

ELITE IAS

**Current Affairs
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Editorial

The dictionary of Nipah

- ✎ A virus named after Kampung Sungai Nipah, a village in Malaysia, where it was first discovered in 1998-99. The virus, that eventually killed 105 people in Malaysia, was first suspected to be Japanese encephalitis (JE) which, like the Nipah virus, induces brain inflammation. According to a paper by Dr K B Chua, who was a virologist in training at the University of Malaya when the disease broke out, “the outbreak of febrile encephalitis in humans was preceded by the occurrence of respiratory illness and encephalitis in pigs in the same region,” he writes, adding however, that at that point, the cause of swine mortality was assumed to be classical swine fever.
- ✎ Suspecting, however, that it was not the mosquito-borne JE that was causing the spate of disease and death among the region’s pig farmers, he took samples of the virus to the Division of Arbovirus-borne Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Fort Collins, USA. “At CDC, Atlanta, the virus was rapidly identified as a novel paramyxovirus,” he writes. The virus, which was traced back to the pigs, led to a large-scale culling of the animals in this region. Further studies indicated that the initial transmission from bats to pigs probably occurred, when pig feed was contaminated with bat excretions, says a 2007 paper, titled ‘Lessons from the Nipah virus outbreak in Malaysia’, published in The Malaysian Journal of Pathology .

Zoonosis

- ✎ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “A zoonosis is any disease transmitted from vertebrate animals to humans.” It could be caused by a virus, bacteria, fungi or parasite; some examples include anthrax, bird flu, ebola, dengue, rabies, malaria, swine flu and leptospirosis.
- ✎ Nipah is believed to be transmitted from what are called flying foxes, or mega bats, so called because they are the largest bat species. They eat fruits and live in trees. These are a part of the old-world fruit bat family, called pteropid bats. Bats often end up being reservoirs for a number of severe infectious diseases, including Ebola, SARS coronavirus, Nipah and Hendra.

Transmission

- ✎ In the case of Nipah, disease transmission or the means by which a pathogen can be passed from one organism to another, is believed to take place, “when one consumes infected fruits and fresh date palm sap contaminated by bats,” points out Dr Mahesh Kumar, Consultant – Internal Medicine, Narayana Health City. Which means, one should be careful while choosing their fruits. “Don’t eat those on the ground, especially if they have broken skin,” says Dr K Kolandaswamy, Director of Public Health, Tamil Nadu.

- ✘ Loss of the natural habitat of the bat, appears to play some part in exacerbating the rate of bat-to-man transmission. The WHO says as much, says Dr Kumar. “As the flying fox habitat is destroyed by human activity, the bats get stressed and hungry, their immune system gets weaker, their virus load goes up and a lot of virus spills out in their urine and saliva,” he says.
- ✘ “Human-to-human transmission occurs due to direct contact,” says Dr N Devadasan, Director of Institute of Public Health, who led the WHO’s outbreak investigation team, when the infection broke out in Siliguri in 2001. That is perhaps why many healthcare providers who change sheets, clean bedpans and tend to the patient, end up being affected. Immediate isolation and ensuring that universal precautions are maintained in hospitals will help check the spread of the disease, agree all the doctors. “In India, if anyone falls sick, the entire family comes and visits,” says Devadasan. “It is better they keep away until the patient gets better.”

RNA virus

- ✘ Nipah is an RNA or Ribonucleic Acid virus. “RNA viruses are the most common cause of emerging diseases in humans, attributable to the high mutation rate in RNA viruses compared to DNA viruses,” says the book Essential Human Virology . Nipah belongs to a genus (category, in layperson speak) called the Henipavirus; the Hendra virus, also found on pteropid bats, belongs to this category too. According to the CDC, “Transmission of HeV to humans has been invariably associated with close contact with ill horses, and transmission of NiV in Bangladesh is mainly through date palm sap contaminated with bat secretions.”

Biosafety Level 4

- ✘ The virus, which is classified as Biosafety Level 4, meaning that it is highly infectious and needs a maximum containment facility, can be confirmed by an ELISA, RT-PCR or Serum Neutralization Test. The incubation period is anywhere between 5-14 days, but it can soon affect the respiratory and nervous system and patients can go into delirium or coma. Unfortunately, there is no definite treatment, except intensive supported care.



Art and Culture, Society, Social and National Issues

Samagra Shiksha scheme for school education

Why in news?

- ✎ The Union Human Resource Development Minister Prakash Javadekar recently launched Samagra Shiksha scheme for school education from pre-school to senior secondary levels.

Objective

- The scheme will mainly focus on improving quality of education, enhancing the learning outcomes and using technology to empower children and teachers.
- The scheme will be focused on digital education and it will enhance use of digital technology in education through smart classroom and digital boards.

Significance

- The scheme will provide holistic education for holistic development.
- It would help improve the quality of education by focusing on teachers and technology.
- An annual grant of Rs 5000- 20,000 will be provided for strengthening of libraries in the schools.

About Samagra Shiksha scheme

- It is an integrated scheme for school education from pre-school to senior secondary levels.
- The scheme is an integration of three already existing schemes Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE).
- While states would have the flexibility to prioritise their interventions under the scheme, learning outcomes and steps taken for quality improvement would be the basis for allocation of grants under the scheme.

Source: PIB, The Hindu

Swachh Surveskshan 2018

Why in news?

- ✎ The Government has recently released the results of the Swachh Surveskshan 2018.

Key facts

- Indore has emerged as the cleanest city again in India for second year in a row.
- Indore and Bhopal have managed to retain their positions as the top 2 cleanest cities, as that of previous year.

Highlights

- Chandigarh was ranked as the third cleanest city, moving up from Rank 11 in 2017.
- Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad was named as the fastest moving big city of the Swachh Survekshan 2018, moving up to Rank 36 from the previous 351 in 2017.
- Jharkhand was declared as the best performing state, followed by Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh.
- In terms of sanitation coverage, around 2133 cities and urban local bodies have been certified as ODF and 2679 cities have self-declared themselves as ODF and await certification.

About the survey

- The Swachh Survekshan 2018 was organised by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) under the aegis of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) with an aim to estimate levels of cleanliness across cities in the country.
- This cleanliness survey was undertaken by 2700 assessors between January 4 to March 10, 2018.
- The survey assessed 4203 Urban Local Bodies, up from 73 cities covered in the Swachata Sarvekshan 2016 and 434 cities covered in 2017.
- This year, citizens played a key role in the survey. Higher weightage was given on citizen feedback along with direct observation by assessors on the performance parameters of Swachhta by their local bodies.

Source: The Hindu

Government to set up national registry of crimes against women

Why in news?

- ✎ The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) is in the process of creating a national registry of crimes against women.

Key facts

- The records will be sourced from the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS).
- The Crime Bureau is in the process of hiring an agency to prepare the whole database.
- The move comes against the backdrop of an around three-per cent increase in crimes against women and a 12-per cent rise in incidents of rape in 2016 as compared to 2015.

What is the issue?

- In 2015, as many as 34,651 cases of rape were registered. The number increased to 38,947 in 2016.
- Overall crimes against women rose from 3,29,243 in 2015 to 3,38,954 in 2016, as per NCRB data.
- A majority of cases, almost 33 per cent, categorised as crimes against women were reported under “cruelty by husband or his relatives”, another 25 per cent under “assault on woman with intent to outrage her modesty”, 19 per cent under “kidnapping and abduction of women” and 11.5 per cent under “rape”.
- According to NCRB data, the highest number of rapes were reported from Madhya Pradesh (4,882), followed by Uttar Pradesh (4,816) and Maharashtra (4,189) in 2016.

National Crime Records Bureau

- The crime bureau was set up in 1986 to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals, in order to assist investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators.
- It was set up based on the recommendations of the National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the MHA’s task force (1985), by merging the Directorate of Coordination and Police Computer (DCPC), Inter State Criminals Data Branch of CBI, Central Finger Print Bureau of CBI and Statistical Branch of Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D).
- The NCRB developed Crime Criminal Information System (CCIS) in 1995, Common Integrated Police Application (CIPA) in 2004 and Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & System (CCTNS) in 2009.
- The CCTNS connects approximately 15000 police stations and 6000 higher offices in the country.
- The NCRB also compiles and publishes National Crime Statistics, which includes crime in India, accidental deaths and suicides and prison statistics.

Source: The Hindu

❑ Gender discrimination kills 239000 girls each year in India: Lancet Report 7-7**Why in news?**

- Around 239000 girls under the age of five die each year in India due to gender discrimination, as per the Lancet Global Health journal that was released recently.

Key Facts

- These deaths amount to about 2.4 million deaths in a decade, however, this number does not include pre-natal mortality rates.
- According to the study, 29 out of Indian 35 States and UTs contributed to the death of these girls. Moreover, additional deaths were found in 90 percent of districts in the country.

Highlights

- The average level of avoidable mortality in 0-4 years age of girls in India was 18.5 per 1000 live births between 2000-2005.
- This problem was most prominent in northern India, where the four largest states Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh accounted for two-thirds of the total avoidable deaths of infant girls under the age of five.
- The worst affected areas were typically in rural regions, having low levels of education, high population densities and high birth rates.

The Way Ahead

- The findings press for the need of addressing the issue of gender discrimination in addition besides encouraging social and economic development.
- Many of the deaths of girl child are partly due to unwanted female child attitude in a society that has more preference for sons.
- A preference for boys and the availability of sex-selective operations, although illegal in India, has led to gender gap of as many as 63 million girls, showcasing India as a country with one of the most distorted sex ratios in the world. For every 107 males born in India, there are 100 females.

Source: The Hindu

Aadhaar linkage not mandatory for getting pension

Why in news?

- ✘ The Union Government has recently clarified that the Aadhaar card is not mandatory for central government employees to get their pension.

What is the issue?

- ✘ The announcement is of significance as there were reports of some retired employees facing difficulty in getting the pension in the absence of Aadhaar linkage with their bank accounts.

Key facts

- There are about 48.41 lakh central government employees and 61.17 lakh pensioners in the country.
- Aadhaar, the 12-digit unique identity number is the world's largest biometric ID system.
- It was issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), a statutory authority established in January 2009 by the Union Government of India.
- The constitutional validity of the biometric ID system is currently being contested in the Supreme Court, as people feel that mandatory linking of Aadhaar with bank accounts, mobile phones and government schemes is a violation of their right to privacy, a fundamental right.

Aadhaar not mandatory for mobile SIMs as well

- The centre recently directed the telecom companies to start accepting other identity proofs such as driving licence, passport and voter ID card while providing mobile SIMs.
- The centre made it clear that Aadhaar would not be mandatory to get a mobile SIM.
- The move comes after the Supreme Court questioned the Centre for using its earlier order on 'mandatory authentication of users' as a 'tool' by asking telecom companies to link their mobile numbers with Aadhaar.
- The apex court has already clarified that Aadhaar is not mandatory for getting SIM cards until it takes a final view on the matter.

Source: PIB, The Hindu

Women can file domestic violence complaint even after divorce: SC**Why in news?**

- ✎ The Supreme Court of India has held that a woman can lodge a complaint under the domestic violence law against the cruel acts committed by her ex-husband even after the dissolution of marriage.
- ✎ The ruling was passed by a three-judge bench comprising Justices Ranjan Gogoi, R Banumathi and Navin Sinha. The ruling came on a plea that challenged an order by the Rajasthan High Court.

Background

- The Rajasthan High Court that had held on October 30, 2013 that the subsistence of marriage or domestic relationship was not a condition precedent for an aggrieved person to invoke the protection orders and other reliefs under the provisions of the Act.
- The court had stated that if the aggrieved person had been in a domestic relationship at any point of time even prior to coming into the force of the Act and was subjected to domestic violence, the person is entitled to invoke the remedial measures provided under the Act.

- The court ruled that the absence of a prevailing domestic relationship in no manner prevents a court from granting relief to an aggrieved woman.
- The court had passed the order while hearing a matrimonial dispute.

The Case: Highlights

- With its ruling, the top court upheld the order of the Rajasthan High Court. The judges' bench dismissed the appeal against the high court verdict, saying it was not inclined to interfere with the order in the facts of the case.
- During the hearing, advocate Dushyant Parashar, appearing on behalf of the estranged husband, appealed that the provisions of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which came into force on October 26, 2006, could not be applied retrospectively.
- He submitted that if the provisions of the domestic violence law were allowed to be used retrospectively, then it would be subjected to gross misuse.
- He also contended that a husband-wife relationship often ends on a bitter note and if the provisions of the act were allowed to be used retrospectively, then it would further increase the animosity and rule out the possibility of any compromise.
- He further said that a legislature's purposive interpretation has to be kept in mind while interpreting any provisions of the law.
- The bench, however, refused to agree with the contention of the advocate and declined to interfere with the high court order in the facts of the case.

Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

- The act aims to provide for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family.
- It was brought into force by the Indian government from October 26, 2006.
- The act provides for the first time in Indian law a definition of "domestic violence", with this definition being broad and including not only physical violence, but also other forms of violence such as emotional/verbal, sexual and economic abuse.
- The act extends to the whole of India except for the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which has its own law - Jammu and Kashmir Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2010.

Source: The Indian Express

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Polity & Governance, Social Justice, Social Development

❑ Inter-State Council Standing Committee completes deliberations on Punchhi Commission report

Why in news?

- ✎ The Standing Committee of the Inter-State Council (ISC) headed by the Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh completed its deliberations on all the 273 recommendations of the Punchhi Commission.

Key facts

- The announcement was made during the 13th meeting of the Standing Committee of the ISC.
- These recommendations will now be placed before the Inter-State Council for decision. With this, the work on Punchhi Commission Report, which had been pending for the last eight years, has been completed. Notably, the ISC meeting in 2016 was held after a gap of 10 years.

