidy burden to agriculture sector.
- It will also promote energy efficiency and water conservation and provide water security to farmers.

Source: The Hindu, PIB

## Gift City gets unified regulator

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Government has announced setting up of a Unified Regulator for International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) in India.
- The announcement is set to benefit the Country's first IFSC set up at Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City) near Gandhinagar.
  - Currently, the financial services provided at GIFT-IFSC involves multiple regulatory bodies including insurance regulator, IRDA, banking regulator RBI and stock market regulator SEBI.

### Significance of the move:

- The announcement of setting up of Unified Regulator for IFSC in India would help India achieve its full potential in the Global Financial markets. Globally, most of the financial centers host Unified Regulator in the same Centre which helps it to promote the financial center.
- The move is likely to contribute to better regulation and supervision of the financial entities in the City.

### Background:

- Notably, earlier last year Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor, Urjit Patel supported the need of a unified financial regulatory framework providing for a single regulator for GIFT City.
- Recently, **GIFT-IFSC found a place in the top 15 emerging Global Financial Centres across the world.** In September 2017 edition of Global Financial Centres Index 22 (GFCI) – London, GIFT-IFSC was featured at the tenth place.

### What is an IFSC?

- An IFSC caters to customers outside the jurisdiction of the domestic economy. Such centres deal with flows of finance, financial products and services across borders.
- London, New York and Singapore can be counted as global financial centres. Many emerging IFSCs around the world, such as Shanghai and Dubai, are aspiring to play a global role in the years to come.

## What are the services an IFSC can provide?

- Fund-raising services for individuals, corporations and governments
- Asset management and global portfolio diversification undertaken by pension funds, insurance companies and mutual funds
- Wealth management
- Global tax management and cross-border tax liability optimization, which provides a business opportunity for financial intermediaries, accountants and law firms.
- Global and regional corporate treasury management operations that involve fund-raising, liquidity investment and management and asset-liability matching
- Risk management operations such as insurance and reinsurance
- Merger and acquisition activities among trans-national corporations

## Can an IFSC be set up in a special economic zone (SEZ)?

- The SEZ Act 2005 allows setting up an IFSC in an SEZ or as an SEZ after approval from the central government.

## Why are banks taking up space in the GIFT SEZ?

- Commercial banks are allowed to open **offshore banking units (OBUs) within SEZs, which are deemed as overseas branches.**
- Such OBUs can trade in foreign currencies in overseas markets and also with Indian banks, raise funds in foreign currency as deposits and borrowings from non-resident sources and provide loans and liability products for clients.
- State Bank of India set up its first OBU at Santacruz Electronics Export Processing Zone in Mumbai, in 2003.

Source: The Hindu

## Government introduces Bill to amend the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002

### Why in news?

- Recently, the Union government has proposed changes to various provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 through the Finance Bill.

### Objectives behind this amendment

- The Amendments aim at further enhancing the effectiveness of the PMLA, widen its scope and take care of certain procedural difficulties faced by the Enforcement Directorate in prosecution of PMLA cases.

### Amendments to Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002

#### Amendment in definition of 'proceeds of crime':

- The amended definition of "proceeds of crime" allows the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to proceed against assets of equivalent value located even outside the country.

### **Amendment in bail provisions:**

- Section 45(1) of the Act has been amended in a move to de-link PMLA proceedings from those involved in scheduled offences pursued by other agencies. It proposes uniform applicability of bail conditions, instead of only those offences under the schedule which are liable to imprisonment of more than 3 years.
- A further limit of Rs 1 crore will allow the court to apply bail provisions more leniently to less serious PMLA cases.
- This amendment came after the Supreme Court recently struck down the previous provisions which could deny bail even when there were sound grounds to believe that a person was not involved in money laundering.

### **Amendment to Section 8(8) of the PMLA, 2002:**

- It allows the Special Court, if it deems fit, to consider the claims for the purposes of restoration of confiscated assets also during the trial. Earlier, the assets could be restored only after completion of the trial.

### **Inclusion of Section 447 of the Companies Act in the list of scheduled offences under PMLA:**

- Section 447 of Companies Act is being included as scheduled offence under PMLA so that Registrar of Companies in suitable cases would be able to report corporate frauds cases for action by Enforcement Directorate.

### **ED to share relevant details with other agencies:**

- The government has introduced a new Sub-Section (2) of Section 66, making it mandatory for the ED to share relevant details with other agencies.
- This shall enable exchange of information among agencies and enhance effectiveness of efforts against black money.

### **About PMLA 2002:**

- Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted to prevent money-laundering and to provide for confiscation of property derived from money-laundering.
- PMLA and the Rules notified there under came into force with effect from July 1, 2005.
- The Act and Rules notified thereunder impose obligation on banking companies, financial institutions and intermediaries to verify identity of clients, maintain records and furnish information.

Source: PIB, The Hindu

## **IWAI inks pact with the World Bank for Jal Marg Vikas Project on Ganga**

### **Why in news?**

- ✎ Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has inked pact with the World Bank for Jal Marg Vikas Project to enhance navigation on National Waterway-1.

### **What is Jal Marg Vikas Project?**

- ✎ Jal Marg Vikas Project is a project on the river Ganga that envisages the development of waterway between Allahabad and Haldia that will cover a distance of 1620 km by March, 2023.

- The JMVP is being **implemented by IWAI with the financial and technical support of World Bank.**
- It will enable commercial navigation of vessels with capacity of 1500-2,000 tons on NW-I.
- The project covers Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.
- It aims to develop fairway with three metres depth to enable commercial navigation of at least 1500 tonne vessels on river.
- It also includes development of fairway, multi-modal terminals, strengthening of open river navigation technique, conservancy works, modern River Information System (RIS) etc.

### **Significance of Jal Marg Vikas Project:**

- Alternative mode of transport that will be environment friendly and cost effective. The project will contribute in bringing down the logistics cost in the country.
- Mammoth Infrastructure development like multi-modal and inter-modal terminals, Roll on – Roll off (Ro-Ro) facilities, ferry services, navigation aids. Socio-economic impetus; huge employment generation.
- It is component of Eastern Transport Corridor (ETC) of India along with proposed Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC) and National Highway-2 (NH2).
- ETC will connect NCR with eastern and north-eastern states and function as link to neighbouring countries viz. Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Thailand and other east and south-east Asian countries.

### **Challenges Ahead:**

- One of the major problems for a commercially viable and safe navigation on NW-1 is low depth upstream of Farakka due to low discharges from tributaries and difficult hydro morphological characteristics of river Ganga.

### **About NW-1:**

- National Waterway-1 (NW-1) is a waterway passing through Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, potentially serving the major cities of Haldia, Howrah, Kolkata, Bhagalpur, Patna, Ghazipur, Varanasi, Allahabad and their industrial hinterlands including several industries located along the Ganga basin.

Source: Business Standard

## Environment and Ecology

### Mass nesting of olive ridleys begins in Odisha

#### Why in news?

- ✎ Starting the mass nesting this year, more than 3,100 female olive ridley turtles have come out of the sea to the sandy beach of the Rushikulaya rookery coast in Ganjam district of Odisha.

#### About Olive Ridley sea turtle:

- The Olive ridley turtles are the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world, inhabiting only in warmer waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
- These turtles, along with their cousin the Kemps ridley turtle, are best known for their unique mass nesting called Arribada, where thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs.
- Though found in abundance, their numbers have been declining over the past few years, and the species is recognized as **Vulnerable by the IUCN Red list**.
- The Olive Ridley turtles live in the Indian Ocean, but they can't mate there.
- They have to come all the way to the Bay of Bengal by travelling thousands of kilometres to mate and to lay eggs.
- Interestingly, the male turtles won't reach the sandy stretch, but wait for their mates to return to the waters. After laying eggs, both male and female turtles return to their native ocean.
- After laying the eggs in the sandy stretches, they begin their return journey. Hatching takes place naturally and the baby turtles too swim back to the Indian Ocean by June every year.
- The 'Homing' characteristics of the Ridley sea turtles make them more prone to mass casualty.

#### Conservation efforts:

- WWF-India, along with the fishermen community, has been involved in protecting the Olive ridley rookery at the mass nesting site at Rushikulaya, in Orissa, by fencing off the nesting area and patrolling it till hatching and ensuring a safe passage for the hatchlings to the sea.
- Olive Ridley sea turtle has found place **in Schedule – I of Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (amended 1991)**.
- The sea turtles are **protected under the 'Migratory Species Convention' and CITES (Convention of International Trade on Wildlife Flora and Fauna)**.
- India is a signatory nation to all these conventions.

#### About Gharimatha Marine Sanctuary:

- Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary is a marine wildlife sanctuary located in Odisha.
- It extends from **Dhamra River mouth in the north to Mahanadi river mouth in the south**.
- It is very famous for its nesting beach for olive ridley sea turtles. It is the one of world's most important nesting beach for turtles.

Source: The Hindu



## Supreme Court paves way for Kaleswaram project in Telangana

### Why in news?

- ✎ In a major relief to the Telangana government, the Supreme Court has refused to intervene in an order granted by the Hyderabad High Court suspending the order of the National Green Tribunal at Delhi staying the construction of the Kaleswaram Lift Irrigation Project.

### Background:

- The NGT bench at Chennai had on October 5, 2017 directed the Telangana government to stay the construction of the project.

### About Kaleswaram irrigation project:

- The Kaleswaram 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 Kaleswaram 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 Kaleswaram 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.

### What is unique?

- 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

## Drypetes kalamii: New plant species from West Bengal

### Why in news?

- ✎ Scientists from Botanical Survey of India (BSI) have identified new plant species named *Drypetes kalamii* from two protected National Parks in West Bengal.
  - These protected National Parks include Buxa and Jaldapara.
  - The new species has been named after former President of India, Dr APJ Kalam.
  - The new species is close relative of medicinal plant known in Sanskrit as Putrajivah.

### About *Drypetes kalamii*:

- *Drypetes kalamii* is small shrub found to be shorter version of its close relative *Drypetes ellisii*.

- It is found in wet, shaded areas of subtropical, moist semi-evergreen forests, at heights of 50-100 metres.
- It is just 1 metre tall and is unisexual in nature, which means they have separate male and female plants.
- It has pale yellow flowers in clusters and bright orange to red fruits.
- Scientists have provisionally assessed plant to be "**Critically Endangered**" as per IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) rules.
- It faces threat from forest fires and grazing.

### About Buxa National Park:

- ✎ Buxa National Park, in the Alipurduar district, was set up in the year 1982-83 at the north eastern corner of West Bengal bordering Bhutan and Assam.
  - The name "Buxa" has been derived from Buxa Fort – a fort at an altitude of 867 meters on the Sinchula Range guarding the most important of the eleven routes into Bhutan, which once was used for detainees during freedom movement of India.
  - With an area of 759 sq km this picturesque reserve with its prodigious Terai, Bhabar as well as Hilly landscape, crisscrossed by numerous rivers and their tributaries, presents a breathtaking landscape.
  - Buxa National Park is the largest forest in Dooars.
  - The Phipsu Wildlife Sanctuary of Bhutan is contiguous to North of BTR. Manas Tiger Reserve lies on east. Thus, Buxa Tiger Reserve serves as international corridor for elephant migration between India and Bhutan. The reserve encompasses as many as eight forest types.

### About Buxa Tiger Reserve:

- The Buxa Tiger Reserve is a 760-square-kilometre tiger reserve **located inside the Buxa National Park in West Bengal.**
- The Buxa Tiger Reserve is **situated in the Buxa Hills of the southern hilly area of Bhutan.**
- Northern boundary of Buxa Tiger Reserve runs along the international border with Bhutan.
- The **Sinchula hill range** lies all along the northern side of BTR and the eastern boundary touches that of the Assam state.
- It is the eastern most extension of extreme bio-diverse North-East India and represents highly endemic Indo-Malayan region.
- The fragile "**Terai Eco-System**" constitutes a part of this reserve.
- The **Phipsu Wildlife Sanctuary of Bhutan** is contiguous to the north of BTR.
- **Manas National Park lies on east of BTR.** BTR, thus, serves as international corridor for Asian elephant migration between India and Bhutan.

### About Jaldapara National Park:

- Jaldapara National Park is a national park situated at the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas in Alipurduar District of northern West Bengal and **on the banks of the Torsa River.**

- Today, it has the largest population of the Indian one horned rhinoceros in the state, an animal threatened with extinction, and is a Habitat management area (Category IV).
- The nearby Chilapata Forests is an elephant corridor between Jaldapara and the Buxa Tiger Reserve.
- Nearby is the Gorumara National Park, known for its population of Indian rhinoceros.
- Toto tribes and Mech Tribes (Bodos) used to stay in this area before 1800. At that time this place was known as “Totopara”.

