

## Current Affairs December 2018



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## Editorial

### Paris to Katowice

Nations gathering in Katowice in December 2018, Poland, for the annual UN climate negotiations are working to conclude a set of rules that will chart the course for implementing the 2015 Paris Agreement. Although greeted with great fanfare in 2015, the Paris Agreement left many operational details for subsequent negotiation. These seemingly arcane details the subject matter of the ongoing negotiations are crucial for delivering on the promise of the Paris Agreement. And, success at the Katowice conference will depend on how well states craft these operational details.

The Paris Agreement centred on “nationally determined contributions” relies on elements that comprise an “ambition cycle” to incentivise progressively ambitious contributions over time. The design of the Paris Agreement is premised on the idea that nationally determined contributions from all states, however weak these may initially be, are preferable to stringent commitments solely for developed countries.

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol contained internationally negotiated green house gas (GHG) mitigation targets for developed countries, covering 24 per cent of global emissions in its first commitment period and 12 per cent in its second. The Paris Agreement, on the other hand, has elicited contributions from states representing 99 per cent of emissions. These targets are, for now, inadequate to meet the “well below 2°C” temperature goal the Paris Agreement identifies. Indeed, the UN climate secretariat estimates that current contributions place the planet on a 2.6°C to 3.2°C pathway.

This initial shortfall, however, is to be expected given the design of the Paris Agreement. These inadequate contributions will, if the promise of the Paris Agreement comes to fruition, be scaled up over time. First, because elements of the Paris Agreement’s “ambition cycle” will generate the pressure and momentum necessary to scale up ambition. And, second because states will “learn by doing” and create the policy environment, epistemic communities and institutional architecture to trigger and implement ever-more ambitious contributions, and shift investment patterns.

At Katowice, states are expected to flesh out elements of the Paris Agreement’s ambition cycle. This ambition cycle includes a series of provisions that require them to submit increasingly ambitious contributions every five years, provide accompanying information necessary to ensure the contributions are clear, comprehensible and transparent, and submit information to track progress in implementing them. In addition, these provisions create a “global stock take” process to assess collective progress towards the purpose of the Agreement, and a compliance and implementation mechanism to facilitate states in implementing and achieving their contributions.

There are many open questions in relation to this ambition cycle.

**For instance :** What form should nationally determined contributions take or what information should accompany it? States currently enjoy tremendous discretion on these, reflected in the breath-taking variety of contributions on display, and information accompanying them. Of the 180 nationally determined contributions submitted under the Paris Agreement, about a third are absolute economy-wide GHG mitigation targets, 45 per cent reflect a deviation from business as usual, 20 per cent are policies and actions, and 4 per cent are emissions intensity targets (including India’s). The reference points for these targets vary — for instance, the EU has committed to a 40 per cent domestic reduction in GHG emissions by 2030 compared to 1990, while Australia has committed to a 26 to 28 per cent reduction below 2005 levels by 2030. The scope and coverage of greenhouse gases also varies — while most include carbon dioxide, and many include methane, only some include other gases. Moreover, several contributions are conditional — for instance, on the use of market mechanisms or on the availability of support (such as India’s). All these variations make it challenging to aggregate the efforts of countries, assess how individual countries are doing, and compare them to each other.

There is thus a clear need to assert some discipline through an agreed rulebook. The rules could, for instance, require states to provide quantifiable contributions. It could list the informational elements that must accompany a contribution, and elaborate information relevant to how a state considers its contribution, “fair and ambitious, in light of its national circumstances,” of particular concern to India. Currently, “fairness and ambition” narratives presented by states are self-determined, largely unsubstantiated and entirely self-serving. A whole host of other such possibilities exist in the ongoing negotiations to strengthen the climate change regime, fill its gaps, and take equity and differentiation into account, issues of particular interest to India.

The Katowice conference comes in the wake of the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C, characterised by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as “an ear-splitting wake-up call to the world”. The report underscores the catastrophic climate impacts likely beyond a temperature rise of 1.5°C, as well as the need for rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented transitions and deep GHG reductions across sectors. Meanwhile, the 2018 UNEP Gap Report released this week highlights the radical inadequacy of current contributions.

In this context, it is tempting to judge the Paris Agreement solely on the strength of its current commitments, and the Katowice conference on the extent to which it extracts stronger ones. However, it is worth keeping in mind the entirety of the Paris regime, the political imperatives that shaped it, and the dynamic processes that it has and will continue to unleash within nations around the world.

Although the Paris Agreement’s prosaic processes and procedures have limited headline-grabbing potential, they may well have the ability, if well crafted, to quietly deliver on the promise of the Agreement. Nations have the opportunity at Katowice to negotiate a robust Rulebook to encourage ambitious climate actions, catalyse increasing levels of support, generate accountability and facilitate implementation. It remains to be seen how well they will do this.



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

### ○ Government launches new initiative to introduce school students to 22 Indian languages

#### Why in news?

- The Union Government has recently launched a unique initiative called Bhasha Sangam to introduce school students to 22 Indian languages.
- This initiative, which is a part of the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat programme, was launched on November 22, 2018 and will continue till December 21, 2018.

#### What is Bhasha Sangam?

- Bhasha Sangam is a programme for schools and educational institutions to provide multilingual exposure to students in Indian languages.
- The initiative aims to enhance linguistic tolerance and respect and promote national integration.
- It also aims to create interest in different Indian languages and instil the curiosity to learn more.
- There are 22 languages listed in Schedule VIII of the Constitution but most students are familiar with only one or two languages.
- Under Bhasha Sangam, the students will now be familiarised with the other languages.

#### Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat

- The 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' programme was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in October 2015 on the occasion of the 140th birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Subsequently, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley announced the initiative in his Budget Speech for 2016-17.
- The programme aims to actively enhance interaction between people of diverse cultures living in different states and union territories in India, with the objective of promoting greater mutual understanding amongst them.
- As per the programme, each year, every state/UT would be paired with another state/UT in India for reciprocal interaction between the people.
- It is envisaged that through this exchange, the knowledge of the language, culture, traditions and practices of different states will lead to an enhanced understanding and bonding between one another, thereby strengthening the unity and integrity of India.
- For the same, the government has drawn up an indicative list of activities and circulated to the state governments, UT administrations and to the key central ministries.
- The paired states and UTs are to enter into MoUs with each other to carry out common activities under the programme.

## Schedule VIII of the Constitution

- ❑ The Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution lists 22 official languages of the Republic of India.
- ❑ The languages include Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu.
- ❑ Among these languages, initially, 14 were included in the Constitution. However, subsequently Sindhi was added in 1967 by 21st constitutional amendment act, Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali were added in 1992 by 71st Constitutional Amendment Act and Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santali were added in 2003 by 92nd Constitutional Amendment Act.
- ❑ At the time when the Constitution was enacted, inclusion in this list meant that the language was entitled to representation on the Official Languages Commission and that the language would be one of the bases that would be drawn upon to enrich Hindi, the official language of the Union.
- ❑ The list has since, however, acquired further significance. The Indian Government is now aiming to take measures for the development of these languages, such that “they grow rapidly in richness and become effective means of communicating modern knowledge”.

*Source: PIB*

## Sentinel Island: Related Issue

### Why in news?

- ❑ Known to be isolated and unwelcoming to outsiders, the tribesmen of the Sentinelese tribe have been in the news lately, after they reportedly killed and buried an American missionary John Allen Chau, who had gone to the islands to tell the remote tribe that “Jesus loves you”.
- ❑ The Indian police, who had gone to the islands to retrieve the body of the 27-year-old American on November 24, were forced to turn back from the off-limits island in North Sentinel after seeing the tribesmen on the beach armed with bows and arrows.