Highlights of the meeting

- The meeting deliberated the VI & VII volumes of the report that contained a total of 88 recommendations.
- The recommendations in Volume VI of the Punchhi Commission report are related to Environment, Natural Resources and Infrastructure and cover the subjects on (a) Environment; (b) Water; (c) Forests; (d) Minerals and (e) Infrastructure.
- The recommendations in Volume VII are related to Socio-economic Development, Public Policy and Good Governance and cover the subjects on (a) Public Policy and Public Administration; (b) Socio-political Developments; (c) Basic Needs of People, Directive Principles, Centrally Sponsored Development Schemes; (d) Migration, Human Development; and (e) Good Governance.
- The previous two meetings of the Standing Committee of the ISC, held in 2017, deliberated on the recommendations contained in Volumes II to V of the Punchhi Commission's Report.
- The 67 recommendations in Volume II on 'Constitutional Governance and the Management of Centre-State Relations' of the report were considered by the Standing Committee in its 11th meeting held in April 2017.
- While, 118 recommendations contained in Volumes III, IV & V of the Punchhi Commission's Report were considered by the Standing Committee in its 12th meeting held in November 2017.

Punchhi Commission

- The Government of India constituted a Commission on Centre-State Relations under the Chairmanship of Justice Madan Mohan Punchhi, former Chief Justice of India on April 27, 2007.
- The committee was constituted to examine the new issues of Centre-State relations, keeping in view the changes in the polity and economy of India.
- The Commission examined the working of the Union and States, various pronouncements of the Courts in regard to powers and responsibilities in all spheres including legislative relations, administrative relations, emergency provisions, financial relations, economic and social planning, Panchayati Raj institutions, sharing of resources including inter-state river water, etc.
- The Commission made 273 recommendations in its seven volume report that was presented to Government on March 30, 2010.

Source: The Hindu

SC approves Centre's draft Cauvery management scheme

Why in news?

- ✎ The Supreme Court of India has recently approved the Centre's draft Cauvery Management Scheme for smooth distribution of Cauvery river water among the southern states.

Key Facts

- The court also dismissed Tamil Nadu's plea seeking initiation of contempt against the Centre for non-finalization of Cauvery scheme.
- The scheme, once finalised, would deal with the issue of water share between Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry in different circumstances like normal and deficient water years in the Cauvery river basin.

About the ruling of the Supreme Court

- The observation was made after the Centre submitted the draft Cauvery management scheme in the court for its approval on May 14.
- The scheme has basically been framed for the smooth implementation of the apex court's February 16 judgment for sharing of Cauvery River's water between the four southern states.
- The bench had said that it will not go into the correctness of the draft Cauvery scheme framed by the government but will examine only one issue - whether the scheme conforms to its judgment of February 16.
- The bench stated that the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal's award, which was modified by the apex court, has to be taken to the logical conclusion by the Cauvery Management Scheme.
- Earlier, the bench had rejected the provision empowering the Centre to issue the directions, saying that it was not in line with the court's February 16 judgement.

What was February 16 verdict?

- The Supreme Court of India on February 16, 2018 reduced Tamil Nadu's share of Cauvery water by 14.75 tmcft water per year, diverting the same to Karnataka.
- The judgement was delivered by a bench comprising Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices Amitava Roy and A M Khanwilkar.
- The court stated that the decision to increase the water share of Karnataka was taken due to the 10 tmcft groundwater and 4.75 tmcft drinking water requirement for Bengaluru residents.
- With the decision, while Tamil Nadu's share was decreased to 177 tmcft, Karnataka's share was increased to 284.75 tmcft and Kerala's and Puducherry's share remained the same.
- The court, however, offered compensation by allowing Tamil Nadu to draw an additional 10 tmcft 'groundwater' from a total of 20 tmcft beneath the Cauvery basin.
- The Cauvery Water Tribunal, in its ruling in 2007, had allocated 192 TMC water to Tamil Nadu, 270 TMC water to Karnataka, 30 tmcft to Kerala and 7 tmcft to Puducherry per year.
- The court in its verdict had also directed the Centre to frame the Cauvery management scheme, including the creation of the Cauvery Management Board, for the release of the River's water from Karnataka to Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.

About Cauvery Water Dispute

- The water sharing of Cauvery River has been a major source of conflict between the states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- The origin of this conflict can be traced back to two agreements in 1892 and 1924, which had taken place between the then Madras Presidency and the Kingdom of Mysore.
- Based on inflow Karnataka has been demanding its due share of water from the river. It stated that the pre-independence agreements were invalid and majorly favour the Madras Presidency, and demanded a renegotiated settlement based on equitable sharing of the waters.
- Tamil Nadu, on the other hand, stated that it has already developed almost 3,000,000 acres (12,000 km²) of land and as a result has come to depend very heavily on the existing pattern of usage and any change in the pattern will adversely affect the livelihood of millions of farmers in the state.
- The Government of India constituted a tribunal in 1990 to look into the matter.
- After hearing arguments of all the parties involved for the next 16 years, the tribunal delivered its final verdict on February 5, 2007.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

Governor's Role in The Hung Assembly

Why in news?

- ✎ The Assembly Elections in Karnataka produced an inconclusive verdict as no single party getting a simple majority to form the government. However, the BJP won 104 of the 222 constituencies and emerged as a single largest party. The Congress and Janata Dal (Secular) won 78 and 37 seats respectively.
- ✎ With the results of the Karnataka assembly election throwing up a hung house, the role of the Governor has come into focus, in regard to whether the single largest party or the leader claiming majority with post-poll alliance should be invited to form the new government.
- ✎ It triggered a debate about the role of the Governor in government formation when there is a hung assembly.

Role of the Governor in the government formation

- As a matter of convention, the Governor has to first invite the single largest party to form the government. But the decision has to be an “informed one” and “on sound basis,” with a view to provide a stable government.
- In 2006, President of India (then) Dr A P J Abdul Kalam while addressing the governors had emphasized the relevance of recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission and said “While there are many checks and balances provided by the Constitution, the office of the Governor has been bestowed with the independence to rise above day-to-day politics and override compulsions either emanating from the central system or the state system.”
- In the Rameshwar Prasad Vs Union of India, 2006, case, a five-judge Constitution Bench, clearly recommended the suggestions made by the R S Sarkaria Commission in its report on Centre-State relations, which had emphasized on the impartiality of Governors and their role in upholding the constitutional mandate.
- Later, the M M Punchhi Commission also elaborated that the governor should follow “constitutional conventions” in a case of a hung Assembly. Further, in a case of a Hung Assembly, the Punchhi Commission prescribed:
 1. The party or alliances which get the widest support in the Legislative Assembly should be called upon to form the government.
 2. If there is a pre-poll coalition or alliance, it should be treated as one political party. And in case, such coalition gets a majority, the leader of such alliances shall be called by the Governor to form the government.
 3. In case no pre-poll coalition or party has a clear majority, the governor should select the Chief Minister in the order of priorities indicated here:

- (i) The group of parties which had a pre-poll alliance of the largest number.
 - (ii) The largest single party which claims to form the government with the support of others;
 - (iii) A post-electoral alliance with all partners joining the government;
 - (iv) A post-electoral alliance where parties are joining the government and the remaining including independents are supporting the government from outside.
- ✎ In the Nabam Rebia and Bamang Felix Vs Deputy Speaker case a five-judge Bench, recommended the views of the Punchhi and Sarkaria Commissions regarding giving the Governor an independent discretion to take a call on the floor test when the government has lost the confidence of the legislature.
- ✎ In the S R Bommai case, a nine-judge Bench had underlined the significance of a floor test when there are claims by two political groups while laying down that the floor test must be conducted by the Governor as soon as possible.

History of such cases

- There are many such incidences in history where the political parties with fewer seats were invited to form the government by the governor.
- In Manipur, the BJP won 21 constituencies and the Congress won 28 constituencies out of 60 Constituencies. But BJP managed to form an alliance.
- In Goa, the BJP won 13 seats and the Congress won 17 seats out of 40 constituencies. Here also, BJP managed to form an alliance.
- In Jharkhand, the BJP had won 30 out of 81 seats in 2005. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha who won only 17 seats was invited to form the government.
- In Jammu and Kashmir 2002, the National Conference won 28 constituencies but the governor invited the Congress and PDP who won 21 and 15 constituencies.
- The BJP won 31 seats in Delhi in 2013, but the AAP who won 27 seats was invited to form the Government.
- There are other such incidences which took place in 1952 (Madras), 1967 (Rajasthan) and 1982 (Haryana).

Constitutional Provisions

- In 1993, advocates on Record Association Vs Union of India, case which was a case in regards to weight of “constitutional convention”, a seven-judge bench, in Supreme Court, had held that “there is no distinction between the ‘constitutional law’ and an established ‘constitutional convention’ and both are binding in the field of their operation.
- The Supreme court also observed that “Once it is established to the satisfaction of the court that a particular convention exists and is operating then the convention becomes a part of the ‘constitutional law’ of the land and can be enforced in the like manner.”.
- Article 164 of the Constitution says: “The Chief Minister shall be appointed by the Governor and the other ministers shall be appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister, and the ministers shall hold office during the pleasure of the Governor.”
- Article 164(2) of the Constitution says that the Council of Ministers must be collectively responsible to the House.

Similar Case in the Lok Sabha

- In Lok Sabha, the debate between a combination of parties constituting a majority versus the largest single party lacking majority was answered by the former President Shri KR Narayanan.
- Mr. Narayanan elaborated it in his communiqué in March 1998 when he invited Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee to form the Government. He had said “when no party or pre-election alliance of parties is in a clear majority, the Head of State has in India or elsewhere, given the first opportunity to the leader of the party or combination of parties that has won largest number of seats subject to the Prime Ministers so appointed obtaining majority support on the floor of the house within a stipulated time.
- This procedure is not, however, all time formula because situations can arise where MPs not belonging to the single largest party or combination can, as a collective entity, out-number the single largest claimant. The President’s choice of Prime Minister is pivoted on the would be Prime Minister’s claim of commanding majority support.”

Conclusion

- In a democracy, the proper representation of public interest is of supreme importance. And the governments are chosen by the people. And, our constitution has clearly directed the ways how the government should be formed in the case of Hung Assembly. And it has given this prerogative to the Governors. So the governor should analyze which political party or alliance is forming the majority on the basis of constitutional provisions. And his decision should be followed by the political parties.

Source: Hindustan Times, Live Mint

❑ SC issues directives to High Courts for monitoring POCSO Act cases

Why in news?

- After witnessing the high rate of pendency of child sexual assault cases, the Supreme Court on May 1, 2018 issued a slew of directions to all the High Courts regarding speedy trial in sexual assault cases involving children under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.

What are the directions issued by Supreme Court?

- The State police chiefs should constitute special task forces to investigate cases.
- High Courts should ensure that the cases are tried and disposed off by the designated Special Courts under the POSCO Act, 2012.
- POCSO judges to give no adjournments and make every effort to fast-track trial.
- Witnesses should be produced in court on the day of the hearing.
- High courts should make every effort to provide a child-friendly atmosphere as per the POSCO Act.
- The Director General of Police (DGPs) or police officer of same rank of all states and UTs shall ensure that probes in POCSO cases were conducted expeditiously and the witnesses are produced in the courts for recording of testimonies.

About POCSO Act:

- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) 2012 was formulated in order to effectively address sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children.
- The Act defines a child as any person below eighteen years of age. It defines different forms of sexual abuse, including penetrative and non-penetrative assault, as well as sexual harassment and pornography.
- It deems a sexual assault to be “aggravated” under certain circumstances, such as when the abused child is mentally ill or when the abuse is committed by a person in a position of trust or authority like a family member, police officer, teacher, or doctor.

What are the key provisions?

- The Act casts the police in the role of child protectors during the investigative process.
- The police personnel receiving a report of sexual abuse of a child are given the responsibility of making urgent arrangements for the care and protection of the child.
- The Act further makes provisions for avoiding the re-victimisation of the child at the hands of the judicial system.

- It provides for special courts that conduct the trial in-camera and without revealing the identity of the child, in a manner that is as child-friendly as possible.
- Hence, the child may have a parent or other trusted person present at the time of testifying and can call for assistance from an interpreter, special educator, or other professional while giving evidence.
- Above all, the Act stipulates that a case of child sexual abuse must be disposed of within one year from the date the offence is reported.
- The Act also provides for mandatory reporting of sexual offences. This casts a legal duty upon a person who has knowledge that a child has been sexually abused to report the offence; if he fails to do so, he may be punished with six months' imprisonment and/ or a fine. It also sought provision of death penalty in such cases and framing of guidelines for speedy trial of cases involving rape of children below 12 years of age under POSCO Act, 2012.

Source: The Hindu

Minimum Wages (Delhi) Amendment Act, 2017

Why in news?

- ✎ The Minimum Wages (Delhi) Amendment Act, 2017 was officially notified recently, following the approval of the Bill by President Ram Nath Kovind on April 26, 2018.
- ✎ This new legislation amends the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and was passed by the Delhi Assembly on August 10, 2017. The bill was first tabled in 2015.

Background

- The Delhi government had first tabled the amendment Bill on December 3, 2015 to increase penalties for denial of minimum wages.
- However, the legislation was sent back to the government to re-introduce the Bill with some changes in the Assembly.
- Finally, after some changes, including the definition of the term Delhi government, the Bill was again introduced and passed in 2017.

Key Features of the bill

- As per the amendment, the employers violating labour rules in Delhi will now face fine ranging from Rs 20000 to 50000 and jail term of one to three years.
- The employer will upload the employee data on website or web portal in the manner as prescribed.
- The court, before which the prosecution complaint is made under Section 22 of the Act, will be required to dispose it off within a month from the date of filing.
- The rate of payment for overtime work will be not less than two times of the normal rate of wages fixed under the Act or under any law of the appropriate government, whichever is higher.