Source: The Hindu

### India to host World Environment Day 2018

#### Why in news?

- ✎ India will be the Global Host for World Environment Day (WED) 2018 which is observed annually on 5 June.
  - The central theme for this year is ‘Plastic Pollution’.

#### About World Environment Day:

- World Environment Day (WED) is observed every year on June 5 to raise global awareness to take positive environmental action to protect nature and the planet Earth.
- World Environment Day was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1972 on the first day of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment.
- It is run by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
- It was started to create global awareness about the condition of the Environment.
- The first World Environment Day was observed in 1973 and since then it is being held every year with different themes.

Source: The Hindu

### World Sustainable Development Summit 2018

#### Why in news?

- ✎ The 2018 edition of World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS 2018) was held recently in New Delhi.
  - The theme of the Summit this year is ‘Partnerships for a Resilient Planet’.

#### About the World Sustainable Development Summit:

- ✎ The World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS), TERI’s flagship event, has been conceptualized as a single platform to accelerate action towards sustainable development and especially climate change.
  - WSDS has replaced TERI’s earlier called Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (DSDS).
  - The first DSDS was organised in 2005. It underscored need for businesses and private sector to take lead in poverty reduction and to ensure rapid and sustained adoption of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- The WSDS series seeks to bring together the finest minds and leading thinkers of the world to focus attention on the challenge of sustainable development and has emerged as a landmark event addressing issues pertinent to the future of humanity.

### About The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI):

- TERI is a non-profit research institution that conducts research work in the fields of energy, environment and sustainable development.
- It was established in 1974 as Tata Energy Research Institute and was renamed The Energy and Resources Institute in 2003.
- It aims to focus on formulating local and national level strategies for shaping global solutions to critical issues.

Source: Indian Express

### Massive reserves of mercury found in Arctic permafrost

#### Why in news?

- ✎ Scientists have discovered that permafrost in the northern hemisphere stores massive amounts of natural mercury and a warming climate could release large amounts of this dangerous toxin that may cause neurological effects in humans and animals.
  - The scientists measured mercury concentrations in permafrost cores from Alaska.

#### Highlights of the study:

- Scientists have found that northern permafrost soils are the largest reservoir of mercury on the planet, storing nearly twice as much mercury as all other soils, the ocean and the atmosphere combined.
- The study found approximately 793 gigagrams, or more than 15 million gallons, of mercury is frozen in northern permafrost soil. That is roughly 10 times the amount of all human-caused mercury emissions over the last 30 years, based on emissions estimates from 2016.
- The study also found all frozen and unfrozen soil in northern permafrost regions contains a combined 1,656 gigagrams of mercury, making it the largest known reservoir of mercury on the planet. This pool houses nearly twice as much mercury as soils outside of the northern permafrost region, the ocean and the atmosphere combined.

#### What is permafrost?

- Permafrost is defined as ground (soil or rock and included ice or organic material) that remains at or below 0°C for at least two consecutive years.
- Such a layer of frozen ground is designated exclusively on the basis of temperature. Part or all of its moisture may be unfrozen, depending on the chemical composition of the water or the depression of the freezing point by **capillary forces**.
- Permafrost with saline soil moisture, for example, may be colder than 0 °C for several years but contain no ice and thus not be firmly cemented. Most permafrost, however, is consolidated by ice.
- A typical classification recognizes continuous permafrost (underlying 90-100% of the landscape); discontinuous permafrost (50-90%); and sporadic permafrost (0-50%).

- Permafrost accounts for 0.022% of total water on Earth and exists in 24% of exposed land in the Northern Hemisphere.

### Where do we find Permafrost?

- Permafrost forms and exists in a climate where the mean annual air temperature is 0 °C or colder. Such a climate is generally characterized by long, cold winters with little snow and short, relatively dry, cool summers.
- Permafrost, therefore, is widespread in the Arctic, sub-Arctic, and Antarctica.

Source: The Hindu

## Government notifies draft Compensatory Afforestation Fund rules

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Union government notified the draft Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) Rules, 2018 to facilitate utilisation of over Rs50,000 crore among states to expand India's forest cover.

### Key Facts:

- The draft rules came nearly one and half years after the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) Bill was passed by Parliament in July 2016.
- The draft rules specify the activities that would be allowed or restricted in a forest area.

### Highlights of the draft rules:

#### Activities allowed:

- ✎ The draft rules specified a list of activities that can be undertaken or are not allowed from the fund.
  - It allows activities like establishment, upgradation and maintenance of modern nurseries, purchase and maintenance of communication devices, construction, up-gradation and maintenance of inspection paths.
  - These activities “shall be taken up in consultation with the Gram Sabha or Van Sanrakshan Samiti (VSS) or Village Forest Committee as the case may be” and shall be in consonance with the provisions of FRA 2006.

#### Activities not allowed:

- The fund will not be used for activities like payment of salary, travelling allowances, medical expenses to regular employees of the state forest department, undertaking foreign visits, payment for legal services, purchase of cars, construction of residential and official buildings for officers above forest range officers.
- The list of activities not permissible also include leasing, hiring and purchase of land for afforestation purposes, purchase of furniture and appliances, establishment, expansion and up-gradation of zoo and wildlife safari among others.

#### Utilization of funds:

- According to the proposed rules, 80% of the “net present value (NPV)” can be used for forest and wildlife management activities like assisted natural regeneration, artificial regeneration (by plantations), protection of plantations and forests, pest and disease control in forest, forest fire prevention and others.

- 20% of the NPV, in a financial year, “shall be utilised for strengthening the forest and wildlife related infrastructure, capacity building of the personnel of state forest departments and other associated agencies and organisations involved in utilisation of these monies”.

### Criticisms:

- Environmentalists and forest rights activists have criticized the draft rules stating they violate the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006.
- They say these will result in further atrocities and crimes against tribals and forest dwellers. FRA Act mandates that gram sabhas (village councils) have both the right and the power to protect, manage and conserve their forests.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

## Straw management now mandatory in Punjab

### Why in news?

- ✎ In an attempt to check the dangerous trend of stubble burning, the Punjab government has decided to make use of Super Straw Management System while using the combine harvester machines mandatory for harvesting the paddy (rice) crop.
- In this regard, the instructions have been issued under section 31 A of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.

### Key facts:

- These instructions are aimed at saving the environment from air pollution caused by stubble burning.
- The owners of combine harvesters desirous of undertaking the harvesting of paddy in the State would now have to attach super straw management system with the harvester combine.
- No harvester combine shall be allowed to harvest paddy in Punjab without functional super straw management system.
- Super straw management system will be attached to self-propelled combine harvesters, which cuts paddy straw into small pieces and spread same. With this method, farmers are not required to burn paddy straw before sowing the next crop.

### Significance of this method:

- Unlike a normal combine harvester, which leaves behind 10 to 12-inch-long stubble, the use of this Super Straw Management System with the combine harvester machine cuts the paddy straw into pieces of 4-5 inches, spreading them out uniformly. One can plough the straw left behind or kept as it is for the sowing of wheat using a **zero-till ‘Happy Seeder’**.

### Background:

- Massive burning of rice stubble in Haryana & Punjab is one of the biggest culprits for poor air quality in the Delhi-NCR region.

### ‘Waste decomposer’ solution:

- Meanwhile, farmers in Punjab have also started using an environment-friendly ‘waste decomposer’ solution.

- The small bottle of solution costs Rs 20 and is developed by the National Centre for Organic Farming and Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
- It can decompose over 10,000 metric tons of biowaste in 30 days.

Source: The Hindu

## India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2017

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has released India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2017.

### About the report:

- The report is the 15th such report in the series.
- It also for the first time contains information on the decadal change in water bodies in the forest during 2005-2015, forest fire, production of timber from outside forest, state wise carbon stock in different forest types and density classes.

### Highlights of the ISFR 2017:

- India is ranked 10th in world, with 24.4% of land area under forest and tree cover, even though it accounts for 2.4 % of the world surface area and sustains needs of 17 % of human and 18 % livestock population.
- India was placed 8th in list of Top Ten nations reporting the greatest annual net gain in forest area.
- There is an increase of 8, 021 sq km in the total forest and tree cover of the country, compared to the previous assessment in 2015.
- The increase in the forest cover has been observed as 6,778 sq km and that of tree cover as 1, 243 sq km.
- The total forest and tree cover is 24.39 per cent of the geographical area of the country.
- Much of the increase in the forest cover has been observed in Very Dense Forest (VDF). These forests absorb maximum carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- About 40 per cent of the country's forest cover is present in 9 large contiguous patches of the size of 10, 000 sq.km or more.

### State-Wise Break-up

- Three states – Andhra Pradesh (2141 sq km), Karnataka (1101 sq km) and Kerala (1043 sq km) have shown a significant increase in forest cover due to successful agro forestry practices, increase in mangrove cover, better conservation and protection practices.
- Madhya Pradesh has the largest forest cover of 77,414 sq km in the country in terms of area, followed by Arunachal Pradesh with 66,964 sq km and Chhattisgarh (55,547 sq km).
- In terms of percentage of forest cover with respect to the total geographical area, Lakshadweep with (90.33 per cent) has the highest forest cover, followed by Mizoram (86.27 per cent) and Andaman & Nicobar Islands (81.73 per cent).
- The study also reveals that 15 states/UT's have more than 33 per cent of their geographical area under forest cover.

- Among these, seven states. UTs including Mizoram, Lakshadweep, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Manipur have more than 75 per cent forest cover.
- Eight other states including Tripura, Goa, Sikkim, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Chhattisgarh and Assam have forest cover between 33 per cent and 75 per cent.

### Miscellaneous:

- According to the study, the total mangrove cover stands at 4,921 sq km and has shown an increase of 181 sq km.
- All the 12 mangrove states have shown a positive change in the mangrove cover, as compared to the last assessment.
- Further, the extent of the bamboo-bearing area in the country has been estimated at 15.69 million hectare, showing an increase of 1.73 million hectare since the last assessment in 2011.

Source: The Hindu

## Rs 50,000 crore CAMPA fund stuck in turf war between environment and finance ministries

### Why in news?

- Nearly-Rs 50,000 crore green fund meant to help India restore its forest cover is caught in a turf war between the Union Environment and Forests ministry and the Finance ministry, hurting the implementation of a critical environment protection law.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is in deliberation with the Ministry of Finance over the future of compensatory afforestation (CA) funds collected by the Centre.

### What are the concerns?

- The adhocism in disbursement of the green funds to states continues, even though Parliament passed an act to end it in July 2016. State CAMPAs currently receive only 10 per cent of funds to use for afforestation and forest conservation, as against the act's promise of 90 per cent.
- The Haryana government, for instance, recently raised the issue, demanding greater funds for increasing the state's forest cover – something which requires the notification of the CAMPA rules.

### Reason for deadlock:

- The disagreement between the ministries over where the cash rich fund should be kept – the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI) or the Public Account of India – and how it should be routed for allocation to the states.

### What is the difference?

- The environment ministry favours the fund to be parked in the Public Account of India whereas the Finance ministry favours Consolidated Fund of India (CFI) route.

### CFI versus Public Account debate:

- The environment ministry is concerned that parking this huge fund in the CFI or even routing it through the CFI could open it to possible diversion for government expenditure other than greening the country.



- All taxes flow into the CFI, and it is from here that the government meets its expenditures with parliamentary approvals. Public Account, on the other hand, does not involve revenues or debt of the government, and its expenditure is not bound by legislative approval. Provident funds and small savings are parked in the Public Account.
- It is learnt that the finance ministry has argued that except General Provident Fund-related monies, there is no precedent of any other fund being held in the Public Account, and hence there is no case for CAMPA funds to be moved there either.
- The environment ministry, on the other hand, pointed out that the CAMPA itself clearly states that it is “an Act to provide for the establishment of funds under the public account of India and the public accounts of each state”. Even the CAG had earlier advocated transferring the amount to the Public Account for expeditious disbursement and timely utilisation. This has, in fact, been the government position on the issue so far.

### Background:

- Currently, the CA funds, amounting to roughly Rs 50,000 crore, are with the ad hoc Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA). The ad hoc body was created by the order of Supreme Court on July 10, 2009.
- Nearly two years after the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Act (CAMPA) 2016 was passed by Parliament, the rules to the act which are essential to its implementation are yet to be notified.

