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EDITORIAL

India- US 2+2 Dialogue

The twice-deferred two-plus-two dialogue between the foreign and defence ministers of India and the US is now expected to take place in early September with the venue perhaps being shifted to New Delhi, with both sides seeking closure on a foundational communications, compatibility and security agreement (COMCASA) at the meeting.

The two delegations were to meet first on April 18 and senior Indian officials were on their way to Washington for preparatory talks when President Donald Trump fired secretary of state Rex Tillerson and gave his job to Mike Pompeo. Set to take place in Washington on July 6, the dialogue was again postponed because Pompeo had to visit North Korea.

In the meetings between Indian foreign minister Sushma Swaraj and defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Pompeo and defense secretary Jim Mattis, the two sides would seek long-term linkages with a focus on the Afghanistan peace process, terrorism, and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. The US policy towards countries that do business with Iran and Russia (India buys oil from Iran and Russia is a key supplier of defence equipment) will also be discussed in detail so that there is broad convergence on the issue, the diplomats added.

The national security advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval may visit Washington next month to put things in motion for the September dialogue and clear the air on COMCASA. This is one of the three agreements that the US has with its closest military allies, and will allow the installation of high-security US communication equipment on defence equipment being sold to India, thereby; the US argument goes, facilitating interoperability. India has concerns on giving the US access to sensitive military communication if it signs the agreement. The two-plus-two dialogue is expected to at least state both countries' commitment to COMCASA.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will also meet the two US principals in case Washington agrees to New Delhi as the venue for the dialogue. The Indian agenda for two-plus-two has been discussed at the highest levels with NSA Doval, Foreign secretary Vijay Gokhale and Indian ambassador to the US, Navtej Sarna, held talks on this in New Delhi recently.

Meanwhile, bilateral concerns over trade are now being discussed between the Indian commerce ministry and the US commerce department with New Delhi deciding to send a negotiating team under joint secretary Santosh Sarangi to Washington on July 16. This follows assistant US trade representative Mark Linscott's India visit in late June to discuss concerns over trade and tariffs.

Under the two-plus-two rubric, the two sides will also discuss the proposed Afghanistan peace process, with India keen that this be driven by Kabul without any outside interference. India wants all ethnic communities living in the strife-torn region to have their say on the peace process rather than focus exclusively on a compromise with the Taliban.

India and the US will also discuss terrorism emanating from the Afghanistan-Pakistan arc. The Modi government is keen that there is no dilution in the American policy towards terrorism in the South Asian region. During the dialogue, the two Indian ministers will share data on continued militant infiltration from the Pakistani side to destabilize Kashmir and the role played by proscribed terrorists groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Tayebba in escalating violence in the Valley.

Even as India and the US wait for this important milestone in their partnership, the two countries are proceeding with other aspects of their defence cooperation, including US military sales to India through the transparent foreign military sales (FMS) route. In the pipeline are surveillance helicopters for the Indian Navy, Predator armed drones, and more long-range anti-submarine reconnaissance aircraft. The Quad process involving India, the US, Japan and Australia is a work in progress with South-East Asian nations such as Indonesia keen to join the informal grouping for protection of shipping lanes passing through Malacca, Sunda and Lombok Straits and providing a counterbalance to China's growing influence in the region.

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Art and Culture, Heritage, Society, Social and National Issues

India Gets Its 37th WORLD UNESCO World HERITAGE SITE

Why in news?

☞ Recently, at the **42nd session of the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO at Manama in Bahrain**, India's nomination of the **"Victorian and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai"** was inscribed on UNESCO's **World Heritage list.**

☞ As recommended by the World Heritage Committee, India accepted the renaming of the ensemble as **"Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai".**

About the nomination:

➢ This makes Mumbai city the second city in India after Ahmadabad to be inscribed on the World Heritage List.

➢ This achievement is expected to give a tremendous fillip to domestic and international tourism leading to increased employment generation, creation of world-class infrastructure and augmentation of sale of local handicrafts, handlooms and heritage memorabilia.

About India's standing in UNESCO Heritage list:

➢ India has managed to get inscribed seven of its properties/sites on the World Heritage List of UNESCO.

➢ India now has overall 37 World Heritage Inscriptions with **29 Cultural, 07 Natural and 01 Mixed sites.**

➢ In addition, **42** sites from the country figures in the **Tentative List** of World Heritage and the Ministry of Culture would be recommending one property every year for nomination to UNESCO.

➢ India stands second largest in number after **China** in terms of number of World Heritage properties in **ASPAC (Asia and Pacific**) region; it is overall **sixth** in the world.

About the Victorian and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai :

➢ The Ensemble consists of 94 buildings primarily of 19th century Victorian Gothic revival and early 20th century Art Deco style of architecture with the Oval Maidan in the centre. Together, this architectural ensemble represents the most remarkable collection of Victorian and Art Deco buildings in the world.

➢ The 19th century Victorian buildings form part of the larger Fort precinct situated to the east of the Oval Maidan.

➤ These public buildings include the Old Secretariat (1857-74), University Library and Convention Hall (1874-78), the Bombay High Court (1878), the Public Works Department Office (1872), Watson's Hotel (1869), David Sasoon Library (1870), the Elphinstone College(1888), etc.

➤ The Art Deco styled buildings to the west of the Oval Maidan were raised in early 20thcentury on the newly reclaimed lands at Marine Drive and symbolised the shift in expression to represent contemporary aspirations.

Source: PIB, Indian Express

4 MoUs signed under 'Adopt a Heritage' Scheme

Why in news?

☞ Recently, Four Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) have been signed under 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme and six more are at an advanced stage. The scheme, implemented by the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India, is reported to be making good progress. Around 31 more Adarsh Monuments have been enlisted for coverage under the scheme.

The four MoUs include :

➤ *Mount Stok Kangri Trek Route, Ladakh :* The MoU for adoption was signed between Ministry of Tourism, Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) and the state government of Jammu & Kashmir.

➤ *Gangotri Temple Area & Trail to Gaumukh, Uttarakhand :* The MoU was signed between Ministry of Tourism, ATOAI and Uttarakhand Government.

➤ *Red Fort, Delhi :* The MoU was signed between Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture, ASI and Dalmia Bharat Limited.

➤ *Gandikota Fort, Andhra Pradesh :* The MoU was signed between Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture, ASI and Dalmia Bharat Limited.

Adopt Heritage Project

☞ This project is a key initiative of Ministry of Tourism in close collaboration with Ministry of Culture and Archeological Survey of India (ASI), to develop heritage sites and monuments and make them tourist-friendly to enhance the tourism potential and their cultural importance in a planned and phased manner.

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Key Features

➢ The Adopt a Heritage project aims to develop synergy among all partners to effectively promote 'responsible tourism'.

➢ It aims to involve public sector companies, private sector companies and corporate citizens/individuals to take up the responsibility to make India's heritage and tourism more sustainable through development, operation and maintenance of world-class tourist infrastructure and amenities at ASI/State heritage sites and other important tourist sites.

➢ The selected agency would become 'Monument Mitras' through the innovative concept of "Vision Bidding", where the agency with the best vision for the heritage site will be given an opportunity to associate pride with their CSR activities. Successful bidders selected for adopting heritage sites/monuments by the Oversight and Vision Committee shall be called as Monument Mitras.

➢ They would also get limited visibility in the premises and the Incredible India website. The aim is to enhance enhancement of tourist experience and promote the incredible heritage sites, in order to bring them on the tourism map.

➢ The Government has carried out 'Critical Gap' analysis in respect of the heritage monuments of importance and has identified public conveniences and civic amenities that can be provided in these monuments with the involvement of corporate sector and PSUs under the CSR activities to enhance the visitor experience.

The project mainly focuses on the following :

➢ Basic amenities such as public conveniences, drinking water, cleanliness, ease of access for differently abled and senior citizens, standardised signage and illumination.

➢ Advanced amenities such as surveillance system, night viewing facilities and tourism facilitation center.

➢ Enhanced tourism experience that will result in more tourist footfall, both domestic and foreign.

➢ Several agencies including public, private, ind ividuals, schools and law firms have come forward to adopt heritage moments falling under the project.

➢ Under the project a total of 31 agencies have been approved, so far, to adopt a total of 95 monuments located across India.

Source: PIB, The Times of India

Sanitation Action Plans prepared for 10 new Swachh Iconic Places

Why in news?

☞ Ten new Swachh Iconic Places of the country have come up with thorough action plans for raising their sanitation standards to exemplary levels.

☞ The plans were formulated at a two-day consultation in Hyderabad held between Central and State Government agencies, local administrations and the Trusts of the iconic places. Over 100 delegates from across the country attended the consultation.

☞ All the 30 Swachh Iconic Places, selected so far under the Swachh Bharat Mission, also resolved to make their sites completely free of plastic.

About Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) project

➢ The Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) project was envisioned by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi under the Swachh Bharat Mission and is being coordinated by the Union Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation with the support of State governments and local administration.

➢ SIP is a collaborative project with three other central Ministries: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Tourism.

➢ It also involves local administrations in the concerned States and Public Sector and Private Companies as sponsoring partners.

➢ The goal of the Initiative is to improve the cleanliness conditions at these places to a distinctly higher level

➢ The first phase was launched in 2016, while the Phase II of Swachh Iconic Places was launched in November 2017.

➢ The iconic sites of Phase I and II saw notable transformations such as improved sewage infrastructure, drainage facilities, installation of Sewage Treatment Plant, improved sanitation facilities, Water ATMs, Solid and Liquid Waste Management, structure restoration, roads maintenance and so on.

Ten new iconic sites are as follows:

Swachh Iconic Place	Location	State
RaghavendraSwamy Temple	Kurnool	Andhra Pradesh
Hazardwari Palace	Murshidabad	West Bengal
Brahma Sarovar Temple	Kurukshetra	Haryana
VidurKuti	Bijnor	Uttar Pradesh
Mana village	Chamoli	Uttarakhand
Pangong Lake	Leh-Ladakh	J&K
Nagvasuki Temple	Allahabad	Uttar Pradesh
ImaKeithal/market	Imphal	Manipur
Sabarimala Temple	Pathanamthitta District	Kerala
Kanvashram	Kotdwara	Uttarakhand

○ These 10 sites constitute Phase-III of the Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) initiative of the Swachh Bharat Mission that is coordinated by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.

Source: The Hindu

India Smart Cities Award 2018

Why in news?

☞ Surat smart city has been selected for 'City Award' for showing great momentum in the implementation of projects under 'India Smart Cities Award' 2018.

Overall, nine awards have been announced under the India Smart Cities Awards.

The awards are divided into following categories:

City Award

☞ The city award will be conferred to Surat for showing great momentum in the implementation of projects especially in the categories of urban environment, transport and mobility and sustainable integrated development.

Innovative Idea Award

➢ The Innovative idea award is conferred to a project or an idea that is particularly remarkable for its innovative, bottom-up and transformative approach towards the achievement of sustainable integrated development.

➢ The joint winners in the category include Bhopal for its Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC) and Ahmedabad for its Safe and Secure Ahmedabad (SASA) Project.

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Project Award

☞ The award is given to most innovative and successful projects in seven categories that have been completed by April 1, 2018.

India Smart Cities Award

➢ The awards were launched on June 25, 2017 with an aim to reward cities, projects and innovative ideas, promoting sustainable development in cities.

➢ Only smart cities are eligible for the awards.

➢ The results were declared after a technical committee comprising international/multilateral experts from UN Habitat, Asian Development Bank and NIUA evaluated the submissions based on innovation, impact, replicability and scalability.

➢ The city award was decided on the basis of the cities' performance on their awards score and on weekly ranking score as on May 2, 2018, which was the award application submission deadline.

Source: PIB

Assam to launch awareness programme against superstition

Why in news?

☞ The state government of Assam has recently planned to introduce an awareness programme called 'Sanskar' in all its development blocks and panchayats.

☞ The decision was taken in the wake of incidents triggered by superstition and ignorance including the lynching of two people in Karbi Anglong district.

Key facts

➢ The state has directed the authorities concerned to frame modalities for the programme and a suitable roadmap to implement the programme at all levels of the state in order to avoid any unfortunate situation due to superstitions.

➢ The programme would involve all deputy commissioners, superintendents of police and all government departments concerned in a district.

➢ Assam Science Technology and Environment Council (ASTEC) would be the nodal agency of the programme.

➢ Local bodies, women's organisations, voluntary organizations, media persons, leading citizens, academicians, MPs and MLAs from ruling and opposition parties would be the stakeholders of the programme.

➢ Social activist Birubala Rabha, who has been tirelessly fighting against witch-hunting, will also be a part of the programme.

➢ The state's chief minister also informed the parents of the two youths, who were killed in Karbi Anglong district on June 8 on the suspicion of being child lifters, about the programme. The parents advocated the need for generating awareness throughout the state so that the society could be empowered to prevent recurrence of such an incident in future.

Lynching incident in Assam

➢ Two men from Guwahati, who were on a visit to Assam's Karbi Anglong district, were lynched late night on June 8, 2018 by a group of villagers who suspected them to be child lifters.

➢ A grainy video surfaced after the incident, which showed the mod thrashing the two men-Abhijit Nath and Nilotpal Das, both in their 20s-with sticks, with others in the crowd kicking them around.

➢ The two youth were battered to death on mere suspicion.

➢ The Assam Police have arrested 16 people in connection with the lynching incident.