Hike in minimum wages

- In March 2017, Lt Governor Anil Baijal approved the Delhi Government's decision to hike the minimum wages of unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers by 37 percent.
- For an unskilled worker, the minimum wages is Rs 13350 per month while for semi-skilled, it is Rs 14698. The minimum wages for skilled persons is Rs 16182 in Delhi.

What is the significance?

- ✎ The amended law will act strongly against the employers who do not pay full minimum wages. The Department of Law, Justice and Legislative Affairs of the Delhi also issued a notification, making it mandatory for employers to pay remuneration either electronically or through cheques, except in some special circumstances.

Source: PIB, Indian Express

SC allows courts to refer to Parliamentary Committee reports

Why in news?

- ✎ The Supreme Court has recently ruled that the courts can look into Parliamentary Standing Committee reports and take them into record while deciding on an issue.

Key Facts

- The decision was taken by a five-judge constitution bench comprising Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices AK Sikri, AM Khanwilkar, DY Chandrachud and Ashok Bhushan.
- The constitution bench unanimously held that placing reliance on Parliamentary Committee Reports in court proceedings does not violate the parliamentary privileges.
- The court stated that the parliamentary standing committee reports were in public domain and hence, relying on them would not be in violation of parliamentary privileges.
- In a separate but concurring judgment, Justice D Y Chandrachud said, "there is no reason or justification" that the report of the Parliamentary Committee is not within the preview of the courts.
- However, the bench made it clear that the parliamentary reports cannot be challenged in Courts.

What was the issue?

- The judgment by the five-judge bench came up on a question whether such reports could be relied upon while deciding an issue.
- A two judge bench of the Supreme Court of India in April, 2017 referred the following questions for the consideration of Constitution Bench:

1. Whether in a litigation filed before this Court either under Article 32 or Article 136 of the Constitution of India, the court can refer to and place reliance upon the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee?
 2. Whether such a Report can be looked at for the purpose of reference and, if so, can there be restrictions for the purpose of reference.
- ✎ The issue was rooted in a public interest plea that was filed by a petitioner called Kalpana Mehta, who questioned the efficacy of a vaccine produced by two drug companies for the treatment of cervical cancer.

What is the significance?

- ✎ The judgment will help NGOs, which frequently file PILs in the SC, to rely on Parliamentary Standing Committee reports that are often critical of the government to seek relief for people under various welfare schemes.

Source: The Hindu, the Times of India

15th Finance Commission sets up Advisory Council

Why in news?

- ✎ The 15th Finance Commission has constituted an Advisory Council to advise and assist the commission on the matters related to its terms of reference.

What is the role of the Advisory Council?

- To advise the finance commission on any issue or subject related to the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Commission, which may be of relevance.
- To assist in the preparation of any paper or research study that would enhance the commission's understanding on the issues containing in its ToR.
- To help in broadening the commission's ambit and understanding to seek best national and international practices on matters pertaining to fiscal devolution and improving the quality and reach and enforcement of its recommendations.

The advisory council will have following members:

1. **Arvind Virmani:** President, Forum for Strategic Initiatives
2. **Surjit S Bhalla:** Part-time Member of PMEAC and Senior Indian Analyst for the Observatory Group and Chairman of Oxus Research and Investments
3. **Sanjeev Gupta:** Ex-Deputy Director (Fiscal Affairs Department), IMF
4. **Pinaki Chakraborty:** Professor (NIPFP)
5. **Sajjid Chinoy:** Chief India Economist, JP Morgan
6. **Neelkanth Mishra:** Managing Director and the Credit Suisse India Economist and Strategist

15th Finance Commission

- The 15th Finance Commission was constituted by the Union Government in November 2017 after approval from the President of India.
- While NK Singh was appointed as the Chairman of the commission, Arvind Mehta was appointed as the secretary.
- The two full-time members of the commission include Shaktikanta Das and Anoop Singh and two part-time members include Ramesh Chand and Ashok Lahiri.
- The commission was mainly set up to give recommendations for five fiscal years commencing on April 1, 2020.

Main role of the commission includes the following:

- To strengthen cooperative federalism
- To improve the quality of public spending
- To help protect fiscal stability

Source: The Hindu

❑ Compensation Scheme for sexual assault and acid attack victims approved

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court (SC) has recently approved the ‘Compensation Scheme for Women Victims/ Survivors of Sexual Assault/Other Crimes-2018’, a uniform compensation scheme for victims of sexual assault and acid attacks.

Key facts

- The scheme was prepared by the **National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)** in consultation with the Union Government.
- A bench of Justice Madan B Lokur and Justice Deepak Gupta ordered that the scheme should be implemented in all states and union territories.
- The bench was also told that though Centre had cleared Rs 3500 crore fund under the Nirbhaya Scheme, but only nine states have received the funds so far.
- There are various cases in which the victims have still not been paid with the compensation, which has been pending since 2013.

- To this, the apex court replied that it would deal with the issue of the Nirbhaya Fund in July 2018.
- The Union Government created the Nirbhaya Fund in 2013 to support state governments and NGOs working for women's safety.

Highlights of the scheme are as follows:

- The scheme defines the compensation slabs for victims of sexual assault, acid attacks and even for the loss of a fetus. and acid attacks to grant interim relief after preliminary verification.
- Under the scheme, a compensation fund will be set up that will be managed by State Legal Services Authority (SLSA).

Source: The Hindu

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International Relations, India & the World and International Affairs

PM Modi's visit to Russia**Why in news?**

- ✎ Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held his first informal Summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin on May 21, 2018 in the city of Sochi, Russia.
- ✎ The Summit provided an opportunity for both the leaders to deepen their friendship and to exchange views on international and regional issues, in keeping with the tradition of high level political exchanges between India and Russia.

Highlights

- During the high-level delegation meet, the two leaders agreed that the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between India and Russia is an important factor for global peace and stability.
- They shared the view that India and Russia have an important role to play in contributing to an open and equitable world order and recognised each other's respective roles as major powers with common responsibilities for maintaining global peace and stability.
- The leaders also held in depth discussions on major international issues and agreed on the importance of building a multipolar world order.
- The leaders decided to intensify consultation and coordination with each other, including on the Indo-Pacific Region.
- They also agreed to continue working together through multilateral organisations such as the United Nations, SCO, BRICS and G-20.

What are the areas of concern?**Terrorism**

- While discussing the concerning issue of terrorism, both Putin and Modi expressed their deep concern on the matter and their determination to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.
- In the same regard, the leaders stressed on the importance of restoring peace and stability in Afghanistan.
- They agreed that it was significant for the nation to be free from the threat of terrorism and agreed to work together towards achieving this objective.

Trade, Energy & Military

- The two leaders agreed to institute a Strategic Economic Dialogue between NITI Aayog of India and the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation to identify greater synergy in trade and investment.
- They noted with satisfaction the expanding cooperation in the energy sector and also welcomed the arrival of the first consignment of LNG under a long-term agreement between Gazprom and GAIL, next month.
- The two leaders also reiterated the significance of longstanding partnership in the military, security and nuclear energy fields and welcomed the ongoing cooperation in these areas.

The Way Ahead

- The informal summit has given a boost to the positive momentum that was established by the two nations in the last bilateral Summit in St Petersburg in June 2017 and the same will be carried on to the forthcoming Summit in India. Prime Minister Modi has invited President Putin for the 19th Annual Summit in India later in 2018.

Source: PIB, Indian Express

US withdraws from Iran nuclear deal

Why in news?

- ✘ The President of United States, Donald Trump has recently announced US withdrawal from the landmark 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.
- ✘ He stated that any nation that helps Iran in its quest for nuclear weapons could also be strongly sanctioned by the United States.

The Iran nuclear deal /Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

- The Iran nuclear deal or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was forged in 2015 during the Obama administration under then-Secretary of State John Kerry, as a multi-nation effort to keep Iran's nuclear program in check.
- The agreement was negotiated between Iran and the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council - the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, France, China, Germany and the European Union.
- The landmark agreement lifted all US, EU, UN sanctions on Iran that crippled its economy and cut its oil exports roughly in half.

- In exchange for sanctions relief, Iran agreed to limit its nuclear program and reduce its uranium enrichment activities.
- Iran also allowed international inspectors to inspect all of its nuclear facilities, supply chains and uranium mining sites.
- The deal had been an effective arms control deal that has kept Iran's nuclear program frozen for three years.

What is the impact of the withdrawal?

- The withdrawal means that the US will not renew the sanctions waiver it had imposed earlier.
- Though Iran's foreign minister had previously said that re-imposition of US sanctions would make the deal null and void, leaving the nation with little choice but to abandon it as well.
- On May 7, President Rouhani said that Iran could stick with the deal if the European Union, whose economies do far more business with Iran than the US, offers a guarantee that Iran would keep benefiting.
- However, if the nuclear deal does collapse, Iran would be free to resume its prohibited nuclear program and enrichment activities.
- On the other hand, businesses and banks doing business with Iran would be forced to exit such arrangements or go against the United States.
- For the US, though the exit fulfills one of Trump's campaign promises, it threatens to strain US relations with some of its closest allies and disrupt a significant source of the world's oil.

What are the reactions from US allies?

- The leaders of US's closest allies – Britain, Germany and France expressed 'regret and concern' over Trump's decision and said they intend to preserve the 2015 agreement.
- In a joint statement on May 8, the leaders of the three nations called on Iran to continue implementing the deal and urged Trump to avoid taking any action that would prevent them from implementing the agreement.
- The leaders also urged the United States to do everything possible to preserve the gains for nuclear non-proliferation brought about by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the deal's official name.

Facts you must not miss: List of US withdrawals at a glance**1. US pulls out of UN's migrant and refugee pact**

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

2. US President Donald Trump signs executive order to pull US out of TPP

Donald Trump signed an executive order on January 23, 2017, immediately after his accession to power, to formally pull the country out of the negotiating process of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), one of the major international trade initiatives of Barack Obama. Trump felt the partnership to be harmful to American workers and manufacturing.

3. Trump announces US withdrawal from Paris Agreement on Climate Change

President Donald Trump announced on June 1, 2017 that he would withdraw the United States from the landmark 2015 Paris agreement to fight climate change, stating that the accord would undermine US economy, cost US jobs, weaken American national sovereignty and put the country at a permanent disadvantage to the other countries of the world.

4. US withdraws from UNESCO

The United States and its ally Israel announced on October 12, 2017 that they were pulling out of the UN's culture and education body, UNESCO, accusing it of anti-Israel bias.

5. US regulators repeal net neutrality rules

The United States Federal Communications Commission voted along party lines on December 14, 2017 to repeal the 2015 Open Internet Order which protects net neutrality in the United States.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express, Wikipedia

□ India, Guatemala will support each other for non-permanent membership of UNSC**Why in news?**

- ✎ India and Guatemala have agreed to support each other's candidature for Non-Permanent Membership in the United Nations Security Council. Guatemala will support India's candidature for UNSC membership for 2021-22 while India will do so for Guatemala for 2031-32.
- ✎ While various issues were discussed at the high-level meet including trade, cultural diversity and economic growth, the main focus was on core sectors such as pharmaceutical, cooperation in education, technology, conservation of wildlife, yoga, tourism and automobiles.

Key Agreements at a Glance

- Leaders of both countries agreed that India and Guatemala are faced with similar challenges including governance issues, terrorism in different forms, poverty and economic disparities and concluded that democracy is the best form of governance to address them.
- Naidu suggested setting up of Parliamentary Friendship group to promote interaction among MPs of both sides.
- During the talks, the Indian side agreed to the Guatemala's request for supplying solar panels to its airports.
- Naidu also invited Guatemala to join the International Solar Alliance stating it has found wide appeal with 61 countries already joining it.
- Both the sides also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for training of diplomats and a Letter of Intent for training Guatemalan English Teachers in India.
- The agreements will be valid for a period of three years and will be extended thereafter, if required.

India-Guatemala Relations

- India and Guatemala started diplomatic relations during the late 1970s and since then, the relations have been cordial and friendly.
- The first-ever ministerial visit from India to Guatemala was in June 2007 by the then Minister of State for External Affairs, Anand Sharma.
- After that, both the countries decided to open their embassies in respective countries. The Indian embassy in Guatemala was formally inaugurated in April 2011 by the then Minister of State for External Affairs, E Ahamed.
- The India-SICA (Central American Integration System) Foreign Ministers' meeting is an important forum for India's bilateral interaction with Guatemala. The second India-SICA Foreign Ministers' meeting was held in Delhi in June 2008.
- Established in 1991, the Central American Integration System (SICA) consists of seven full members -Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama and Dominican Republic as the Associate Member (Total 8).

- India has offered to assist SICA countries in priority areas including agriculture, SMEs, pharmaceuticals, tourism, IT-related activities, renewable energy, disaster management, distant education and supply of satellite imagery for development purposes.
- Further, Guatemalan Vice President Dr. Franco invited India to send a delegation to the Conference of Ibero America to be held in Guatemala City in November 2018, which will be attended by all the Latin American countries besides Spain and Portugal. This is the first time that India has received such an invitation for the conference that is held once in three years.

Source: PIB, Times of India, Business Standard

India at 4th position in Asia-Pacific on power index

Why in news?

- ✎ The inaugural Asia Power index by the Lowy Institute, an Australian think tank, has ranked India at the 4th position among 25 nations in the Asia Pacific region.

Key Facts

- The index measures the overall power of 25 countries and territories across the Asia-Pacific region including nations such as Pakistan, Russia, Australia, New Zealand and the United States.
- The index measures a country's overall power through its weighted average across eight measures of power - economic resources, military capability, resilience, future trends, diplomatic influence, economic relationships, defence networks and cultural influence.

Highlights

- The index revealed Japan and India to be countries sharing major power status.
- While the report labeled Japan as a smart power, it called India the giant of the future.
- It also found that US remained to be the pre-eminent power in Asia, while China, the emerging superpower, was found to be rapidly closing in on the United States.
- The report revealed that three of the world's four largest economies are in Asia, and the fourth, the United States, is a Pacific power.
- It also stated that by 2025, two-thirds of the world's population will live in Asia, compared to just over a tenth in the West.