### About the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill, 2016:

- ✎ The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill, 2016 establishes the **National Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of India**, and a **State Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of each state**.
  - These Funds will receive payments for:
    1. Compensatory afforestation,
    2. Net Present Value of forest (NPV), and
    3. Other project specific payments.
  - The National Fund will receive 10% of these funds, and the State Funds will receive the remaining 90%.
  - These Funds will be primarily spent on afforestation to compensate for loss of forest cover, regeneration of forest ecosystem, wildlife protection and infrastructure development.
  - The Bill also establishes the National and State Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authorities to manage the National and State Funds.

### What is CAMPA?

- In 2002, the Supreme Court of India observed that collected funds for afforestation were underutilized by the states and it ordered for centrally pooling of funds under Compensatory Afforestation Fund.
- The court had set up the National Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (National CAMPA) to manage the Fund.
- In 2009, states also had set up State CAMPAs that receive 10% of funds from National CAMPA to use for afforestation and forest conservation.

## Objectives of CAMPA

- ✎ Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) are meant to promote afforestation and regeneration activities as a way of compensating for forest land diverted to non-forest uses.
- ✎ Its mandate includes:
  - Lay down broad guidelines for State CAMPA.
  - Facilitate scientific, technological and other assistance that may be required by State CAMPA.
  - Make recommendations to State CAMPA based on a review of their plans and programmes.
  - Provide a mechanism to State CAMPA to resolve issues of an inter-state or Centre-State character.

## What is NPV?

- NPV was defined by the Supreme Court in its landmark decision of 2005 to be “the present value of net cash flow from a project, discounted by the cost of capital.”
- In common parlance, it is the sum arrived at by deducting the cost of investment from the present value of all future earnings.
- NPV is a monetised value of forest land to be paid by the user agency to compensate for the loss of tangible and intangible benefits flowing from such lands.

Source: The Hindu

## Karnataka to prepare action plan to protect Great Indian Bustard

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Forest Department is framing an action plan to save Great Indian Bustard in Karnataka where its numbers are fast decreasing.

### Need of conservation:

- According to experts, only around 200 Great Indian Bustards were now present in the mid-Karnataka region. If no steps are taken, this bird will not be seen in the next five years.

### Novel experiment in Gujarat:

- In a novel experiment, a group of farmers at the Lala Sanctuary in Kutch, Gujarat have decided not to use inorganic fertilizers and toxic pesticides so as to save the Great Indian Bustard (GIB).
- According to experts, when farmers use pesticides, GIB loses a major portion of its food — insects, locust, lizard among others — and the bird is forced to look for smaller insects in the grains, resulting in damage to the crops.

### ‘Hakki Habba’:

- In January 2017, the third edition of **Hakki Habba, a three-day bird festival**, was organized at Daroji Bear Sanctuary, adjacent to Hampi,

### Project Great Indian Bustard:

- The state of Rajasthan initiated “Project Great Indian Bustard”, on World Environment Day 2013, identifying and fencing off bustard breeding grounds in existing protected areas as well as provide secure breeding enclosures in areas outside protected areas.

- The species recovery plan also calls for ex situ conservation measures. However, it has so far failed in its objectives.

### About the Great Indian Bustard:

- ✎ The Great Indian Bustard or Indian bustard is a bustard found in India and the adjoining regions of Pakistan.
  - In India, the bird is found in Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat states of India.
  - A large bird with a horizontal body and long bare legs, giving it an ostrich like appearance, this bird is among the heaviest of the flying birds.
  - The species is listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, in the CMS Convention and in Appendix I of CITES, as **Critically Endangered** on the IUCN Red List.
  - It has also been identified as one of the species for the recovery programme under the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India.
  - These birds are often found associated in the same habitat as blackbuck.

Source: The Hindu

### Govt launches mobile App 'Ash Track'

#### Why in news?

- ✎ Recently, the Government has launched Web based monitoring System and Fly Ash mobile application named ASH TRACK.
  - These platforms will enable better management of fly ash produced by thermal power plants by providing interface between ash producers (thermal power plants) and potential ash users such as - cement plants, road contractors etc.

#### About ASH TRACK App:

- The app shows coal based power plants situated within radius of 100 km and 300 km from a given location.
- It will allow user to select power station from where he wants to take fly ash. It will also show ash availability, distance from user's location.
- It will help power plants to see location of prospective fly ash users surrounding it like – cement plants, NHAI, contractors of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) projects, brick producers, etc.
- The app will give plant wise, utility wise and state wise fly ash utilization status in the country and also details of ash generation and utilization in real time.

#### Significance of the app:

- It will allow effective monitoring and reviewing for increasing fly ash utilization.
- It will help in protecting environment in terms of reduction in fugitive emissions, saving of precious top soil and conservation of land for sustainable development.

## What is Fly Ash?

- Fly ash is one of the coal combustion products.
- It is composed of the fine particles that are driven out of the boiler with the flue gases.
- In modern coal-fired power plants, fly ash is generally captured by electrostatic precipitators or other particle filtration equipment before the flue gases reach the chimneys.
- Fly ash includes substantial amounts of silicon dioxide, aluminium oxide and calcium oxide.

## What are environmental impact of Fly Ash?

- Apart from causing air pollution, it can also contaminate water and soil systems.
- Heavy metals can leach from stored fly ash into groundwater, which can put the health of the surrounding population in danger.

## Reuse of Fly Ash:

- Fly ash can be reused as a substitute material for Portland cement and sand in concrete production. It can also be used for road construction.
- Its agricultural uses include soil amendment, fertilizer, cattle feeders and soil stabilization in stock feed yards etc.
- It can also be used as a substitute material for clay for cement clinkers production.

## Fly ash management:

- Quality-wise Indian coal has much more ash content than other countries. Diverse approaches must be adopted for fly ash management.
- It includes washing coal at its place of origin will prevent ash from coming to power plant.
- Promoting R&D for increasing efficiency of power plants will also help in reducing ash generation.
- Proper management of fly ash is important for environment and also for power plants as it occupies a lot of land space. At present, 63% of the fly ash is being utilized.

Source: PIB

## Union cabinet approves ratification of Minamata Convention

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Union Cabinet has approved proposal for ratification of Minamata Convention on Mercury and depositing instrument of ratification enabling India to become Party of Convention.
  - The approval entails ratification of convention along with flexibility for continued use of mercury-based products and processes involving mercury compound up to 2025.
  - After joining the Convention, it will now be easier for India to get technological or financial assistance to address issues related to mercury.

### About Minamata Convention on Mercury:

- ✎ The Minamata Convention on Mercury is a multilateral environmental agreement that addresses specific human activities which are contributing to widespread mercury pollution.

- The Minamata Convention is named after the Japanese city of Minamata, which experienced a severe, decades-long incidence of mercury poisoning after industrial wastewater from a chemical factory was discharged into Minamata Bay.
- It aims to control anthropogenic releases of mercury throughout its lifecycle.
- The Convention was agreed at 5th session of Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Mercury in Geneva, Switzerland in January 2013 and was adopted in October 2013 at Diplomatic Conference (Conference of Plenipotentiaries), Kumamoto, Japan.

### Obligations on Parties of Convention

- Ban on new mercury mines, the phase-out of existing ones.
- Phase out and phase down of mercury use in a number of products and processes.
- Control measures on emissions to air and on releases to land and water.
- Regulation of the informal sector of artisanal and small-scale gold mining.

### Significance of Convention

- It is implemented in context of sustainable development agenda with objective to protect human health and environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds.
- It addresses interim storage of mercury and its disposal once it becomes waste, sites contaminated by mercury as well as health issues.
- It protects most vulnerable from the harmful effects of mercury. It also protects the developmental space of developing countries. Therefore, protects interest of the poor and vulnerable groups.
- It further urges enterprises to move to mercury-free alternatives in products and non-mercury technologies in manufacturing processes. This will drive R&D, and promote innovation.

### Signatories:

- Till now, the convention has 88 ratifications and 144 signatories including India, which signed it on 30 September 2014.
- India had actively participated in the negotiating process, making significant contributions in finalizing the treaty text but had not ratified it till now.
- India's neighbours – Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan – are also signatories to the convention. But only Sri Lanka has ratified it.

### About Mercury:

- It is commonly known as **quicksilver** and was formerly named hydrargyrum.
- Mercury is the **only metallic element that is liquid at standard conditions for temperature and pressure**. The only other element that is liquid under these conditions is bromine.
- Mercury **occurs in deposits throughout the world mostly as cinnabar**(mercuric sulfide).
- Mercury poisoning can result from exposure to water-soluble forms of mercury (such as mercuric chloride or methylmercury), inhalation of mercury vapor, or eating seafood contaminated with mercury.

- Mercury is a very **rare element in the Earth's crust**. It accounts for only about only 0.08 parts per million (ppm).
- It is a relatively **poor conductor of heat**. Most metals are excellent thermal conductors.

### Applications of Mercury:

- Mercury is used in thermometers, barometers, manometers, sphygmomanometers, float valves, mercury switches, mercury relays, fluorescent lamps and other devices.
- It is also used in lighting: electricity passed through mercury vapor in a fluorescent lamp produces short-wave ultraviolet light which then causes the phosphor in the tube to fluoresce, making visible light.

### Effects of Mercury on Health:

- Exposure to mercury – even small amounts – may cause serious health problems, and is a threat to the development of the child in utero and early in life.
- Mercury may have toxic effects on the nervous, digestive and immune systems, and on lungs, kidneys, skin and eyes.
- It is threat to the development of child in utero and early in life. It may also cause skin rashes and dermatitis.
- Mercury is considered by WHO as one of the top ten chemicals or groups of chemicals of major public health concern.
- People are mainly exposed to methylmercury, an organic compound, when they eat fish and shellfish that contain the compound.

### Mercury pollution

- Mercury is global and ubiquitous metal that occurs naturally and has broad uses in everyday objects.
- It is released to the atmosphere, soil and water from a variety of sources such as burning coal for power plants, waste from industrial and medical products like batteries, measuring devices, such as thermometers and barometers, etc, extraction of minerals (smelting of gold), electric switches and relays in equipment, lamps (including some types of light bulbs) etc.

Source: The Hindu, PIB

### Centre to implement Rs 6000-crore Atal Bhujal Yojana in 78 districts

#### Why in news?

- ✎ In a major push to improve the groundwater situation and recharge of underground water tables, the Central Government is speeding up the ambitious Rs 6000-crore Atal Bhujal Yojana.

#### About Atal Bhoojal Yojana:

- The scheme is aimed at efficient management of available water resources and strengthening of recharge mechanism through community participation.
- The emphasis of the scheme will be on recharge of ground water sources and efficient use of water by involving people at the local level.

### Funding:

- Rs 6,000 crore has been earmarked for this ambitious plan.
- **Half of the total cost of this central scheme will be supported by the World Bank as loan** while the remaining half (Rs 3,000 crore) will be funded by the government through budgetary support.

### Implementation:

- The government plans to give 50% of the money to states, including gram panchayats, as incentives for achieving targets in groundwater management. That's a first-ever move to encourage community participation and behavioural changes.
- The remaining 50% of the funds will be given to states for strengthening institutional arrangements such as providing a strong database and scientific approach to help them accomplish sustainable management of groundwater.

Source: PIB, The Hindu

### Tawang gets rhododendron park, NIC

#### Why in news?

- ☞ Recently, Arunachal Pradesh government laid the foundation stone for Rhododendron Park in Tawang.
  - More than 30 species of rhododendrons would be planted and conserved in park where terrace cutting to raise the beauty and scenic component.
  - The park will be partly funded under border area development programme (BADP).

#### Significance:

- The park will not only add to the scenic enhancement of the city but will also offer an opportunity for conservation of Rhodo Species, which are under serious threat due to various ongoing road and land acquisition projects by the Army and Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

#### Background:

- Tawang was once home to around 100 species of rhododendron. The number has now been reduced to only 50+ as a result of construction activities in the border areas.

#### About the Rhododendron:

- Rhododendron — literally rose tree in Greek - found in the region, with 18 species endemic to India.
- Found in varied habitats from subtropical forest to alpine shrubs, rhododendrons range from dwarf shrubs to large trees.
- There are 132 taxa (80 species, 25 sub species and 27 varieties) of Rhododendron found in India, of which 129 are found in the north-eastern India alone.
- Only three taxa — **Rhododendron arboretum nilagiricum** found in south India and **Rhododendron colletianum** and **Rhododendron rawatti** from the western Himalayas are not found in the north-east.
- **Arunachal Pradesh is home to the highest number** with 119 taxa (74 species, 21 sub species and 24 varieties) of the Rhododendron.