➢ The arrested persons have been booked under Section 302/34 of IPC and interrogation is on.

Source: The times of India, India Today

India records reduction in Maternal Mortality Ratio

Why in news?

☞ India recorded 22 per cent reduction in Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) since 2013, as per the Sample Registration System (SRS) bulletin that was released by the Office of the Registrar General of India recently.

☞ As per the bulletin, the Maternal Mortality Ratio in India declined from 167 in 2011-2013 to 130 in 2014-2016. The MMR is defined as the proportion of maternal deaths per 1, 00,000 live births.

Key Facts

➢ The decline in the ratio was most significant in Empowered Action Group (EAG) states from 246 to 188.

➢ Among the southern states, the decline was from 93 to 77 and in other states from 115 to 93.

➢ Kerala topped the list with 46 MMR, followed by Maharashtra with 61 and Tamil Nadu with 66.

➢ The highest maternal death ratio was recorded by Assam at 237, though the number is down from 300 in 2011-13.

➢ UP and Uttarakhand registered the second-highest MMR at 201, down from 285 in the last three years.

➢ Besides, three states including Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu were able to meet the SDG target for MMR of 70 per 1, 00,000. Two other states, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, are not very far behind.

➢ According to SRS Bulletin, there were nearly 12,000 fewer maternal deaths in 2016 as compared to 2013, with the total number of maternal deaths reducing to 32,000 for the first time.

➢ The figures mean that every day 30 more pregnant women are being saved in India as compared to 2013.

What is MMR and Maternal Death?

➢ The Maternal mortality ratio is derived as the proportion of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. It represents the risk associated with each pregnancy.

➢ A maternal death is the death of a woman during pregnancy or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy.

➢ The MMR is a key performance indicator for efforts to improve the health and safety of mothers before, during and after childbirth per country worldwide.

➢ In order to understand the maternal mortality situation in the country better and to map the changes that have taken place, especially at the regional level, the government has categorised the states into three groups namely:

➢ **EAG states:** The EAG states include Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Assam and Uttar Pradesh.

➢ **Southern states:** The southern states include Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

➢ **Other states:** The category covers the remaining states and Union territories.

Source: Indian Express

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❑ **POSHAN Abhiyaan TECH-THON being Organized by Ministry of Women and Child Development**

Why in news?

☞ The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development has announced to organise a day-long Seminar on Technology Partnerships 'TECH-THON' for steering POSHAN Abhiyaan.

POSHAN Abhiyaan TECH-THON: Key facts

➢ The upcoming POSHAN Abhiyaan TECH-THON is aimed at improving the nutrition outcomes through effective monitoring and timely intervention.

➢ The Vice Chairman of the NITI Aayog will inaugurate the Seminar and launch the Jan Andolan Guidelines of POSHAN Abhiyaan.

➢ It will showcase and familiarise the people towards the initiative, exchange ideas to explore avenues of cooperation and partnerships for technology support, as well as, reach-out to the beneficiaries for effective behavioural change to initiate a 'Peoples Movement' or 'Jan Andolan' towards Nutrition.

➢ The Seminar will witness the presence of Ministers, top policy makers, participants from multilateral partner institutions like UNICEF, World Bank, WHO, WFP, Tata Trust, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) etc, Philanthropic Private Sectors and Civil Society Organizations.

➢ Leading experts from a range of fields will be present to lead panel discussions and share insights on addressing avenues of cooperation and partnerships for technology support.

➢ An exhibition will also be organised showcasing the technology and other materials of POSHAN Abhiyaan in the gallery of Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra.

POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission)

➢ POSHAN Abhiyaan, also known as National Nutrition Mission, was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 8, 2018 in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan.

➢ The initiative, largely, aims to scale-up the interventions supported by the World Bank assisted Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Systems Strengthening and Nutrition Improvement Project (ISSNIP) to all districts in the country over a 3-year period.

➢ The POSHAN Abhiyaan empowers the frontline functionaries such as the Anganwadi Workers and Lady Supervisors by providing them with Smartphones.

➢ Convergence and use of Technology are the two hallmarks of POSHAN Abhiyaan.

What are the Objectives?

➤ The mission aims to reduce stunting, under-nutrition, anaemia among young children, women and adolescent girls and reduce low birth weight by at least 2 percent per annum.

➤ Though the target to reduce stunting is at least 2 percent per annum, the mission will strive to achieve reduction in stunting from 38.4 percent to 25 percent by 2022.

➤ More than 10 crore people are expected to be benefitted by the programme. It also focuses on adolescent girls, pregnant women & lactating mothers.

➤ It will cover all the states and districts in a phased manner. While 315 districts will be covered in 2017-18 and 235 districts will be covered in 2018-19, the remaining districts will be covered in 2019-20.

Source: PIB

Seva Bhoj Yojna' Launched

Why in news?

☞ The Union Ministry of Culture has recently introduced a new scheme called 'SevaBhojYojna' to reimburse the central share of CGST and IGST on items for food/prasad/langar/bhandara offered free of cost by charitable religious institutions.

Key Facts

➤ The scheme has been launched for financial years 2018-19 and 2019-20 with a total outlay of Rs. 325.00 crores.

➤ The scheme seeks to reimburse the central government's share of Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) and Integrated Goods and Service Tax (IGST) on purchase of raw items which go into preparation of food/prasad/langar/bhandara offered free of cost by religious institutions.

➤ The main objective of the scheme is to lessen the financial burden of such charitable religious institutions, which provide free of cost without any discrimination to the general public and devotees.

Highlights

➤ The Ministry of Culture would be registering the eligible charitable religious institutions for a time period ending with finance commission period and subsequently, the registration may be renewed by the Ministry after the performance evaluation of the institutions.

➤ The details of the registered institutions would be made available on an online portal for the viewership of the public, GST authorities and the entity or institution itself.

➢ The entity/institution will be permitted to submit the reimbursement claim of the GST and Central Government share of IGST to the designated authority of GST Department at the state level in the prescribed format during the validity of registration.

➢ The institution would be required to intimate the Ministry regarding any changes being made in the Memorandum of Association, office bearers or addition/deletion of the location of the free food services.

➢ All the eligible institutions would also be required to be registered with the Darpan portal.

➢ A committee constituted for the purpose within four weeks would be examining all the applications along with supporting documents received from the institutions in the Ministry.

➢ On the basis of the recommendation of the committee, a competent authority in the Ministry shall register charitable religious institutions for reimbursing claim of CGST and central government share of IGST paid on above mentioned specific items.

Who will be eligible for the grant?

➢ The charitable religious institutions including temples, gurudwara, mosque, church, dharmik ashram, dargah, monasteries, which fulfill the following criteria are eligible for the grant:

➢ The institutions that have been in existence for at least five years before applying for financial assistance/grant.

➢ The institutions that serve free food to at least 5000 people in a month.

➢ The institutions covered under Section 10(23BBA) of the Income Tax Act or those registered as Society under Societies Registration Act (XXI of 1860) or as a Public Trust under any law for the time being in force of statuary religious bodies constituted under any Act or institutions registered under Section 12AA of Income Tax Act.

Source : PIB

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Polity & Governance, Social Justice, Social Development

Draft Act to replace UGC with Higher Education Commission of India

Why in news?

☞ The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development has proposed a draft bill to repeal the University Grants Commission (UGC) and set up the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), a move that aims to reform higher education in India.

Key Facts

➢ The draft Act is in accordance with the commitment of Government for reforming the regulatory systems that provide for more autonomy and facilitate holistic growth of the education system.

➢ The Act entitled **'Higher Education Commission of India Act, 2018 (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act)'** revamps UGC Act, 1951 and its parent legislation completely.

➢ The HECI Act, 2018 is expected to be introduced in Parliament in the upcoming monsoon session.

Constitution of the HECI

➢ The Commission will be constituted by the Chairpersons of regulatory bodies in higher education, namely the AICTE and the NCTE.

➢ The Chairpersons/Vice-Chairpersons and members will be scholars of eminence, standing in the field of academics and research and possess leadership qualities.

➢ There will be an Advisory Council within the HECI to render advice to the Commission on matters concerning coordination and determination of standards in the country. This will be represented by the Chairpersons /

➢ Vice-Chairpersons of State Councils for Higher Education and will be chaired by the Union Minister for HRD.

Following are the provisions of the Draft Act

➢ The focus of the Commission will be on improving academic standards and quality of higher education.

➢ It will specify norms for learning outcomes and will lay down standards of teaching/research etc.

➢ It will provide a roadmap for mentoring of institutions found failing in maintaining the required academic standards.

➢ It will enforce its decisions through legal provisions in the Act.

➢ It will have the power to grant authorisation for starting of academic operations on the basis of their compliance with norms of academic quality.

➢ It will also have the powers to annul a higher education institution where there is a case of wilful or continuous default in compliance with the norms.

➢ It will have the power to recommend closure of institutions which fail to adhere to minimum standards without affecting students' interest.

➢ The Commission will encourage higher education institutions to formulate a Code of Good Practices, covering promotion of research, teaching and learning.

➢ The Bill also provides for the penal provisions which will cover withdrawal of power to grant degrees/ diplomas or direction to cease academic operations.

➢ The cases of wilful non-compliance may result in prosecution as per the Criminal Procedure Code with a punishment of imprisonment for a term which may extend up to 3 years.

➢ It will also specify norms and processes for fixing of fee chargeable by higher education institutions.

➢ It will monitor all matters covering the development of emerging fields of knowledge and balanced growth of higher education institutions in all spheres.

What is the significance of this move?

➢ The UGC and its regulatory regime have been criticised several times by a number of committees for its restrictive and suffocating processes.

➢ Several committees including the Professor Yash Pal committee and the National Knowledge Commission of the UPA era and the Hari Gautam committee of Modi regime have recommended a single education regulator to rid higher education of red tape and lethargy.

Source: PIB, Indian Express

⭕ Ministry of Women and Child Development's report 'Women in Prisons'

Why in news?

☞ Union Ministry for Women and Child Development has recently launched the report titled **'Women in Prisons'.**

Key Facts

➢ The report throws light on the condition of women in prisons and their entitlements; issues faced by them and possible methods for resolution of the same.

➢ The report contains a comprehensive list of 134 recommendations for improving the lives of women under incarceration, addresses a wide range of issues pertaining to pregnancy and childbirth in prison, their mental health, legal aid and reintegration in society.

Highlights

➢ The report covers a wide range of issues that women face in prisons. It not only considers the needs of pregnant women, but also those who have recently given birth, those who have miscarried, or those who have recently undergone abortion.

➢ It suggests that the **women with care-giving responsibilities** must be allowed to make arrangements for their children prior to their imprisonment. If there is no family or friends to look after the child (above 6 years of age), then he must be placed in a Child Care Institution.

➢ It proposes **amendment in Section 436A of the CrPC** for granting bail to those under-trial women who have spent one-third of their maximum possible sentence in detention.

➢ It recommends **separate accommodation for mothers in post-natal stage** to maintain hygiene and protect the infant from infection for at least a year after childbirth.

➢ It suggests special provisions for women who have recently given birth outside prison, or who have undergone abortion or miscarriage. It also suggests that pregnant women must be given information and access to abortion during imprisonment.

➢ It suggests that **legal consultations** must be conducted in confidentiality and without censorship.

➢ It proposes **re-integration programme for released women**, covering employment, financial support, regaining of child custody, continuity of health care services etc.

➢ It recommends that prison authorities should coordinate with local police to ensure released prisoners are not harassed by them due to the attached stigma.

➢ It recommends **robust grievance redressal system** for women to tackle cases of sexual harassment, violence and abuse against women in jails.

➢ Apart from the prisoner herself, her legal adviser or family members should be allowed to make complaints regarding her stay in prison.

➢ Inmates should have **access to female counselors or psychologists** at least on a weekly basis or as frequently as needed by them.

Statistics related to the women prisoners

➢ As per most recent data of 2015, there are 419623 persons in jail in India, of which, 17834 (about 4.3 percent) are women.

➢ Of these, 11916 (66.8 percent) are undertrial prisoners.

➢ The analysis of prison statistics reveals an increasing trend in the number of women prisoners from 3.3 percent of all prisoners in 2000 to 4.3 percent in 2015.

➢ A majority of female inmates are in the age group of 30-50 years (50.5 percent), followed by 18-30 years (31.3 percent).

➢ Of the total 1401 prisons in India, only 18 are exclusive for women, housing 2985 female prisoners.

Source: PIB

National Consultation on Child Protection

Why in news?

☞ The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) has recently organised the National Consultation on Child Protection.

Key Facts

➢ The conference purposefully discussed the Juvenile Justice (Care and protection of Children) Act (JJ Act), 2015 and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012.

➢ The first part of National Consultation focused on deliberations with regard to JJ Act, 2015; POCSO Act, 2012; Trackchild and Childline (1098) with an aim to introspect on various issues and concerns which have manifested lately.

➢ The second part of the National Consultation focused on the child care and protection issues of Child Protection Services (CPS) Scheme; and areas of concern during the implementation issues in the States and seeks proposals, solutions and way forward.

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What is the significance?

➢ The National Consultation on Child Protection was organised as a part of new initiative by Ministry of Women and Child Development to deliberate the issues concerning child protection with all the State Women and Child Development Departments and State Police Departments along with Union Ministry of Home Affairs and National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPC.