### Why are the Sentinelese in news?

- ❑ The Indian police, who had gone to the islands to retrieve the body of the 27-year-old American. The Indian government’s regulations for the region forbid any sort of interaction with the Sentinelese, who are known to shoot arrows at outsiders.
- ❑ John Allen Chau was reportedly shot by an arrow and buried on the beach on North Sentinel Island, after paying Indian fishermen to illegally take him to the island in the Andaman Sea.
- ❑ The officials believe they have a general idea of where Chau’s body is buried, because of information provided by fishermen who took the 27-year-old near the island on November 17.
- ❑ The fishermen, who were paid \$325 by Chau to take him close to the island, say that they saw the tribespeople drag Chau’s body along the beach and bury his remains.
- ❑ Seven people accused of helping Chau reach the island were arrested.

### Who are the Sentinelese?

- ❑ The Sentinelese tribe is one of the most isolated tribes in the world. The tribe, reported to be pre-Neolithic, rejects all contact with outsiders.
- ❑ They wear no clothes, they are known to cover their bodies using leaves and wreaths fashioned out of plants.
- ❑ Further, they have a relatively short stature, dark skin and hair that suggests that they may have migrated from the African subcontinent centuries ago.

### What is their language?

- ❑ The tribe reportedly has its own language. Their language was found to be incompatible with that of the neighboring islands.
- ❑ According to Indian census documents, attempts to contact them with Jarawa, the language of nearby islands, have been unsuccessful.

### How do they survive?

- ☞ The surveys of the North Sentinel Island haven't found any evidence of agriculture. The community is assumed to be hunter-gatherers, getting food through fishing, hunting and collecting wild plants living on the island.

### Where do they live?

- ❑ They live on the North Sentinal Island, which is a part of the Andaman group of islands in the Indian Ocean.
- ❑ The island is officially a part of the Indian union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, yet the government, recognising their desire to be left alone, considers the Sentinelese as a sovereign entity, meaning that they govern themselves and live according to their own rules.
- ❑ The island is in effect a sovereign area under the protection of the Indian Government. The Indian navy regularly monitors the parameter of the island from afar.

### What is the estimated population of the Sentinelese?

- ❑ The Indian government doesn't include the Sentinelese in its census. However, the government has counted its residents based on photos taken from afar.
- ❑ In the first census on the island, taken in 1991, the government estimated that around 117 people were living there. In 2011, the government counted 15 people.

### Are all islands on Andaman so isolated?

- ❑ The Andaman Islands are far from the coast of India and are home to the Andamanese, a group of various indigenous tribes that have historically been hunter-gatherers.
- ❑ At this point in history, most of the groups that make up the Andamanese aren't as isolated from the rest of the world as the Sentinelese, which has maintained a reputation for keeping other groups away. Since its language appears to be incompatible with that of other Andamanese groups, it's isolated from them as well.

### Are Sentinelese cannibals?

- ❑ There were many reports in the past that suggested that the Sentinelese were cannibals but there was no evidence to either prove or deny the rumour.
- ❑ However, in 2006, following the death of two Indian fishermen, the Indian government concluded that the tribe's group definitely does not practice cannibalism.

### What do they eat?

- ❑ The tribe reportedly hunts animals using bows and arrows and survives on mud crabs and seafood.
- ❑ According to Welfare of Primitive Tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the tribe does not even know how to light the fire.

### Who was the first Indian to enter the Sentinel Island?

- ❑ TN Pandit was the first anthropologist to enter the isolated Andaman island of North Sentinel, back in 1967. Pandit was in-charge of the regional centre of the Anthropological Survey of India in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- ❑ The mission was a joint venture of the Anthropological Survey of India and the Andaman administration. The main objective of the mission was to explore the North Sentinel island and become friends with the tribe there.

### Laws governing the Island

- ❑ Indian laws do not allow anyone to trespass their territory as the tribe, living without vaccines, is highly prone to catch diseases. Till recently, the North Sentinel Island came under India's Restricted Area Permit (RAP) regime.
- ❑ In June 2018, the Restricted Area Permit (RAP) was withdrawn from 29 islands, including the North Sentinel Island, which required foreigners to take special permission to visit them.
- ❑ In November 2018, however, the Union Home ministry clarified that the relaxation of the prohibition was intended only to allow researchers and anthropologists, with pre-approved clearance, to visit the Sentinel islands, as it is protected under two other acts - protection of aboriginal people and forest acts.

### Can the Sentinelese be punished for their acts of murder under the Indian law?

- ☞ The Indian government treats the island as a sovereign region. They do not prosecute the Islanders for killing non- Sentinelese people.

*Source: Indian Express*

## **Saubhagya Scheme: 8 States achieve 100% household electrification**

### **Why in news?**

The, Union Ministry of State for Power and Renewable Energy recently announced that 8 States have achieved 100 percent saturation in household electrification under Saubhagya Scheme.

### **Why in news?**

- ❑ With this, there are now total 15 States in the country that have 100 percent household electrification.
- ❑ These eight states are Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Bihar, J&K, Mizoram, Sikkim, Telangana and West Bengal. As many as 2.1 crore connections have been released under Saubhagya or Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana so far.
- ❑ States like Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, etc. are left with small number of un-electrified households and expected to achieve saturation any time.
- ❑ In order to ensure that no un-electrified household is left in the States which have achieved 100 percent household electrification, campaign will be taken up to publicize the achievement across the areas, so that anyone left out for any reasons may avail electricity connection under Saubhagya.
- ❑ With the present pace of electrification, India is expected to achieve 100 percent saturation in the country by December 31, 2018.
- ❑ Achievement of 100 percent household electrification would be a major milestone in the direction to achieve 24x7 power for all by March 31, 2019.

### **Award scheme under Saubhagya**

- ❑ Earlier on October 15, 2018, the Government launched an award scheme under the umbrella Saubhagya Scheme, also known as Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana.
- ❑ The Saubhagya award scheme will felicitate the power distribution companies (DISCOMs) and Power Department of the States and their employees for achieving 100 percent household electrification.

### **Three categories of Saubhagya award scheme**

Award will be given in three categories. These categories are:

- (i) DISCOMs / Power Departments of Special Category States (Seven North Eastern States, Sikkim, J&K and Uttarakhand)
- (ii) DISCOMs / Power Departments of Non-Special Category States having more than 5 Lakh un-electrified households (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Telengana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal)
- (iii) DISCOMs / Power Departments of other than Special Category States having less than 5 Lakh un-electrified households

## **Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (Saubhagya)**

- ❑ Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched Rs 16320-Crore ‘Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana’ - Saubhagya on September 25, 2017 to mark the birth anniversary of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya.
- ❑ The scheme aims to achieve the goal of universal household electrification in the country by March 31, 2019.
- ❑ The scheme envisages providing last mile connectivity and electricity connections to all remaining households in rural as well as urban areas.
- ❑ With the support of State Power Departments and DISCOMs, more than 1.65 crore households have already been connected since the launch of scheme.
- ❑ The Eligibility for free electricity will be identified through Caste Census of 2011 and on the basis of Socio-Economic.
- ❑ The Households that do not fall under the free criteria of this scheme will be provided electricity at a sum of Rs 500.
- ❑ To identify and register beneficiaries under the Saubhagya scheme, a mobile app will be used.
- ❑ Households in remote areas like hilly or tribal areas where providing electricity is not feasible, will be provided with solar power packs of 200 to 300 Wp (Watt peak).
- ❑ The Rural Electrification Corporation Limited (REC) has been appointed as the nodal agency for the implementation of the Saubhagya scheme.

*Source: The Hindu, PIB*

## **‘Institution’s Innovation Council’ programme Launched**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The Union HRD Minister, Prakash Javadekar launched the Institution’s Innovation Council (IIC) programme under Innovation cell of the Ministry of Human Resource Development through video conferencing in New Delhi on November 21, 2018.
- ☞ The HRD Ministry has established an ‘Innovation cell’ at AICTE to systematically foster the culture of Innovation in all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the country. Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said that it is a significant step in institutionalising innovation and developing a scientific temperament in the country.