- The small State of Sikkim is home to 42 taxa (25 species, 11 sub-species and six varieties) while 10 taxa are found in Manipur, four in Mizoram and 11 in Nagaland.
- The eastern Himalayas are regarded as one of the centres of diversity for the genus, which means that the Rhododendron has migrated to different parts of world from this region.
- The Sikkim Forest department and the Sikkim Rhododendron Society have identified nine Rhododendron ecosystems and protected area networks in the State. The two famous Rhododendron sanctuaries in the State are **Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary** and **Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary**.

### Geographical conditions for the growth of Rhododendron:

- The cold, moist slopes and deep valleys of the eastern Himalayas form a conducive habitat for the luxuriant growth of Rhododendron species.
- Nowhere in the world, are such unique geographical and ecological formations are found. This is the primary reason for such a diversity of Rhododendron available in the region.

### Use of Rhododendron:

- Other than the ornamental value, use in packaging wood crafts, fragrance and religious use, Rhododendrons also are used in local medicines against colds, coughs and chronic bronchitis and diarrhoea.
- The petals of *R. arboretum* are widely used for making juice, jams and jelly.

### Environmental concerns:

- ✎ The scientists have pointed to the need for conservation of Rhododendrons.
  - Epiphytic species, which grow on other trees or plants, of rhododendrons with limited population are most vulnerable due to loss of the host trees.
  - While in high altitude areas of Arunachal Pradesh, rhododendrons are routinely cut for firewood by local people, forest fires in the dry seasons in Manipur and Nagaland were threatening the survival of many species.
  - The endemic *R. wattii* from Dzukou hills of Manipur and Nagaland is one of the most critically endangered species in India, with only a few adult trees remaining in their natural habitat.

### Nature Interpretation Centre (NIC):

- On the sidelines, Arunachal Pradesh government also inaugurated the Nature Interpretation Centre (NIC).
- NIC was established and managed by the forest department.
- The objective of this centre is to help people develop a better understanding of nature and development of the area should not result in ecological imbalance.
- The centre also has sections on wildlife including Red Panda, Rhododendron species, flora, high-altitude lakes and Monpa culture.

Source: The Hindu



## India to develop 60 solar cities

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy under its scheme “Development of Solar Cities” has approved/sanctioned 60 Cities including 13 Pilot and 5 Model Cities up to 12th Five-year Plan period.

### Development of Solar Cities scheme

- ✎ The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is implementing a programme on ‘Development of Solar Cities’.
  - The Scheme aims at reducing minimum 10% in projected demand of conventional energy at end of five years, through combination of enhancing supply from renewable energy sources in city and energy efficiency measures.
  - Under it, local Governments are motivated for adopting renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency measures.
  - Sixty Cities are proposed to be developed as Solar Cities during the Eleventh Plan period including four Model Solar Cities and 10 Pilot Solar Cities. The Master plan for each Solar City is being prepared to assess and utilize various renewable sources including Solar, Wind, Municipal Waste etc.
  - The criteria set by the ministry for the identification of cities include a city having population between 50,000 to 50 lakh (with relaxation given to special category states including northeast states), initiatives and regulatory measures already taken along with a high level of commitment in promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy.
  - Solar City developed under this scheme will have all types of renewable energy based projects like solar, wind, biomass, small hydro, waste to energy etc.
  - It may be installed along with possible energy efficiency measures depending on the need and resource availability in the city.

### Objectives of Solar City Scheme

- Enable and empower Urban Local Governments (ULBs) to address energy challenges at City-level.
- Provide framework and support to prepare Master Plan including assessment of current energy situation, future demand and action plans.
- Oversee the implementation of sustainable energy options through public-private partnerships (PPPs).
- Build capacity in ULBs and create awareness among all sections of civil society.
- Involve various stakeholders in the planning process.

### Need for Solar Cities:

- Urbanization and economic development are leading to a rapid rise in energy demand in urban areas in our country leading to enhanced Green House Gas (GHG) emissions.
- Many cities around the world are setting targets and introducing policies for promoting renewable energy and reducing GHG emissions and the countries like Australia and USA are developing the solar cities.
- Several Indian cities and towns are experiencing rapid growth in the peak electricity demand. The local governments and the electricity utilities are finding it difficult to cope with this rapid rise in demand and as a result most of the cities/towns are facing electricity shortages.

- ✎ In this context, the “Development of Solar Cities” programme is designed to support/encourage Urban Local Bodies to prepare a Road Map to guide their cities in becoming ‘renewable energy cities’ or ‘solar cities’.

Source: PIB

### India Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC)

#### Why in news?

- ✎ Latest scientific techniques have been added to India Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC) to provide early warnings for an impending tsunami to all countries in the Indian Ocean region.

#### About India Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC):

- ✎ The Indian Tsunami Early Warning System has the responsibility to provide tsunami advisories to Indian Mainland and the Island regions.
  - Acting as one of the Regional Tsunami Advisory service Providers (RTSPs) for the Indian Ocean Region, ITEWS also provide tsunami advisories to the Indian Ocean rim countries along with Australia & Indonesia.
  - ITEWC comprises a real-time seismic monitoring network of broadband seismic stations.
  - ITEWC is also receiving data in real time from 350 seismic stations, 50 tsunami buoys and 300 tide gauges established in the Indian as well as the other oceans by other countries and international agencies.
  - Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO has designated ITEWC as the Tsunami Service Provider (TSP) for the entire Indian Ocean Region.
  - Since 2012, ITEWC is providing tsunami advisories and related services to about 25 countries”.
  - Currently Warning Centre disseminates tsunami bulletins to various stakeholders through multiple dissemination modes simultaneously (Fax, Phone, Emails, GTS and SMS etc.). Users can also register on the website for receiving earthquake alerts and tsunami bulletins through emails and SMS.

#### Establishment of ITEWS:

- On December 26, 2004, one of the deadliest earthquakes (9.3 magnitude), epicentred off the West coast of Sumatra, Indonesia, triggered a tsunami that killed over 2.3 lakh people across 14 countries, including 11,000 in India.
- Since then, India has made rapid strides in establishing an early warning system with the help of various organisations and partnered with international agencies involved in the study of earthquakes, tsunami and other ocean-related natural disasters.
- India started its own interim tsunami warning center in the first quarter of 2005 to issue tsunami bulletins generated from seismic information. The interim services were succeeded by setting up of a state-of-the-art Indian Tsunami Early Warning System (ITEWS) at the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), Hyderabad, under the Earth System Sciences Organization (ESSO), Govt. of India.
- The system implemented in phases became full-fledged 24X7 operational early warning system in October 2007.

## About Tsunami:

- Tsunamis are giant waves caused by earthquakes or volcanic eruptions under the sea.
- Even though tsunamis can be generated by various phenomenon, the most destructive tsunamis are generated from large, shallow earthquakes at subduction zones.
- Major tsunamis are produced by large earthquakes of magnitude greater than 7.0 associated with the movement of oceanic and continental plates.
- The waves can travel great distances from the source region, spreading destruction along their path.

## Occurrences of Tsunamis:

- More than 80% of the world's tsunamis occur in the Pacific along its Ring of Fire subduction zones. Tsunamis are not as common in the Indian Ocean as in the Pacific. As compared to average eight tsunamis per year in the Pacific, Indian Ocean has one in three years or so.
- About thirteen years ago, a magnitude 9.1 earthquake struck beneath the Indian Ocean near Indonesia, generating a massive tsunami that claimed more than 230,000 lives in fourteen different countries, one of the deadliest natural disasters ever recorded.

Source: PIB, Live Mint

## Pelican Bird Festival-2018

### Why in news?

- ✎ The 'Pelican Bird Festival-2018' was held for first time in Atapaka Bird Sanctuary on at Kolleru lake in Andhra Pradesh.
- It was jointly organised by Andhra Pradesh Tourism Authority (APTA) and Krishna district administration.

### Background:

- During winter season, thousands of pelicans, painted storks and other birds migrate to Kolleru lake. During their stay they roost, breed and later fly away with their off springs.
- Recently, **Atapaka Bird Sanctuary was recognised as one of the largest pelicanry in the world.**

### About Kolleru lake:

- Kolleru Lake is **one of the largest freshwater lakes** in India located in **Andhra Pradesh**.
- It is **located between Krishna and Godavari deltas**. It spans into two districts of Andhra Pradesh- Krishna and West Godavari.
- It was declared as wildlife sanctuary in November 1999 under Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, and designated wetland of international importance in November 2002 under Ramsar Convention.
- The lake is known to amateur birdwatchers and professional ornithologists as a Pelicanery — a location where the Grey Pelicans, a large magnificent bird, nest and breed.
- Grey pelicans had vanished from the lake in 1973 for nearly 35 years and returned to it to nest again in December 2006.
- Many birds migrate here in winter, such as Siberian crane, ibis, and painted storks.

### About Grey Pelican:

- The Grey Pelican also called the Spot Billed Pelican is listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act and in the Red Data Book.
- It is also considered a “globally threatened species” under the “vulnerable” category.
- Pulicat Lake Bird Sanctuary and Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary are two most popular bird sanctuaries in South India and an important breeding site for spot billed pelicans in India.

Source: The Hindu

### New Project to Control Pollution of River Sal at Navelin, Goa

#### Why in news?

- The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change has sanctioned a new project to control pollution in River Sal at Navelim town in Goa.
- The project was sanctioned under the National River Conservation Plan.

#### About the project:

- The project would cost of Rs. 61.74 cr. Both the Centre and State will share the cost on 60:40 basis.
- Under the project, around 32 kms of sewers will be laid and sewage treatment plant of 3 million litres per day (MLD) constructed.
- The project is scheduled for completion by January, 2021.

#### Significance of the project:

- The project will help in reduction of pollution load in the river and improvement in its water quality, besides improving the environment and sanitation in the town.

#### About Sal River:

- The Sal River is the third largest river in Goa. It is one of the nine major rivers of Goa.
- It is based in South Goa and starts in Cavelossim.
- The River measures 35 kilometers in length and has a basin size of 301 square kilometers.
- Being the only river that flows in a north-south direction prior to flowing in to the Arabian Sea at Betul, the Sal River is a geologically odd one because it runs parallel to the west of geological coast.
- Sal River has a natural harbour, ‘Kutubandh’ in Velim, Goa, meaning ‘hidden’ from the Arabian sea. The Kadambas navy use this harbour for shipbuilding.

Source: PIB

### 2<sup>nd</sup> February: World Wetlands Day

#### Why in news?

- ✎ World Wetlands Day is celebrated every year on 2 February.

#### Theme of World Wetlands Day for 2018:

- The theme of World Wetlands Day for 2018 is ‘Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future’.
- In focusing on the theme “wetlands for a sustainable urban future”, this year’s World Wetlands Day sheds light on the importance of wetlands for cities.

- This theme is selected to raise awareness and to highlight the vital roles of healthy Wetlands in reducing the impacts of extreme events such as floods, the role of Wetlands for replenishing drinking water, filter waste and improve water quality, improve urban air quality, promote human well being, and enable people to earn a living.

### Significance of Wetlands for urban areas:

- Today, 50% of the world's population live in urban areas. Forecasts expect the urban population to rise to 6.3 billion by 2050 – a more than eightfold increase since 1950.
- While the urban proportion of the world's population will more than double from 1950 to 2050, the number of the world's wetlands has already more than halved over the past 100 years.
- However, wetlands play a vital role for cities and for the whole of humanity. For instance, they serve as a source of drinking water; they reduce flooding and the vegetation of wetlands filters domestic and industrial waste and improves water quality.

### Concerns:

- Wetlands are at risk, from 1900 64% of wetlands around the world have disappeared with severe consequences for those who are living in close proximity with them, mostly Farmers.

### Way ahead:

- The International Community should make greater efforts to preserve these wetlands and put Farmers in the best conditions to take advantage of wetlands while respecting them.

### About World Wetlands Day:

- World Wetlands Day is celebrated on February 2 each year to mark the Day the Convention on Wetlands was adopted in the Iranian City of Ramsar (on the shores of the Caspian Sea) in 1971.
- India is a party to the Convention since 1982 and committed to the Ramsar approach of wise use of wetlands.