Indian Context

- India was ranked fourth on the parameters of economic resources, military capability and diplomatic influence. It was ranked fifth on resilience.
- However, on the parameters of cultural influence and future trends, India scored well by ranking third in both.
- India scored low on the measure of economic relationships and defense networks, ranking 7th and 10th respectively.

About other countries

- The US claimed the top spot in five of the eight Index measures and a 10-point lead over China in overall power.
- The country retains the most powerful military force in Asia and is at the centre of a network of regional alliances that China cannot match. It has a 65-point lead over China in defence networks.
- However, in terms of economic relationships the US lags China by more than 30 points.
- Future trends also point towards a relative decline in US power even though the nation continues to outspend China in military expenditure.
- China held top-two positions across all but one measure and ranked first in economic relationships, diplomatic influence and future trends.

Further, nations including Russia, Australia, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, New Zealand, Vietnam, Pakistan, Taiwan, Philippines and North Korea were ranked as middle powers, while nations such as Bangladesh, Brunei, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Mongolia, Laos and Nepal were ranked as minor powers.

Source: The Hindu, Economic Times

Forbes World's Most Powerful People list 2018

Why in news?

- ✎ Prime Minister Narendra Modi was ranked among the 10 most powerful people in the world in the 2018 World's Most Powerful People list that is topped by Chinese President Xi Jinping.
- ✎ As per the World's Most Powerful People list, that was released on May 8, 2018, Reliance Industries (RIL) Chairman Mukesh Ambani is the only Indian businessman to feature in the list of 75 most powerful people.

Highlights

- Chinese President Xi Jinping tops the list for the first time, replacing Russian President Vladimir Putin, who slipped to 2nd place after being named as the most powerful person in the world for four consecutive years.
- US President Donald Trump was ranked third, despite his inability to shake off scandals arising from his personal and business life. While, British Prime Minister Theresa May fetched 14th place.
- Rounding up the top 10 on the list are German Chancellor Angela Merkel (4th rank), Amazon chief Jeff Bezos (5th), Pope Francis (6th), Bill Gates (7th), Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Al Saud (8th), Narendra Modi (9th) and Google founder Larry Page (10th)
- Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg was ranked 13th, Apple CEO Tim Cook got 24th spot, while, Indian-origin Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella was ranked 40th.
- There are 17 new names in this year's list including US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell (11th rank), Exxon Mobil Chief executive Darren Woods (34th rank) and US Department of Justice Special Counsel Robert Mueller (72nd rank).
- The list also includes Pope Francis (6th), French President Emmanuel Macron (12th), Alibaba Chief Jack Ma (21st), Elon Musk (25th), UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres (31st), North Korean leader Kim Jong-un (36th) and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (57th).
- PM Modi (9th rank) and Mukesh Ambani (32nd rank) are the only two Indians on the Forbes World's Most Powerful People list.

Source: The Indian Express, Live Mint

‘World Employment and Social Outlook Report’ 2018

Why in news?

- ✎ titled ‘World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with Jobs’.

As per the report, 24 million new jobs are expected to be created globally by 2030, if the right policies to promote a greener economy are put in place.

What is Green Economy?

- UNEP has defined the *green economy* as “one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. It is low carbon, resource efficient, and socially inclusive”

Highlights of the report

- At the regional level, there will be net job creation in the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific and Europe, representing some 3 million, 14 million and 2 million jobs, respectively, resulting from measures taken in the production and use of energy.
- But, if present trends continue, there could be net job losses in the Middle East (-0.48 percent) and Africa (-0.04 percent) due to their dependence on fossil fuels and mining, respectively.
- Mostly all the sectors of the economy will be benefitted from net job creation.
- Out of the 163 analysed economic sectors, only 14 will suffer employment losses of more than 10000 jobs worldwide.
- Only two sectors, namely, petroleum extraction and petroleum refining, show losses of over 1 million jobs.
- Over 2.5 million jobs will be created in renewable-energy based electricity, balancing around 400000 jobs lost in generation of fossil fuel-based electricity.
- 6 million jobs will be created by transitioning towards a ‘circular economy’ which involves activities like recycling, repair, rent and remanufacture. This concept of circular economy replaces the traditional economic model of extracting, making, using and disposing.

India’s green sector to employ 300000 workers by 2022

- As per the report of ILO, 300000 workers will be employed directly in the solar and wind energy sectors by 2022 to meet India’s goal of generating 175 gigawatts of electricity from renewable sources.
- As per estimates of the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) and the Natural Resources Defence Council (NRDC), the employment in solar and wind energy sectors in 2022 will be nearly double against the 154000 similar jobs in 2009.
- If India adopts environmentally sustainable means, all sectors, except the mining industry, will experience an increase in employment,.
- Over 1.5 million jobs are expected to be created in the renewable sector, 4.6 lakh jobs in construction and 2.8 lakh in the services sector across the country.

The Way Ahead

- Countries need to take urgent action to train workers in the skills needed for the transition to a greener economy.
- Countries should provide social protection to the workers that contributes in preventing poverty and reduces the vulnerability of households and communities.
- There should be synergy between social protection and environmental policies which support both workers' incomes and the transition to a greener economy.
- A policy comprising cash transfers, stronger social insurance and restrictions on the use of fossil fuels would lead to faster economic growth, stronger employment creation and a fairer income distribution.

Source: Business Standard, Indian Express

World Press Freedom Day 2018

Why in news?

- ✎ The World Press Freedom Day was observed across the world on May 3, 2018 with an aim to celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom, defend the media from attacks and pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives while being on duty.

Theme

- The theme of 2018 World Press Freedom Day was - 'Keeping Power in Check: Media, Justice and The Rule of Law'.

Background

- The day was established by the UN General Assembly in December 1993, following the recommendation of UNESCO's General Conference.
- The day marks the anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration, a statement of press freedom principles put together by African newspaper journalists, which was produced at a UNESCO seminar that was held from 29 April to 3 May 1991.

2018 World Press Freedom Index

- The Reporters without Borders (RSF) has released the World Press Freedom Index 2018, reflecting growing animosity towards journalists.
- The index reflected the growing influence of political heads and rival models. It pointed out that how more and more democratically-elected leaders no longer see media as a part of democracy, but as a rival.

- For instance, the US Congress narrowed the freedom of press in 2017, which only led to its fall in the index from rank 43 in 2017 to rank 45 this year.
- The index was topped by Norway again for the second year, followed by Sweden at second and the Netherlands at third. Although Nordic countries dominate the index, they too were affected by the overall decline.
- India's rank dropped down to 138th in the index this year from 136th in 2017. The index blamed PM Narendra Modi's "troll army" for intensifying hate speeches targeting journalists on social networks.

UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize 2018

- On the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day, UNESCO also held a ceremony to give away the 2018 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize.
- The 2018 Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize went to jailed Egyptian photographer Mahmoud Abu Zeid, popularly known as Shawkan.
- Abu Zeid was arrested in August 2013 for covering deadly demonstration between the security forces and supporters of ousted Islamist president Mohammed Morsi at Rabaa Al-Adawiya Square in Cairo, Egypt.
- He is one among the 700 defendants facing charges of killing police and vandalising property during the clashes.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

15th Asia Media Summit

Why in news?

- The Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), New Delhi and Broadcast Engineering Consultants India Limited (BECIL), organized the 15th Asia Media Summit (AMS-2018) in New Delhi recently.

Theme

- "Telling our Stories Asia and More" The theme aims to encourage dialogue and cooperation in Media Sector in the region.

Objective

- The summit mainly aims to provide a unique opportunity to the broadcasters in Asia to share their thoughts on broadcasting and information.

About the summit

- It is a prestigious annual event in the Asia Pacific Region, which is organised by the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) in collaboration with its partners and international organizations. India has organized the event for the first time.

Key Facts

- The summit was organised in two parts pre-summit workshop (8-9) and summit (10-12).
- It aims to encourage regional and bilateral dialogue and cooperation to respond to challenges to the broadcasting sector in the region.
- It would provide a unique opportunity for broadcasters in the Asian region to share their thoughts on software and hardware aspects of Broadcasting.
- It would also provide opportunities for networking, facilities for business to business meetings and prospective translation of these meetings into trade and economic relations after the summit.

About AIBD

- Set up in 1977, the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) is a unique regional inter-governmental organisation servicing countries of the United Nations
- Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) in the field of electronic media development.
- It is hosted by the Government of Malaysia and the secretariat is located in Kuala Lumpur.
- The AIBD is mandated to achieve a vibrant and cohesive electronic media environment in the Asia-Pacific region through policy and resource development.
- The Institute seeks to fulfill this mandate by mobilizing the intellectual and technological resources available within the national broadcasting organizations of its member countries as well as regional and international bodies through a well-established infrastructure and networking mechanism that includes government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and institutions of higher learning, private sector and individual professionals.

Source: Indian Express

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Indian Economy and Economic Development

RBI restricts Dena Bank from lending loans and hiring staff

Why in news?

- Taking into account the high Non-Performing Assets (NPAs), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has ordered the Dena Bank Ltd to not to issue any fresh loans and hire any new personnel. The move restricts the bank from giving fresh credits; however, it can accept the deposits.

Key Facts

- The move is a part of the RBI's prompt corrective action against public sector lender Dena Bank in view of its high non-performing loans.
- The RBI initiated Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) for Dena Bank in May 2017 and imposed certain restrictions on the bank.

Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) of the RBI

- Under the PCA, banks face restrictions on distributing dividends and remitting profits.
- In such cases in India, the government is asked to infuse capital into the lender.
- Banks could also be stopped from expanding their branch networks.
- Lenders are directed to maintain higher provisions and management compensation; and limit the directors' fees.
- The metrics that are used to measure how weak a lender is, are - capital, net NPAs, Return on Assets (RoA) and Tier 1 leverage ratio and these metrics define the three risk thresholds according to which RBI implement the action plan.
- Banks under PCA can fall into three risk thresholds based on the level of bad loans, capital adequacy and profitability.
- In April 2017, the RBI had issued a new set of provisions under the revised PCA framework, adding a clause that if a bank does not show improvement or if it reaches the level of 'risk threshold 3', then it could either be merged or be taken over by other bank.

RBI's corrective action against other banks

- As of now, out of 21 state-owned banks, there are 11 banks under the PCA framework of the Reserve Bank because of their weak financials.
- Together, these banks accounted for Rs 52311 crore of the capital infusion plan 'EASE' of Rs 88139 crore, announced by the Union Government for 2017-18.
- Recently, the RBI initiated the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) mechanism against four other public sector banks, including Allahabad Bank, IDBI Bank Ltd, Indian Overseas Bank and UCO Bank.

Source: Economic Times

Gujarat to offer PNG subsidy**Why in news?**

- Gujarat is planning to launch the new PNG/LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) Yojana, an extension to the Ujjwala Yojana.

Key facts:

- The scheme for select urban areas will supplement Ujjwala for BPL-AAY households not covered under Ujjwala to help supply households with clean fuel.
- As per the scheme, the government will pay Rs1,600 as one-time subsidy per connection and Rs1,725 as loan to customers opting for a new PNG connection. As a result, a beneficiary will have to pay only Rs118 to get a new connection and a refundable security deposit of Rs50 per month for a period of 100 months.
- The pipeline infrastructure and maintenance charges will be borne by city gas distribution companies.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana aims to provide LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to poor households.
- Under the scheme, an adult woman member of a below poverty line family identified through the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) is given a deposit-free LPG connection with financial assistance of Rs 1,600 per connection by the Centre.
- Eligible households will be identified in consultation with state governments and Union territories.
- The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

Significance of the move

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

Source: The Hindu

GOBAR-DHAN Scheme launched under Swachh Bharat Mission

Why in news?

- ✎ Union Minister for Drinking Water and Sanitation, Uma Bharti, on April 30, 2018 launched the GOBAR - DHAN (Galvanising Organic Bio-Agro Resources Fund) Scheme.

About GOBAR-DHAN Scheme

- Under GOBAR-DHAN scheme, solid waste of dung and fields will be changed into compost and fuels such as biogas and bio-CNG.
- The cooking gas will be provided to the rural habitations with optimum technical support to ensure that the schemes functions on a sustainable basis.
- The government has selected over 115 districts for implementation of the scheme.
- Under the scheme, farmers will be able to make use of easily available Compost fertilizer for their farm lands.
- As part of the scheme, people will be educated about the usage of cattle dung for converting it into more valuable fuel, biogas and manure.

What is the Impact?

- The scheme will boost village cleanliness and generate wealth and energy from cattle and organic wastes.
- It will create new rural livelihood opportunities and enhance income for farmers and other rural people.
- It will help in saving electricity and environment also

How GOBAR-DHAN Scheme will impact the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin)?

- The Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) comprises two main components for creating clean villages – creating Open Defecation Free (ODF) villages and managing solid and liquid waste in villages.
- As over 3.5 lakh villages, 374 districts and 16 States and UTs have already been declared ODF; the next move is for ODF-plus activities such as measures to enhance the solid and liquid waste management.
- The GOBAR-DHAN scheme comes as a savior at this point, with its focus on keeping villages clean and generating energy from cattle waste, which is just a part of this ODF-plus strategy.
- The scheme envisages the implementation of 700 bio-gas units in different states of the country in the year 2018-19.

About Swachh Bharat Mission

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Swachh Bharat Mission on October 2, 2014 to accelerate the efforts to achieve universal sanitation coverage and to put focus on sanitation.
- The Secretary of Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) was assigned as the Mission Coordinator with two Sub-Missions – the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) and the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban).
- Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) seeks to motivate communities and Panchayati Raj Institutions to adopt sustainable sanitation practices through awareness creation and health education.
- It also calls for developing managed sanitation systems with focus on scientific solid & liquid waste management systems for overall cleanliness in the rural areas
- The Mission aims to achieve a Swachh Bharat by 2019, as a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary.