➢ The Ministry of Women and Child Development is implementing various laws and schemes such as: Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act), Child Protection Services (CPS).

➢ All these laws and schemes fall under the umbrella Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) for the protection of children from various abuses and ensuring their best interest.

Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act

➢ The JJ Act, 2015 mandates upon the State to provide a safety net to children in need of care and protection for children in conflict with law.

➢ It provides for Institutional and Non-institutional care for these children, along with certain statutory services.

➢ The Act is gender neutral and acknowledges person up to 18 years of age as child.

➢ The Act covers offences like sale and procurement of children for any purpose including illegal adoption; corporal punishment in child care institutions and offences against disabled children.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act,2012

➢ POCSO Act was established to protect the children against offences like sexual abuse, sexual harassment and pornography.

➢ The Act defines a child as any person below eighteen years of age. It also makes provisions for avoiding the re-victimisation of the child at the hands of the judicial system.

➢ The Act provides for punishment against false complaints or untrue information. It describes strict action against the offender according to the gravity of the offence.

Child Protection Services (CPS)

➤ The Child Protection services, under the Umbrella ICDS, provide statutory support Services along with Institutional and Non-institutional facilities to ensure best interest of child.

➤ It also provides for the 24*7 child helpline and an online portal to track the missing children.

➤ Under the scheme, 1508 Child Care Institutions (CCIs) are being supported with average occupancy of 50 children.

Source: PIB

❍ Centre forms Cauvery Management Authority to address water-sharing dispute.

Why in news?

☞ Following directions from Supreme Court, the Central Government has constituted the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CMA) to address the dispute over sharing of river water among Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Puducherry.

Significance of notification:

➤ This would help to solve the long running conflict on distribution of Cauvery waters.

➤ It will make the management of Cauvery water scientific.

Background:

☞ In February, 2018 judgement, the Supreme Court had directed centre to form the CMA within six weeks. In the same verdict, the court had also increased Karnataka's share in Cauvery Water marginally.

About Cauvery Water Management Authority (CMA) :

☞ The newly constituted *Cauvery Water Management Authority* (CMA) has been created as per the Cauvery Management Scheme earlier framed by Centre and approved by Supreme Court.

Composition and Powers of CMA:

➤ The authority will comprise a chairman, a secretary and eight members. Out of the eight members, two will be full time, while two will be part time members from centre's side.

➤ Rest four will be part time members from states. The main mandate of the CMA will be to secure implementation and compliance of the Supreme Court's order in relation to "storage, apportionment, regulation and control of Cauvery waters".

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➢ CMA will also advise the states to take suitable measures to improve water use efficiency. It will do so by promoting use of micro-irrigation, change in cropping patterns, improved farm practices and development of command areas.

➢ The CMA will also prepare an annual report covering its activities during the preceding year.

Role of Central Government

➢ The central government will provide help in implementation of the modified award in case of any of the state /UT parties (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Puducherry) do not cooperate in implementing the decision or direction of the tribunal.

➢ Initially, centre will contribute Rs. 2 crore for the functioning of the authority.

Cauvery Water Regulation Committee:

➢ Along with CMA, the government has also established Cauvery Water Regulation Committee that shall give effect to the decision of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal as modified by the Supreme Court order.

➢ This committee will meet every 10 days during months of June and October when the south-west and north-east monsoon set in and again after the monsoon has set in.

About river Cauvery :

➢ Cauvery River rises on Brahmagiri Hill of the Western Ghats in south-western Karnataka state. It flows in a south-easterly direction for 475 miles through the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

➢ Before emptying into the Bay of Bengal south of Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu, the river breaks into a large number of distributaries forming a wide delta called the "garden of southern India." The river is important for its irrigation canal projects.

➢ In the upper course, at the Krishnaraja Sagara, the Kaveri is joined by two tributaries, the Hemavati and Lakshmantirtha, where a dam was constructed for irrigation.

➢ Upon entering Tamil Nadu, the Kaveri continues through a series of twisted wild gorges until it reaches Hogenakal Falls. There the Mettur Dam was construted for irrigation and hydel power.

➢ Its main tributaries are the Kabani (Kabbani), Amaravati, Noyil, and Bhavani rivers.

Source: The Hindu, Economic Times

Rural sanitation coverage crosses 85 per cent mark

Why in news?

➢ The sanitation coverage in rural India has risen to 85 per cent under Swachh Bharat Mission, the largest cleanliness drive in the world.

➢ A recent survey conducted by an Independent Verification Agency across 90,000 households in over 6000 villages found that the usage of toilets in rural India had risen to 93.4%.

➢ Two independent surveys conducted in the past by the Quality Council of India in 2017 and National Sample Survey Organization in 2016 also recorded the usage of toilets in rural India to be around 91 per cent and 95 per cent respectively.

➢ Through mobilisation of rural communities, around 7.4 crore toilets have been built across rural India, and as an outcome, over 3.8 lakh villages and 391 districts have been declared Open Defecation Free (ODF).

➢ The development is significant because under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen), sanitation coverage increased to more than double the coverage at the time of the launch of the Mission.

➢ The success has reportedly been achieved due to the difference in approach to sanitation adopted by the Swachh Bharat Mission in comparison to the previous sanitation programmes in the country.

Swachh Bharat Mission

☞ The campaign, which was launched on October 2, 2014, is India's largest cleanliness drive and it aims to clean up the streets, roads and infrastructure of India's cities, smaller towns and rural areas.

The mission's objectives are :

➢ Eliminating open defecation through the construction of household-owned and community-owned toilets and establishing an accountable mechanism for monitoring toilet use.

➢ Achieving an Open-Defecation Free (ODF) India by October 2, 2019, on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, by constructing 90 million toilets in rural India.

➢ Helping India reach Sustainable Development Goal Number 6 (SDG 6).

➢ The mission is the first sanitation programme in the country to measure outcomes (ODF) instead of output (toilets) alone.

➢ The mission's emphasis on behavior change in rural sanitation at the grassroots has lead to rigorous verification and sustainability of the benefits accrued to rural communities under the progress made.

➢ Since its launch, the mission has evolved into a people's movement and it is the participation of the people that has led to its current success.

Source: The Hindu, PIB

Govt proposes to ban obscene depiction of women on internet

Why in news?

☞ The Ministry of Women and Child Development has recently proposed amendments to the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (IRWA), 1986 with an aim to ban obscene and indecent depiction of women on internet.

Key Facts

➢ The original law prohibits the indecent portrayal of women only in the print media via advertisements, publications and paintings. The punishment included is a fine of Rs 2000 and prison term up to two years.

➢ The amendments have been proposed keeping in view the recent technological developments in the field of electronic communication and are similar to the provisions under section 67 of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000.

➢ Sections 67 and 67A of the IT Act lay down a punishment of three to five years for circulating obscene material and five to seven years for circulating sexually explicit material, respectively.

About the proposed amendment: Highlights

➢ The Centre proposed amendments to widen the scope of the Indecent Representation of Women Act to include digital and internet-based communication services.

➢ Once the Parliament passes the proposed amendments, the indecent representation of women in electronic forms through text and online messaging services will be treated as an offence and will attract penalties similar to those under the Information Technology Act, 2000.

➢ The ministry proposes a fine of Rs 2 lakh and a prison term of up to three years.

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- ➢ It proposes amendment in the definition of 'advertisement' to including digital and electronic form of hoardings i.e. the SMS and MMS.

- ➢ It also proposed to amend the definition of 'distribution' of material to include publishing, licensing or uploading it digitally.

- ➢ It also proposes amendments in Section 4 of the Act to include that no person shall publish or distribute any material which contains indecent representation of women in any form.

- ➢ The government has also proposed to include hoardings in the Act as it is limited to traditional media such as books, pamphlets, images and films.

- ➢ The proposed amendments call for setting up a central authority under the National Commission of Women to receive and investigate complaints of offences under the law.

- ➢ The authority will have representatives from Advertising Standards Council of India, Press Council of India and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Background

☞ The amendments were proposed after the government received the inputs from the parliamentary standing committee formed in 2012 to study a bill to bring the law up to date and also from the National Commission for Women.

Source: The Hindu

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International Relations, India & the World and International Affairs

G7 Summit: Trump abandons joint statement

Why in news?

☞ The 44th summit of the Group of Seven (G7), which was held from June 8–9, 2018 in La Malbaie, Quebec, Canada, ended in complete disarray with US President Donald Trump blasting off host Canada and abruptly retracting his support for a joint statement, signed by every nation in the group.

What is G7?

➢ The G7 includes a group of seven most industrialized, developed and advanced economies of the world.

➢ It includes US, UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan. The countries meet annually and discuss global issues.

➢ The G7 Summit is an event that is conducted annually where leaders from the seven most powerful economies of the world - US, Canada, UK, France, Germany, Japan and Italy come together to discuss burning issues happening around the globe.

➢ The leaders, by mutual understanding, also form policies or figure out remedies for the concerned issues.

➢ Each year, the location of the summit rotates among the member countries.

➢ The host country not only sets the agenda for the year but also holds the G7 presidency.

➢ The current presidency of the G7 is held by Canada, which is also the host of the 2018 G7 summit.

➢ The 2019 summit will be held in Biarritz, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France. The presidency will also automatically shift to France in the year.

➢ Last year's G7 summit was hosted by Italy.

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➢ Russia became a formal member of the group in 1998, making it G8. The move aimed to encourage capitalist reforms in the country.

➢ However, in 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin alarmed the world leaders by moving Russian troops into eastern Ukraine and taking over Crimea.

➢ The other nations in the G8 heavily condemned the act and decided to suspend Russia as a consequence of its actions.

➢ The group became G7 again in 2014.

The five themes for this year's summit are as follows:

➢ Inclusive economic growth

➢ Gender equality and women's empowerment

➢ World security

➢ Jobs of the future

➢ Climate change and oceans

"G6 plus one"

➢ The G7 summit was dominated by disagreements, notably over trade.

➢ Trump's 'America first' policy has led to policy decisions that have angered even the closest of US allies.

➢ Trump infuriated Canada and European Union members of the G7 by imposing tariffs on steel and aluminum and pulling out of a deal to monitor Iran's nuclear activities.

➢ On the eve of the summit, Trump slammed both Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau and French President Emmanuel Macron for their trade tariffs on the United States.

➢ With Trump's isolation from other allies, the G7 has been billed as a 'G6 plus one' with US on the outs for the first-ever time.

The tariffs

➢ On June 1, the US imposed a 25 per cent tariff for steel and 10 per cent for aluminium on imports from the EU, Canada, and Mexico.

➢ Trump said the move would protect domestic producers that were vital to US security. Trump feels that the United States has been taken advantage of for decades and decades.

➢ The European Union then announced tariffs on US goods ranging from Harley-Davidson motorcycles to bourbon.

➢ Canada and Mexico are planning to retaliate to the action with their own tariffs.

⭕ Canada and partners announce single largest investment in the education of girls

➢ Canada, along with the European Union, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom and the World Bank announced an investment worth $3.8 billion CAD in education for women and girls in crisis and conflict situations.

➢ The move marks a fundamental shift towards improving access and reducing barriers to quality education around the world.

➢ Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a top priority for Canada and its G7 Presidency and equal access to quality education and learning opportunities is essential to make gender equality a reality.

The investment will support global action to:

➢ Equip women and girls with the skills needed for the jobs of the future

➢ Improve training for teachers to provide better curriculum for women and girls

➢ Improve the quality of available data on women's and girls' education

➢ Promote greater coordination between humanitarian and development partners

➢ Support innovative education methods, especially for vulnerable and hard to reach groups, including refugees and displaced people.

➢ Support developing countries in efforts to provide equal opportunities for girls to complete at least 12 years of quality education, from primary to secondary school

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

Financial Action Task Force puts Pakistan on 'grey list'

Why in news?

☞ The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has recently added Pakistan to its 'grey list' of countries involved in providing monetary assistance to terrorism and related causes. The decision was taken during FATF meeting on Money Laundering in Paris.

Key Facts

➢ Pakistan had earlier been included in the 'grey list' from 2012 to 2015.

➢ FATF had earlier taken the decision to place Pakistan on its grey list during a plenary meeting in February 2018.

➢ At that time, China, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, leading the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that votes as one bloc, were against Pakistan being put in the grey list.

➢ The grey list puts countries under the scanner for not implementing the objectives of the task force.

➢ As per FATF rules, three votes from the FATF's members are needed for not putting a country in the grey list.

What are the impacts?

➢ With its entry into the grey list, Pakistan will be on intense scrutiny by FATF and its members. It's a major setback for the country that has been trying to improve its image globally.

➢ Being included in the FATF watch list could give a blow to Pakistan's economy as it would make it harder for foreign investors and companies to do business in the country that is blamed for funding terror activities.

➢ Being put on FATF list could make borrowing from international debt markets harder and costlier for Pakistan. It might reduce Pakistan's credibility in the international market.

➢ The grey listing would not only amplify Pakistan's risk profile, but could also make it difficult for foreign banks and financial institutions to deal with Pakistani banks and counterparties. Foreign banks could also pull out of Pakistan.

➢ In case, if grey listing leads to a decline in foreign transactions and if it blows off Pakistan's economy, it will directly lead to widening of Pakistan's Current Account Deficit (CAD), which has already been very huge.

➤ The grey listing would lessen the investors' confidence in the country. Some may cut short their investments, while others may pull out their investments completely. However, a large part of foreign investment in Pakistan is sourced from friendly nations like China and Saudi Arabia.