### What is Ramsar Convention?

- The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, called the Ramsar Convention, is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.
  - The Convention was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975.
  - Since then, almost 90% of UN member states, from all the world's geographic regions, have acceded to become "Contracting Parties".
  - Every three years, representatives of the Contracting Parties meet as the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP), the policy-making organ of the Convention.

### What is Montreux Record?

- The Montreux Record is a register of wetland sites on the 'List of Wetlands of International Importance' where variations in ecological character have happened, are happen, or are likely to happen as an outcome of technological developments, pollution or other human interference.
- The Montreux Record maintained as part of the Ramsar List.

- The Montreux Record was established by Recommendation of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (1990).
- Sites may be added to and removed from the Record only with the approval of the Contracting Parties in which they lie.

### Indian sites in Montreux Record:

- Currently, two wetlands of India are in Montreux record viz. Keoladeo National Park, Rajasthan and Loktak Lake, Manipur.
- Further, Chilka lake was placed in the record but was later removed from it.

Source: The Hindu

### Dust mitigation plan must for firms

#### Why in news?

- ✎ The Environment Ministry has made it mandatory for companies seeking environment clearance to ensure that they put in place a dust mitigation plan.

#### What are the requirements under the dust mitigation plan?

- ✎ The requirements, specified in a gazette notification on January 25, say that
  - Roads leading to or at construction sites must be paved and black-topped.
  - There could be no soil excavation without adequate dust mitigation measures in place.
  - No loose soil, sand, construction waste could be left uncovered.
  - A water sprinkling system was mandatory, and the measures taken should be prominently displayed at the construction site.
  - Moreover, the grinding and cutting of building materials in open area were prohibited and no uncovered vehicles carrying construction material and waste would be permitted.

#### Background:

- The standards were developed by the Central Pollution Control Board as part of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) and will now empower the organisation to fine companies and agencies for not complying with norms.

#### What is Dust?

- Dust is a generic term for a vast mix of metals and non-metals — silicon, aluminium, titanium, manganese, copper, barium, antimony, selenium and zinc.

#### Need for dust mitigation:

- A study by the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur and commissioned by the Delhi government reported, in 2015, that road dust, burning of biomass and municipal solid waste, constituted the lion's share of the city's air pollution.

- Road dust contributed 56% of all PM10 pollution, while it was 38% for PM2.5. Another estimate by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune had different numbers but still ranked dust as the major contributor 52% to the city's PM10 load.
- Before PM2.5 became the focus of attention for its role in lodging itself in the lungs and for being a key component of diesel emissions dust was the key villain for a long time.

Source: The Hindu



## Science and Technology, Defense and Health

### India test fires medium range nuclear capable Agni-II missile

#### Why in news?

- ✎ An indigenously developed intermediate-range nuclear capable ballistic Agni II was successfully test-fired from the Abdul Kalam Island off the Odisha coast.

#### Background:

- The Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) had successfully tested country's longest indigenously developed nuclear missile Agni-V in January and short-range nuclear capable ballistic Agni-I earlier this month.

#### Key facts about Agni II:

- The intermediate-range nuclear capable ballistic Agni II is indigenously made and has already been inducted into the Indian Army.
- Agni II missile has a strike range of more than 2,000 km and is 20 metres long.
- Agni II missile weighs 17 tonnes and can carry a payload of 1,000 kg.
- The two-stage Agni II missile is equipped with advanced high accuracy navigation system.
- The navigation system in Agni II missile is guided by a novel scheme of state-of-the-art command and control system was propelled by solid rocket propellant system.

Source: The Hindu

### Saras completes second test flight successfully

#### Why in news?

- ✎ The indigenous light transport aircraft (LTA) Saras PT1N recently completed the second of the proposed 20 test flights.

#### What is SARAS?

- The SARAS is an indigenous aircraft developed by the National Aeronautics Laboratories (NAL), which is overseen by the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR).
- The aircraft programme is named after Indian crane Saras.

#### About SARAS PT1N:

- SARAS PT1N is a 14-seater passenger aircraft designed and developed by CSIR-NAL, a frontline aerospace research laboratory.
- The flight recently completed a successful first flight in its new avatar.
- The production version aircraft will have 19-seat capacity.

Source: The Hindu



## India ranked 47<sup>th</sup> in Inclusive Internet Index 2018

### Why in news?

- India was ranked 47<sup>th</sup> out of 86 nations in the Inclusive Internet Index 2018, which was released by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU).

### Key facts:

- The EIU was commissioned by social media giant Facebook.
- This year's index covered 91 per cent of the world's population and an expanded data set of 86 countries, up from 75 countries in 2017.
- It provides rigorous benchmark of national-level Internet inclusion across four categories: Availability, Affordability, Relevance and Readiness.

### Highlights of the report:

#### India's performance:

- The report ranked India at the 47<sup>th</sup> position when it comes to inclusive Internet and connectivity for all due to low usage and poor quality.
- Among the Asian nations, India featured in the middle at the 12<sup>th</sup> position from a total of 23.
- India was placed at or near the top of the lower-middle-income bracket on most indicators, except for availability, where it was ranked 13<sup>th</sup> out of 23.
- India's position is compromised by low usage and poor quality despite relatively strong infrastructure.

#### Other countries:

- The top five in the list included Sweden at the 1<sup>st</sup> position followed by Singapore, the United States, Denmark and South Korea.
- The bottom five in the list included Congo at the 86<sup>th</sup> position followed closely by Malawi, Madagascar, Liberia and Burkina Faso.

Source: The Hindu

## **Indian Navy to host 'Milan-2018'**

### Why in news?

- Indian Navy's Andaman & Nicobar Command will host the multinational mega event MILAN 2018 with theme of 'Friendship Across the Seas'.

### About MILAN Exercise:

- MILAN is congregation of littoral navies conducted biennially by Indian Navy under aegis of the Andaman and Nicobar Command. It was first held in 1995.
- In the first edition, only four littoral navies had participated in it. Now it has now grown into prestigious international event and encompasses participation by maritime forces from not just Bay of Bengal and South East Asia but larger Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- It provides effective forum to participating navies to come together to discuss common concerns in the Indian Ocean Region and forge deeper cooperation among friendly navies.

## About MILAN 2018:

- MILAN 2018 aims to showcase the rich heritage and pristine natural beauty of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the foreign visitors.
- Besides fostering co-operation through naval exercises and professional interactions, MILAN also provides an excellent opportunity to the participating navies to come together in a spirit of collaboration and mutual understanding to nurture stronger ties.
- 16 countries participating in this edition of exercise include Australia, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, New Zealand, Oman, Vietnam, Thailand, Tanzania, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kenya and Cambodia.

## Maldives rejects India's MILAN 2018 invite

- Maldives declined India's invitation to participate in the biennial naval exercise MILAN 2018.
- Meanwhile, the Maldivian envoy has said that his country cannot participate in the naval drills due to the state of emergency in the island nation.
- Maldives has been regularly participating in the biennial exercise, which was started in 1995.

Source: PIB

## Rustom-2 UAV successfully test-flown

### Why in news?

- ✎ India's premier defence research institute Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) carried out "successful" test flight of its Rustom 2 drone, a medium-altitude long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).
  - This flight assumes significance due to the fact that this is the first flight in user configuration with higher power engine.

### About Rustom 2:

- ✎ Rustom 2 drone is a medium-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle, developed on the lines of predator drones of the United States.
  - The objective of this drone is to carry out surveillance for the armed forces with an endurance of 24 hours.
  - Rustom 2 is part of the Rustom line of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) that includes Rustom-I, Rustom-H and Rustom-C.
  - The drone was developed for use by all three services of the Indian armed forces, primarily for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) operations.
  - The medium-altitude prototype can fly at over 22,000 ft and is a long-endurance (MALE) UAV that has an approximate flight time of 20 hours.
  - It can fly at around 280 km/h and carry a variety of payloads like Medium Range Electro Optic (MREO), Long Range Electro Optic (LREO), Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), and Electronic Intelligence (ELINT).
  - Rustom 2 can fly missions on manual as well as autonomous modes. The onboard way-point navigation system allows the drone to conduct missions autonomously.

## Way ahead:

- Modern warfare is heavily dependent on drones and India had deployed its imported drones effectively during the surgical strikes it carried out across the Line of Control in Pakistan in September 2016.

Source: The Hindu

## Blockchain tech could help prevent frauds like at PNB

### Why in news?

- ✎ According to bankers and blockchain specialists, the adoption of blockchain by India's banks could help avert frauds such as the one at Punjab National Bank.

### How does it possible?

- As per experts, the disaggregated and transparent nature of the blockchain technology, which updates information across all users simultaneously, would have ensured that various officials would have instantly been alerted to the creation of the letters of undertaking (LoUs).

### What is Blockchain technology?

- ✎ Blockchain is a sort of distributed ledger or decentralized database that keeps records of digital transactions.
  - Blockchain technology was first developed in 2009 by Satoshi Nakamoto.
  - Since its inception, it has been used as the basis for several cryptocurrencies from around the world, including Bitcoin and Bitshares.
  - Once a transaction is entered in the blockchain, it cannot be erased or modified.
  - Blockchain removes the need for using a trusted third party such as a bank to make a transaction by directly connecting the customers and suppliers.
  - Each transaction is recorded to the ledger after verification by the network participants, mainly a chain of computers, called nodes.

### Advantages of blockchain technology:

- A blockchain is anonymous, protecting the identities of the users. This makes blockchain a more secure way to carry out transactions.
- The algorithm used in blockchain reduces the dependence on people to verify the transactions.
- Blockchains, like Bitcoin and Ethereum, have not yet been hacked. They are considered to be very secure.
- It is very challenging, almost impossible, to change any transaction information once it is validated and becomes part of a block.
- Bitcoin is commonly referred to as digital gold. Referring to bitcoin as insecure or unsafe is like calling gold insecure or unsafe.

### Blockchain tech can reduce transaction costs:

- According to FICCI report, the next generation blockchain technology can help in reducing cost of transactions in various government schemes.

- For example, it is estimated that approximately 1.3 per cent of the GDP is lost due to unclear land titles and the litigation cost associated with competing claims only serves to exacerbate the problem further. Here the use of blockchain technology has the potential to make the agri-supply chain more secure, transparent and efficient.
- As per the report, Blockchain solutions, if implemented, may lead to the elimination of intermediaries or middlemen, thereby leading to improved pricing, decreased transaction fees, thus eliminate issues of hoarding

### **Disadvantages of blockchain technology:**

- Blockchain is still relatively a new technology. There are ongoing concerns about privacy in the settlement and storage of securities – blockchain providers are working hard to address.
- Banks are also at threat with blockchain, since more and more firms (using their IT service providers from India and elsewhere) will build systems that can create and exchange ‘blocks’ with one another completely legally, without ever having to use the banks as a financial intermediary.

### **Blockchain is not bitcoin.**

- Bitcoin is digital money, a virtual currency that was the first successful blockchain product. Blockchain is the technology that enables cryptocurrency like bitcoin. While they go hand-in-hand, there are other use cases for blockchain besides bitcoin.

Source: The Hindu, Economic Times

## **Dhanush’ ballistic missile successfully test-fired**

### **Why in news?**

- ✎ Nuclear-capable surface-to-surface Dhanush ballistic missile was successfully test-fired recently.

### **Key Facts:**

- The missile test was carried out by **Strategic Forces Command (SFC), the tri-services military command that controls all of India’s nuclear weapons and their associated delivery systems.**

### **About Dhanush missile:**

- Dhanush, also known as Prithvi-III, is a surface-to-surface missile.
- It is a naval variant of the indigenously-developed ‘Prithvi’ missile.
- It has a strike range of 350 km.
- It is capable of carrying a payload of 500 kg.
- It can be used for both ship-to-ship and ship-to-surface strikes.
- The single-stage, liquid-propelled ‘Dhanush’, has already been inducted into the defence services.

### **Background:**

- Dhanush is one of the five missiles developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP). The other families of missiles developed under IGMPD are Agni, Trishul, Akash and Nag.

- The Dhanush missile made its first test flight in 2000, with first fully operational test conducted in 2004. It has been test-fired total of seven times so far. The last time Dhanush was test fired was in November 2015.

Source: Indian Express

## Centre unveils another draft of Pesticide Management Bill

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Centre has released a new draft Pesticide Management Bill 2017 to replace an almost 50-year old legislation governing the plant chemicals sector.
  - Proposed as a step towards promoting safe use of pesticides, this Bill seeks to regulate the manufacture, inspection, testing and distribution of pesticides.