Source: The Hindu, PIB

AT Kearney FDI Confidence Index 2018

Why in news?

- Global consultant AT Kearney recently released the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Confidence Index 2018, an annual survey which tracks the impact of political, economic and regulatory changes on the FDI preferences of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) of the country.
- The United States (US) topped the index, followed by Canada at 2nd and Germany at the 3rd place.

Key facts

- The top five countries in the Index remain the same like the previous three years, but their relative positions have shifted. These top 5 countries are the United States, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and China.
- China falls three spots to 5th place this year, the lowest ranking of the country in the history of the Index.
- Switzerland and Italy entered the top 10 for the first time in more than a decade, pushing out India and Singapore to 11th and 12th spots, respectively.
- Only four emerging markets appear among the top 25 countries for FDI intentions- China, India, Mexico and Brazil.
- The newcomers to the Index are all European countries- Denmark (20th), Portugal (22nd) and Norway (23rd).
- The countries, that appeared on the 2017 Index but do not appear this year, are all emerging markets: Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and South Africa.
- Investors are interested in developed markets across all regions including Europe, North America, Asia, and Australasia.
- Around 80 percent of investors believe FDI will become more important for corporate profitability and competitiveness in the next three years.
- Around 95 percent of investors conduct business in North America, any changes in or termination of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) would reshape the FDI patterns.

Indian Context

- The index ranked India at 11th spot, three places down from the previous year. In the year 2017, India was ranked 8th. It is the first time since 2015 that India has been pushed out of the top 10.
- However, India retained its position as the second highest ranked emerging market on the Index.
- A variety of recent reforms by the Union Government have made the country more business friendly, such as the abolition of the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) in 2017 and liberalisation of FDI thresholds for the retail, aviation and biomedical industries.
- Overall, India remains among the top investment destinations due to its market size and rapid economic growth.
- As per the report, Investors, based in the US, rank India the highest in terms of intention to invest. This could be a result of Make in India' initiative, which aims to boost investment in India's manufacturing sector.

Japan, the US, the UK and Singapore consistently serve as large sources of FDI for India.

About Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Confidence Index

- The AT Kearney Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Confidence Index, initiated in 1998, is an annual survey of the business executives that ranks countries which are likely to attract the most FDI in the next three years.
- The Index is calculated as a weighted average of the number of low, medium and high responses to questions on the possibility of making a direct investment in a market over the next three years.

Source: The Hindu, Economic Times

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Environment and Ecology

National Policy on Bio fuels 2018

Why in news?

- ✎ The Union Cabinet has recently approved the National Policy on Bio fuels 2018.

The Policy categorizes bio fuels as :

- **First Generation (1G)** - Basic Biofuels such as Bioethanol & Biodiesel
- **Second Generation (2G)** - Advanced Biofuels, ethanol, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) to drop-in fuels
- **Third Generation (3G) biofuels** - Bio-CNG

Policy Highlights

- The Policy expands the scope of raw material for ethanol production by allowing use of products that are unfit for human consumption for ethanol production. These are:
 - Sugarcane Juice
 - Sugar containing materials like Sugar Beet, Sweet Sorghum,
 - Starch containing materials like Corn, Cassava,
 - Damaged food grains like wheat, broken rice, Rotten Potatoes
- Considering that farmers are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce, the Policy allows use of surplus food grains for production of ethanol for blending with petrol, with the approval of National Biofuel Coordination Committee.
- The policy indicates a viability gap funding scheme for 2G ethanol Bio refineries of Rs 5000 crore in 6 years in addition to additional tax incentives, higher purchase price as compared to 1G bio fuels.
- It encourages setting up of supply chain mechanisms for biodiesel production from non-edible oilseeds, used cooking oil and short gestation crops.

What is the significance of the Policy?

- **Reduce dependency on imports:** The ethanol supply year 2017-18 is likely to see a supply of around 150 crore litres of ethanol which will result in savings of over Rs.4000 crore of forex.
- **Cleaner environment:** The decline in crop burning and conversion of agricultural wastes to biofuels will further lead to reduction in green house gas emissions.

- **Health benefits:** Prolonged reuse of cooking oil for preparing food such as deep-frying is a potential health hazard and can lead to many diseases. However, the use of old cooking oil for making biodiesel will prevent the practice of used cooking oil in the food industry.
- **Management of municipal solid waste:** As per the estimates, 62 MMT of municipal solid waste gets generated in India annually. One ton of such waste has the potential to provide around 20 percent drop in fuels. There are technologies which can convert MSW to drop in fuels.
- **Boost infrastructural investment in rural areas:** At present Oil Marketing Companies are in the process of setting up 12 2G bio refineries with an investment of around Rs 10,000 crore. The further addition of 2G bio refineries across the country will encourage infrastructural investment in the rural areas.
- **Employment generation:** One 2G bio refinery may contribute 1200 jobs in plant operations, village level entrepreneurs and supply chain management.
- **Additional income to farmers:** The conversion of surplus grains and agricultural biomass to ethanol can help in price stabilisation.

Source: PIB, Economic Times

Green Skill Development Programme Launched

Why in news?

- ✎ The Union Environment Ministry has recently launched the Green Skill Development Programme (GSDP) with an aim to train over 5.5 lakh workers in environment and forest sectors in the country.

Key Facts

- The Green Skill Development Programme was initially launched in 2017 as a pilot project in 10 districts only wherein 154 youths, mainly school dropouts, were trained as parataxonomists and biodiversity conservationists.
- However, the programme is now launched on a large scale. Around 80000 youths will be trained at 80 institutions in a time frame of one year.
- By 2020, over 2 lakh youths will be trained and by 2021, a total over 5.5 lakh youths will be trained as green skilled workers.

GSPD-ENVIS mobile app

- Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan also launched a related mobile app 'GSDP-ENVIS' to boost employability and entrepreneurship of the youth in the country.
- The app can be used for information and for applying to the courses.
- The GSPD-ENVIS app can be downloaded on android mobile phones without any hassle.

How the courses will be carried out under the programme?

- The government aims to train the youth by 2021 through the launch of 30 courses.
- It will carry out the skill development of youth in the environment and forest sectors through 30 courses with the help of its Environment Information System (ENVIS) hubs, resource partners as well as other institutions across the country.
- The certificate courses with duration of 80 hours to 560 hours will be open for admission from July 2018 onwards.
- Many of these courses will be open for admission to 10th and 12th dropouts.
- Few of the interesting courses will be - River Dolphin conservator, water budgeting and auditing, forest fire management, management of small botanical gardens, propagation and management of bamboo, bird identification and basic ornithology, city environment surveyors, among others.
- These 30 courses will be taught across 84 institutes like WII-Delhradun, Bombay Natural History Society in Mumbai, Botanical Survey of India in Pune and WWF in Delhi.
- The ministry will be open to any collaboration or partnership with national and international organisations to build a strong network which can be utilised for green skilling under GSDP for sustainable conservation and management of natural resources.
- The cost of the programme will be supported by the Union Environment Ministry.

Source: Business Standard

International Day for Biological Diversity

Why in news?

- ✎ The International Day for Biological Diversity was observed across the world on May 22, 2018 with an aim to raise awareness about the conservation of biodiversity.

Key Facts

- The theme of International Day for Biological Diversity 2018 was ‘**Celebrating 25 Years of Action for Biodiversity**’ as the year 2018 marks the 25th anniversary of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- The Convention entered into force on December 29, 1993 and since then, it has been implemented through the vision and leadership of several countries, non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations, indigenous peoples and local communities and individuals.

Convention on Biological Diversity

- The Convention on Biological Diversity is the international legal instrument that has been ratified by 196 nations. The convention calls for:
- Conservation of biological diversity
- Sustainable use of its components
- Fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resource

When was the day proclaimed?

- The United Nations General Assembly, by its resolution 55/201 of December 20, 2000, proclaimed 22 May as the International Day for Biological Diversity.
- The day was proclaimed with an aim to commemorate the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on May 22, 1992 by the Nairobi Final Act.
- The International Day for Biological Diversity falls within the scope of the UN Post-2015 Development Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals.

Source: The Hindu

Banned ozone-destroying chemical emissions on rise

Why in news?

- ✘ According to a new study, emissions of one of the chemicals that can cause a hole in the ozone layer are on the rise, despite an international ban on the chemical by the 1987 Montreal Protocol.
- ✘ The gas, Trichlorofluoromethane, or CFC-11, is a member of the family of chemicals most responsible for the giant hole in the ozone layer that forms over Antarctica every September.

Key facts

- The new study, published in the journal Nature, documents an unexpected increase in emissions of the gas.
- Once widely used as a foaming agent, production of CFC-11 was phased out by the Montreal Protocol in 2010.
- The researchers are not sure at present why the emissions of the gas are increasing.
- According to the researchers, further work is required to figure out exactly why emissions of CFC-11 are increasing and if something can be done about it soon.

Highlights of the study

- For the study, researchers at NOAA and Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at the University of Colorado, Boulder, in the US made precise measurements of global atmospheric concentrations of CFC-11.
- The results showed that CFC-11 concentrations declined at an accelerating rate prior to 2002 as expected.
- Then, surprisingly, the rate of decline hardly changed over the decade that followed. Even more unexpected was that the rate of decline slowed by 50 percent after 2012.
- After considering a number of possible causes, the researchers concluded that CFC emissions must have increased after 2012.
- This conclusion was confirmed by other changes recorded in National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) measurements during the same period, such as a widening difference between CFC-11 concentrations in the northern and southern hemispheres, showing evidence that the new source was somewhere north of the equator.

The Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer

- The Montreal Protocol, finalized in 1987, is a global agreement to protect the stratospheric ozone layer by phasing out the production and consumption of ozone-depleting substances (ODS).
- The stratospheric ozone layer filters out harmful ultraviolet radiation, which is associated with an increased prevalence of skin cancer and cataracts, reduced agricultural productivity, and disruption of marine ecosystems.
- The United States ratified the Montreal Protocol in 1988 and has joined four subsequent amendments.
- The United States has been a leader within the Protocol throughout its existence, and has taken strong domestic action to phase out the production and consumption of ODS such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and halons.

KIGALI AMENDMENT TO THE MONTREAL PROTOCOL

- On October 15, 2016, Parties to the Montreal Protocol adopted the Kigali amendment to phase down production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) worldwide.
- HFCs are widely used alternatives to ozone depleting substances such as hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), already controlled under the Protocol.
- This amendment creates market certainty and opens international markets to new technology that is better for the environment, without compromising performance.

- It calls on all countries to gradually phase down their production and consumption of HFCs in the coming decades using the flexible, innovative, and effective approaches the Montreal Protocol has used for three decades.
- Global stakeholders endorsed adoption of the Kigali amendment, including most of the major U.S. companies working in related sectors.

Source: The Hindu, Wikipedia

Convention on Rejuvenation of Krishna River

Why in news?

- ✘ The 'National Convention on Rejuvenation of the Krishna River' was held recently in Hyderabad, Telangana. The convention was organised by the Indian Water Council (IWC).
- ✘ During the convention, experts in water conservation from across the country deliberated on the ways to rejuvenate the Krishna River.

Highlights

- The convention was IWC's first event which saw the participation of over 300 delegates of government organisations including Rajendra Singh, the 'Waterman of India'.
- The convention was organised as part of the Telangana government's initiative to rejuvenate the Krishna River by involving government organisations from Krishna river basin states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana and several NGOs.
- The focus areas of discussions were the arresting flow of pollutants into the river, creating awareness among farmers to avoid taking up paddy crops, and the issues of over extraction and encroachments.
- There are plans to set up committees in villages to create awareness among people and farmers on the ways to recharge ground water along Krishna with the help of organizations such as Indian Water Council, Walk for Water, Jal Biradari, etc.
- The main aim behind this initiative is to apply for the membership of the World Water Council.

Indian Water Council

- The Indian Water Council was formed in April 2018 in Rajasthan.
- IWC, an off-shoot of the World Water Council (WWC), plans to mobilise action against critical water issues in the country.
- V Prakash Rao, Chairman of Telangana Water Resources Development Corporation (TWRDC), is one of the founder members of IWC.
- The council's major plan is to revive the Krishna River by adopting a four-pronged approach - addressing river pollution, clearing encroachment of water bodies, discouraging over extraction of groundwater and stopping deforestation in the river basin.

Source: The times of India, Indian Express

WHO Global Urban Ambient Air Pollution Database

Why in news?

- As per the data released by the World Health Organisation (WHO), 14 Indian cities figure in the list of world's 20 most polluted cities in terms of particulate matter PM2.5 levels in 2016. While, in terms of PM10 levels, 13 cities from India figured among the 20 most-polluted cities of the world in 2016.
- The particulate matter PM2.5 includes pollutants like sulfate, nitrate and black carbon, which pose the greatest risk to human health. However, PM2.5 is more dangerous than PM10.

Highlights

- The data reveals that 9 out of 10 people in the world breathe air containing high levels of pollutants.
- Around 7 million people die every year from exposure to fine particles in polluted air that break through the lungs and cardiovascular system, causing stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases and respiratory infections.
- Air pollution is also a critical risk factor for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), causing 24 percent of all adult deaths from heart disease, 25 percent from stroke, 43 percent from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and 29 percent from lung cancer.
- Ambient air pollution caused some 4.2 million deaths in 2016, while household air pollution from cooking with polluting fuels caused over 3.8 million deaths in 2016.
- Over 90 percent of air pollution-related deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, mainly in Asia and Africa regions, followed by Eastern Mediterranean region, Europe and the Americas.
- The highest ambient air pollution levels are in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and in South-East Asia, followed by low and middle-income cities in Africa and the Western Pacific.
- WHO also called upon the member-countries of the Southeast Asia Region to address the double burden of household and ambient air pollution as the region, which comprises India, accounts for 34 percent or 2.4 million of the seven million premature deaths globally every year.
- Of the 3.8 million deaths caused by household air pollution globally, the Southeast Asia Region accounts for 1.5 million or 40 percent deaths, and of the 4.2 million global deaths due to ambient air pollution, region accounts for 1.3 million or 30 percent of deaths.