➤ Pakistan's export of rice, cotton, marble, clothes, onions and other items will suffer a lot, causing huge loss to producers. Moreover, accessing funds and goods from international market would become tougher.

About Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

➤ The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 by the Ministers of its Member jurisdictions.

➤ Established during the G7 Summit in Paris (France), the organisation aims to establish international standards for combating money laundering and terrorist financing and seeks to combat the growing problem of money laundering.

➤ FATF Secretariat is housed at the headquarters of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris.

➤ FATF's decision making body is the 'FATF Plenary'. The FATF plenary sessions are held in February, June and October every year.

➤ It consists of over 39 member countries including India. Currently, China is the Vice President of the FATF.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

❑ **India, Cuba sign MoUs to enhance co-operation in field of Biotechnology, medicine & homoeopathy**

Why in news?

☞ India and Cuba on June 22, 2018 signed two Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) in the field of biotechnology, traditional medicine and homoeopathy.

☞ The agreements were signed following delegation-level talks between President Ram Nath Kovind and his Cuban counterpart Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel at Revolution Palace in Havana, Cuba.

Key Facts

➤ Both the countries agreed to enhance cooperation in biotechnology, renewable energy and traditional medicine.

➤ The health ministries of Cuba and India signed an MOU to increase cooperation in traditional medicine and homeopathy.

➢ Meanwhile, envoys from the Ministry of Science and Technology of both the sides agreed on an MOU to deepen collaboration on biotechnology. In this context, a Letter of Intent was signed between BioCubaFarma, Cuba's state company for pharmaceutical and biotechnology products, and India's Kalam Institute of Health Technology.

➢ Cuba reaffirmed its support to India's candidature for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

Indo-Cuba Relations

☞ India shares strong, cordial and friendly relations with Cuba. Cuba and India have historic ties which date back to 1959 when famous guerrilla fighter Ernesto Guevara visited New Delhi.

☞ Both the countries are founding members of Non-Aligned Movement and have stood for South-South solidarity. The two countries have also collaborated very closely in United Nations and other forums.

Source: PIB

❍ Qingdao Declaration: India refuses to endorse China's One Belt One Road initiative

Why in news?

☞ India has refused to endorse Chinese President Xi Jinping's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project as part of a joint declaration at the 18th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Qingdao.

☞ It was for the first time that the Indian prime minister attended the SCO summit after India and Pakistan became full-fledged members of the grouping.

What is Belt and Road Initiative?

➢ The Belt and Road Initiative is a development strategy proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

➢ The initiative aims at connectivity and cooperation among countries primarily between the People's Republic of China and the rest of Eurasia, which consists of two main components, the land-based "Silk Road Economic Belt" and oceangoing "Maritime Silk Road".

➢ It was unveiled in September 2013 and October 2013 in announcements revealing the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road, respectively.

The initiative is structured along 6 corridors and the maritime Silk Road. They are:

➢ New Eurasian Land Bridge, running from Western China to Western Russia

➢ China - Mongolia - Russia Corridor, running from Northern China to Eastern Russia

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- China - Central Asia - West Asia Corridor, running from Western China to Turkey

- China - Indochina Peninsula Corridor, running from Southern China to Singapore

- China - Pakistan Economic Corridor, running from South-Western China to Pakistan

- Bangladesh - China - India - Myanmar Corridor, running from Southern China to India

- Maritime Silk Road, running from the Chinese Coast over Singapore and India to the Mediterranean

India's stand against One Belt One Road initiative

- India has been severely critical of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as the USD 50 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is part of the BRI, passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

- India was the only member in the eight-nation SCO bloc to do so and stressed for initiatives that ensure inclusivity.

- Except India, all other member nations of the SCO including Russia, Pakistan and Iran have supported China's BRI.

- Pakistan's President Mamnoon Hussain supported the BRI and said the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has boosted Pakistan's economy.

Qingdao Declaration

- All SCO members including China, India and Russia, came out with a declaration with a resolve to deepen cooperation to contain terrorism, extremism and separatism.

- They talked about the special role of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure in the fight against the three evils- terrorism, extremism and separatism.

- They condemned all forms of terrorism and consider it necessary to make efforts to promote the creation of a unified global counterterrorism front.

- The declaration calls for reaching consensus for adopting the **'UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism'**.

- The SCO leaders also adopted a **'Joint Appeal to Youth'**, in which they appealed to youths not to get influenced by extremist ideologies.

- They also noted that the interference in the domestic affairs of other states under the pretence of combating terrorism and extremism is unacceptable.

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➢ In relation to the developments in the Middle East, the SCO talked about growing threat from foreign terrorists who return to their countries or find shelter in other countries to continue their terrorist activity within the bloc.

➢ They called for strengthening their cooperation in combating the spread of terrorist ideology through the internet.

➢ They also reaffirmed their commitment to improve the mechanism of cooperation within the bloc to combat illegal drug trafficking.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

➢ The SCO is a Eurasian economic, political and security organisation, headquartered in Beijing, China.

➢ It was founded at a summit in Shanghai in 2001 by the presidents of Russia, China, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

➢ India and Pakistan became full members of the organisation at Astana Summit in Kazakhstan in June 2017.

➢ The SCO currently has eight member countries which represent around 42 percent of the world's population and 20 percent of the global GDP.

Source: The Hindu, Times of India

Mauritius will organize 11th World Hindi Conference

Why in news?

☞ The 11th World Hindi Conference will be held in Mauritius from August 18 to August 20, 2018 with an aim to increase the popularity of Hindi globally.

Key Facts

➢ The main theme of the Conference is *'Hindi Vishwa Aur Bharatiy Sanskriti'*.

➢ The venue of the Conference is Swami Vivekanand International Convention Centre, Pailles Mauritius.

11th World Hindi Conference: Highlights

➢ The World Hindi Secretariat (WHS) will be the organising authority of the event.

➢ The conference will cover both classical and modern elements of Hindi and will see participation of delegates and scholars of Hindi from all over the world.

➢ This World Hindi Conference seeks to produce concrete guidelines for the promotion of Hindi as a language of globalisation.

➤ The Ministry of External Affairs also aims to promote Hindi at the United Nations and in this regard, a lot of work is being done and the disclosures would be made at the World Hindi Conference.

➤ As part of the preparation, regular official visits to Port Louis have been taking place in the past few months including one by Secretary in charge of Eastern affairs in the Ministry, Preeti Saran.

➤ The special focus of this year's event will be on Bollywood and the global reach of Hindi through movies.

World Hindi Conference

➤ The World Hindi Conference was conceptualised in Wardha of Maharashtra in 1973 and the first conference was held in Nagpur in 1975.

➤ The Conference is organised once in every three years by the External Affairs Ministry with an aim to propagate the use of the Hindi language across the world.

➤ So far, India hosted the event for three times including the present conference. India hosted it for the second time in 1983 in New Delhi.

➤ The conference was also held in Mauritius in 1976 and 1993, in Trinidad and Tobago in 1996, in London (1999), Surinam (2003), New York (2007) and Johannesburg (2012).

Source: Business Standard

Global Peace Index 2018

Why in news?

☞ India fetched 136th rank among 163 countries on the 2018 Global Peace Index that was released on June 7, 2018 by the Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP), an Australian think tank.

While, Iceland managed to retain its position as the most peaceful country in the world.

Key Facts

➤ Global level of peace has deteriorated by 0.27 percent in the last year.

➤ A total of 71 countries have shown improvement in their rankings on the index, while, 92 countries have shown deterioration in their rankings on the index.

➤ Amid continuing social and political turmoil, the world continues to spend resources on creating violence, but very little on peace.

➤ **Iceland** fetched 1st rank on the index, a position it has held since 2008, followed by **New Zealand** and **Austria** at 2nd and 3rd position.

- ➢ **Portugal** and **Denmark** rounded up the top five most peaceful rankings.

- ➢ **Syria** remains the least peaceful country in the world, a position it has held for the past five years. **Afghanistan, South Sudan, Iraq** and **Somalia** round up the list of five least peaceful countries.

- ➢ Four most peaceful regions are Europe, North America, Asia-Pacific, and South America; however, all these regions recorded deteriorations.

- ➢ The greatest increase in the number of deaths occurred in **Syria**, followed by **Mexico, Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen**.

- ➢ The countries that displayed the most significant growth in heavy weapons capabilities over the last 30 years are located in unstable regions facing high tensions with neighbouring countries. These include **Egypt, India, Iran, Pakistan, South Korea** and **Syria**.

Indian Context

- ➢ India's GPI rank was 137th out of 163 countries in 2017, when the year 2016 was assessed. In 2018, India's rank moved up to 136, when the year 2017 is assessed.

- ➢ This is largely attributed to reduction in level of violent crime, driven by increased law enforcement.

- ➢ Meanwhile, unrest in Kashmir raised tensions between India and Pakistan, with the number of deaths from external conflict increasing in both countries.

- ➢ India also stands among the countries that have witnessed biggest decrease in the number of deaths. These are Sri Lanka, Chad, Colombia and Uganda.

Global Peace Index (GPI)

- ➢ GPI was launched in 2007 as a measure of world peace.

- ➢ It is the world's leading measure of global peacefulness produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP).

- ➢ The Index is composed of 23 indicators, ranging from a nation's level of military expenditure to its relations with neighbouring countries and the percentage of prison population in 163 countries.

- ➢ The IEP is a Sydney-based international and independent think tank dedicated to shift the world's focus to peace as a positive, achievable, and tangible measure of human well-being and progress.

Source: The Hindu

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Indian Economy and Economic Development

Second Bi-monthly Monetary Policy Statement 2018-19 by RBI

Why in news?

☞ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has in June released its Second Bi-monthly Monetary Policy Statement 2018-19.

☞ After assessing the current and evolving macroeconomic situation in the economy, the six members Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to:

➢ Increase the policy Repo Rate under the Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF) by 25 basis points to 6.25 percent.

➢ The Reverse Repo Rate under the LAF stands adjusted to 6.0 percent.

➢ The Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) rate and the Bank Rate stand at 6.5 percent.

➢ The decision of the MPC was consistent with the monetary policy in consonance with the objective of achieving the medium-term target for Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation of 4 percent within a band of +/- 2 per cent.

Key Highlights

➢ The RBI retained GDP growth for 2018-19 at 7.4 percent, the same as that of the First Bi-monthly Monetary Policy Statement in April. Growth is projected in the range of 7.5-7.6 percent in April-September and 7.3-7.4 percent in October-March.

➢ The committee revised the retail inflation estimate to 4.8-4.9 percent for the first half of 2018-19 and 4.7 percent in the second half.

➢ The statement mentioned various regulatory initiatives undertaken to increase activity and participation in financial markets, such as, strengthening of regulations to prevent abusive market practices and development of a fair practice code (FPC) by the Fixed Income Money Market and Derivatives Association of India (FIMMDA).

➢ The Urban Co-Operative Banks can now covert into Small Finance Banks after meeting the prescribed criteria. The details of the scheme will be announced separately by the RBI.

➢ The committee announced to set up a Public Credit Registry, an information repository that has all loan information of individuals and corporate borrowers.

➢ RBI has also allowed all banks to spread their mark-to-market losses on investments in 'Available for Sale' and 'Held for trading' for the April-June quarter of 2018, equally over four quarters.

➢ RBI also announced to ease the transition of MSMEs to the formalised sector post their registration under the GST.

➢ Considering the level of non-performing assets (NPAs) for the ticket size of up to Rs 2 lakh as high, RBI asked banks to strengthen their screening and follow up in respect of lending to this segment in particular.

Source: Economic Times

Credit enhancement fund to be launched by the Government

Why in news?

☞ The Union Government is planning to launch Rs 500-crore worth credit enhancement fund in July to boost infrastructure financing.

☞ Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had in his 2016-17 Budget speech announced that the Rs 500-crore credit enhancement fund to be set up to help raise credit rating of bonds floated by infrastructure companies.

Key Facts

➢ The dedicated fund is expected to operate as a non-banking financial company (NBFC) with 49 percent government stake.

➢ It is expected to get support from investors including India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd (IIFCL) and Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India.

➢ The China-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is also expected to infuse equity to pick up 10 percent of its stake.

➢ The initial corpus of the fund, to be sponsored by IIFCL, will be Rs 500 crore. IIFCL will also hold a 22.5 per cent stake in the NBFC.

➢ The state-run SBI, Bank of Baroda and LIC will also have stakes in the firm.

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Significance of the move

➢ The bank lending to the infrastructure segment has reportedly slowed down in the past few years and the annual growth rates fell to 3 percent between FY14-17, as against 43 percent from FY 2000-2013.

➢ The non-performing assets (NPAs) from the segment also rose to 9 per cent in FY17, from 3 percent in FY13.

➢ Currently, only $110 billion is being invested in infrastructure, as against the required $200 billion, which has led many analysts to classify India as an infrastructure deficit country.

Source: The Hindu, Business Standard

RBI to set up Public Credit Registry

Why in news?

☞ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on June 6, 2018 announced to set up a Public Credit Registry, an information repository that has all loan information of individuals and corporate borrowers.

☞ The repository will be set up in a modular and phased manner. Moreover, RBI will be setting up an implementation task force to undertake the logistics for setting up of the credit repository.

What is the significance?