### **Objective**

- ☞ The main purpose behind the formation of the network of Institution’s Innovation Councils (IICs) is to encourage, inspire and nurture young students by exposing them to new ideas and processes resulting in innovative activities in their formative years.

### Key Highlights

- ❑ More than 1000 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have already formed IICs in their campuses and enrolled for the IIC network managed by MHRD's Innovation cell to promote innovation through multitudinous modes leading to an innovation promotion eco-system in their campuses.
- ❑ In most developed countries, Universities are the main research centers and because of their research, the nations get top ranks in the global innovation ranking.
- ❑ Now, Indian universities are also setting up research centers through the Institution's Innovation Council programme.
- ❑ Through this initiative, India hopes to get a good rank in global innovation ranking in the next 2-3 years.

### The Way Ahead

- ☞ According to the HRD Minister, educational advancement in higher education can only be achieved by encouraging best practices in innovation and advance research and the Innovation Cell has undertaken many initiatives in this direction such as implementing programmes like Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievement (ARIIA) and Smart India Hackathon (SIH)- 2019.

*Source: PIB*

## Open Defecation in India: Rural Jharkhand declared ODF

### Why in news?

- ☞ The rural Jharkhand was declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) on November 15, 2018 during a regional review meeting of the eastern states held in Kolkata, West Bengal.
- ☞ The workshop comprised discussions on sustaining Open Defecation Free (ODF) status, Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM), and rural water supply. It saw participation from teams belonging to West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and Odisha.

### Key Facts

- ❑ The key aspects of sustainability such as geo-tagging, verification of ODF villages, conversion of dysfunctional toilets, IEC expenditure, Swachhagrahi engagement were reviewed during the workshop.
- ❑ The West Bengal Government, on the occasion, shared the state's commitment towards achieving open defecation free status by December 2018.
- ❑ West Bengal currently has rural sanitation coverage of 97per cent and is on track to becoming ODF much before the national target of October 2019.
- ❑ The review meeting was preceded by an early morning village visit during which the Ministry officers and State Mission team visited villages in the out skirts of Kolkata and interacted with villagers regarding their access to and usage of household toilets.

## All North East States to become ODF by December 2018

- ❑ All the north-eastern states on November 14, 2018 committed to declaring themselves as Open Defecation Free (ODF) by December 2018. The decision was taken during the regional review meeting of the north-eastern states held in Guwahati, Assam.
- ❑ The review meeting saw participation from teams belonging to Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. While the teams from the ODF States of the region spoke about efforts to sustain their ODF status, the non-ODF states committed to declaring themselves as ODF by December 2018.
- ❑ Sikkim highlighted the solid and liquid waste management initiatives being undertaken in the first ODF state of the country. The state of Assam also shared highlights of “Mission Sambhav”, under which more than one lakh pit digging activities were initiated on a single day during the Swachhata Hi Seva fortnight.

## ODF states in North East

- ❑ **Sikkim:** The state became India’s first Open Defecation Free State in 2008, long before the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan was launched, after the state government and the local population collaborated to construct toilets using local materials and together maintained a strict resilience against open defecation.
- ❑ **Arunachal Pradesh:** The state became the second state in the Northeast to be declared Open Defecation Free on December 31, 2017.
- ❑ **Meghalaya:** The state achieved its ODF status in January 2018. The state now aims to make all the 2,347 villages in 11 districts free from solid and liquid waste in a year’s time.
- ❑ **Mizoram:** The state declared itself as an open defecation-free state in July 2018, after all eight of its districts were reported to have 100 per cent sanitation coverage.
- ❑ **Nagaland:** The state declared as the 22nd Open Defecation Free state (Rural) in the country in October 2018, on the occasion of the 149th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
- ❑ **Manipur:** The state’s Chief Minister N Biren Singh declared it as the 23rd state to become Open Defecation Free (ODF) in India on October 2, 2018.

*Source: The Hindu*

## **Government approves 3 proposals under Nirbhaya Fund**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The Empowered Committee of Officers under Nirbhaya Fund, under the Chairmanship of Secretary, Women and Child Development Ministry on November 16, 2018 three proposals under the Nirbhaya Fund including setting up of 1023 Fast Track Special Courts.

### **Setting up of 1023 Fast Track Special Courts**

- ❑ The Committee approved the proposal of the Department of Justice under Ministry of Law and Justice to set up 1023 Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) to dispose off pending cases of rape and POCSO Act across the country.
- ❑ The project was approved with a total financial outlay of Rs 767.25 crores.
- ❑ In the First phase, 777 FTSCs will be set up in 9 states and in the second phase, 246 FTSCs will be set up.

### **Procurement of forensic kits for sexual assault cases**

- ❑ The Committee approved the proposal of Union Ministry of Home Affairs for procurement of forensic kits for sexual assault cases to kick start usage of such kits in States.
- ❑ These kits will be used through Training of Trainers (TOTs), capacity building or training for forensics in sexual assault cases and strengthening of State Forensic Science Laboratory (FSLs).
- ❑ The proposal was approved with a total financial implication of Rs 107.19 crore.

### **Setting up video surveillance system at 50 Railway Stations**

- ❑ The Committee approved the proposal from Konkan Railway Corporation Limited for setting up video surveillance system at 50 Railway Stations with a total Project cost of Rs 17.64 crore.
- ❑ The funding will be utilised for surveillance hardware and accessories, local connectivity equipment and power supply devices.

### **In-principle approval for state wise vehicle tracking platform**

- ☞ Apart from these three proposals, the committee gave in-principle approval to the proposal of the Union Ministry of Road Transport and highways for C-DAC for customization, deployment and management of state wise vehicle tracking platform for safety and enforcement.

### **Nirbhaya Fund**

- ❑ The Nirbhaya Fund was announced in 2013 Union Budget by the government with a corpus of Rs 1000 crore. This fund was created to support the initiatives taken by the government and NGOs working towards protecting the dignity and ensuring the safety of women in India.
- ❑ The government, in April 2015, made the Women and Child Development Ministry (WCD) as the Nodal Agency for the Nirbhaya Fund replacing the Home Ministry.
- ❑ To approve the funds under Nirbhaya fund, a committee was constituted which comprised officials from various ministries, including women and child development, home affairs, road transport and railways.
- ❑ Between 2013 and 2017, the corpus of Nirbhaya Fund grew to Rs 3100 crore.

*Source: The Hindu*

## ○ Government to refund employers for seven weeks of maternity leave given to employees

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Women and Child Development Ministry announced on November 15, 2018 that the government will refund the employers the salaries for the first seven of the 26 weeks of maternity leave for women earning more than Rs 15,000 a month.
- ☞ The Ministry's decision came in the wake of complaints that many companies were reluctant to hire pregnant women after maternity leave was extended from 12 to 26 weeks and some were even firing women employees.

### Key Highlights

- ❑ The decision covers both the government as well as the private sector.
- ❑ The government has decided to utilise the funds lying in the labour welfare cess to pay the employers.
- ❑ The utilisation of the cess lying with the state governments has been very less.
- ❑ Hence, the government decided after talks with the Labour Ministry that the seven of the 26 weeks of maternity leave for all women employees in the private and government sector getting more than Rs 15,000 a month would be paid from that fund.
- ❑ The maternity leave for pregnant women was extended from 12 weeks to 26 weeks in 2017.

### Background

- ❑ The Lok Sabha on March 10, 2018 had passed the Maternity Benefits (Amendment) Bill, 2016, paving the way for doubling of the maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks.
- ❑ The Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Parliament passed the bill in August 2017 during the monsoon session.
- ❑ The bill, strongly supported by the women and child development ministry, increased maternity benefit from 12 weeks to 26 weeks for two surviving children and is aimed at benefitting about 1.8 million women in the organised sector.
- ❑ Post the bill's passing, India's position rose to the third place in terms of the number of weeks given for maternity leave, after Canada (50) and Norway (44).