### About the Pesticide Management Bill, 2008:

#### Definition of pesticide:

- The Bill defines a pesticide as any substance used to destroy or control pests in agricultural commodities or animal feeds. Pesticides used for non-agricultural purposes, such as health care, are thus excluded from this definition.

#### Highlight of the bill:

- The Bill establishes a Central Pesticides Board to advise the government on matters related to pesticide regulation, manufacture, use and disposal. It establishes a registration committee to register pesticides.
- No pesticide can be registered unless tolerance limits for its residues on crops and commodities are specified under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.
- The Bill establishes a procedure to license manufacturers, distributors and retailers of pesticides, to be administered by state governments. Pesticide inspectors shall inspect facilities and collect pesticide samples while pesticide analysts shall test the samples collected.

#### Critical analysis of the bill:

- Farmers are opposing the bill as it does not address the core issues of applying penal provisions on companies marketing pesticides.
- The draft bill also does not ease the powers of regulation and registration to the state governments which have been a long pending demand of many governments.
- Also, the burden of spurious pesticide has once again passed on to the Registration Committee (RC) which is set to expand under the new Bill.

Source: The Hindu, Business Standard

### Defence Acquisition Council approves acquisitions worth over Rs 15,000 crore

- ✎ Defence Acquisition Council has recently cleared a plan to procure some much-needed fire-power for the armed forces, expected to cost Rs. 15,935 crore.
  - The list includes light machine guns, assault rifles and sniper rifles.

### About Defence Acquisition Council (DAC):

- ✎ To counter corruption and speed up decision-making in military procurement, the government of India in 2001 decided to set up an integrated DAC.
  - It is **headed by the Defence Minister**.
  - The DAC is responsible to give policy guidelines to acquisitions, based on long-term procurement plans.
  - It also clears all acquisitions, which includes both imported and those produced indigenously or under a foreign license.

### Objective of DAC:

- The objective of the Defence Acquisition Council is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces in terms of capabilities sought, and time frame prescribed, by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.

### Functions of the DAC include:

- In-principle approval of 15 Year Long-Term Integrated Perspective Plan for Defence Forces;
- accord of Acceptance of Necessity to acquisition proposals;
- categorization of the acquisition proposals relating to 'Buy', 'Buy & Make' and 'Make';
- issues relating to Single vendor clearance;
- decision regarding 'offset' provisions in respect of acquisition proposals above Rs. 300 crores;
- decisions regarding Transfer of Technology under 'Buy & Make' category of acquisition proposals; and
- Field Trial evaluation.

Source: PIB

### World Information Technology Congress 2018

#### Why in news?

- ✎ The World Congress on Information Technology (WCIT) 2018 was held recently in Hyderabad.

#### Organizers:

- The event was hosted by Telangana Government, in association with country's top IT body, National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) and global IT organization World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA).

#### Theme:

- The theme of this edition of conference was 'Future Enterprises.'

#### Key facts:

- This is **for first time India is hosting WITC**. It will second time that the event will be taking place in Asia after it was hosted in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2008.

#### About World Information Technology Congress (WITC):

- ✎ WITC is a biennial event and considered as the biggest and the most reputable international event among worldwide IT leaders.

- It aims provide single platform to IT experts, policy and decision makers and Government officials from all over the world together to discuss various challenges and possible solutions to them.
- It is unique in its global perspective on ICT issues and its ability to draw users, providers, media and academia from around the world.
- It was first held in 1978 since then held after every two years.
- The 2014 WITC was held in Mexico and had focused on the theme of ‘Digital World’ and 2016 edition was held in Brasilia, Brazil.

### About World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA):

- ✓ The World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA) is a consortium of associations from the information and communications technology (ICT) industry around the world.
- ✓ WITSA was founded in 1978 as the World Computing Services Industry Association
- ✓ WITSA’s motto is “Fulfilling the Promise of the Digital Age”.
- ✓ It voices the concerns of the international IT industry in organizations such as the World Trade Organization, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the G8.
- ✓ It participates in advocacy in international public policy that affects the “global information infrastructure”.

Source: The Hindu

### Govt to provide free viral load testing to people living with HIV/AIDS

#### Why in news?

- ✎ The Union government launched a scheme to provide free of cost viral load testing, at least once a year, for 1.2 million people who are living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) and are on treatment.

#### What is viral load testing?

- The viral load testing is used to monitor the effectiveness of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) over time.
- It measures the amount of HIV genetic material (RNA) in the blood and reports how many copies of the virus are present.

#### Significance of viral load testing:

- The routine viral load testing will optimize the utilization of first line regimens, thus preventing drug resistance and ensuring the longevity of people living with HIV.
- Viral load testing will empower medical officers at ART to detect failure on first line treatment early and therefore save PLHIV from developing resistance to drugs.
- It will also help in strengthening ‘Mission Sampark’ in tracking LFU (loss to follow up) PLHIV and to be brought under ART services.

#### Background:

- India has the third largest population of people with HIV after South Africa and Nigeria, according to UNAIDS.

- The report released in July 2017 revealed that in India, only 49% of patients were on antiretroviral therapy (ART) in 2016.
- According to the report, India had 2.1 million people living with HIV at the end of 2016 and 36.7 million globally.
- In 2017, India revised the ART treatment protocols to initiate all PLHIV on ART.
- The 'treat all' initiative was started to ensure that treatment is started early and the virus transmission is curtailed both at the individual and the community level.
- According to the union health ministry, about 1.2 million PLHIV are availing the benefit of free treatment from more than 530 ART centers.

Source: Live Mint

## UP govt launches campaign to eradicate Japanese Encephalitis

### Why in news?

Recently, Uttar Pradesh Government launched the **"Dastak Campaign against Japanese Encephalitis (JE) and Acute Encephalitis Syndrom (AES)"**.

- The campaign was launched in collaboration with UNICEF.

### Key facts:

- DASTAK campaign is part of the comprehensive Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) strategy embraced by state government to beat encephalitis.
- The war cry of DASTAK is Darwaja khatkhatoo, AES aur JE ko bhagao.

### Background:

- 38 districts of Uttar Pradesh are affected with AES and JE. They are mostly falling in the Tarai region of state which contributes to about 60% of total AES cases all over the country.

### What is Japanese Encephalitis?

- Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV) is a flavivirus related to dengue, yellow fever and West Nile viruses. It is spread by mosquitoes.
- In 1871, the first case of Japanese encephalitis viral disease (JE) was documented in Japan.

### Symptoms:

- Most JEV infections are mild with patients experiencing fever and headache, without apparent symptoms.
- In case of severe illness, the patient experiences rapid onset of high fever, headache, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, seizures, spastic paralysis and ultimately death.
- Of those who survive, 20 to 30 per cent suffer permanent intellectual, behavioural or neurological problems such as paralysis, recurrent seizures or the inability to speak.

### How is the disease transmitted?

- JEV is transmitted to humans through bites from infected mosquitoes of the Culex species (mainly Culex tritaeniorhynchus)



- Humans, once infected, do not develop sufficient viraemia to infect feeding mosquitoes
- The virus exists in a transmission cycle between mosquitoes, pigs and/or water birds (enzootic cycle)
- The disease is predominantly found in rural and periurban settings, where humans live in closer proximity to these vertebrate hosts.

### Is there a treatment for it?

- There is no antiviral treatment for patients with JE. Treatment is supportive to relieve symptoms and stabilize the patient.

Source: The Times of India

## Government extends anti-narcotics scheme for 3 more years

### Why in news?

- ✎ Taking into consideration the 40 lakh drug addicts in the country, the Union government has extended the period of the 'Assistance to States and UTs for Narcotics Control' scheme for the three years i.e. from 2017-18 to 2019-20 -with an estimated budget of Rs 21 crore.
  - The scheme was first launched on October 24, 2004 for a period of five and later extended twice in subsequent years.

### About the 'Assistance to States and UTs for Narcotics Control' scheme:

- The scheme aims to combat illicit trafficking in drugs and psychotropic substance.
- The purpose of the scheme is to assist state governments and Union Territories which are contributing in controlling the inter-state and cross border drug trafficking.
- Financial assistance will be provided to all the anti- narcotics agencies for strengthening their enforcement capabilities to combat illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
- Financial assistance is also proposed to be provided for all capacity building activities, including training of personnel.
- **The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) being the national nodal agency for drug administration** will process the requests from state governments and UTs for financial assistance for improving their enforcement capabilities in dealing with the supply side of the drug menace.

### About Narcotics Control Bureau:

- ✎ The Narcotics Control Bureau is the apex coordinating agency.
  - The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 which came into effect from the 14th November, 1985 made an express provision for constituting a Central Authority for the purpose of exercising the powers and functions of the Central Government under the Act.
  - In presence of this provision, the Government of India constituted the Narcotics Control Bureau on the 17th of March, 1986.
  - The Director General of NCB is an officer of the Indian Police Service (IPS) or the Indian Revenue Service (IRS).
  - The Narcotics Control Bureau is **also represented on the Economic Intelligence Council**.
  - NCB is **affiliated to Home Ministry**, which was made responsible for administering The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.

### Need to curb the drug menace:

- According to the latest assessments, there are approximately 40 lakh drug addicts in India but the actual figure may be still higher.
  - The most common drugs of abuse are ‘ganja’, ‘hashish’, ‘opium’ and ‘heroin’. The abuse of pharmaceutical preparations like ‘buprenorphine’, codeine based cough syrups and painkillers like ‘proxivon’ has also assumed serious proportions.
  - In certain regions of the country, drug abuse has already become a severe social-economic problem affecting the vulnerable age groups, the official said.
- ✎ It is, therefore, essential that the state governments and UTs are aware of the drug related problems in their states and UTs and address them in an effective manner before they assume epidemic proportions, another official said.

### Way ahead:

- The strategies would include both supply reduction and demand reduction. Supply reduction would include enforcement activities while demand reduction would involve rehabilitation and de-addiction measures.

Source: PIB, Economic Times

### India successfully conducts night trial of Prithvi-II missile

#### Why in news?

- ✎ India successfully conducted a night trial of its indigenously developed nuclear capable Prithvi-II missile from a test range in Odisha.

#### About Prithvi-II:

- The Prithvi-II is a short-range surface-to-surface missile.
- The missile is capable of carrying warheads weighing 500 kg to 1,000 kg.
- Notably, Prithvi is India’s first indigenously-built ballistic missile.
- With a strike range of 350 km, Prithvi-II is powered by twin-engines which use liquid propulsion.
- It uses advanced inertial guidance system with manoeuvring trajectory to hit its target.
- It is one of the five missiles being developed under the country’s Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme.
- The missile was inducted into the armed forces in 2003.

Source: The Hindu

### Govt drops the idea of an India EV policy

#### Why in news?

- ✎ The Union government has decided against formulating an electric vehicle (EV) policy in an apparent U-turn from its position so far, providing a breather to many carmakers that are unprepared for an abrupt shift to the clean-fuel technology.
- Meanwhile, the existing FAME (incentive) scheme may continue for another two years.

## Reasons for drop:

- Implementing an EV policy package would need huge investments and with empty coffers, it is not possible for the government. So, the idea is left to the open market, manufacturers and the consumers.

## Background:

- The government's decision to have an EV policy had created uncertainty in the automobile industry for the past year, although several companies had outlined their strategies for EVs or lobbied the government to drop the idea.

## What is FAME India scheme?

- With an aim to promote eco-friendly vehicles, the government had launched the FAME India scheme in 2015 offering incentives on electric and hybrid vehicles of up to Rs 29,000 for bikes and Rs 1.38 lakh for cars.
- FAME India – Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric vehicles in India – is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan.
- The scheme envisages Rs 795 crore support in the first two fiscals starting with the current year.
- It is being **administered by the Heavy Industries Ministry**.

## Way ahead:

- Electric vehicle sales are low in India because of few available models and a lack of charging infrastructure.
- To overcome some of the problems for electric vehicles, NITI Aayog, along with Colorado-based Rocky Mountain Institute, in their 2017 report on the future of shared, electric and connected mobility future in India, had suggested setting up “a manufacturer consortium for batteries, common components, and platforms to develop battery cell technologies and packs and to procure common components for Indian original equipment manufacturers”.
- The report said that adoption of electric and shared vehicles could help India save \$60 billion in diesel and petrol, along with cutting down as much as 1 gigatonne of carbon emissions by 2030.