➢ With the help of the credit repository, banks will be able to differentiate between a bad and a good borrower, thus, can accordingly offer attractive interest rates to good borrowers and higher interest rates to bad borrowers.

➢ It will address issues of information asymmetry, improve access to credit and strengthen the credit culture among consumers.

➢ It will help in addressing the bad loans problem being faced in the banking system, as corporate borrowers will not be able to lend from multiple banks without disclosing their existing debt.

➢ It will also help improve India's rankings in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index.

❍ **Following are the recommendations of the task force on Public Credit Registry**

➢ The move is based on the recommendations of a committee headed by Y.M. Deosthalee that was set up in 2017. The committee submitted its report in April 2018.

➢ The task force recommended that the registry should be set up by RBI and in due course, the RBI may consider moving the registry to a separate non-profit entity.

➢ It envisaged that Public Credit Registry shall be set up as a registry of all credit contracts duly verified by reporting institutions, for lending in India and any lending by Indian financial institution to Indian person.

➢ It recommended that PCR shall serve as a registry of all credit contracts irrespective of any threshold amount and shall be backed by a legal framework.

➢ The registry should also capture data such as external commercial borrowings, market borrowings, and all contingent liabilities.

➢ The registry shall capture both positive and negative information for all loans and borrowers.

➢ The data will be available to stakeholders like banks on a need-to-know basis strictly and privacy of data will be protected.

➢ It also proposed linkages with other defaulter databases like the wilful defaulter's list and that maintained by Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India.

Source: The Hindu, Live Mint

One year of GST: Issues and Challenges

Why in news?

☞ India on July 1, 2018 observed the 1st Goods and Services Tax (GST) Day to commemorate the first year of the unprecedented reform of Indian taxation.

Also, the Union Finance Ministry announced to observe July 1, 2018 as the 'GST Day'.

About GST

➢ The GST is a single indirect tax that subsumes most of the Central and State taxes such as the Value Added Tax (VAT), excise duty, service tax, central sales tax, additional customs duty and special additional duty of customs.

➢ The Tax was notified through the Constitution 122nd Amendment) (GST) Bill, 2014 and was enacted through Constitution (101st Amendment) Act, 2016.

➢ A special GST Network (GSTN) was created for GST implementation. Under this, section 25 private limited companies with Strategic Control under the Union Government were mandated to function as a common Pass-through portal for taxpayers.

➢ It facilitates the taxpayers by prescribing grant of refund within 60 days, and provisional release of 90 percent refund to exporters within 7 days.

➢ Under GST, the tax incidence is transparent, enabling full removal of tax burden on exports and full incidence of domestic taxes on imports.

About the GST Model

➢ India adopted dual GST model because of its unique federal nature.

➢ Under this model, tax is levied concurrently by the Centre as well as the States on a common base that is for the supply of goods or services or both.

➢ GST to be levied by the Centre is called Central GST (Central tax / CGST) and that to be levied by the States is called State GST (State Tax / SGST).

➢ State GST (SGST) is referred as UTGST (Union territory tax) in case of the Union Territories without legislature.

➢ CGST, SGST and UTGST are levied on all taxable intra-State supplies.

➢ Inter-State supply of goods or services is subjected to Integrated GST (IGST). The IGST Model envisages that Centre would levy IGST which would be CGST plus SGST on all inter-State supply of goods or services or both.

➢ Before implementation of GST, Indian taxation system was comprised of central, state and local area levies.

➢ Multiple taxes, multiple returns to be filed by assesses, interface with multiple tax authorities, cascading effect of taxes, rising inflation, no free flow of goods across the country, fragmented markets across the country were some of the vague issues plaguing the indirect taxation system in India.

❑ Issues and Challenges faced during the implementation of GST Regime

➢ The implementation of a tax reform like GST in a diverse country like India required a lot of efforts on the state and national level and drew a lot of challenges like the reconciliation of interests of various States with that of the Centre.

➢ Some of these issues in cluded origin-based versus destination-based taxation, rate structure and compensation, dispute settlement, inclusion of Alcohol and Petroleum products under GST.

➢ Resolution of these issues took some time and finally, the Constitution (122nd Amendment) Bill, 2014 was introduced in the Parliament in December 2014 to replace the Indian taxation system with the GST and was enacted as **Constitution (101st Amendment) Act, 2016** with effect from September 16, 2016.

- Many of the processes under the GST are new for small and medium enterprises in particular, who were not used to regular and online filing of returns and other formalities.

- However, the government has put in place the IT grievance redressal mechanism to address the difficulties faced by taxpayers owing to technical glitches on the GST portal.

What are the impacts of GST?

- The GST regime has resulted in **'ONE NATION, ONE TAX, ONE MARKET'**, replacing multi-layered, complex indirect tax structure with a simple, transparent and technology–driven tax regime.

- It has improved the **'Ease of Doing Business'** in India with the introduction of the common procedures for registration, duty payment, return filing and refund of taxes.

- The GST has also been successful in promoting **'Digital India'** initiative with the launch of the GST portal. From returns to refunds, everything happens online.

- This reform has created a unified market; and the **cascading of taxes** has been eliminated.

- The tax reform has also put an **end to the illegal activities** like tax evasion through the simplification of the tax administration and transformation in the culture among trade and industry.

- The introduction of e-way bill has ensured hassle free movement of goods throughout the country. It has led to **tremendous gains for logistic sector** through abolition of toll collection at state borders, saving time for trucks.

- The regime has **benefitted the poor and middle class families** as well, as the large number of daily use items are either exempted from the GST or fall under 5 percent tax slab. Moreover, 95 percent items fall in or below 18 percent GST slab.

- It also **augmented opportunities for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME)** as enterprises having a turnover of Rs. 20 lakhs are exempted from GST and those with a turnover up to Rs 1 crore have to pay only 1 percent tax. There is no GST on advance supply of goods for SME.

Source: Economic Times

Solar Charkha Mission

Why in news?

☞ President Ram Nath Kovind recently launched the 'Solar Charkha Mission' on the occasion of the UN MSME Day to mark the important economic role played by Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

Key Facts

➢ The Solar Charkha Mission was launched with an aim to employ artisans in 50 identified clusters.

➢ The mission will entail a subsidy of Rs 550 crore in the initial two years for 50 clusters and every cluster will employ 400 to 2000 artisans.

➢ The mission will generate employment in rural areas and will contribute to the green economy.

➢ It also aims at linking five crore women across the country to the initiative.

➢ The mission is expected to create one lakh jobs during the first two years.

Sampark portal

➢ President Kovind also launched the 'Sampark portal', a digital platform to connect five lakh job seekers with recruiters.

➢ This digital platform will be useful in creating a skill pool of workers and connecting trained youth with job opportunities.

About Indian Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Sector

➢ The Indian MSME sector provides maximum opportunities for both self-employment and wage-employment outside the agricultural sector.

➢ The sector generates around 100 million jobs through over 46 million units situated throughout the geographical expanse of the country.

➢ Besides the wide range of services provided by the sector, the sector is engaged in the manufacturing of over 6,000 products ranging from traditional to hi-tech items.

➢ Currently, MSME sector leverages demographic dividend of the country and promotes inclusive growth in rural and backward areas. The sector accounted for around 60 percent employment in India.

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➢ There are about 6.5 crore MSMEs in India which have created over 11 crore job opportunities.

➢ Such enterprises have registered over 10 percent growth in recent times which is much more compared to large enterprises.

➢ At Present, the Ministry of MSME is working to set up 15 new modern technology centres all over the country including in the Northeast. Each centre is being built at a cost of around Rs 150 crore.

Source: PIB, The Hindu

India hikes import duty on 29 US products

Why in news?

☞ In a retaliatory move to the heavy tariffs imposed by the United States on imported steel and aluminium items, India has decided to raise customs duty on 29 US products including almond, walnut and pulses.

☞ The duty hike would come into effect from August 4, as per a notification from the Union finance ministry.

Key Facts

➢ While import duty on walnut has been hiked to 120 per cent from 30 per cent, the duty for shelled almond has been increased to Rs120/kg from Rs 100/kg earlier.

➢ The import duty on chickpeas, Bengal gram (chana) and masur dal has been increased to 70 per cent from 30 per cent earlier and that on lentils has been hiked to 40 per cent from earlier 30 per cent.

➢ Further, apples imported from the US will attract customs duty of 75 per cent as against 50 per cent earlier.

➢ The import duty on boric acid and phosphoric acid has also been hiked to 17.50 per cent and 20 per cent respectively from earlier 10 per cent each.

➢ The import duty on diagnostic reagents has been doubled to 20 per cent, while the duty on binders for foundry moulds has been hiked to 17.5 per cent.

➢ The duty on flat-rolled products on iron has also been raised to 27.50 per cent from 15 per cent earlier, while the duty on certain flat-rolled products on stainless steel has been increased to 22.50 per cent as against earlier 15 per cent.

➢ The customs duty on Artemia, a kind of shrimp, has also been raised to 30 per cent.

➢ For automobiles and earth moving equipment, SIM socket/other mechanical items (metal) for use in the manufacture of cellular mobile phones, the duty has been hiked to 25 per cent from earlier 15 per cent.

Background

➢ Recently, India had submitted a list of 30 items to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), on which it proposed to raise customs duty by up to 50 per cent.

➢ In the notification, however, there is no mention of duty hike on motor cycle with engine capacity of over 800cc.

➢ As per the list India submitted to the WTO, it had proposed to hike customs duty on specified motorcycles, which included Harley Davidson, to 50 per cent.

➢ The higher customs duty would come into effect from August 4, 2018.

About the ongoing trade war

➢ The duty hike decision by India is similar to that of the European Union and China which decided to levy higher import duties on a variety of US products in retaliation to the protectionist policies adopted by America.

➢ The decision was taken in retaliation to the unilateral increase in tariff by the US on certain steel and aluminium products earlier this year.

➢ On March 9, US President Donald Trump imposed heavy tariffs on imported steel and aluminium items.

➢ According to India, the duty hike imposed by the US has affected Indian steel exports by USD 198.6 million and aluminium shipments by USD 42.4 million.

➢ The duty hike by India would have equivalent tariff implications for the US.

➢ India exports steel and aluminium products worth about USD 1.5 billion to the US every year. India's exports to the US in 2016-17 stood at USD 42.21 billion, while imports were USD 22.3 billion.

➢ Meanwhile, the European Union has also slapped tariffs on iconic US products including bourbon, jeans and motorcycles in its opening salvo in a trade war with President Donald Trump.

Source: The Hindu, Business Standard

Government launches 'Krishi Kalyan Abhiyaan'

Why in news?

☞ The Union Ministry of Agriculture and farmers' welfare has launched the Krishi Kalyan Abhiyaan from June 1, 2018 till July 31, 2018 to aid, assist and advice farmers on how to improve their farming techniques and raise their incomes.

Key Facts

➢ The Krishi Kalyan Abhiyaan will be undertaken in 25 Villages with more than 1000 population, each in 111 Aspirational Districts identified in consultation with Ministry of Rural Development as per directions of NITI Ayog.

➢ In the districts where the number of villages (with more than 1000 population) is less than 25, all villages will be covered.

➢ An action plan comprising specifically identified activities under various departments of the ministry namely, Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW), Animal Husbandry Dairying & Fisheries (DAHD&F) and Department of Agricultural Research & Education (DARE-ICAR) will be implemented to saturate the chosen 25 villages in each district with these activities.

➢ The overall coordination and implementation in the 25 villages of a district will be done by Krishi Vigyan Kendra of that district.

➢ Further, 111 officers have been made in-charge of one district each for overall coordination and field level monitoring.

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❍ **Activities undertaken to promote best practices under this plan are as follows:**

➤ Distribution of Soil Health Cards to all farmers

➤ 100% coverage of bovine vaccination for Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in each village

➤ 100% coverage of Sheep and Goat for eradication of Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR)

➤ Distribution of Mini Kits of pulses and oilseeds to all

➤ Distribution of Horticulture/Agro Forestry/Bamboo plant at 5 per family(location appropriate)

➤ Making 100 NADAP Pits in each village

➤ Artificial insemination saturation

➤ Demonstration programmes on Micro-irrigation

➤ Demonstrations of integrated cropping practice

➤ Besides this, demonstration programmes on Micro Irrigation and Integrated Cropping Practice will be organised in order to familiarise the farmers with the latest techniques and how they can be incorporated at the grass root level.

Source: PIB

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Environment and Ecology, Disaster management, Pollution

India hosts World Environment Day 2018

Why in news?

☞ The World Environment Day was observed across the world on June 5, 2018 with an aim to encourage worldwide awareness and action for the protection of environment.

○ **The theme of the World Environment Day 2018 was 'Beat Plastic Pollution'.**

➢ The theme 'Beat Plastic Pollution' is a call to action to reduce the heavy burden of plastic pollution on natural places and wildlife.

➢ 'Beat Plastic Pollution' urges governments, industry, communities, and individuals to reduce the production and excessive use of single-use plastic polluting the oceans, damaging marine life and threatening human health.

➢ Plastic is a huge environmental and health issue and the day was observed with the main focus on creating mass awareness about the hazards of plastic pollution.

India was the host country

➢ Every World Environment Day has a different global host country, where the official celebrations take place. This year it was India.

➢ For World Environment Day, India announced to clean up 100 of its historic monuments, including the famous Taj Mahal. Union Environment Minister Harshvardhan unveiled the first non-plastic bound copy of the National Geographic magazine.