*Source: PIB*

## ○ **HRD Ministry launches LEAP and ARPIT programmes for higher education faculty**

### Why in news?

- ☞ Satya Pal Singh, Minister of State for Human Resource Development, launched two new initiatives, namely, the Leadership for Academicians Programme (LEAP) and the Annual Refresher Programme In Teaching (ARPIT) on November 13, 2018 for higher education faculty.
- ☞ While LEAP is a three weeks flagship leadership development training programme for second level academic functionaries in higher education institutions, ARPIT is a unique initiative of online professional development of 15 lakh higher education faculty.

### Leadership for Academicians Programme (LEAP)

- ❑ Leadership for Academicians Programme (LEAP) is a three weeks (2 weeks domestic and one week foreign training) flagship leadership development training programme for second level academic functionaries in public funded higher education institutions.
- ❑ LEAP will make Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) perform their roles of developing better students who will be future torch bearers.
- ❑ The main objective is to prepare second tier academic heads who are potentially likely to assume leadership roles in the future.
- ❑ It would provide senior faculty the required leadership and managerial skills including skills of problem-solving, handling stress, team building work, conflict management, communication, understanding the complexity and challenges of governance in HEIs and general administration.
- ❑ It will be implemented through 15 NIRF top ranked Indian Institutions namely, IIT Roorkee; IIT Kanpur; NIT Trichy; IISER Kolkata; JNU; IIT (BHU); Delhi University; IIT Bombay; TISS Mumbai; University of Hyderabad ; NIEPA, IIT Kharagpur; Jamia Milia Islamia; BHU; and AMU.
- ❑ The foreign universities identified for the training are also within the top 100 in the world global rankings.
- ❑ The foreign collaborating institutions are University of Michigan; NTU Singapore; Harvard University; Purdue University, USA ; University of Chicago; University of Pennsylvania; Monash University; Oxford University; University of Cambridge and University of Virginia.

### Annual Refresher Programme in Teaching (ARPIT)

- ❑ Annual Refresher Programme in Teaching (ARPIT) is a major and unique initiative of online professional development of 15 lakh higher education faculty using the MOOCs platform SWAYAM.
- ❑ For implementing ARPIT, 75 discipline-specific institutions have been identified and notified as National Resource Centres (NRCs) in the first phase.
- ❑ These instituted are tasked to prepare online training material with focus on latest developments in the discipline, pedagogical improvements and methodologies for transacting revised curriculum.
- ❑ In 2018, the inaugural year itself, the NRCs are expected to cater to around 13 lakh faculty of the total 15 lakh faculty in higher education.

### The courses cover a diverse range of topics

- ❑ The course is a 40 hour module with 20 hours of video content and 20 hours of non-video content.
- ❑ There are built-in assessment exercises and activities as part of the academic progression in the course.
- ❑ At the end of the course, there will be a terminal assessment which can be either online or a written examination.
- ❑ All faculties who have successfully completed the online refresher course will be certified.
- ❑ The courses will remain open from November 1, 2018 to February 28, 2019.
- ❑ ARPIT will be an ongoing exercise so that every year NRCs will continuously develop new refresher module in their earmarked discipline each year.

*Source: PIB*

### Bihar approves funds worth Rs 25000 for graduate girls

#### Why in news?

- ❑ The state cabinet of Bihar has approved a proposal to pay Rs 25000 to every girl graduating in 2018 and onwards.
- ❑ The decision was taken at the cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. As per the decision, the one-time payment will be made to every girl who graduated from the colleges of the state on or after April 25, 2018, irrespective of the pass division, community or region.

#### Key Highlights

- ❑ The state cabinet has allotted Rs 300 crore towards the disbursement of the payment.
- ❑ Around one lakh twenty thousand girls are expected to clear their graduation course in 2018.
- ❑ The scheme is a part of a larger government scheme that aims to pay each girl Rs 54000 including the payments made to her, right from birth to graduation.

☞ **Besides this, the Bihar cabinet gave its approval to six proposals, the others are as follows:**

- ❑ The cabinet sanctioned allotment of 50 acres of land from the Bhagalpur Engineering College campus to the Indian Information Technology Institute Society. The land transfer is free of any fee. instructors and 10 employability skills instructors, for the newly created Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and extremist-affected districts for skill development.
- ❑ The cabinet also sanctioned the creation of 132 new posts in the Criminal Investigation Department of the state police to man various wings for the weaker sections in the districts, including the rail districts. The posts include one each of DSP (special crime), typist assistant sub-inspector and constable driver for each district.
- ❑ The cabinet also gave its approval to allotment of Rs 1.75 crore to the building construction department.

*Source: Times of India*



## Polity & Governance, Social Justice, Social Development

### ○ Capital Punishment in India: SC upholds constitutional validity of death penalty

#### Why in news?

- ☛ The Supreme Court on November 28, 2018 upheld the constitutional validity of death penalty while awarding life term imprisonment to Chhannu Lal Verma instead of death penalty for murdering three persons including two women.
- ☛ Though the three judges differed on the applicability of death penalty, they were unanimous in commuting or reducing the death sentence of Chhannu Lal Verma.

#### Unanimous view of judges

- ☐ The three judges were unanimous in their view that the Chhattisgarh High Court has wrongly confirmed death penalty on Chhannu Lal Verma without correctly applying the law laid down in Bachan Singh and other cases.
- ☐ As per the judges, the decision to impose the highest punishment of death sentence in this case does not fulfil the test of rarest of rare case.
- ☐ They noted that the superintendent of the jail has given a certificate that his conduct in jail has been good during the pendency of his appeal in apex court for past four years.
- ☐ Thus, there was a conscious effort on his part to lead a good life for the remaining period. A convict is sent to jail with the hope and expectation that he would make amends and get reformed.
- ☐ Verma was convicted by a Sessions Court in Chhattisgarh and then by the Chhattisgarh High Court for killing Anand Ram Sahu, his wife Firanteen Bai and raping and murdering their daughter-in-law Ratna Sahu in 2011 and was subsequently awarded a death penalty.

#### Capital Punishment or Death Penalty in India

- ☐ Capital punishment is a legal penalty in India. The execution of death sentence in India is carried out by hanging by the neck until death or by shooting. However, the issue of death penalty has been debated and discussed from time to time in India with no conclusion drawn till now.
- ☐ There have been diverse and distinct opinions regarding the death penalty in India as some are in the favour while others are against it.
- ☐ India is one of the 78 countries which have retained death penalty on the ground that it will be awarded only in the 'rarest of rare cases' and for 'special reasons'.
- ☐ According to Amnesty International 'Death Sentences and Executions' report released in April 2018, the Indian courts gave away 109 death sentences in 2017 but no executions were carried out. Overall, there were 371 people on death row in India in 2017.