Source: The Hindu

## National Deworming initiative launched

### Why in news?

- ✎ The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) launched National Deworming Initiative on the occasion of National Deworming Day (observed on 10 February).
  - It aims to reach more than 32.2 crore children aged between 1 to 19 years to combat parasitic worm infections.
  - This year it is fourth edition of National Deworming Day after it was launched in 2015.

### About National Deworming Day (NDD):

- ✎ The National Deworming Day is a single fixed-day approach to treating intestinal worm infections in all children aged 1- 19 years, and is held on 10 February and 10 August each year.

- Union Ministry for Health and Family Welfare had first launched National Deworming Day (NDD) in 2015 which was implemented in 11 States/UTs across all Government and Government-aided schools and Anganwadi centres targeting children aged 1 to 19 years.
- The National Deworming Day 2016 is launched to cover the whole country, aiming towards a massive target of 27 crore children in 536 districts of the country.
- The National Deworming Day aims to create mass awareness about the most effective and low-cost Soil Transmitted Helminth (STH) treatment— administering Albendazole tablets.
- Along with Albendazole administration, behaviour change practices in terms of cleanliness, hygiene, use of toilets, wearing shoes/chappals, washing hands etc. is also important to reduce incidents of re-infection.
- At the state and local level, community mobilisation and outreach efforts are underway to engage community-based health workers, like ASHAs, Gram Sabhas and others, to spread awareness and encourage participation in the program.

### **Alarming situations in India:**

- India has the highest burden of parasitic worms in the world.
- Parasitic worms in children interfere with nutrient uptake, and can contribute to anaemia, malnourishment, and impaired mental and physical development.
- According to the 2012 report ‘**Children in India**’, published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, 48% of children under the age of 5 years are stunted and 19.8% are wasted, indicating that half of the country’s children are malnourished.

### **Significance of the initiative:**

- School-based mass deworming program is safe, cost-effective, and can reach millions of children quickly.
- Deworming has been shown to reduce absenteeism in schools; improve health, nutritional, and learning outcomes; and increase the likelihood of higher-wage jobs later in life.
- The National Deworming Day will mobilize health personnel, state governments and other stakeholders to prioritize investment in control of Soil Transmitted Helminth (STH) infections— one of the most common infections.

### **About National Deworming Programme:**

- To combat Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) infections, government has adopted a single day strategy called National Deworming Day (NDD).
- The programme is being implemented through the combined efforts of Department of School Education and Literacy under Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Ministry of Women and Child Development and Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.
- During NDD single dose of Albendazole is administered to children from under 1 to 19 years of age group through the platforms of schools and aanganwadi centers.

## About Albendazole:

- Albendazole is an extremely safe drug that has been used for decades by millions of people around the world and in India, with no or minimal side effects.
- Side effects such as nausea and vomiting can manifest in the children with high worm load.

## What is Soil-Transmitted Helminths (STH)?

- ✎ Soil-Transmitted Helminths (STH) also known as **parasitic worm** is a type of helminth infection (helminthiasis) caused by different species of roundworms.
  - Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) interfere with nutrients uptake in children; can lead to anaemia, malnourishment and impaired mental and physical development.
  - The situation of undernutrition and anaemia which is linked to STH ranges from 40% to 70% in different population groups across the country (WHO).
  - They also pose a serious threat to children's education and productivity later in life.
  - India carries the highest burden of worm infestation and 64% of Indian population less than 14 years of age are at risk of Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) or worms' infestation (WHO).

Source: PIB

## India Health Fund to boost research on TB, malaria

### Why in news?

- ✎ The India Health Fund (IHF) launched by Tata Trusts in collaboration with Global Fund in August 2016 has come forward to financially support innovations and technologies designed to combat tuberculosis (TB) and malaria.

### Aims and objectives of India Health Fund:

- The IHF aims to support new products and strategies that impact entire lifecycle of malaria and TB, from prevention to post-cure recovery. It has recently invited project proposals.
- It is a lead initiative of Tata Trusts, with technical support from the Global Fund. It is a pioneering vehicle by Tata Trusts, designed to not only influence philanthropic capital within India, but also serve as a trusted mechanism to generate significant impact in addressing key health challenges in the country - starting with malaria and tuberculosis.
- The IHF initiative will support individuals and organisations with already germinated innovative strategies, services, products, such that they become sustainable and scalable solutions in addressing TB and malaria.
- The initiative is not a fellowship programme to do research from scratch. It is long-term exercise aligned with country's goal of eliminating TB by 2025 and malaria by 2030.
- It will promote innovative solutions such that they are widely accessible and are affordable

### Areas of research:

- Use of technology and data science to strengthen surveillance of TB and malaria, inform early warning systems and improve early detection and prompt treatment.

- Promote robust molecular diagnostic facilities feasible for primary healthcare in low-resource settings;
- Promote innovations on effective communication strategies that will prevent transmission of malaria and TB and enable people to protect themselves from diseases.
- Research on innovative approaches to vector surveillance.

Source: The Hindu, PIB

## ISRO sets up 473 Village Resource Centres for rural development through satellite technology

### Why in news?

- ✎ To demonstrate the potential of satellite technology for development of rural areas, ISRO established Village Resource Centres (VRCs) on a pilot scale.
  - About Rs 18 crores was spent for establishing 473 VRCs.
  - The project is running in association with selected NGOs, Trusts and State Government Departments.

### About Village Resource Centres program:

- To provide the space based services directly to the rural areas, ISRO/ DOS has launched the Village Resource Centres (VRCs) programme in association with NGOs/ Trusts and state/ central agencies.
- VRCs provide various space technology enabled services such as tele-healthcare, tele-education, natural resources information, advisories related to agriculture, career guidance to rural students, skill development and vocational training etc.
- Establishing new VRCs is an ongoing process and the same is carried out based on communication technology needs, funds available, proposals received from State Governments/NGOs etc.

### Parameters

- The parameters for selecting NGOs and Trusts as partners in VRC include experience in community organisation and social work, availability of required infrastructure for housing the VRC facility, requisite manpower for day-to-day operation and capacity for conducting programmes of relevance for the development of rural areas.

Source: PIB

## India Successfully Test-Fires Nuclear Capable Prithvi-II

- ✎ India has successfully test-fired its indigenously developed nuclear capable Prithvi-II missile as part of a user trial by the Army from a test range in Odisha.

### About Prithvi-II:

- The Prithvi-II is a short-range surface-to-surface missile.
- The missile is capable of carrying warheads weighing 500 kg to 1,000 kg.
- Notably, Prithvi is India's first indigenously-built ballistic missile.
- With a strike range of 350 km, Prithvi-II is powered by twin-engines which use liquid propulsion.

- It uses advanced inertial guidance system with manoeuvring trajectory to hit its target.
- It is one of the five missiles being developed under the country's Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme.
- The missile was inducted into the armed forces in 2003.

Source: PIB

### India successfully test-fires nuclear capable ballistic missile Agni-1

#### Why in news?

- ✎ Indigenously developed short-range nuclear capable ballistic Agni-1 was successfully test-fired recently from mobile launcher located at Integrated Test Range of Dr Abdul Kalam Island (Wheeler Island) off the Odisha.
  - The missile was tested as part of a periodic training activity by the Strategic Forces Command (SFC) of the Indian Army to consolidate operational readiness.
  - It is claimed to be part of India's minimum credible deterrence under No first to use policy.
  - It was 18th version of Agni-I, which could achieve all parameters within the stipulated time period.

#### About Agni-1 Missile:

- ✎ Agni-1 is indigenously developed **intermediate range surface-to-surface, single-stage missile**.
  - It was developed by Advanced Systems Laboratory (ASL) in collaboration with Defence Research Development Laboratory (DRDL) and Research Centre Imarat (RCI). ASL is the premier missile development laboratory of DRDO.
  - The missile was integrated by the Bharat Dynamics Limited, Hyderabad.
  - The missile weighs around 12 tonnes and is propelled by a solid rocket propellant system. It is 15-metre-long and can carry both conventional as well as nuclear payloads (warheads) up to 1,000 kg.
  - It has strike range of over 700 km. It is equipped with specialised navigation system that ensures it reaches target with high degree of precision.
  - The missile already has been inducted into the armed forces (service) in 2004. The last trial of missile was successfully conducted in November 2016 from the same base.

Source: The Hindu

### Task force set up to study AI application in military

#### Why in news?

- ✎ The Department of Defence Production has constituted a task force headed by Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran to study use of artificial intelligence.
  - The task force will study the whole gamut of issues surrounding strategic implications of AI in national security perspective, in global context.

#### What is Artificial intelligence (AI)?

- AI is branch of computer science concerned with making computers behave like humans.
- In contrast to normal hardware and software, AI enables a machine to perceive (i.e. to think) and respond to its changing environment.

### Potentials of AI application in military:

- Experts believe that future progress of artificial intelligence (AI) has potential to have transformative impact on national security.
- It is also seen that AI is essentially a dual use technology. While it can fuel technology driven economic growth, it also has potential to provide military superiority.

Source: Indian Express

### New tunnel at Sela pass in Arunachal Pradesh announced

#### Why in news?

- 📌 The Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley announced while presenting the Union Budget 2018 that the government would be building a tunnel through the Sela Pass in Arunachal Pradesh.

#### Significance:

- The construction of the tunnel will ensure faster movement of troops in Tawang, a strategically-located town in Arunachal Pradesh bordering China.
- According to the Defence Ministry, the approval for the construction of Sela pass in Arunachal Pradesh has given further impetus to the defence preparedness.
- The proposed Sela Pass tunnel would be an all weather transport tunnel and hence, would enable movement throughout the year.

#### About Sela Pass:

- The Sela Pass is located at a height of 13700 ft between the strategically-located Tawang and West Kameng Districts of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The Pass is considered crucial from strategic perspective.
- Sela Lake, near the summit of the pass, is one of approximately 101 lakes in the area that are sacred in Tibetan Buddhism.
- It crosses a sub range of the Himalayas that separates Tawang District, which borders China, from the rest of India.

#### Background:

- While the Border Roads Organization (BRO) of India works to keep the Pass open throughout the year, it shuts down temporarily after landslides and during heavy snow.
- The **BRO's Project Vartak** has already started land acquisition and double landing of the national highway as part of the larger plan. Two tunnels-of lengths 475 m and 1,790 m-will be constructed by BRO.

Source: Economic Times

### Ayushman Bharat for a new India -2022

#### Why in news?

- 📌 As part of Ayushman Bharat programme, the Government has announced two major initiatives in health sector.



### National Health Protection Scheme:

- The flagship programme under Ayushman Bharat is National Health Protection Scheme, which will cover over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families (approximately 50 crore beneficiaries) providing coverage upto 5 lakh rupees per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.
- This will be the world's largest government funded health care programme.
- Adequate funds will be provided for smooth implementation of this programme.

### Health and Wellness Centre:

- The National Health Policy, 2017 has envisioned Health and Wellness Centres as the foundation of India's health system.
- Under this 1.5 lakh centres will bring health care system closer to the homes of people.
- These centres will provide comprehensive health care, including for non-communicable diseases and maternal and child health services.
- These centres will also provide free essential drugs and diagnostic services.
- The Budget has allocated Rs. 1200 crore for this flagship programme. Contribution of private sector through CSR and philanthropic institutions in adopting these centres is also envisaged.

### Significance:

- These two health sector initiatives under Ayushman Bharat Programme will build a New India 2022 and ensure enhanced productivity, well being and avert wage loss and impoverishment.
- These Schemes will also generate lakhs of jobs, particularly for women.

Source: The Hindu

### Bharat Net phase II gets Rs 10,000 crore

#### Why in news?

- ☞ Recently, the Government has allocated Rs 10,000 crores in 2018-19 for phase two of BharatNet, the government's ambitious scheme to connect the country's villages with high-speed optical fibre network.
  - The deadline for completion of the second phase of the project is March 2019–December 31, 2017 being the date when the first installment got over.

#### Background:

- In its first phase, the BharatNet project saw over one lakh gram panchayats being connected across the country with high speed optical fibre network as of December 31, 2017.
- Under the first phase, the project saw 2,54,895 km of optical fibre cable being laid covering 1,09,926 gram panchayats out of which 1,01,370 gram panchayats have been provided active connectivity.

#### What is BharatNet?

- ☞ BharatNet is Centre's rural internet connectivity programme which is implemented by Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL).
  - It is world's largest rural broadband connectivity programme using Optical fibre.

- Bharat Net seeks to connect all of India's households, particularly the rural areas, through demand, affordable broadband connectivity of 2 Mbps to 20 Mbps to realise the vision of Digital India.
- The project is being funded by Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF).
- Bharat Net infrastructure is expected to catalyse digital delivery of services for the rural poor — health, education, livelihood skills, e-agriculture and e-commerce.