➢ Various events were held across India to observe the Day including cleanliness campaigns by state governments, cleaning of 24 beaches and 24 rivers in 19 states, social media campaigns and mini-marathons like 'Envithon' in five cities besides Delhi.

World Environment Day (WED)

➢ World Environment Day (WED) is celebrated every year on June 5.

➢ The day is celebrated to bring environmental concerns into the mainstream of the national developmental effort and also to bring people to the front of environmental conservation.

➢ The day, which began in 1974, is a flagship campaign for raising awareness on emerging environmental issues from marine pollution to global warming, to wildlife crime and sustainable consumption.

➢ Every World Environment Day has a different global host country, where the official celebrations take place. In 2018, it is India

➢ For the year 2017, Canada was the Global Host country for the celebrations of World Environment Day.

Source: The Hindu

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❍ Union Cabinet approves proposal for enactment of Dam Safety Bill, 2018

Why in news?

☞ The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the proposal for introduction of Dam Safety Bill, 2018 in the Parliament.

Key Facts

➢ The bill will enable all states and union territories of India to adopt uniform dam safety procedures that will not only ensure the safety of the dams but will also safeguard their benefits.

➢ The uniformity will also help in protecting human life, livestock and property.

➢ The draft bill has been finalised after wide consultation with leading Indian experts and international experts.

What is the significance?

➢ The Bill will address all issues concerning dam safety including regular inspection of dams, emergency action plan, comprehensive dam safety review, adequate repair and maintenance funds for dam safety and instrumentation and safety manuals.

➢ Under the bill's provisions, the responsibility of ensuring dam safety will lay on the dam owner.

➢ The bill will also provide for penal provisions for commission and omission of certain acts.

Following are the Key Features of the Bill

➢ The Bill will provide for proper surveillance, inspection, operation and maintenance of all specified dams in the country to ensure their safe functioning.

➢ It will provide for the constitution of a **National Committee on Dam Safety** that will evolve dam safety policies and recommend necessary regulations as required for the purpose.

➢ It will also provide for the constitution of a **State Committee on Dam Safety** by the state government.

➢ It will also enable the establishment of **National Dam Safety Authority** as a regulatory body, which will discharge functions to implement the policy, guidelines and standards for dam safety in the country.

National Dam Safety Authority

➢ The national authority will be required to maintain contact with the state dam safety organisations and the owners of dams for standardisation of dam safety-related data and practices.

➢ It will provide technical and managerial assistance to the states and state dam safety organizations.

➢ It will also help maintain a national level database of all the dams in the country and the records of major dam failures.

➢ It will also be required to examine the cause of any major dam failure.

➢ Further, the authority will publish and update the standard guidelines and check-lists for routine inspection and detailed investigations of dams and appurtenances.

➢ It will also accord recognition or accreditations to the organisations that can be entrusted with the works of investigation, design or construction of new dams.

➢ It will also look into unresolved points of issue between the state dam safety organisation of two states, or between the state dam safety organisation of a state and the owner of a dam in that state, for a proper solution.

➢ In cases where dams of one state fall under the territory of another state, the national authority will perform the role of state dam safety organization thereby eliminating potential causes for inter-state conflicts.

Source: PIB

❑ Government of Gujarat announced wind-solar hybrid power policy - 2018

Why in news?

➢ The state government of Gujarat has recently announced its wind-solar hybrid power policy - 2018 to promote setting up of wind as well as solar power projects at one location. T**he policy aims to make optimum utilisation of land and grid lines.**

Key Facts

➢ The 'Wind-Solar Hybrid Power Policy-2018' will remain in force for five years.

➢ It will provide encouragement to renewable power producers supplying to the grid as well as to those having captive use.

➢ The policy would enable the developer of an existing solar project to use the same land for setting up wind and solar power units.

➢ It would also allow them to use the common transmission line to evacuate the power.

➢ A power project could also be set up on a land being used for wind farms.

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➢ The benefits of the new policy will be applicable for a period of 25 years or till the life of the project, whichever is earlier.

➢ The electricity generated from wind-solar hybrid projects will be exempted from energy charges.

➢ The policy would also provide 50 per cent concession for cross-subsidy surcharge and additional surcharge when the generated energy is sold to a third party.

➢ For the captive users, the hybrid projects will have complete waiver on cross-subsidy surcharge and additional surcharge. The projects will also qualify for 50 per cent relaxation in wheeling charges and distribution loss. At present, Gujarat produces approximately 7,100 MW of non-conventional energy including 5,500 MW of wind power and 1,600 MW of solar power.

Source: Business Standard, Indian Express

Government collaborates with Google for flood forecasting

Why in news?

❍ The Central Water Commission (CWC), has recently signed a Collaboration Agreement with Google for flood forecasting.

Key Facts

➢ CWC would use up to date technology of Google in the field of Artificial Intelligence, machine learning and geo spatial mapping for effective management of water resources particularly in the field of flood forecasting.

➢ The agreement involves dissemination of flood related information to the people using the dissemination platforms developed by Google.

➢ This agreement will help crisis management agencies to deal extreme hydrological events in a better manner.

➢ Under collaborative arrangement, Google will use high resolution Digital Elevation Model and vast computational resources and Artificial Intelligence to generate flood inundation maps utilising the input provided by CWC.

➢ The information would be disseminated with a lead time of up to 3 days.

➢ For the flood season of 2018, flood forecasting would be done on trial basis and the same would be scaled up in near future.

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What is the significance?

➢ The collaboration between the Government and Google on flood forecasting is expected to meet the much awaited demand of the inhabitants of the flood prone areas for inundation warnings with sufficient lead time.

➢ It will result in saving crore of rupees which otherwise would have to be spent by the government on acquiring high resolution Digital Elevation Model, high end computational resources and developing dissemination platforms widely used by the people.

➢ It will enable the Government as well as disaster management organisations to identify, in advance, the locations and population which are at risk from floods and require warnings and information.

➢ This collaborative initiative is expected to be a milestone in flood management and in mitigating the flood losses.

National Hydrology Project

➢ The Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation had earlier launched an ambitious programme 'National Hydrology Project' (NHP) during the year 2016-17.

➢ NHP is a World Bank assisted central sector scheme with pan India coverage that was launched with an aim to improve the extent, quality and accessibility of water resources information, decision support system for floods.

➢ It was also aimed at strengthening the capacity of targeted water resources professionals and management institutions in India.

Source: Business Standard

World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought 2018

Why in news?

➢ The World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought was across the world on June 17, 2018 to promote public awareness of international efforts to combat desertification.

➢ In 1994, the United Nations General Assembly declared June 17 as the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought through its resolution to promote public awareness and to implement 'United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification' in countries experiencing serious drought.

➢ The theme of 2018 World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought was *Land has true value – invest in it.*

❍ ***The theme urges everyone to move away from unsustainable land use and make a difference by investing in the future of land in following ways:***

➢ Spending money on organic trade products to avoid land degradation

➢ Pledging to protect and conserve the value of land

➢ Supporting a sustainable way of living, producing and consuming.

Desertification and the Sustainable Development Goals

☞ The Goal 15 of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states the need to halt and reverse land degradation.

☞ It declares that "*we are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations*".

Gender Action Plan of UNCCD

➢ The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) recently launched the Gender Action Plan (GAP) to support and enhance gender-responsive policy needs.

➢ The Gender Action Plan (GAP) aims to enhance the participation of women at all levels of decision-making including in the field of drought management as well as sand and dust storms and land degradation neutrality interventions to reach gender parity by 2030.

➢ This plan represents a landmark opportunity to transform gender equality and human rights into action.

Source: The Times of India

World Oceans Day 2018

Why in news?

☞ The World Oceans Day was observed across the world on June 8, 2018 to highlight the major role of the oceans in everyday life.

World Oceans Day celebrated with an objective to:

➢ To remind everyone of the major role the oceans have in everyday life. They are the lungs of our planet, providing most of the oxygen we breathe.

➢ To inform the public of the impact of human actions on the ocean.

➢ To develop a worldwide movement of citizens for the ocean.

➢ To mobilize and unite the world's population on a project for the sustainable management of the world's oceans. They are a major source of food and medicines and a critical part of the biosphere.

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- To celebrate together the beauty, the wealth and the promise of the ocean.

  The action focus for the 2018 World Oceans Day was 'preventing plastic pollution and encouraging solutions for a healthy ocean'.

- The agenda also coincided with the theme of 2018 World Environment Day – 'Beat Plastic Pollution'.

  Plastic pollution is causing tremendous harm to the marine resources:

- 80 percent of all pollution in the ocean comes from people on land.

- 8 million tonnes of plastic ends up in the ocean every year, causing damage on wildlife, fisheries and tourism.

- Plastic pollution costs the lives of 1 million seabirds and 100000 marine mammals per year.

- 'Fishes eat plastic, and we eat the fish'.

Background

- The United Nations General Assembly through its resolution 63/111 of December 5, 2008 designated 8 June as the World Oceans Day.

- The concept of a 'World Oceans Day' was first proposed in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro as a way to celebrate world's shared ocean and to raise awareness about the crucial role the ocean plays in our lives.

- The UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea actively coordinates different activities of the World Oceans Day.

Source: The Times of India, PIB

World Bank approves funding for Atal Bhujal Yojana

Why in news?

☞ The World Bank has recently approved Water Resources and River Development Ministry's Rs 6000 crore worth central sector scheme, 'Atal Bhujal Yojana'.

Key Facts

- The scheme will be implemented over a period of five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23 with assistance from the World Bank.

- The scheme proposal has already been recommended by the Expenditure Finance Committee and the Ministry will be seeking Cabinet approval for the project shortly.

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Atal Bhujal Yojana

➢ The scheme has been formulated by the Water Resources Ministry to address the criticality of ground water resources in major country parts.

➢ It aims to improve ground water management in priority areas in the country through community participation.

What are the objectives?

➢ Ensuring active community participation in groundwater management.

➢ Ensuring active participation of the communities in various activities such as formation of Water User Associations, monitoring and disseminating ground water data, water budgeting, preparation and implementation of gram-panchayat wise water security plans and IEC activities related to sustainable ground water management.

➢ Enabling better understanding of the ground water regime.

➢ Enabling focused and integrated community-based approach for addressing issues related to ground water depletion.

➢ Enabling sustainable ground water management through convergence of on-going and new schemes.

➢ Adoption of efficient water use practices to reduce ground water use for irrigation and augmentation of ground water resources in targeted areas.

Implementation and Funding

➢ The implementation of the scheme is expected to benefit nearly 8350 Gram Panchayats in 78 districts of states that are facing severe shortage in ground water resources.

➢ The priority areas identified under the scheme fall in the states of Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

➢ These states represent about 25 per cent of the total number of over-exploited, critical and semi-critical blocks in terms of ground water in India.

Source: The Hindu

Uttarakhand to restrict use of polythene

Why in news?

☞ The Uttarakhand Government has decided to completely prohibit the use of polythene or plastic from July 31, 2018.

Key Facts

➢ All the polythene vendors in Uttarakhand have been asked to finish the polythene stock before July 31.

➢ The state would also be launching a comprehensive public awareness campaign on the environmental damage caused by polythene, one week before the complete ban on polythene.

➢ According to the Govt, environmental conservation is a collective responsibility and so people's cooperation is necessary to make Uttarakhand polythene-free.

Significance of the move

➢ The move is aimed at curbing rampant use of plastic, which is increasingly becoming a huge environmental challenge.

➢ The announcement was made by the state on the occasion of World Environment Day on June 5, 2018.

HOW PLASTICS AFFECT THE ENVIRONMENT?

➢ Environmentally, plastic is a growing disaster. Most plastics are made from petroleum or natural gas, non-renewable resources extracted and processed using energy-intensive techniques that destroy fragile ecosystems.

➢ The manufacture of plastic, as well as its destruction by incineration, pollutes air, land and water and exposes workers to toxic chemicals, including carcinogens.

➢ Plastic packaging is a significant source of landfill waste and is regularly eaten by numerous marine and land animals, to fatal consequences. Synthetic plastic does not biodegrade. It just sits and accumulates in landfills or pollutes the environment.

➢ Plastics have become a municipal waste nightmare, prompting local governments all over the world to implement plastic bag, and increasingly polystyrene (styrofoam), bans.

➢ Plastic pollution may not even be visible to the naked eye as research is showing that microscopic plastic particles are present in the air at various locations throughout the world and in all major oceans. Plastic is now ubiquitous in our terrestrial, aquatic and airborne environments - that is, it's everywhere.

Move towards banning plastic use

➢ The governments of Tamil Nadu, Nagaland, Maharashtra and Jharkhand on June 5 affirmed their commitment to make their states plastic-free.

➢ While Tamil would ban the use of plastic items from January 2019, Nagaland set December 2018 as a deadline to free the state of all plastic.

➢ State governments of Jharkhand and Maharashtra sought a year to rid their states of plastic items. Jharkhand Chief Minister announced that the state would become plastic-free by June 5, 2019 and Maharashtra Environment Minister Ramdas Kadam said the state would be totally free of plastic in the next one year.

➢ West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee also urged the people of the state to curb plastic pollution on the occasion of World Environment Day.

The state governments expressed their concern to stop the plastic use as India played global host to 2018 World Environment Day celebrations with the theme "Beat Plastic Pollution".