### Cases which challenged constitutional validity of the death penalty

- ❑ The constitutional validity of the death penalty was challenged from time to time in numerous cases starting from **Jagmohan Singh v State of UP** where the Supreme Court rejected the argument that the death penalty is in violation of Article 19 of the Indian constitution which guarantees “Right to Life”.
- ❑ In **Rajendra Prasad v State of UP** in 1979, Justice Krishna Iyer of the Supreme Court ruled that death penalty violates Articles 14, 19 and 21.
- ❑ In **Bachan Singh v State of Punjab** case of 1980, the Supreme Court overruled its earlier decision in Rajendra Prasad case. It expressed that death penalty is an alternative punishment for murder and hence not violative of Articles 14, 19 and 21. The court also pronounced the principle of awarding death penalty only in the ‘rarest of rare cases’.
- ❑ In **Machhi Singh v State of Punjab**, the apex court laid down the broad outlines of the circumstances when death sentence should be imposed and held that five categories of cases may be regarded as rarest of rare cases:
  1. **Manner of carrying out murder** : When the murder is committed in an extremely brutal manner to arouse intense fury in the community, for instance, when the house of the victim is set a flame to roast him alive, when the body is cut to pieces or the inhuman torture.
  2. **Motive** : When the murder is committed for a motive such as a murder by a hired assassin, a cold blooded murder to inherit property, or gain control over property of a ward, or a murder committed for betrayal of the motherland.
  3. **Anti-social or socially abhorrent nature of the crime** : A scheduled caste or minority community person is murdered in circumstances which arouse social wrath; or bride burnt for dowry or for remarriage.
  4. **Magnitude of the crime** : Crimes of enormous proportion, like multiple murders of a family or persons of a particular caste, community or locality.
  5. **Personality of victim of murder**

### Recent death sentence executions

- ❑ The last time India had carried out an execution was in 2015 when **Yakub Memon** was hanged after being found guilty in the 1993 Mumbai terrorist bombings that killed 257 people.
- ❑ In February 2013, **Afzal Guru**, convicted of conspiracy in connection with the 2001 Indian Parliament attack, was hanged till death at Delhi’s Tihar Central Jail.
- ❑ Prior to that, on November 21, 2012, **Ajmal Kasab** was hanged in the Yerwada Central Jail in Pune. Kasab was a Pakistani terrorist and a member of the Lashkar-e-Taiba Islamist group and took part in the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks. Kasab was the only attacker captured alive by police.

*Source: The Hindu*

## J&K Governor dissolves state assembly, President's rule to be imposed

### Why in news?

☞ The Jammu and Kashmir Governor Satya Pal Malik on November 21, 2019 dissolved the State Assembly with immediate effect after rival alliances staked claim to form the government.

**The Governor cited four main reasons for dissolving the Assembly with immediate effect, which include:**

- (i) The impossibility of forming a stable government by the coming together of political parties with opposing political ideologies including some which have been demanding dissolution of the Assembly; whereas the experience of the past few years shows that with the fractured mandate that is there in the Assembly, it is not possible to form a stable government comprising of like-minded parties. The coming together of such parties in a grouping is nothing but an attempt to gain power rather than to form a responsive government.
  - (ii) Reports of extensive horse trading and possible exchange of money in order to secure the support of legislators belonging to widely diverging political ideologies just to be able to form a government. Such activities are not healthy for democracy and vitiate the political process.
  - (iii) Serious doubts about the longevity of any such arrangement where there are competing claims of majority.
  - (iv) The fragile security scenario in the state of Jammu and Kashmir where there is a need to have a stable and supportive environment for security forces which are engaged in extensive anti-militancy operations and are gradually gaining control over the security situation.
- ❑ The governor released the communiqué of dissolution minutes after People's Democratic Party (PDP) leader and former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti released a letter on Twitter announcing that she would seek to form the government with her traditional rivals, the National Conference (NC) and Congress.
  - ❑ The governor released the communiqué of dissolution minutes after People's Democratic Party (PDP) leader and former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti released a letter on Twitter announcing that she would seek to form the government with her traditional rivals, the National Conference (NC) and Congress.
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- ❑ The governor released the communiqué of dissolution minutes after People’s Democratic Party (PDP) leader and former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti released a letter on Twitter announcing that she would seek to form the government with her traditional rivals, the National Conference (NC) and Congress.
- ❑ The former Chief Minister and PDP President, Mehbooba Mufti staked claim to form the government in the state by saying that her party, which is the largest party in the assembly with 29 MLAs, had the backing of 15 lawmakers of National Conference and 12 of Congress.
- ❑ Earlier, both NC and Congress had demanded the dissolution of the assembly to avoid horse-trading and possible poaching of legislators amid the emergence of the Lone-led front.
- ❑ Mufti’s letter was followed by People’s Conference Chief Sajad Lone’s letter to the governor, in which he staked claim to form the government with the support of the BJP, which has 25 seats and more than 18 other elected members. People’s Conference has just two seats in the assembly
- ❑ The majority mark required to form the government in the state’s 87-member assembly is 44.

### **President’s rule to be imposed**

- ❑ The Governor’s rule was imposed in the state on June 19 for a 6-month period following the collapse of the PDP-BJP coalition government after the BJP withdrew its support.
- ❑ The state assembly was kept in suspended animation so that political parties could explore the possibility of forming a new government.
- ❑ The six-month tenure of the Governor’s rule is scheduled to end on December 18, after which the state will be put under the President’s rule till it goes into polls.
- ❑ The state went to polls at the end of 2014 and the Assembly’s tenure was till October 2020.
- ❑ The Governor has decided to hold elections at an appropriate time so that a government with a clear mandate is formed.

*Source: Indian Express*

### **WB passes bill to give land rights to enclave dwellers**

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

- ☞ To end an era of undecided future for the people residing West Bengal (WB) enclaves, the WB Assembly unanimously passed a bill to provide land rights to enclave dwellers in north Bengal.

#### **Key Facts**

- ❑ The bill was moved by Minister of State for Land and Land Reforms Chandrima Bhattacharya, the West Bengal Land Reforms (Amendment) Bill, 2018, was passed in the House unopposed.
- ❑ It would help the enclave dwellers to get full-fledged status as citizens of India, along with all civic amenities and citizenship rights. This Bill will help in the distribution of land-right documents to the people of the enclaves in the border district of Cooch Behar.

## Background

- ☞ India and Bangladesh on August 1, 2015 ended one of the world's most-complex border disputes that had lingered for seven decades since Independence by exchanging a total of 162 enclaves. With this exchange, 14,856 people living in 51 Bangladeshi enclaves became part of India. Indian deeds for their land eluded them till date, making it impossible for them to buy, sell or get farming loans for their land.

With the exchange of enclaves, following an agreement between the two countries with the consent of West Bengal, the enclave dwellers deserve their rights as the citizens of India.

## The agreement of exchange

- ❑ The agreement of exchange between India and Bangladesh also gave some territory from India to Bangladesh. In Cooch Behar of WB, 111 Indian enclaves, spread across 17,160 acres, became a part of Bangladesh territory and 51 Bangladesh enclaves, comprising 7,110 acres, joined India.
- ❑ The enclave residents were allowed to either reside at their present location or move to the other country.
- ❑ Around 37,334 people residing in the enclaves in the Indian side refused to go to Bangladesh, whereas 922 enclave dwellers, who were in the Bangladesh side, preferred to be in India.

## Impact

- ☞ With the passing of the bill, it will create 13 new administrative districts (mouzas), while the rest of the area would be merged with the existing 31 'mouzas'. However, the Plot-to-plot verification has already been commenced to ascertain the possession of the land to the dwellers, who now reside on khas land.

*Source: The Hindu*

## SC to direct states to implement draft witness protection scheme

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Supreme Court of India on November 19, 2018 said that it would direct all the states to implement the draft witness protection scheme framed by the Centre in consultation with the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).

### Key Highlights

- ❑ The issue of the witness protection scheme had cropped up earlier when the top court was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking protection for witnesses in rape cases involving self-styled preacher Asaram Bapu.
- ❑ During the hearing on November 19, advocate Gaurav Agrawal, assisting the court as an amicus curiae in the matter, told the bench that the government has finalised the draft witness protection scheme in consultation with NALSA, based on the inputs received from a majority of the states.
- ❑ The advocate stated that the scheme has three categories of witnesses based on the threat perception, and suggested that the states should start enforcing it.
- ❑ The petitioners, who are witnesses in cases related to Asaram, had sought a probe into the instances of alleged attacks and disappearances of witnesses in these cases.
- ❑ The top court had in March 2017 questioned Haryana and Uttar Pradesh over the status of implementation of witness protection schemes till then and had directed them to provide security cover to witnesses in rape cases against Asaram, who is currently in jail.
- ❑ While Uttar Pradesh has three such witnesses, Haryana has one.