### Stakeholders:

- Besides telecom services companies which are the implementation partners, BharatNet stakeholders include optic fibre cable manufacturers and equipment suppliers and technology partners.

### About the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF):

- USOF was formed by the Central Government to help fund projects to boost connectivity in rural areas.
- Established in 2002, it is headed by the USOF Administrator who reports to the Secretary, Department of Telecommunications (DoT).
- The money for this fund comes through a 'Universal Access Levy,' charged from the telecom operators on their Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) which are then deposited into the Consolidated Fund of India and require prior parliamentary approval to be dispatched.
- The USOF works through a bidding process, where funds are given to the enterprise quoting the lowest bid. However, the funds for National Optic Fibre Network (NOFN) were made an exception to this process since Bharat Broadband Nigam Limited (BBNL) was the sole party involved in the implementation having been specifically created for it.

Source: The Hindu

## “Healthy States, Progressive India” Report

### Why in news?

- Recently, NITI Aayog has released a comprehensive Health Index report titled, “Healthy States, Progressive India”.

### About the report:

- The report has been developed by NITI Aayog, with technical assistance from the World Bank, and in consultation with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).
- The report ranks states and Union territories innovatively on their year-on-year incremental change in health outcomes, as well as, their overall performance with respect to each other.
- It is the first attempt to establish an annual systematic tool to measure and understand the heterogeneity and complexity of the nation's performance in Health.

### Health Index:

- States and UTs have been ranked in three categories namely, Larger States, Smaller States, and Union Territories (UTs), to ensure comparison among similar entities.
- The Health Index is a weighted composite Index, which for the larger States, is based on indicators in three domains: (a) Health Outcomes (70%); (b) Governance and Information (12%); and (c) Key Inputs and Processes (18%), with each domain assigned a weight based on its importance.

- Health Index has been developed as a tool to leverage co-operative and competitive federalism to accelerate the pace of achieving health outcomes.
- It would also serve as an instrument for “nudging” States & Union Territories (UTs) and the Central Ministries to a much greater focus on output and outcome based measurement of annual performance than is currently the practice.
- With the annual publication of the Index and its availability on public domain on a dynamic basis, it is expected to keep every stakeholder alert to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal number 3.

### Performance of states:

- Among the Larger States, Kerala, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu ranked on top in terms of overall performance, while Jharkhand, Jammu & Kashmir, and Uttar Pradesh are the top three ranking States in terms of annual incremental performance.
  - Among Smaller States, Mizoram ranked first followed by Manipur on overall performance, while Manipur followed by Goa were the top ranked States in terms of annual incremental performance.
- ✎ The Health Index report notes that while States and UTs that start at lower levels of development are generally at an advantage in notching up incremental progress over States with high Health Index scores, it is a challenge for States with high Index scores to even maintain their performance levels.

### Concerns:

- The incremental measurement reveals that about one-third of the States have registered a decline in their performance in 2016 as compared to 2015, stressing the need to pursue domain-specific, targeted interventions.
- Common challenges for most States and UTs include the need to focus on addressing vacancies in key staff, establishment of functional district Cardiac Care Units (CCUs), quality accreditation of public health facilities and institutionalization of Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS).
- Additionally, almost all Larger States need to focus on improving the Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB).

Source: PIB

## More News

### National Science Day 2018

- ✎ The National Science Day is observed every year on 28th February with an objective to spread message of importance of science and its application among the people.
- The theme for National Science Day 2018 is “Science and Technology for a sustainable future.”

### About National Science Day:

- The National Science Day marks the epoch-making discovery of Raman Effect by Indian physicist Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman (CV Raman) on February 28, 1928. This discovery was awarded with the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930.

- This day is celebrated as science festival in the entire nation by organising science exhibitions, seminars, workshops, symposiums and many other activities.
- The National Science Day was instituted by the Union Government in 1986 based on the demand of National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC) forwarded.
- The first National Science Day was celebrated on 28 February 1987.

### What is Raman Effect?

- The Raman Effect is a change in the wavelength of light that occurs when a light beam is deflected by molecules.
- Some part of light beam after passing through a transparent medium gets scattered. This phenomenon of scattering of light is termed as Raman Scattering and the cause of scattering is called the Raman Effect. The wavelength of these scattered rays is different from that of the incident rays of light.

### First woman fighter pilot to fly fighter jet

- Flying Officer Avani Chaturvedi scripted history by becoming the first Indian woman fighter pilot to fly solo.
- She flew a MiG-21 Bison, which has the highest landing and take-off speed in the world.
- The fighter stream was opened for women in 2015

### YH Malegam committee

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has constituted an expert committee to look into the entire gamut of issues relating to classification of bad loans, effectiveness of audits and rising incidents of frauds.
- The committee will be headed by Y H Malegam, a former member of Central Board of Directors of RBI.

### ‘Paschim Lehar’

- It is a **tri-service maritime exercise**, being held off India’s western coast with an aim to build interoperability between **Indian Navy, Indian Army, Indian Air Force and Coast Guard**.
- The objective of the exercise is to build interoperability.
- This exercise includes participation of a large number of ships, submarines and aircraft from the Western Naval Command of the Indian Navy.
- This exercise includes participation of large number of ships, submarines and aircraft from Western Naval Command of Indian Navy and units from Eastern Naval Command, Indian Army, Air Force and Coast Guard.

### Indian engineer awarded Sci-tech Oscar Award

- ✎ Vikas Sathaye, a Pune-born Indian engineer was recently honoured with the **Scientific and Engineering Academy Award at the Oscars Scientific and Technical Awards 2018** at Beverly Hills in Los Angeles, California.

- Sathaye received the award along with his team for their contribution towards the conceptualisation, design, engineering and the implementation of the ‘Shotover K1 Camera System’.

### About Shotover K1 Camera System:

- The Shotover K1 Camera System is a camera mount that is used for aerial filming.
- The six-axis stabilised aerial camera mount can be attached to the base of a helicopter, which carries the camera and lens.
- The primary function of the camera mount is ensuring a steady footage by eliminating any vibration from reaching the camera.
- The innovative creation, with its enhanced ability to frame shots while looking straight down, enables greater creative freedom and results in clear, unwavering photography and videography.

### About the award:

- The Oscar’s or Academy’s Scientific and Technical Awards honours companies and individuals for their discoveries and innovations that have contributed significantly to motion pictures.
- They are conferred on three levels: Technical Achievement Award (certificate), Scientific and Engineering Award (bronze tablet) and Academy Award of Merit (Oscar statuette).

### Eminent Kannada writer Chandrashekhara Kambara elected as Sahitya Akademi president

- ✎ Jnanpith recipient and Kannada litetratureur Chandrashekhar Kambar was elected as President of the Sahitya Akademi.
- Hindi poet Madhav Kaushik was elected as vice president of the Sahitya Akademi.

### About Chandrashekhar Kambar:

- Kambar, who has been recipient of various awards including Sahitya Akademi Award, Padma Shri and Pampa Award, will serve as president of the Akademi for a period of five years.
- Kambar is the third Kannada writer to head the country’s premier literary institution, after Vinayak Krishna Gokak (1983) and U.R. Ananthamurthy (1993).

### About Sahitya Akademi:

- Sahitya Akademi, India’s National Academy of Letters, is the central institution for literary dialogue, publication and promotion in the country and the only institution that undertakes literary activities in 24 Indian languages, including English.
- Though set up by the Government, the Akademi functions as an autonomous organisation.
- The Sahitya Akademi was formally inaugurated by the Government of India on 12 March 1954.
- The Government of India Resolution, which set forth the constitution of the Akademi, described it as a national organisation to work actively for the development of Indian letters and to set high

literary standards, to foster and co-ordinate literary activities in all the Indian languages and to promote through them all the cultural unity of the country.

### About the Sahitya Akademi 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)**.
- It also gives special awards called Bhasha Samman to significant contribution to the languages not formally recognized by the Akademi as also for contribution to classical and medieval literature.
- The award consists of a casket containing an engraved copper-plaque, a shawl and a cheque of 1 Lakh rupees.

### First Hindu Temple Project in Abu Dhabi

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone-laying ceremony for construction of first traditional Hindu temple in Al Wathba, Abu Dhabi, the capital city of United Arab Emirates (UAE), home to over three million people of Indian origin.
- The temple will be the first traditional Hindu stone temple in the Middle East.
- The temple design and structure is along the lines of the Akshardham temple in Delhi and other places.
- It will be hand-carved by Indian temple artisans and assembled in UAE.
- It will be completed by 2020 and open to people of all religious backgrounds.

### First women Chief Justice of Manipur HC

- ✎ Abhilasha Kumari was sworn in as the Chief Justice of the Manipur High Court. With this, she becomes the first woman Chief Justice of the High Court of Manipur.
  - Formerly, she was the Judge of the High Court of Gujarat.

### Key facts:

- On re-organization of the North-Eastern region by the North Eastern Area (Re-organization) Act, 1971, a common High Court was established for the **five North-Eastern States Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura**) and the two Union Territories (Union Territory of Mizoram and the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh) and called as the **Gauhati High Court**.
- Thereafter, when Manipur attained Statehood, **Imphal Bench of the Gauhati High Court** came into existence on Friday, the 21st day of January 1972.
- In 2013, the **Manipur High Court** was established after making suitable amendments in the Constitution of India and North-Eastern Areas (Re-organisation) Act, 1971.

### Magahi writer Madhukar awarded Sahitya Akademi's Bhasha Samman

- ✎ Magahi writer Shesh Anand Madhukar, who has been working extensively for the development of the language, has been honoured with this year's Sahitya Akademi Bhasha Samman award.

- He is the second writer of Magahi language to be given the award.

### About Magahi language:

- The Magahi language, also known as Magadhi, is a language spoken in Bihar-Jharkhand region of eastern India.
- Magadhi Prakrit was the ancestor of Magadh, from which the latter's name derives.
- It is believed to be the language spoken by Gautama Buddha.
- It was the official language of the Mauryan court, in which the edicts of Ashoka were composed.

### About Bhasha Samman:

- It identifies and honours literary works in those languages which are equally spoken in different parts of country but are not among 24 regional language recognised for Sahitya Akademi Awards.
- The award is an attempt to make writers of other languages feel equally important.
- The award comprises Rs 1 lakh cheque and memento.

### Under-19 World Cup

- India has won Under-19 ICC World Cup 2018 by defeating Australia by eight wickets.
- With this victory, **India became first nation to win Under-19 World Cup four times.**
- It was India's sixth appearance in the under-19 World Cup finals.

### “Green Good Deeds” campaign

- The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has launched Green Good Deeds campaign.
- The purpose of the people-oriented campaign is to sensitise people and students, in particular about climate change and global warming.
- The objective of the campaign is to restore and return the clean and green environment to the next generation.
- Environment Minister has underlined need for ‘Green Sainiks’ on the lines of ‘Polio Sainiks’ to broaden the ‘Green Good Deeds’ campaign and take it to the grassroots level.

### 7th India Energy Congress 2018

- The 7th India Energy Congress (IEC) 2018 was held in New Delhi.
- The theme of the 7th edition of India Energy Congress is Energy 4.0: Energy Transition Towards 2030.
- The Congress is structured in five cross-cutting sub-themes: Policy and Energy Environment 2030; Energy Investments in an Uncertain World; Sustainable Mobility; Variable Renewable Energy Integration; and Reaching the Last Mile.

**About India Energy Congress:**

- The India Energy Congress is the flagship event of World Energy Council India (WEC India) and joint event of ministries of power, coal, new & renewable energy, petroleum & natural gas, external affairs and Department of Atomic Energy.
- The WEC India functions under the power ministry.
- Secretary (Power) is the chairman of the WEC India.
- NTPC Chairman is the member secretary of the WEC India.

**‘Exam Warriors’**

- It is a book authored by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for students facing exams.
- The book aims to inspire youth to face the difficult moments of examinations and life with fresh and new energy.
- It emphasizes the importance of play, sleep & even travel.

**Sherin’s Law**

- It is a new proposed law in the US state of Texas.
- It would make leaving a young child alone at home a felony offense.
- The Law would also require that any adult who witnesses or has personal knowledge of an abused child report it to authorities within 48 hours.
- The law was inspired by the death of Indian toddler Sherin Mathews, who was left alone in her Richardson, Texas, home last October as her Indian American adoptive parents went out to dinner.