Source: Indian Express, Times of India

Odisha beach is Asia's first to get 'Blue Flag' tag

Why in news?

☞ The Chandrabhaga beach on the Konark coast of Odisha will be the first in Asia to get the Blue Flag certification.

What is Blue Flag project?

➢ Blue Flag project is a certification by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) that a beach, Marina or sustainable boating tourism operator, meets its stringent standards.

➢ Launched in December 2017 by the Environment Ministry, the prime objective of the project is to enhance standards of cleanliness, upkeep and basic amenities at beaches.

➢ Under the pilot project, each of coastal state/UT was requested to identify and nominate a beach, which is to be funded through ongoing Integrated Coastal Management Programme (ICMP).

Criteria for certification:

➢ To achieve the Blue Flag standards, a beach has to strictly comply with 33 environment and tourism-related conditions. The standards were established by the Copenhagen-based Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) in 1985.

➢ For example- a beach must be plastic-free and equipped with a waste management system. Clean water should be available for tourists, apart from international amenities.

➢ The beach should have facilities for studying the environmental impact around the area.

About Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) :

➢ The Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation promoting sustainable development through environmental education.

➢ FEE is active through five programmes; Blue Flag, Eco-Schools, Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE), Learning about Forests (LEAF) and Green Key.

Background:

➢ Twelve more beaches in the country are being developed by the Society for Integrated Coastal Management (SICOM), an Environment Ministry's body working for the management of coastal areas, in accordance with the Blue Flag standards.

About Society of Integrated Coastal Management (SICOM) :

➢ SICOM has been established under the aegis of Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate change.

➢ The main objective of the Centre is to promote research and development in the area of coastal management including addressing issues of coastal communities.

➢ It also supports implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) activities in India and implements the World Bank assisted India ICZM Project.

Source: The Hindu

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July – 2018

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○ India among the top five countries in e-waste generation: ASSOCHAM-NEC study

Why in news?

☞ A recent ASSOCHAM-NEC study on "Electricals & Electronics Manufacturing in India" has revealed that India recycles only 5% of its e-waste and the country is one of the biggest contributors of e-waste in the world.

What is E-waste?

➢ E-waste or electronic waste refers to the electronic equipment being thrown away. It includes discarded computer monitors, motherboards, Cathode Ray Tubes (CRT), Printed Circuit Board (PCB), mobile phones and chargers, compact discs, headphones, white goods such as Liquid Crystal Displays (LCD)/ Plasma televisions, air conditioners, refrigerators and so on.

Highlights of the report:

➢ India generates around 2 million tonnes per annum (TPA) of E-waste of which 12% constituted of telecom equipment alone.

➢ Apart from India, the top e-waste generator countries are China, US, Japan and Germany.

➢ Among Indian states, largest quantity of E-waste is generated by Maharashtra (19.8%), followed by Tamil Nadu (13%), Uttar Pradesh (10.1%), Karnataka (8.9%), Gujarat (8.8%) and Madhya Pradesh (7.6%).

➢ Out of the 2 million TPA e-waste generated, only 4.38 Lakh TPA is recycled in India.

➢ The low quantum of recycling of e-waste in India is due to lack of infrastructure, absence of strong legislative framework etc.

➢ The chemicals and pollutants generated by E-waste lead to environment and public health issues. Prolonged exposure to chemicals released by e-waste causes damage of nervous systems, blood systems, kidneys and brain development, respiratory disorders, skin disorders, bronchitis, lung cancer, heart, liver, and spleen damage.

➢ E-waste is one of the major global concerns of the 21ˢᵗ As per Moore's law, the transistor numbers to be accommodated in same size chip double every two years, and due to this most electronic systems get outdated in about three years. People upgrade their mobiles, laptops, cameras, televisions etc. creating a large amount of useless e-waste.

Source: The Times of India

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Science and Technology, Defense, Health

India successfully tests nuclear-capable Agni-5 missile

Why in news?

☞ India recently successfully test-fired indigenously developed nuclear-capable ballistic missile Agni-5 from the Integrated Test Range on Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island, previously known as Wheeler Island.

Key Facts

➢ The long-range surface-to-surface missile with a strike range of 5,000 km was fired from a mobile launcher off the Odisha coast.

➢ All the radars, electro-optical tracking stations and telemetry stations tracked the vehicle all through the course of the trajectory. The launch was reported to have achieved all its mission objectives.

➢ This was the sixth trial of the state-of-the-art missile Agni-5, which covered its full distance during the test.

➢ Unlike other missiles of the series, Agni-5 is the most advanced in terms of navigation and guidance, warhead and engine.

➢ Several new technologies were successfully tested during the Agni-5 trial.

➢ The navigation systems- very-high accuracy Ring Laser Gyro-based Inertial Navigation System and the modern and highly-accurate Micro Navigation System ensured that the missile reached within a few metres of the target.

➢ The missile comprised a high-speed onboard computer and fault tolerant software along with robust and reliable bus, which were able to guide it flawlessly.

Agni 5

➢ Agni-V is an intercontinental ballistic missile developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) of India.

➢ The missile is a part of the Agni series of missiles, one of the missile systems under the original Integrated Guided Missile Development Program.

- The first test launch of the missile was conducted on April 19, 2012. The missile was able to hit the target nearly at pin-point accuracy, within a few metres of the designated target point.

- India conducted the second test flight of Agni-V from the Wheeler Island on September 15, 2013. The missile hit the pre-designed target in the Indian Ocean with an accuracy of a few metres.

- The third successful test flight of the Agni-V was conducted on January 31, 2015. The test **used a canisterised version of the missile, mounted over a Tatra truck.**

- The fourth test of the missile was successfully conducted on December 26, 2018. This was the second canisterised test of the missile.

- The fifth test of the missile was successfully conducted on January 18, 2018. This was the third consecutive canisterised test of the missile on a road-mobile launcher and the first in its final operational configuration. The missile covered a distance of 4,900 km in 19 minutes.

- The Agni series includes Agni-1 with a range of 700-900 km, Agni-2 with 2000-3000km range, Agni-3 and Agni-4 with 3000 km to more than 4000 km range.

Source: The Hindu, Wiki

NASA approves mission extension for Juno

Why in news?

☞ NASA has recently approved an extension of Juno's science operations until July 2021. This provides the space probe with an additional 41 months in orbit around Jupiter.

☞ The probe will complete its two-year anniversary of being in the orbit of Jupiter in July 2018.

Key Facts

- The extension of its operations will enable Juno to achieve its primary science objectives.

- NASA has now funded Juno through FY 2022. The spacecraft was supposed to end its mission by crashing into Jupiter's atmosphere in July this year.

- The end of prime operations is now expected to be in July 2021, with data analysis and mission close-out activities continuing into 2022.

➢ The spacecraft is in 53-day orbits rather than 14-day orbits as initially planned because of a concern about valves on the spacecraft's fuel system.

➢ The longer orbit means that it will take more time to collect the needed science data.

➢ Juno will make its 13th science flyby over Jupiter's mysterious cloud tops on July 16.

About Juno Mission

➢ Juno, the NASA space probe was launched on August 5, 2011, as a part of NASA's New Frontiers program to begin a scientific investigation of Jupiter.

➢ The spacecraft was managed by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and built by Lockheed Martin Space.

➢ It successfully entered the polar orbit of Jupiter on July 5, 2016.

➢ The spacecraft's primary goal was to gain data on the story of Jupiter's formation and evolution, including whether it has a rocky core and to measure the amount of water present within the deep atmosphere.

➢ It aimed to observe and measure Jupiter's gravity and magnetic fields, mass distribution, atmospheric dynamics and composition and evolution using long-proven technologies.

➢ Juno is the second spacecraft to orbit Jupiter, after the nuclear powered Galileo orbiter, which orbited the gas planet from 1995 to 2003.

Source: The Hindu, Wiki

Coast Guard interceptor ship commissioned

Why in news?

☞ The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has recently commissioned an interceptor boat- ICGS C-439 at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Key Features

➢ The ICGS C-439 is designed by the L&T Marine & Ship Design Division, an in-house facility of Larsen & Toubro Limited.

➢ The vessel is 27.4 m long with a displacement of 136 tonnes. It can achieve a maximum speed of 45 knots.

➢ It has full aluminium-alloy hull for reduced weight and is powered by twin water-jet propulsion systems to enable quick response.

➢ It is fitted with state-of-the-art navigation and communication equipment and medium-range armament.

➢ The vessel will operate under the operational and administrative control of the Commander, Coast Guard District Headquarters No 2 (Maharashtra), Mumbai and will further enhance the operational capabilities to undertake multifarious tasks such as surveillance, interdiction, search & rescue and medical evacuations of the region.

Source: The Hindu

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India, Bangladesh Navies agree to institute Coordinated Patrol

Why in news?

➢ India and Bangladesh Navies have recently agreed to institute a Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) as an annual exercise between both the Navies.

➢ The first edition of CORPAT was inaugurated by Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lanba during his visit to Bangladesh.

➢ The visit is aimed at consolidating bilateral defence relations between India and Bangladesh and exploring new avenues for naval cooperation.

CORPAT between India and Bangladesh Navies

➢ The first edition of CORPAT was held from June 27 to June 29, 2018.

➢ Four maritime patrol aircraft, two from the Bangladesh Navy and two from the Indian navy participated in the CORPAT.

➢ Four frigates, two from the Bangladesh Navy, namely, BNS Abu Bakar and BNS Dhaleswari; and two from the Indian navy, namely, INS Satpura and INS Kadmatt, also joined the CORPAT.

What is the Significance?

➢ The commencement of CORPAT is major step towards enhanced operational interaction between the navies of the India and Bangladesh.

➢ Naval cooperation between India and Bangladesh includes operational interactions through port calls, passage exercises along with capacity building, capability enhancement and training initiatives.

➢ During the last few years, the Indian Navy has expanded its assistance to countries in the region through material support, training, EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) surveillance, provisioning of platforms, hydrographic assistance, and joint exercises and offering slots in professional training courses.

➢ The Navy regularly conducts CORPATs with Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand.

➢ It also conducts EEZ surveillance of Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles on their request.

Source: The Hindu

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❍ Health Ministers conclave: 20 states sign MoU to implement Ayushman Bharat - National Health Protection Mission

Why in news?

☞ The Union Health Minister, recently exchanged Memorandum of Understanding with health ministers from 20 states, marking their commitment towards the launch of the Ayushman Bharat – National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM) at a Health Ministers conclave in New Delhi.

Key Facts

➤ The AB-NHPM will protect around 50 crore people from about 10 crore families.

➤ The scheme will enable cashless and paperless access to services up to Rs 5 lakhs per family per year.

➤ The services will be available for the beneficiary families at the point of service in both public and private empanelled hospitals across India.

➤ The scheme is expected to bring a visible relief to the target families by mitigating the financial risk arising out of catastrophic health episodes.

➤ The Ayushman Bharat - National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM) will have a major impact on the reduction of Out Of Pocket (OOP) expenditure.

➤ The scheme will give cashless benefits in any public or private hospital across the country, ensuring accessible and equitable quality health care to the marginalized and vulnerable sections.

➤ *The scheme is a huge step towards improving secondary and tertiary hospitalisation and healthcare facilities.*

➤ As of now, 20 states have signed the MoU. The number is likely to go up to 25 by the end of June 2018.

Ayushman Bharat – National Health Protection Mission

➤ The scheme will provide a defined benefit coverage of Rs 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization to 10 crore poor and vulnerable families (approximately 50 crore beneficiaries).

➤ The beneficiary families covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospitals across the country.

➤ The beneficiaries will be decided on the basis of the Socio-Economic and Caste Census 2011 (SECC) database.

➤ It will be rolled out across all States/UTs in all districts with an objective to cover all the targeted beneficiaries. To control costs, the payments for treatment will be done on package rate basis.

➢ The scheme proposes setting up of Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Council (AB-NHPMC) at the national level to give policy directions and fostering coordination between centre and states. The council will be chaired by Union Health and Family Welfare Minister.

➢ The states would be required to set up a dedicated entity called State Health Agency (SHA) to implement the scheme.

➢ In partnership with NITI Aayog, a robust, modular, scalable and interoperable IT platform will be made operational which will entail a paperless, cashless transaction.

➢ The expenditure incurred in premium payment will be shared between Central and State Governments in a specified ratio as per Ministry of Finance guidelines.

➢ The scheme is expected to increase access to quality health and medication. It is also expected to lead to timely treatments, improvements in health outcomes, patient satisfaction, improvement in productivity and efficiency, job creation thus leading to improvement in the quality of life.

Source: PIB

National Health Resource Repository project

Why in news?

☞ Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has recently launched the National Health Resource Repository (NHRR).

Key Facts

➢ The repository is India's first ever national healthcare facility registry of authentic, standardised and updated geo-spatial data of all public and private healthcare establishments.

➢ The Ministry also released the National Health Profile (NHP)-2018 prepared by the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence (CBHI).

➢ The E-book of the annual document was also released. The National Health Profile covers demographic, socio-economic, health status and health finance indicators, along with comprehensive information on health infrastructure and human resources in health.

➢ This resource repository shall enable advanced research towards ongoing & forthcoming healthcare challenges arising from other determinants of health such as disease and environment.

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Highlights

➢ The project envisions strengthening of evidence-based decision making and developing a platform for citizen and provider-centric services by creating a robust, standardised and secured IT-enabled repository of India's healthcare resources.