## Witness Protection Scheme-2018

### Objective

- ❑ To enable a witness to give testimony in a judicial setting or to cooperate with law enforcement and investigations without fear of intimidation or reprisal.
- ❑ To ensure that the investigation, prosecution and trial of criminal offences is not prejudiced because witnesses are intimidated or frightened to give evidence without protection from violent or other criminal recrimination.
- ❑ To promote law enforcement by facilitating the protection of persons who are involved directly or indirectly in providing assistance to criminal law enforcement agencies and the overall administration of Justice.
- ❑ To give witnesses the confidence to come forward to assist law enforcement and Judicial Authorities with full assurance of safety.
- ❑ To identify a series of measures that may be adopted to safeguard witnesses and their family members from intimidation and threats against their lives, reputation and property.

### Why is there a need for such a scheme?

- ❑ In cases involving influential people, witnesses turn hostile because of the threat to life and property. In such cases, witnesses find that there is no legal obligation by the state for extending any security.
- ❑ The Supreme Court had held in an old judgement that it is the salutary duty of every witness who has the knowledge of the commission of the crime, to assist the State in giving evidence.
- ❑ If the witnesses get threatened or are forced to give false evidence, it would not result in a fair trial.
- ❑ Due to witnesses turning hostile, the conviction rate in murder and rape in India is just around 10 to 12 per cent.
- ❑ The first-ever reference to witness protection in India came in 14th Law Commission Report in 1958.

### Why now?

- ❑ Organised crime has seen a huge jump in recent years and is becoming stronger and more diverse.
- ❑ In the investigation and prosecution of crime, particularly the more serious and complex forms of organised crime, it is essential that witnesses, the cornerstones for successful investigation and prosecution, have trust in the criminal justice system.
- ❑ Witnesses need to have the confidence to come forward to assist law enforcement and prosecutorial authorities. They need to be assured that they will receive support and protection from intimidation and the harm that criminal groups may seek to inflict upon them in attempts to discourage or punish them from co-operating.
- ❑ Hence, legislative measures to emphasise prohibition against tampering of witnesses have become the imminent and inevitable need of the day.
- ❑ Even the Law Commission of India has recommended that witnesses should be protected from the wrath of the accused in any eventuality.

○ **Following are some of the rights that the witnesses should be entitled to:**

- (i) Right to give evidence anonymously
- (ii) Right to protection from intimidation and harm
- (iii) Right to be treated with dignity and compassion and respect of privacy
- (iv) Right to information of the status of the investigation and prosecution of the crime
- (v) Right to secure waiting place while at Court proceedings
- (vi) Right to transportation and lodging arrangements

**Scope of the Scheme**

- The Witness Protection scheme may be as simple as providing a police escort to the Courtroom, offering temporary residence in a safe house or using modern communication technology such as video conferencing for the recording of testimony.
- In other more complex cases, where cooperation by a witness is critical to the successful prosecution of a powerful criminal group, extraordinary measures are required to ensure the witness's safety such as anonymity, relocation of the witness under a new identity in a new, undisclosed place of residence.
- The witness protection, especially in its practical operation, must, therefore, be viewed on a case by case basis in meaningful assistance to the witnesses.

**Background**

- In November 2017, the Supreme Court had asked the Centre as to why a draft scheme cannot be formulated for witness protection in the country when specific provisions in this regard were already there in the National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act.
- It had said that the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) could at least come out with a draft scheme for witness protection and had asked the Attorney General to give his suggestions on the issue.
- The court had said that the witness protection scheme can be implemented for at least sensitive cases and that the MHA could come out with a comprehensive plan.
- In April 2018, the Centre had informed the top court that it had framed a draft witness protection scheme and it was circulated among the states and Union Territories administration for comments.
- The court had asked the Centre to finalise the scheme after getting a response from the states and Union Territories.

*Source: The Hindu*

## NITI Aayog constitutes ‘Himalayan State Regional Council’

### Why in news?

- ☞ NITI Aayog on November 15, 2018 constituted the ‘Himalayan State Regional Council’ to ensure sustainable development of the Indian Himalayan region.

### Key Facts

- ☐ The Himalayan State Regional Council will be chaired by the Dr VK Saraswat, Member of NITI Aayog.
- ☐ It will consist of the Chief Secretaries of the Himalayan States as well as the Secretaries of key Central Ministries, senior officers of NITI Aayog as well as special invitees.
- ☐ The Council was constituted with an aim to review and implement identified action points based on the Reports of five Working Groups, which were established along thematic areas to prepare a roadmap for action.

### Terms of Reference of the Himalayan States Regional Council

- ☐ The Himalayan States Regional Council will be the nodal agency for the Sustainable development in the Himalayan Region.
- ☐ It will monitor the implementation of action points for Central Ministries, Institutions and 12 Himalayan State Governments in Indian Himalayan Region.
- ☐ The action points include river basin development and regional cooperation, spring mapping and revival across Himalayas for water security; develop, implement and monitor tourism sector standards, strengthen skill and entrepreneurship, among other action points.
- ☐ Himalayan Region consists of 12 States, namely, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, two districts of Assam namely Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong; and Darjeeling & Kalimpong in West Bengal.

### Background

- ☞ Earlier in June 2017, the NITI Aayog had set up 5 Working Groups to prepare a roadmap for actions in 5 thematic areas that are quite significant for the Himalayas. These areas were:
  1. Inventory and Revival of Springs in Himalayas for Water Security
  2. Sustainable Tourism in Indian Himalayan Region
  3. Transformative Approach to Shifting Cultivation
  4. Strengthening Skill & Entrepreneurship Landscape in Himalayas
  5. Data/Information for Informed Decision Making
- ☞ These working groups were constituted after the NITI Aayog recognised that mountains require specific solutions for resilience building that address socio-economic and environmental challenges in the mountain setting.
- ☞ The five thematic reports were released by the NITI Aayog in August 2018 to frame the action points for the Terms of Reference of the Council constituted.

*Source: PIB*

## Maharashtra legislative assembly passes Maratha Reservation Bill

### Why in news?

- ☞ The state legislative assembly of Maharashtra on November 29, 2018 passed the Maratha Reservation Bill, approving 16 per cent reservation for the Maratha community in education and job sectors.

### Key Facts

- ❑ The bill will now be sent to the state's upper house, the legislative council. The Maharashtra cabinet had earlier on November 18, given its approval to the reservation bill.
- ❑ The decision to introduce the bill was taken by the state government on the basis of the recommendations made by the Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission, whose report was submitted to the state government's Chief Secretary DK Jain on November 15.
- ❑ The move follows months of massive protests by members of the community demanding reservation in education and jobs.

### Highlights

- ❑ Maharashtra's Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced that independent reservation will be given to the Maratha community under a new category called SEBC (socially and economically backward category).
- ❑ The Marathas will get the reservation from an independent quota and it is not expected to affect the reservations given to the Other Backward Class (OBC).
- ❑ The State Commission for Backward Class had stated in its report that extraordinary and exceptional circumstances prevail among the Marathas, which makes them eligible to reap the benefits of reservation.
- ❑ The commission's report stated that Marathas are a "socially and educationally backward class of citizens" with minuscule representation in government and semi-government services.
- ❑ The percentage of the reservation for the Maratha community will be decided by a sub-committee, which will be constituted by the state cabinet to take statutory steps for the implementation of the recommendations of the backward commission.