Indian Context

- The WHO Global Urban Ambient Air Pollution Database ranked Kanpur as the most polluted city among 4300 world cities which were monitored for their air pollution levels in the year 2016.
- The other Indian cities that registered very high levels of PM_{2.5} pollutants were Faridabad, Varanasi, Gaya, Patna, Delhi, Lucknow, Agra, Muzaffarpur, Srinagar, Gurgaon, Jaipur, Patiala and Jodhpur.
- In terms of PM₁₀ levels, 13 cities in India figured among the 20 most-polluted cities.
- These Indian cities were followed by Ali Subah Al-Salem of Kuwait, Baoding of China and Ulaanbaatar of Mongolia.
- However, India managed to obtain a bright spot with its mention among the countries undertaking measures to tackle and reduce air pollution from particulate matter.
- India's Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana has served the need by providing free LPG connections to some 37 million women living Below Poverty Line (BPL) line to support them to switch to clean energy for household use.
- ❑ **However, the Government of India has claimed that various pollution-control measures have led to decline in the pollution levels in 2017.**
- As per the data released by the WHO, Delhi's PM_{2.5} level in 2016 was at 143 micrograms/cubic metre, making it the sixth most polluted city in the world.
- However, as per India's Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data, Delhi's PM_{2.5} level was 134 micrograms/cubic metre in 2016 and 125 micrograms/cubic metre in 2017, showing an improvement.
- Moreover, the PM (10) levels in Delhi have also come down in the year 2017 against 2016; PM 10 levels in 2016 were 289 micrograms/cubic metre and in 2017, the levels dropped to 268 micrograms/cubic metre.
- While, WHO reported PM 10 levels of Delhi at 292 micrograms/cubic metre in 2016.
- The CPCB data was based on the Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS)

Source: Indian Express

First organised census to estimate population of Indus dolphin started

Why in news?

- ✎ The Punjab government along with WWF-India is conducting the first organised census of Indus Dolphins, one of the world's rarest mammals.
- ✎ The move is aimed at conservation of the species. The dolphins are found only in India and Pakistan, confined to the 185 km stretch between Talwara and Harike Barrage in India's Beas River in Punjab.

Key facts

- The most flourishing population of the Indus dolphin, *platanista gangetica minor*, is reportedly found across Pakistan where their numbers are estimated to be around 1,800 over a stretch of 1,500 km of the Indus River.
- In India, only a tiny population survives that too in the small stretch of Beas River.
- According to experts, they were also found in Sutlej decades back. However, river pollution is believed to be the major cause of extinction of the species from the habitat.
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) suspects that the population size of the Indus river dolphins has reduced by more than 50 per cent since 1944.
- Dolphins are a key indicator of a river's health, if a river is healthy the dolphins will be there and Sutlej is the example of what happens when a river is not healthy.

Significance of the move

- It is the first organised census and would be conducted over a period of five days. Previously, the researchers had merely spotted the dolphins.
- The officials from the Department of Forests and Wildlife Preservation, Punjab and WWF-India would be working in two teams to estimate the population of the dolphins.
- The objective behind the exercise is to establish the accurate population of the dolphins, in order to plan the conservation of the species accordingly.

Source: The Hindu

National wind-solar hybrid policy

Why in news?

- The Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has recently issued the National Wind-Solar Hybrid Policy.

Key Facts

- The main objective of the policy is to provide a framework for the promotion of large grid connected wind-solar PV hybrid system for efficient utilisation of transmission infrastructure and land.
- It also aims to reduce the variability in renewable power generation and achieve better grid stability.

Highlights

- The policy provides for the integration of both wind and solar energy sources at alternating current (AC) and direct current (DC) level.
- The policy also provides for flexibility in the share of wind and solar components in the hybrid project, subject to the condition that, rated power capacity of one resource be at least 25 per cent of the rated power capacity of other resource for it to be recognised hybrid project.
- Further, the policy seeks to promote new hybrid projects along with hybridisation of existing wind and solar projects.
- The existing wind and solar projects can be hybridised with higher transmission capacity than the sanctioned one, subject to availability of margin in the existing transmission capacity.
- The policy also provides for the procurement of power from a hybrid project on the tariff-based transparent bidding process for which Government entities may invite bids.
- It also permits the use of battery storage in the hybrid project for optimising the output and further reduce the variability.
- It also requires the regulatory authorities to formulate necessary standards and regulations for wind-solar hybrid systems.

What is the significance?

- The Hybrid policy, which aims at facilitating better utilization of resources, is expected to open-up a new area for availability of renewable power at competitive prices along with reduced variability.
- A scheme for new hybrid projects under the policy is also expected shortly.

Source: PIB



Science and Technology, Defense, Health

Russia launches world's first floating nuclear power plant

Why in news?

- Russia has recently launched 'Akademik Lomonosov', the world's first floating nuclear power plant at the St Petersburg shipyard.
- The plant is currently towed to a port town called Murmansk in northwest Russia, where it will be loaded up with fuel. The plant would be then taken to a town in the Arctic Circle called Pevek, where it will begin generating power in mid-2019.

Key Facts

- The 'Akademik Lomonosov' is to be the first of a fleet of floating nuclear power stations to be stationed in the Russian Arctic.
- The 144-by-30-metre (472-by-98-foot) power plant holds two reactors with two 35 megawatt nuclear reactors that are similar to those used to power icebreaker ships.
- The power plant has no propulsion of its own. It will be towed up North to avoid the steep cost of shipping it by land piece by piece to remote areas.
- The plant is capable of producing enough electricity to power a town of 200,000 residents, far more than the 5,000 living in Pevek.

What is the significance?

- The floating reactor can help save 50,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per year.
- It is set to replace an ageing nuclear reactor and a coal-fired power plant, both of which are both located in Chukotka.

What are the concerns?

- While the power plant has the latest security systems and should be one of the safest nuclear installations in the world, environmental activists think otherwise.
- Activists at the environmental group Greenpeace have called for international monitoring on the issue.
- The activists fear that the nuclear plant could become a 'nuclear Titanic' or a 'Chernobyl on ice' 32 years after the Soviet nuclear disaster.

Source: The Hindu

Nipah Virus Outbreak

Why in news?

- Recently, the state Health Department has confirmed Nipah virus (NiV) infection for the first time in Kerala with the blood and body fluid samples of two persons who died of viral fever in the past fortnight in Kozhikode district indicating the presence of the zoonotic disease.

Key Facts

- This is the first time the Nipah virus has been detected in this state which has high fatality rate and spreads mainly through bats, pigs and other animals.
- However, According to World Health Organisation (WHO), India has in the past documented human-to-human transmission of the rare Nipah virus.

What is Nipah Virus?

- Nipah virus (NiV) infection is a newly-emerging zoonosis (a disease which can be transmitted to humans from animals) that causes severe disease in both animals and humans.
- The natural host of the virus is fruit bats of the Pteropodidae Family, Pteropus genus. According to WHO, Nipah Virus was first identified during an outbreak of disease that took place in Kampung Sungai Nipah, Malaysia in 1998.
- It first appeared in domestic pigs and has been found among several species of domestic animals including dogs, cats, goats, horses and sheep. The infection is also known to affect human beings.
- The organism which causes Nipah Virus encephalitis is an RNA or Ribonucleic acid virus of the family Paramyxoviridae, genus Henipavirus, and is closely related to Hendra virus.
- However, in subsequent NiV outbreaks, there were no intermediate hosts. In 2004, in Bangladesh, humans infected with Nipah Virus as a result of consuming date palm sap that had been contaminated by infected fruit bats. Human-to-human transmission has also been documented, including in a hospital setting in India.
- Nipah Virus infection is also capable of causing disease in pigs and other domestic animals.
- **Till date, there is no vaccine for either humans or animals.** However, as per WHO, the primary treatment for human cases is intensive supportive care.

How this virus got its name?

- Nipah virus infection gets its name from the village in Malaysia where the person from whom the virus was first isolated succumbed to the disease.
- The NiV has been listed in the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) Terrestrial Animal Health Code and must be reported to the OIE (OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code).

How does Nipah spread or gets transmitted?

- The disease spreads through fruit bats or ‘flying foxes,’ of the genus Pteropus, who are natural reservoir hosts of the Nipah and Hendra viruses.
- The virus is present in bat urine and potentially, bat faeces, saliva, and birthing fluids.
- Presumably, the first incidence of Nipah virus infection occurred when pigs in Malaysian farms came in contact with the bats who had lost their habitats due to deforestation.
- Furthermore, transmission between farms may be due to fomites or carrying the virus on clothing, equipment, boots, and vehicles.

Symptoms

- Nipah virus infection is associated with encephalitis (inflammation of the brain).
- According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US), after exposure and an incubation period of 5 to 14 days, illness presents with 3-14 days of fever and headache, followed by drowsiness, disorientation and mental confusion.
- These signs and symptoms could lead to coma within 24-48 hours. Some patients have a respiratory illness during the early part of their infections, and half of the patients showing severe neurological signs showed also pulmonary signs.

Source: The Hindu, WHO

Essential Diagnostics List Released by WHO

Why in news?

- ✎ The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recently published its first ‘Essential Diagnostics List’.

What is ‘Essential Diagnostics List’?

- It is a catalogue of tests needed to diagnose the most common conditions along with a number of global priority diseases.
- The list aims to address people’s inability to access diagnostic services, which results in them failing to receive the correct treatment.
- With the publication of the essential diagnostics list, WHO aims to provide a tool that can be useful to all countries, not only to test and treat health complications better but also to use health funds more efficiently by concentrating on the truly essential tests.
- The list, similar to the WHO essential medicines list, which has been in use for four decades, is intended to serve as a reference for countries to update or develop their own list of essential diagnostics.

Highlights

- The essential diagnostics list concentrates on in-vitro tests like tests of blood and urine.
- It comprises 58 tests for detection and diagnosis of a wide range of common conditions.
- It also comprises 55 tests for the detection, diagnosis and monitoring of 'priority' diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, hepatitis B and C, human papillomavirus and syphilis.
- Some of the tests are particularly suitable for primary health care facilities, where laboratory services are often poorly resourced and sometimes non-existent for example, tests that can rapidly diagnose a child for acute malaria or glucometers to test diabetes. These tests do not require electricity or trained personnel.
- For each category of test, the list specifies the type of test and intended use, format and if appropriate for primary health care or for health facilities with laboratories.
- The list also provides links to WHO guidelines or publications and to pre-qualified products.

What is the significance?

- The list provides an essential package that can form the basis for screening and management of patients.
- According to WHO, an estimated 46 per cent of adults with Type 2 diabetes worldwide were undiagnosed, risking serious health complications and higher health costs.
- WHO stated that late diagnosis of infectious diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis increases the risk of their spread and makes them more difficult to treat.

Source: The Hindu

Intellectual Property mascot 'IP Nani' Launched

Why in news?

- ✕ Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry has recently launched the Intellectual Property (IP) mascot 'IP Nani'. The mascot was launched during a conference on the National Intellectual Property Rights Policy in New Delhi.

Key facts

- Mascot IP Nani is a tech-savvy grandmother who is shown helping the government and enforcement agencies in combating the Intellectual Property crimes with the help of her grandson 'Chhotu', also known as Aditya.
- This IP mascot will spread awareness about the importance of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) among people, especially children, in an interesting manner.

- This mascot is also in line with the World Intellectual Property Organization's (WIPO) campaign for the World IP Day 2018 which celebrated the brilliance, ingenuity and courage of the women who are driving change in our world.
- It also depicts that a strong IP system can support innovative women and everyone in their quest to bring their amazing ideas to the market.

National IPR Policy

- Considering that the Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) are increasingly becoming the crucial drivers of social and economic growth, the Union Cabinet approved the National IPR Policy on May 12, 2016.
- The first and foremost objective of the Policy is “**IPR Awareness: Outreach and Promotion**”, aimed at raising awareness on IPR for school children to nurture creativity and the ability to innovate from a very young age.
- In this context, the **Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM)**, a professional body under the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) produced a series of animated videos on IPRs for children with IP Nani as their central character.
- For creating such inspirational videos, CIPAM collaborated with the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EU-IPO).

What are the objectives of IPR Policy?

- **IPR Awareness: Outreach and Promotion** - To create public awareness about the economic, social and cultural benefits of IPRs among all sections of society.
- **Generation of IPRs** - To stimulate the generation of IPRs.
- **Legal and Legislative Framework** - To have strong and effective IPR laws, which balance the interests of rights owners with larger public interest.
- **Administration and Management** - To modernize and strengthen service-oriented IPR administration.
- **Commercialization of IPRs** - Get value for IPRs through commercialisation.
- **Enforcement and Adjudication** - To strengthen the enforcement and adjudicatory mechanisms for combating IPR infringements.
- **Human Capital Development** - To strengthen and expand human resources, institutions and capacities for teaching, training, research and skill building in IPRs.

Source: PIB, Business Standard

Exercise SURYA KIRAN-XIII

Why in news?

- ✘ Joint military exercise SURYA KIRAN-XIII will be conducted between India and Nepal at Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand from May 30 to June 12, 2018.
- ✘ This will be the thirteenth edition of the military exercise between India and Nepal.

SURYA KIRAN-XIII

- The joint military exercise will enhance the level of defence cooperation which will further strengthen the bilateral relations between the two nations.
- The military exercise will include training on jungle warfare, anti-terrorism combat as well as disaster response activities.
- Over 300 soldiers from both Indian and Nepal Army will be participating in the exercise.
- These soldiers will be sharing the experiences gained during the conduct of various counter insurgency and counter terrorism operations in the past.
- The SURYA KIRAN-XIII will be first exercise to be held under the surveillance of Nepal's newly-appointed Defence Minister Ishwor Pokharel, who assumed the office in February 2018.