➢ NHRR will be the ultimate platform for comprehensive information of both, private and public healthcare establishments including Railways, ESIC, defence and petroleum healthcare establishments.

➢ Under the Collection of Statistics Act 2008, over 20 lakh healthcare establishments such as hospitals, doctors, clinics, diagnostic labs, pharmacies and nursing homes would be enumerated under this census capturing data on over 1,400 variables.

What are the benefits?

➢ The project would create a reliable, unified registry of Country's healthcare resources showing the distribution pattern of health facilities and services between cities and rural areas.

➢ It would generate real-world intelligence to identify gaps in health and service ratios and ensure judicious health resource allocation and management.

➢ It would also identify key areas of improvement by upgrading existing health facilities or establishing new health facilities keeping in view the population density, geographic nature, health condition and distance.

What is the significance?

➢ The National Health Profile is a very important tool as it has helped in designing various programmes such as free drugs and diagnostics and Mission Parivar Vikas.

➢ In recent years, India has shown substantial progress on several indicators. India's national health indicators like Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), Maternal Maternity Rate (MMR) and Total Fertility Rate (TFR) are declining faster than the world's pace.

Source: PIB

National Digital Library Launched

Why in news?

☞ The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development has recently launched the National Digital Library of India (NDLI) on the occasion of the National Reading Day, on June 19, 2018.

Key Facts

➢ This National Digital Library of India (NDLI) is a project of the Ministry of Human Resource Development under the aegis of National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT). It has been developed by IIT Kharagpur.

➢ The main objective of the digital library is to make quality digital educational resources available to all citizens of the country to empower, inspire and encourage learning.

Highlights

➢ The NDL is a single window platform that collects and collates metadata from premier learning institutions in India and abroad, as well as other relevant sources.

➢ It is a digital repository containing textbooks, articles, videos, audio books, lectures, simulations, fiction and all other kinds of learning media.

➢ It is a 24x7 knowledge resource that is accessible to anyone with internet access and it is built to enable the rise of digital India.

➢ The library has 1.7 crore content from more than 160 sources, in over 200 languages.

➢ Users would be able to access the digital library anytime and anywhere absolutely free of cost. It was launched in pilot form in May 2016.

➢ The library also has a mobile app, which can be accessed by both iPhone and Android users. The App has been downloaded over 6.70 lakh times.

➢ Users can search for content using various parameters like subject matter, source, content type and more.

➢ Currently, the app is available in three languages – English, Hindi and Bengali.

Source: PIB

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❑ Indian Army observes 2018 as 'Year of Disabled Soldiers in Line of Duty'

Why in news?

➢ Indian Army is observing the year 2018 as the 'Year of Disabled Soldiers in Line of Duty' to honour soldiers who have been disabled in the line of duty while serving the nation and to celebrate the undying spirit of 'Soldiering'.

What is the objective?

➢ The main aim of the observance is to alleviate the sufferings of the soldiers, who have done their duty with utmost dedication to the nation and have been disabled for life.

➢ For the same, the observance aims to provide one-time financial assistance to disabled soldiers, who have been put out service on medical grounds and are rendered non-employable due to their medical or physical conditions.

➢ Though the Indian Army has established rehabilitation programmes and beneficiary schemes for the disabled soldiers, the programmes and schemes require reinforcement.

Key features

➢ The Union Government is considering the proposal of a major grant to establish a separate fund that can be further enhanced by contributions from individuals, establishments and corporate sector thus facilitating meaningful initiatives for disabled soldiers.

➢ On the other hand, the Indian Army plans to create awareness on organisational support available to soldiers and their dependents with respect to medical, rehabilitation, various beneficiary schemes of the central and state governments, vocational opportunities and assistance for their placement.

➢ The Indian Army also plans to showcase the talent of the disabled soldiers by organising sports and physical activities, cultural events and their art exhibitions.

➢ The army is also planning to felicitate the disabled soldiers along with selected organisations that are dedicated in their rehabilitation.

➢ The Indian army also plans to gather due support for the unemployable disabled soldier and his family with an initial financial support to ensure a life of dignity through partially-funded entrepreneurship venture.

Source: PIB, Indian Express

NITI Aayog announces 3000 additional Atal Tinkering Labs

Why in news?

☞ NITI Aayog has recently announced creation of 3000 additional Atal Tinkering Labs under the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM).

➢ For this purpose, NITI Aayog has selected 3000 additional schools for the establishment of Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs), bringing the total number of ATL schools to 5441.

Highlights

➢ The selected schools will receive a grant of Rs 20 lakh in the next five years to establish Atal Tinkering Labs for nurturing innovation and entrepreneurial spirit among secondary school children.

➢ With the development of these over 5000 ATLSs, almost every district of India will have at least one lab to enable an innovation ecosystem, which will facilitate transformational change in technological innovation and pedagogy.

➢ These additional 3000 schools will expand the reach of the ATL program, increasing the number of children exposed to innovation and technologies like 3D Printing, Robotics, IoT and microprocessors.

➢ These schools will facilitate the creation of over 1 million Neoteric Child Innovators by 2020.

➢ ATLs will function as innovation hubs for these student innovators to explore solutions to unique local problems which they come across in their everyday lives.

➢ With these new schools, the Atal Innovation Mission envisions strong growth in the collaborative ecosystem, where students, teachers, mentors and industry partners work to facilitate innovation.

Atal Tinkering Labs

➢ The labs aims to be innovative play workspaces for students between Grade VI to Grade XII, which stimulate innovations combining science & technology.

➢ These open-ended innovation workspaces would be equipped with state of the art technologies such as 3D printers, Robotics, Sensor Technology Kits, Internet of Things and miniaturized Electronics, which enable the students to learn and solve local community problems using emerging Technologies.

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➤ Through the labs, the students will be encouraged to explore and experience Design Thinking and Innovation, using a do-it-yourself approach and develop innovative solutions to India's social, community or economic problems.

➤ The young students who have already got exposure to creative technology platforms to nurture their curiosity, creativity and imagination from ATLs in their schools, have already started designing prototype solutions and started creative projects such as better irrigation management, waste management, and sensor based solutions.

About Atal Innovation Mission

➤ Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is Union Government's flagship initiative to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.

➤ AIM is mandated to create an umbrella structure to oversee innovation ecosystem of the country.

➤ AIM envisions the creation of a collaborative ecosystem, where students, teachers, mentors and industry partners work to facilitate innovation, foster scientific temper and an entrepreneurial spirit.

➤ Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs), Atal Incubation Centre and Established Incubation Centre will take the innovations to the market and a network of incubators will help create enterprises around these innovations.

➤ As of now, AIM had announced selection of 2441 schools across India to establish ATLs covering 93 percent of the total districts in India and 98 percent of the upcoming smart cities. However, this number now comes to 5441.

Source: PIB, Business Standard, Wiki

India tastes only partial success in Ramjet test

Why in news?

☞ The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully carried out maiden flight test new surface-to-air missile powered by Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) propulsion Technology.

☞ The test also successfully demonstrated technology of nozzle less booster for first time in the country.

☞ The defensive missile flew in its intended trajectory at speed of Mach 3 (thrice the speed of sound) and met all mission objectives.

SFDR technology:

➢ SFDR technology is jointly developed by India and Russia.

➢ It will help both India's surface-to-air and air-to-air missiles to perform better and enhance their strike range, making them more lethal.

➢ With it, India can have fastest long-range missiles in two categories, providing full-fledged and multi-layered aerial protection from hostile attacks.

➢ Its successful use in missiles will mark India's entry into select club of nations that use next-generation missile technology against maneuvering targets, compromising effectiveness of conventional missiles.

SFDR vs. Conventional Missiles:

➢ SFDR is propulsion technology different than that of conventional solid fuelled or liquid fuelled missiles.

➢ Presently, lot of conventional missiles use booster or sustainer configuration with solid or liquid propellants, which have limitations against maneuvering target. This is because terminal stage of conventional missiles cannot provide enough energy to maintain their speed in order to hit targets.

➢ SDFR technology removes this drawback by exceptionally enhancing endgame maneuverability of missile at terminal stage when its seeker is locked onto target.

Source: Economic Times

More News

○ **Ecuador's Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces elected as President of UN General Assembly**

➢ Ecuadorean Foreign Minister Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces was on June 5, 2018 elected as the President of the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). She will be succeeding Miroslav Lajcak, the current Assembly President.

➢ Poet and politician, Espinosa secured 128 votes against 62 votes obtained by UN Ambassador Mary Elizabeth Flores Flake of Honduras, the only other candidate.

RIMPAC 2018

➢ Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC-2018), the world's largest international maritime warfare exercise will see participation of 26 countries, including India.

➢ The exercise will be held from June 27 to August 2, 2018 in and around Hawaiian Islands and Southern California.

➢ The theme for this year's RIMPAC exercise is "Capable, Adaptive, Partners." Four countries Brazil, Israel, Sri Lanka and Vietnamare are participating for first time.

○ **International Day of Parliamentarism 2018 observed across the globe**

➢ The 2018 International Day of Parliamentarism was observed across the globe on June 30, 2018 with an aim to recognise the role of parliaments in national plans and strategies and in ensuring greater transparency and accountability at national and global levels.

➢ The Day celebrates parliaments and the ways in which parliamentary systems of government improve the day-to-day lives of people the world over. It is also an opportunity for parliaments to take stock, identify challenges, and ways to address them effectively.

➢ The year 2018 marked the first celebration of the International Day of Parliamentarism.

National Statistics Day 2018 observed in India

➢ The National Statistics Day was observed across India on June 29, 2018 with an aim to create public awareness about the importance of statistics in socio-economic planning and policy formulation.

➢ This year celebrations of the Day marked the closing ceremony of year long celebrations of 125th birth anniversary of Late Professor Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis. June 29, 2017 marked the beginning of the 125th year of birth of Prof. Mahalanobis. The theme selected for the 2018 Statistics Day was 'Quality Assurance in Official Statistics'.

E Sreedharan Committee to lay down standards for metro rail systems

❍ Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved a proposal to set up a committee which will lay down standards for India's metro rail systems in the country. The decision aims at cutting the costs in the construction and operation of metro rail systems in the country and brings them under the Make in India umbrella.

❍ Besides recommending standardisation norms for various components, the Sreedharan Panel will also propose ways to indigenise metro components that are currently imported. This will bring down costs and also give a boost to the government's Make in India policy.

International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

❍ The International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking was observed across the globe on June 26, 2018 with an aim to raise awareness of the major problem that illicit drugs represent to society.

❍ **The theme of the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking 2018 was**"*Listen First - Listening to children and youth is the first step to help them grow healthy and safe",* **built on the success of last year.**

❍ **The theme seeks to increase support for prevention of drug use that is based on science and is thus an effective investment in the well-being of children and youth, their families and their communities.**

Day of the Seafarer 2018 observed by IMO

➢ Day of the Seafarer 2016 was observed across the world on 25 June, 2018 by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to thank the seafarers for their contribution to the economy and civil society of the world.

➢ The theme of the 2018 Day of the Seafarer theme was 'Seafarers' wellbeing'. The years 2017 and 2018 have seen strong momentum in the industry to address seafarer's wellbeing, particularly their mental health. The theme aimed to highlight specific strategies to tackle stress and other issues affecting seafarers' mental conditions.

Veteran journalist Prabhakar Choubey passes away

➢ Veteran journalist and litterateur Prabhakar Choubey passed away after a prolonged illness at a city hospital in Raipur on June 21, 2018. He was 83-year-old.

➢ Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh condoled Choubey's death and said that the senior journalist, in his career spanning 54 years, made invaluable and memorable contribution in the fields of journalism and literature,.

➢ His last rites were conducted on June 22.

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International yoga day observed globally

➢ The 4th International yoga day was celebrated across the world on June 21, 2018. The day's celebrations in India were led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Dehradun.

➢ The Prime Minister joined thousands of volunteers, performing Yoga asanas in the lawns of Forest Research Institute in Dehradun. Similar Yoga related events were held across the world to mark the occasion.

➢ In fact, ahead of the yoga day, the PM Modi had taken to social media to share the intricacies of various Yoga Asanas. He also shared pictures of people performing Yoga, at various locations across the world.

❑ Indian Army observes 2018 as 'Year of Disabled Soldiers in Line of Duty'

➢ The Indian Army is observing the year 2018 as the 'Year of Disabled Soldiers in Line of Duty' to honour soldiers who have been disabled in the line of duty while serving the nation and to celebrate the undying spirit of 'Soldiering'.

➢ The main aim of the observance is to alleviate the sufferings of the soldiers, who have done their duty with utmost dedication to the nation and have been disabled for life. For the same, the observance aims to provide one-time financial assistance to disabled soldiers, who have been put out service on medical grounds and are rendered non-employable due to their medical or physical conditions.

❑ Sulabh International Honhoured with Japan's prestigious Nikkei Asia Prize

➢ Bindeshwar Pathak, noted social reformer and founder of Sulabh International, was on June 13, 2018 honoured wisth Japan's prestigious Nikkei Asia Prize.

➢ The award was conferred to Pathak under the 'Culture and Community' category for his significant work in tackling poor hygiene and discrimination.

➢ Speaking after receiving his award at the 23rd Nikkei Asia Prize ceremony in Tokyo, 75-year-old Pathak said that the honour will be another milestone in his commitment to the service of the society in Asia in particular and the world in general.

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