### Background

- ❑ Maharashtra CM had said recently that all statutory formalities over the quota issue will be completed in the next 15 days and that the Maratha community should get ready to celebrate on December 1.
- ❑ The Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission's report on the social and economic conditions of the Marathas, favouring the grant of quota to the community was submitted to the Chief Secretary on November 15.
- ❑ The Maratha community, which accounts for 30 per cent of the state's total population, has been protesting since 2017, demanding reservation in government jobs and educational institutions.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Allied and Healthcare Council of India to be set up

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 22, 2018 approved the Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2018 for regulation and standardisation of education and services by allied and healthcare professionals.
- ☞ The Bill provides for setting up of an Allied and Healthcare Council of India and corresponding state allied and healthcare councils, which will play the role of a standard-setter and facilitator for professions of allied and healthcare.

### Key Highlights

- ❑ The bill provides for the establishment of central and corresponding state allied and healthcare councils and 15 major professional categories including 53 professions in allied and healthcare streams.
- ❑ It provides for structure, constitution, composition and functions of the central council and state councils such as framing of policies and standards, regulation of professional conduct, creation and maintenance of live registers, provisions for common entry and exit examinations.
- ❑ The professional advisory bodies under central and state councils will examine issues independently and provide recommendations relating to specific recognised categories.
- ❑ The bill will also have an overriding effect on any other existing law for any of the covered professions.
- ❑ The state council will undertake recognition of allied and healthcare institutions.
- ❑ The clause of offences and penalties has been included in the bill to check mal-practices. The bill also empowers the central and state governments to make rules.
- ❑ Under the bill's provisions, the central government will also have the power to issue directions to the council, to make regulations and to add or amend the schedule.
- ❑ The bill calls for the constitution of an interim council within 6 months of its passing, which will hold the charge for a period of two years until the establishment of the Central Council.
- ❑ The council at the centre and the states are to be established as body corporate with a provision to receive funds from various sources.
- ❑ The councils will also be supported by central and state governments respectively through grant-in-aid as needed. However, if the state government expresses inability, the central government may release some grant for initial years to the state council.

### **Composition of the Council**

- ❑ The central council will comprise 47 members, of which 14 members shall be ex-officio representing diverse and related roles and functions and remaining 33 shall be non-ex-officio members who mainly represent the 15 professional categories.
- ❑ The state councils are also envisioned to mirror the central council, comprising 7 ex-officio and 21 non-ex officio members and a chairperson to be elected from amongst the non-ex officio members.

### **Impact**

- ❑ during the first few of years from the date of establishment of the council.
- ❑ They will provide an opportunity to create qualified, highly skilled and competent jobs in healthcare by enabling professionalism of the allied and healthcare workforce.
- ❑ This would also lead to high quality, multi-disciplinary care in line with the vision of Ayushman Bharat, moving away from a ‘doctor led’ model to a ‘care accessible and team-based’ model.
- ❑ It would also provide an opportunity to cater to the global demand (shortage) of the healthcare workforce, which is projected to be about 15 million by the year 2030, as per the WHO Global Workforce, 2030 report.
- ❑ The bill is expected to directly benefit around 8-9 lakh existing Allied and Healthcare related professionals in the country and several other graduating professionals joining workforce annually and contributing to the health system.
- ❑ However, since the bill is directed to strengthen the healthcare delivery system at large, it is expected to benefit the entire population of the country and the health sector as a whole.

### **Who are Allied and Healthcare Professionals?**

- ❑ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Allied health personnel are personnel who have specific connections with the art and science of health care and are recognised as members of the health team in the national health system.
- ❑ They are educated with different levels of professional qualifications, in a recognised or accredited health or health-related or academic Institution.
- ❑ The allied and healthcare professionals include individuals involved with the delivery of health or related services, with expertise in therapeutic, diagnostic, curative, preventive and rehabilitative interventions. They work in interdisciplinary health teams including physicians, nurses and public health officials to promote, protect, treat or manage a person’s physical, mental, social, emotional and environmental health and holistic well-being.

### **Present Scenario**

- ❑ In the current state of the healthcare system, there exist many allied and healthcare professionals, who remain unidentified, unregulated and underutilized.
- ❑ professionals such as doctors, nurses and frontline workers such as Accredited Social Health Activist or ASHAs, Auxiliary Nurse Midwife or ANMs.
- ❑ However, a number of others have been identified over the years, whose potential can be utilized to improve and increase the access to quality driven services in the rural and hard to reach areas.

- ❑ The allied and healthcare professionals constitute an important element of the health human resource network and the skilled and efficient allied and healthcare professionals can help reduce the cost of care and dramatically improve the accessibility to quality driven healthcare services.
- ❑ Globally, allied and healthcare professionals (A&HPs) typically attend undergraduate degree programme of a minimum of 3-4 years to begin with and may attain up to Ph.D. level qualification in their respective streams. However, most of the Indian institutions offering such courses lack standardisation.
- ❑ Most of the countries across the world have a statutory licensing or regulatory body that is authorized to license and certify the qualifications and competence of such professionals, especially those involved in direct patient care such as physiotherapist, nutritionist or those whose occupation impact patient care directly such as lab technologists and dosimetrists.

### The Way Ahead

- ❑ Though such professionals exist in the Indian healthcare system, the gap in the allied and healthcare space is due to the lack of a comprehensive regulatory framework and absence of standards for education and training of A&HPs.
- ❑ The bill thus seeks to establish a robust regulatory framework that will play the role of a standard-setter and regulator for the allied and healthcare professions.

*Source: PIB, Indian Express*

## ○ **WCD Ministry empanels Institutes to conduct awareness programmes on Sexual Harassment at Workplace**

### Why in news?

- ❑ The Ministry of Women and Child Development has empanelled institutions and organisations to conduct awareness exercises on the provisions of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, in order to ensure security of women at all workplaces.
- ❑ Around 223 institutes and organisations have been empanelled from across the country to impart training in local languages as of November 2018.

### Key Facts

- ❑ The empanelled institutes will be required to submit quarterly reports through SHe-Box, an online complaints portal, of all the training programmes and workshops conducted by them under the SH Act.
- ❑ The empanelled institutes, organisations and companies have so far organised over 700 capacity building exercises that were attended by nearly 50,000 participants.
- ❑ The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013 mandates all the workplaces that include any department, organisation, undertaking, establishment, enterprise, institution, office, branch or unit with more than 10 workers to constitute an Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) to receive complaints of sexual harassment.
- ❑ The complaints can be registered on SHe-Box, a single window access to every woman, irrespective of her work status, whether working in organised or unorganised, private or public sector, to facilitate the registration of complaint related to sexual harassment.

- ❑ Any woman facing sexual harassment at workplace can register her complaint through the portal.
- ❑ Once a complaint is submitted on the online portal, it will be directly sent to the authority concerned having jurisdiction to take action in the matter.
- ❑ The WCD Ministry has published a handbook and training module on the SH Act to provide information about the provisions of the Act in an easy-to-use practical manner.
- ❑ The private organizations are encouraged to customise the Training Module as per their extant service rules and disciplinary procedures prescribed therein.

## She-Box

- ❑ The comprehensive online complaint management system- ‘SHe-Box’ - was launched by WCD Minister Maneka Sanjay Gandhi on November 7, 2017 for women working in both public and private organisations to lodge complaints of sexual harassment at workplace.
- ❑ The portal was launched to ensure the effective implementation of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (SH Act), 2013.
- ❑ The SH Act defines “sexual harassment at the workplace” in a comprehensive manner, to cover circumstances of implied or explicit promise or threat to a woman’s employment prospects or creation of hostile work environment or humiliating treatment, which can affect her health or safety.

*Source: PIB, Times of India*

## ○ **WCD Ministry links ‘SHe-Box’ to central, state ministries for speedy disposal of cases**

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Ministry of Women and Child Development has linked the sexual harassment complaints portal ‘SHe-Box’ with all the Central Ministries, Departments and 653 districts across 33 states and union territories.
- ☞ SHe-Box is an online portal, which has been created by the WCD Ministry to report complaints of sexual harassment at the workplace.