Exercise SURYA KIRAN: What is the Significance?

- Exercise SURYA KIRAN is a biannual exercise which is conducted alternatively in Nepal and India.
- Notably, among all the military training exercises undertaken by India with various countries, it is Exercise SURYA KIRAN with Nepal which is the largest in terms of troop participation.
- The aim of this exercise is to conduct battalion level joint training with emphasis on counter terrorism operations in mountainous terrain.
- During the exercise, aspects of disaster management and joint effort towards relief work have also been included.
- The joint military exercise will enhance the level of defence cooperation which will further strengthen the bilateral relations between the two nations.
- The 12th edition of India-Nepal joint military exercise- Surya Kiran XII was held at Nepal Army Battle School (NABS) in Saljhandi, Nepal.

Source: The Hindu

Indian Navy commissions fourth ship of Landing Craft Utility MK-IV

Why in news?

- ✎ The Indian Navy on May 25, 2018 commissioned the IN LCU L54, the fourth ship of Landing Craft Utility MK-IV, into its fleet at Port Blair.
- ✎ The ship was commissioned by Vice Admiral GS Pabby, AVSM, VSM and Chief of Materiel. The Commissioning of L-54 is in line with the Union Government's Make in India initiative.

IN LCU L54

- IN LCU L54 is the fourth Landing Craft Utility (LCU) Mk-IV class to be inducted into the Indian Navy.
- The ship was indigenously designed and built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers, Kolkata.
- The ship is commanded by Lieutenant Commander Munish Sethi and has a complement of 05 officers, 41 sailors and is capable of carrying 160 troops in addition.
- The ship, carrying 830 tons, is capable of transporting various kinds of combat equipment such as the Main Battle Tank, T72 and other vehicles.
- It is fitted with up to date equipment and advanced systems like Integrated Bridge System (IBS) and Integrated Platform Management System (IPMS).

About Landing Craft Utility (LCU) MK-IV ships

- Landing Craft Utility (LCU) MK-IV fleet of ships is an amphibious programme with its primary role being transportation and deployment of Main Battle Tanks, Armoured Vehicles, troops and equipment from ship to shore.
- The fleet containing a total of 8 ships will be based at the Andaman and Nicobar Command.
- The ships can be deployed for multirole activities like beaching operations, search and rescue, disaster relief operations, supply and replenishment and evacuation from distant islands.
- The remaining four ships of the same class are in advanced stages of construction at Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers, Kolkata and are scheduled to be inducted over the next year.
- The induction of these ships will contribute to the nation's maritime security needs and is in consonance with Prime Minister's drive for 'Make in India'.

Source: The Hindu

INSV Tarini team conferred Nari Shakti Puraskar 2017

Why in news?

- The Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Maneka Gandhi presented the prestigious Nari Shakti Puraskar 2017 to the members of the INSV Tarini team recently.

Key facts

- The all-women team comprised six members including Lt Commander Vartika Joshi, Lt Commander Pratibha Jamwal, Lt Commander Swathi Patarpalli, Lt Aishwarya Bodapatti, Lt SH Vijaya Devi and Lt Payal Gupta.
- The Nari Shakti Puraskars were conferred to the recipients by President Ram Nath Kovind on March 8, 2018, on the occasion of International Women's Day.
- However, the award could not be presented to the INSV Tarini team, as they were sailing then.

Navika Sagar Parikrama

- The all-women crew of the Indian Navy Sailing Vessel (INSV) 'Tarini' undertook the task of circumnavigating the globe, as a part of a project by Indian navy-'Navika Sagar Parikrama'.
- The unique project aims to demonstrate the thrust of Nari Shakti or women power on a global platform.
- The massive expedition was aimed at promoting ocean sailing activities in the Navy and depicting Indian Government's commitment towards women empowerment.
- It also showcased the Union Government's 'Make in India' initiative by sailing on-board the indigenously built INSV Tarini.

INSV Voyage: Details

- The six-member crew led by Lieutenant Commander Vartika Joshi circumnavigated and managed the whole operation on their own.
- It is the first ever circumnavigation of the globe by an all-women Indian crew.
- The expedition lasted for 254 days, which included 199 days at sea, covering a total of 21600 nautical miles.
- In total, the team made 5 port calls including Fremantle in Australia, Lyttelton in New Zealand, Port Stanley in Falkland Islands, Cape Town in South Africa and finally Mauritius before returning to home base to Goa.
- The vessel encountered rough seas, high stormy conditions and severely cold temperatures, making the expedition an extremely challenging one.

- All the six members aboard had undergone proper training for a period of three years before undertaking the massive operation.
- The training was conducted under Captain Dilip Donde, who was the first Indian to successfully carry out solo-circumnavigation of the globe between 2009 and 2010.
- Besides, successfully circumnavigating the globe on a 55-foot yacht, the crew also collated and updated meteorological, ocean and wave data on a regular basis for accurate weather forecast by Indian Meteorological Department and reported marine pollution on the high seas.
- They interacted extensively with the local populace, especially children, during the port halts to promote ocean sailing and spirit of adventure.

Source: The Hindu

India launches its second IT corridor in China

Why in news?

- India has recently launched its second IT corridor in China to benefit from the nation's growing software market.

Key Facts

- The IT corridor, Digital Collaborative Opportunities Plaza (SIDCOP) platform, was established in China's Guiyang city by the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM).
- The main aim behind the move is to provide market access to Indian IT firms in the vast Chinese market.

What is the significance?

- The initiative will bring together Indian software and Chinese hardware and boost cooperation between the two nations in automation, artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging IT fields.
- It will enable marrying of the requirements of Chinese companies with the capabilities of Indian IT service providers.
- India's top IT firms have a huge presence in China, especially multi-nationals and IT Corridor at Dalian, which is expected to provide a gateway for the Indian IT-small and medium-sized enterprises.
- For India, getting access to China's IT market, valued at over \$493 billion in 2013 by the ministry of industry and information technology of China, is important to address the massive trade deficit which has now spiralled to over \$51 billion. The Chinese IT market grew exponentially since then.

- India has been demanding China to provide market access to Indian IT and pharmaceutical firms for several years to reduce the bilateral trade deficit.
- The two corridors, which were started in collaboration with China's provincial governments, are expected to provide the much-needed big opening for Indian IT firms.
- India is a world leader in the area of Information Technology and IT-enabled services with annual revenue of over \$164 billion and exports of over \$120 billion.
- In China, Indian IT companies are present in 10 cities with a total work-force of around 25000 employees.
- In addition to the Dalian and Guiyang, the NASSCOM is in touch with four other provinces including Wuhan to work out new IT corridors based on local needs.

Source: The Hindu

India, World Bank loan agreement for National Nutrition Mission

Why in news?

- India has recently signed a loan agreement with the World Bank worth USD 200 million for the National Nutrition Mission (POSHAN Abhiyaan). The loan will support Indian Government's National Nutrition Mission that aims to reduce stunting in 0-6 years old children from 38.4 percent to 25 percent by the year 2022.

About National Nutrition Mission (POSHAN Abhiyaan)

- The National Nutrition Mission was launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 8, 2018 at Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan with a total budget of Rs 9046.17 crore.
- It 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.

Its Objectives are as follows:

- 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 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.

What is the significance of the scheme?

- The mission emphasizes on improving the coverage and quality of ICDS nutrition services to pregnant and lactating women and children less than 3 years of age.
- It will boost up investments in improving the skills and capacities of ICDS staff and community nutrition workers.
- It aims at strengthening the systems of citizen engagement and grievance redressal; and establish mobile technology based tools for improved monitoring and management of services for reaching out the beneficiaries during the critical 1000 day window for nutrition impact.
- It will ensure amalgamation of all nutrition related schemes and will provide performance based incentives to states and community nutrition and health workers.

Source: PIB

Atomic clock for indigenous navigation satellites developed by ISRO

Why in news?

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has developed an atomic clock that will be used in navigation satellites to measure precise location data.

Key facts

- Till now, the space agency has been importing the atomic clocks for its navigation satellites from the European aerospace manufacturer Astrium.
- All seven navigation satellites, which have been launched earlier as part of the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) or Navigation with Indian Constellation (NaVIC), have three imported Rubidium atomic clocks each.
- The atomic clock has been developed by Ahmedabad-based Space Applications Centre (SAC) and is currently undergoing a series of qualification tests.
- Once tested successfully, the atomic clock will be used in an experimental navigation satellite to test its accuracy and durability in space.
- With the development of the atomic clock, ISRO has become one of the few space organisations in the world that are capable to develop this highly sophisticated technology.

Rationale behind this move

- A navigation satellite is fixed with three atomic clocks. Besides atomic clocks, a navigation satellite also has crystal clocks but they are not as accurate as atomic clocks.
- The time difference between the atomic clocks of different satellites positioned at different orbits is used to measure the accurate positioning of a navigation receiver or an object on the Earth.
- If an atomic clock malfunctions, the time difference calculated between it and other clocks comes out to be inaccurate, thus, rendering inaccurate positioning of an object.
- If all the three atomic clocks of a satellite show error, then the space agency needs to launch a back-up satellite with new atomic clocks.
- As 9 of the 21 atomic clocks used in already launched seven navigation satellites are showing error, therefore, ISRO planned to launch four backup navigation satellites to keep the NavIC effective.
- These backup satellites, which are expected to have indigenous atomic clocks as well, will add buffer to the country's GPS system.

Source: The Hindu

National Technology Day 2018

Why in news?

- ✎ The National Technology Day was observed across India on May 11, 2018 to commemorate the anniversary of Pokhran nuclear tests of 1998.
- ✎ The day also marks India's scientific prowess and technological advancements.
- ✎ Its **Theme was : 'Science and Technology for a sustainable future'**

Background

- The day is observed to mark the nuclear test that was held in Pokhran on May 11, 1998. The first nuclear test Pokhran with a code named as 'Smiling Buddha' was carried out in May, 1974.
- On May 11, 1998, India successfully test-fired nuclear missile Shakti-I at the Pokhran Test Range of Indian Army in Rajasthan in an operation administered by late president and aerospace engineer Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam.
- Overall, five nuclear tests were conducted with the detonation of two fission bombs and one fusion bomb on May 11 and two additional fission bombs on May 13.

About the National Technology day

- Every year the Union Ministry of Science and Technology celebrates National Technology Day on May 11.
- The day is considered as a symbol of pursuit for technological creativity, scientific inquiry and the conversion of that pursuit in the integration of society, industry and science.
- On the occasion, various events are organized in technical institutions as well as engineering colleges. Presentations, interactive sessions, quizzes, lectures and competitions are also held to mark the day.
- The President of India also presents National Technology Award on the day to individuals as well as companies for their immense contribution to science.
- Technology and science ministers also come forward to celebrate the day by organizing various kinds of events for the development of science in the country.

Source: The Hindu

National Digital Communications Policy, 2018.

Why in news?

- ✎ The Union Government has recently released the draft of a new Telecom policy - National Digital Communications Policy, 2018.
- ✎ The policy aims to provide broadband coverage with 50 Mbps speed to every citizen, attract USD 100 billion investment in the sector and create 40 lakh new jobs by 2022.

Key facts

- The new telecom policy draft aims to ensure universal broadband coverage at 50 Mbps to every citizen.
- It proposes to provide 1 Gbps connectivity to all Gram Panchayats by 2020 and 10 Gbps by 2022.
- It also proposes to address the woes of the Telecom sector by reviewing licence fees, spectrum usage charges, and universal service obligation fund levy for enhancing ease of doing business in the sector.
- It also proposes goal to attract investments worth USD 100 billion in the digital communications sector by 2022.
- It also aims to enhance the contribution of digital communications space to 8 per cent of the country's GDP from about 6 per cent last year.

Other Facts

- The policy also aims to pursue regulatory reforms to ensure that the regulatory structures and processes remain relevant, transparent, accountable and forward-looking.
- Additionally, it aims to remove regulatory barriers and reduce the regulatory burden that hampers investments, innovation and consumer interest.
- The draft also proposes to address woes of debt-ridden telecom sector by reviewing license fees, spectrum usage charges, universal service obligation fund levy, all of which add to cost of telecom services, under the new policy for enhancing ease of doing business in the sector.
- The policy also proposes to rationalize taxes and levies on digital communications equipment, infrastructure and services.
- Further, the policy recognises the importance of continued improvement in the regulatory framework for attracting investments and ensuring fair competition, to serve the needs of the people. It aims to attract long-term, high quality and sustainable investments, given the sector's capital-intensive nature.

Source: PIB

Exercise Harimau Shakti 2018

Why in news?

- ✎ Indian and Malaysian Armies on May 11, 2018 concluded the Exercise Harimau Shakti 2018 at the tropical rainforests of Hulu Langat, Malaysia.

Key Facts

- The grand finale of the Exercise was a tactical operation on conduct of attack on the enemy camp.
- During the exercise, both the contingents showcased extremely high standards of their professional acumen, operational abilities, battle drills and physical endurance, an apt reflection of the level of interoperability achieved by them during the Exercise.
- This was the first time when the exercise was organised on the Malaysian land. The title 'Harimau Shakti' takes its name from 'Harimau', the Malay word that stands for 'tiger'.

Highlights

- As a part of the exercise, both the nations shared the expertise of each other's contingents while conducting counter insurgency operations in the jungle terrain of Malaysia.
- Indian contingent was represented by 4 GRENADIERS, one of the oldest infantry battalions having rich operational experience in conventional as well as counter insurgency warfare.
- While, the Malaysian contingent was represented by soldiers from 1 Royal Ranjer Regiment and the Royal Malay Regiment; both are known for their experience in Jungle Warfare.
- The exercise involved a cross training phase followed by a field training phase of seven days in the jungles of Hulu Langat wherein both armies jointly planned and executed a series of training activities.
- The focus of the entire exercise was on tactical operations in jungle warfare.

Source: The Hindu

Why in news?

- ✘ The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is set to send its first-ever mission to Mars to study its deep interior and find traces of how it was formed.
- ✘ It also will be the first NASA mission, after the Apollo Moon Landings, to place a seismometer on the soil of another planet. The seismometer is a device that measures quakes.

Key facts

- Insight is a part of the Discovery Program of NASA which is managed by the Marshall Space Flight Centre in Huntsville, Alabama. Lockheed Martin Space in Denver built and tested the Insight spacecraft.
- JPL manages the InSight Project for NASA's Science Mission Directorate in Washington.
- Apart from NASA, several European partners have also contributed to the InSight mission in the form of instruments and instrument components.
- A multinational team from France's Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales built an ultra-sensitive seismometer for detecting mars-quakes.
- While, the German Aerospace Centre (DLR) developed a thermal probe that can go up to 16 feet underground and measure heat flowing from inside the planet.

- At present, the Insight is at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California undergoing final preparation before launch.

What is the significance?

- Insight will bring back information about the earliest stages of Mars' formation dating 4.5 billion years ago.
- It will give hints of how rocky bodies form such as Earth, its moon and also about planets of other solar systems.
- It carries a set of responsive instruments to gather data. These instruments require a stationary lander like InSight from which they can be carefully placed on and below the Martian surface.
- The deep revelations about Mars will let scientists understand the difference in the crust, mantle and core of Mars and Earth.

Source: The Hindu

❑ SpaceX launches Falcon 9 rocket, carrying Bangladesh's first communication satellite**Why in news?**

- ✘ The California-based aerospace company SpaceX has recently launched its most powerful rocket yet 'Falcon 9', which is expected to carry humans to space later this year.

Key Facts

- The rocket was launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida
- The main aim behind the launching of the Block 5 Falcon 9 rocket was to propel Bangladesh's first high-orbit communications satellite, namely, Bangabandhu Satellite-1.
- The launch was initially expected to take place on May 10, 2018, but due to triggering of the automatic abort switch, the launch was postponed at the last minute.
- After successful liftoff, the rocket returned to an upright landing on the "Of Course I Still Love You" dronship stationed in the Atlantic Ocean.

About Block 5 Falcon 9 Rocket

- The Block 5 Falcon 9 rocket is, ultimately, meant for carrying astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS) around December 2018. If things happen as planned, it will be the first time that a rocket will carry people to space since the end of the US space shuttle program in 2011.

- The rocket is built to re-fly up to 10 times with minimal refurbishment with an aim to bring down the cost of spaceflight.
- The Falcon 9 Block 5's avionics are multi-fault tolerant, that is, the rocket can still reach orbit after multiple system failures.

About Bangabandhu Satellite-1

- Named after Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of Bangladesh who was assassinated in 1975, the spacecraft will provide data services during a 15-year mission.
- The satellite will offer video and communications coverage over Bangladesh and its territorial waters in the Bay of Bengal, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Indonesia.
- It will also provide broadband connectivity to rural areas throughout the country.
- The satellite was built by Thales Alenia Space of Cannes, France.

Source: The Hindu

❑ Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana approved beyond 12th Five Year Plan

Why in news?

- ✎ The Union Cabinet has recently approved the continuation of Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) beyond the 12th Five Year Plan for a period of three year from 2017-18 to 2019-20 with the financial outlay of Rs 14832 crores.
- ✎ It was initially approved in March 2006 with an aim to correct the imbalances in the availability of affordable healthcare facilities across the country and augmenting facilities for quality medical education in the under-served States, in particular.

Its Key Features are as follows:

- PMSSY has two components - setting up of AIIMS in various states and upgradation of existing Government Medical Colleges (GMC).
- PMSSY will lead to development of apex level medical education and nursing education and connected research facilities.
- It will also lead to creation of tertiary level health care infrastructure through establishment of new AIIMS and will enhance cross linkages between primary, secondary and tertiary level health care facilities.
- The construction of new AIIMS will be fully funded by the Central Government and their operations and maintenance expenses will also be fully borne by the Central Government.
- AIIMS will add 100 UG (MBBS) and 60 B.Sc (Nursing) seats, 15-20 Super Specialty Departments and around 750 hospital beds.

- Under each Government Medical Colleges up-gradation project, 8-10 Super Specialty Departments and around 15 new PG seats will be added on an average.
- Each new AIIMS will cater to around 1500 OPD patients every day and around 1000 IPD patients every month.

What is the Significance?

- Setting up of new AIIMS would not only transform health education and training but also address the shortfall of health care professionals in the region. Construction of new AIIMS is fully funded by the Central Government.
- The Operations & Maintenance expenses on new AIIMS are also fully borne by the Central Government. Setting up new AIIMS in various states will lead to employment generation for nearly 3000 people in various faculty & non-faculty posts in each of the AIIMS.
- Further, indirect employment generation will take place due to facilities & services like shopping centre, canteens, etc. coming in the vicinity of new AIIMS.
- The upgradation programme is carried out in selected Government Medical Colleges (GMCs) by agencies appointed by the Government of India under the direct supervision of the Central Government.
- Post-Graduate seats and additional faculty posts as per norms will be created and filled up in these GMCs by the respective State/UT Governments.

Source: PIB

❑ Online professional development programme for faculty launched**Why in news?**

- ✎ Recently, the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development has launched a major and unique initiative of online professional development of 1.5 million higher education faculty using the MOOCs platform SWAYAM.
- ✎ In the first phase of the initiative, 75 discipline-specific National Resource Centres (NRC) have been identified.

Key Facts

- The NRCs have been tasked with preparing online training material with major focus on latest developments in the discipline, new and emerging trends, pedagogical improvements and methodologies for transacting revised curriculum.
- The centres will cover wide-ranging disciplines including social sciences, sciences, engineering and technology, design and manufacturing, humanities, language teaching, commerce, management, education planning and administration, public policy and other disciplines.

- The initiative will benefit the faculty, as it would be highly flexible and can be done at one's own pace and time.
- Under the initiative, all in-service teachers, irrespective of their subject and seniority, will have the opportunity to be updated with the latest developments in their disciplines through the technology-based online refresher course.
- The NRCs will develop the Refresher Module which will include the latest trends in their earmarked discipline by June 15 each year.
- The training materials under the initiative will be uploaded and made available through SWAYAM platform to all the teachers with effect from October 1 every year.
- Based on the response the course received, it can be repeated in the following January.
- The centres will publish the list of the faculty who have been certified by December 31, 2018.

What is the Significance?

- ✎ The NRCs will revolutionise the professional development of faculty by catering to massive numbers by leveraging information and communication technology (ICT) and online technology platform of SWAYAM.

Source: PIB, Business Standard

□ Government announces project to strengthen Namami Gange Programme through GIS Technology

Why in news?

- ✎ The 11th Executive Committee meeting of National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) recently approved the project encompassing the use of GIS technology for Namami Gange programme with a total budget of Rs 86.84 crore.
- ✎ In order to facilitate the Ganga rejuvenation task through the Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, the National Mission for Clean Ganga has tied-up with the Survey of India, the oldest scientific department in the country set up in 1767.

GIS technology: Key Features

- The project includes use of Digital Elevation Model (DEM) technology which ensures accurate data collection, an important aspect for river basin management planning.
- DEM technology will enable the identification of entire topography of an area, making it easy for policy makers to analyse the available data.

- The use of GIS technology for Namami Gange programme will also ensure decentralization, that is the data collected by the government would be easily shared with the local public through geo portals and mobile apps.
- The technology will also enable people to send their feedback up to the national level.
- The high resolution GIS enabled data will help in regulating the proposed protected and regulatory zones along the banks of river.

❑ **Project to strengthen SPCBs of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal**

- The National Mission for Clean Ganga also approved the project to strengthen the State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) of five main stem Ganga basin states, namely, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. The project was approved at an estimated cost of Rs 85.97 for 5 years.
- For this purpose, the identified laboratories will be equipped in terms of advanced instruments and equipment with well-trained scientific personnel to carry out the pollution assessment and water quality monitoring activities.
- In West Bengal, two projects worth Rs 358.43 crore were approved to develop sewerage infrastructure in Hooghly-Chinsurah and Maheshtala municipalities of West Bengal.
- Maheshtala is an important town of Greater Kolkata. In Maheshtala, the project includes construction of interception and diversion sewer network (27 km), rehabilitation of existing infrastructure along with operation and maintenance for 15 years at an estimated cost of Rs 198.43 crore.
- In Hooghly-Chinsurah, the project includes construction of one STP (29.3 MLD), laying of 20 km of sewer line, construction of 2 pumping stations, rehabilitation of existing infrastructure along with operation and maintenance for 15 years at an estimated cost of Rs 160 crore.

Source: PIB

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More News

Shashank Manohar re-elected as Chairman of International Cricket Council

- Shashank Manohar was re-elected as the Independent Chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC) for his second term.
- He was the sole nominee for the post and was nominated by the ICC Board itself. Manohar became the first Independent Chairman of ICC in 2016. He was the one who introduced a revised governance structure, including the appointment of the ICC's first independent female director. Following which, Indra Nooyi was appointed as the first independent female Director of ICC.

Uttam Pacharne appointed as Chairman of Lalit Kala Akademi

- Uttam Pacharne was on May 17, 2018 appointed as the regular Chairman of the Lalit Kala Akademi. His appointment was approved by the President Ram Nath Kovind. Pacharne is an eminent artist and sculptor.
- Pacharne succeeds ML Srivastava, Joint Secretary (Akademies), Union Ministry of Culture, who was appointed as Protem Chairman of the Lalit Kala Akademi in March 2018, due to the impending appointment of a regular Chairman.

Pacharne will hold office for a three years term from the date of assuming the charge of the office.

Guwahati: India's first solar powered railway station

- Guwahati now has India's first railway station run by solar power.
- Around 2352 solar modules with a capacity of generating 700 kwp has been set up over the roof of the Guwahati railway station.
- The solar power plant will save Rs 67 lakh worth of electricity.

Polish author Olga Tokarczuk wins Man Booker International prize 2018

- Polish author Olga Tokarczuk on May 23, 2018 won the Man Booker International Prize 2018 for her novel 'Flights', becoming Poland's first ever writer to win the award.
- Lisa Appignanesi, presiding over of the bench of board of five judges, praised Tokarczuk as a 'writer of wonderful wit, imagination and literary panache'.
- Tokarczuk shared the prize money of 50,000 pounds with the Flight's English-language translator, Jennifer Croft.

About Man Booker International Prize

- The Man Booker International Prize is an international literary award hosted in the United Kingdom.
- From 2005 until 2015, the award was given every two years to a living author of any nationality for a body of work published in English or generally available in English translation.
- Since 2016, the award has been open to books in any language that have been translated into English.
- It carries the award money of 50,000 pounds, which is split evenly between the writer and translator.
- The 2017 winner of the prestigious prize was 'A Horse Walks Into a Bar' by David Grossman.

International Day of UN Peacekeepers 2018 observed globally

- ✘ The International Day of UN Peacekeepers was observed across the world on May 29, 2018 with an aim to honour more than 3700 peacekeepers who have lost their lives while serving the United Nations since 1948, including 129 who died in 2017.
- ✘ The date, May 29, marks the anniversary of the creation of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in 1948 to monitor the ceasefire after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which was the first ever UN peacekeeping mission.

65th National Film Awards

- President Ram Nath Kovind on May 3, 2018 presented the 65th National Film Awards at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi.
- However, this year, controversy engulfed the National Film Awards as more than 60 awardees boycotted the ceremony. In a historic first, the President of India presented the National Film Awards to just 11 of the 137 winners; remaining awards were handed over by the Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting Smriti Irani and MoS Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore.
- This year, Amit V Masurkar's 'Newton' movie won the Best Hindi language film award, while Pankaj Tripathi received a special mention for his performance in the same film.
- Ganesh Acharya won the award for Best Choreography for the song 'Goli Tu Lath maar' in 'Toilet Ek Prem Katha'.
- The movie 'Baahubali: The Conclusion' by SS Rajamouli won in three categories- Best Action Direction, Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment and Best Special Effects.
- Sridevi was posthumously awarded with the Best Actress award for her movie 'Mom' and the Dada Saheb Phalke Award went to late veteran actor Vinod Khanna, who died on April 2, 2017.

15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas to be held in Varanasi

- The 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will be held in the holy city of Varanasi in January 2019, giving a chance to the Indian diaspora to participate in Kumbha Snan and attend the Republic Day parade in New Delhi.

15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

- 2019 Pravasi Bharatiya Divas would be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Mauritian counterpart Pravind Jugnauth.
- The theme of the 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will be “Role of Indian Diaspora in building a New India”.
- It will be held in Varanasi from January 21 to January 23, 2019.
- The Day will be jointly organised by the Union Ministry of External Affairs in association with the Uttar Pradesh government.

About Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

- Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is celebrated in India on 9 January each year.
- It is celebrated to mark the contribution of the overseas Indian community to the development of India.
- The day also commemorates the return of Mahatma Gandhi from South Africa in Bombay on January 9, 1915.
- The decision to celebrate Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was taken in accordance with recommendations of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora set up by India Government under the chairmanship of L M Singhvi.
- The day was formally established in 2003 and is sponsored by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region of India.
- The 14th Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas was held in New Delhi.

Mahathir Mohamad sworn in as Malaysia’s seventh Prime Minister

- Mahathir Mohamad was on May 10, 2018 sworn in as the seventh Prime Minister of Malaysia, making a stunning comeback to politics 15 years after his retirement.
- Mohamad claimed election victory in the country’s General Elections 2018, becoming the world’s oldest Prime Minister at the age of 92.
- Mahathir’s coalition, Pakatan Harapan, won 121 out of 222 seats. Mahathir’s coalition defeated the governing Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition led by Prime Minister Najib Razak, which has been in power for more than 60 years. BN coalition managed to win only 79 seats.