### Key Facts

- ❑ With the linkage of the SHe-Box with central and state governments, once a case is reported on the portal, it will go directly to the concerned central and state authority having jurisdiction to take action in the matter, in order to enable prompt disposal of complaints.
- ❑ The progress of the cases on the portal can be monitored by the complainants as well as the WCD Ministry, reducing the time taken in case disposal.
- ❑ Around 321 complaints have been registered with ‘SHe-Box’ till November 20, 2018, among which around 120 are related to central ministries and departments, 58 are from state governments and 143 are from private companies.
- ❑ The SHe-Box portal is an effort to provide a speedy remedy to women facing sexual harassment at workplace.

### She-Box

- ❑ The comprehensive online complaint management system- ‘SHe-Box’- was launched by WCD Minister Maneka Sanjay Gandhi on November 7, 2017 for women working in both public and private organisations to lodge complaints of sexual harassment at workplace.
- ❑ The creation of the portal is historic, as it is the first-ever time that the government of any country has launched an online portal to receive complaints of sexual harassment at workplace.
- ❑ Besides, allowing a user to file a complaint, the portal also gives them the option of interacting with Ministry of WCD, with an assured time-bound response.
- ❑ The portal also provides information on 112 institutions empanelled by the WCD Ministry to conduct training and workshops on the issue of sexual harassment at the workplace.
- ❑ It also has the option for resource persons and institutions willing to contribute to training on this subject in various organisations to submit their applications.
- ❑ It also provides a platform to the empanelled institutes and organisations to share their capacity building activities with the Ministry, which in turn will be able to monitor the activities of these institutes and organizations empanelled from across the country.
- ❑ The portal can be accessed at the following link: <http://shebox.nic.in/>

### ○ **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act**

- ❑ SHe-Box was launched to ensure the effective implementation of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (SH Act), 2013.
- ❑ This SH Act is unique in its broad coverage, which includes all women irrespective of their work status, whether working in organised or unorganised, public or private sectors, regardless of hierarchy. The domestic workers are also included within its ambit.
- ❑ It defines *”sexual harassment at the workplace”* in a comprehensive manner, to cover circumstances of implied or explicit promise or threat to a woman’s employment prospects or creation of hostile work environment or humiliating treatment, which can affect her health or safety.

*Source: PIB*



**International Relations, India & the World and International Affairs****33rd ASEAN Summit, 13th East Asia Summit and 2nd RCEP Summit****Why in news?**

- ❑ The 33rd edition of the ASEAN Summit concluded on November 15, 2018 at Suntec Singapore Convention Centre, Singapore. The Summit also saw the conclusion of other related summits like 13th East Asia Summit (EAS), 2nd Regional Comprehensive Economic Summit, (RCEP) and ASEAN plus summits.
- ❑ The Summit began on November 13, 2018. The opening ceremony of the summit was addressed by Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of Singapore, Chairman of this year's Summit. In his speech, Lee Hsien Loong called on ASEAN members and partners to uphold multilateralism and international cooperation and tackle common challenges including terrorism and climate change.
- ❑ The Summit saw the presence of leaders of partner countries such as Russian President Vladimir Putin, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.
- ❑ However, the US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping were not in attendance. The Vice President Mike Pence represented the US, while the Chinese side was represented by Premier Li Keqiang.

**Key Highlights**

- ❑ The leaders of ASEAN's 10 member countries reviewed ASEAN's achievements in the year 2018 while mapping out a new course for the year ahead.
- ❑ Over 400 companies from over 100 countries took part as exhibitors in the summit.
- ❑ Apart from leaders of all 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, heads of 8 key partner nations of ASEAN also participated.
- ❑ The ASEAN leaders adopted the ASEAN Smart Cities Framework and took stock of ASEAN's achievements in 2018 in strengthening ASEAN's resilience and innovation.
- ❑ The ASEAN leaders, along with their counterparts from countries participating in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), discussed the process of the RCEP negotiations at the 2nd RCEP Summit.
- ❑ The leaders also exchanged views on regional and international issues with their counter parts at the 21st ASEAN Plus Three Summit and 13th East Asia Summit.
- ❑ Singapore PM Lee handed over the ASEAN Chairmanship to Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.

- **PM Narendra Modi attended East Asia Summit, ASEAN-India Summit and Fintech Conference**
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 13th East Asia Summit and ASEAN-India Summit on November 14-15 in Singapore. PM Modi also attended a dinner hosted by Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong.
- On the sidelines of the 2nd RCEP Summit, East Asia Summit, and ASEAN Summit, PM Modi held bilateral talks with global leaders namely, US Vice President Mike Pence; Australian PM Scott Morrison; Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong; and Thailand PM General Prayut Chan-o-cha.
- The Prime Minister called for enhancing multilateral cooperation and economic and cultural ties among member-nations. He reiterated India's vision of a peaceful, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, strengthening maritime cooperation and commitment to a balanced Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) pact.
- It was PM Modi's 5th East Asia Summit (EAS). India has been participating in the EAS since its inception in 2005. The EAS consists of 10 ASEAN nations (Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Brunei and Laos), Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia and the United States.
- The Prime Minister held interaction with ASEAN leaders at the ASEAN-India Informal Breakfast Summit. During the Summit, all the leaders reaffirmed cooperation in maritime domain and centrality of trade and investment towards prosperity of Indo-Pacific region.
- PM Modi attended the second RCEP Summit in Singapore with 16 member states. Prime Minister Modi highlighted the need for an early conclusion of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement through multilateral and bilateral talks among the member countries.

*Source: PIB*

## **Asia Pacific Summit 2018 begins in Kathmandu**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The Asia Pacific Summit 2018 began on December 1, 2018 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

### **Theme of Asia Pacific Summit 2018**

- The Theme of two-day Summit is “Addressing the Critical Challenges of Our Time: Interdependence, Mutual Prosperity, and Universal Values”.

### **Key Facts**

- The Summit, organised by the South Korea-based Universal Peace Federation and supported by the Nepal Government, will be attended by the leaders from the Asia-Pacific region including India, Cambodia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Pakistan and Philippines.
- Around 1500 participants from 45 countries are attending the summit.
- They will discuss various global issues, including peace, development, good governance and role of parliamentarians, climate change and role of media.
- Some of the notable attendees include senior leader of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party Vijay Jolly, former Indian Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, Myanmar Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, former Pakistani Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani, Nauru President Baron Waqa, Philippines Vice-president Maria Leonor G Robredo, Samoa Head of State Vaaleto'a Sualauvi II Tuimalealiifano and Tuvalu Governor General Iakoba Taefiaaleli.

### Address by various leaders and participants

- ❑ The Summit began with an inaugural address by Nepal's Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli who called for active partnership between governments, private sector and diverse social groups.
- ❑ While, former Indian Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, who is representing India at the Summit, addressed the issues of terrorism and climate change as the biggest challenges of world.
- ❑ Myanmar State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi stressed the need for collective efforts to tackle terrorism, hunger, migration and displacement, poverty, discrimination and injustice.
- ❑ This is the first extended international summit being held in Nepal after the 4th BIMSTEC Summit held on August 30-31.

*Source: The Hindu, Indian Express*

### India, Vietnam issue joint statement

#### Why in news?

- ☛ India and Vietnam released a Joint Statement on November 21, 2018 after extensive talks between Vietnam President Nguyen Phu Trong and Indian President Ram Nath Kovind, during the latter's state visit to Vietnam from November 18-20, 2018.

#### Four MoU's were signed between the two nations

- (i) The MOU between Vietnam's Ministry of Information and Communications and the Indian Ministry of Communications on cooperation in the field of Communications
- (ii) The MOU on cooperation between Vietnam's Department of Foreign Affairs and the Indian Business Chamber in Viet Nam (INCHAM)
- (iii) The MOU between the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, Ha Noi, Vietnam and the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India
- (iv) The Cooperation Agreement between Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI)

#### Highlights

- ❑ The two leaders shared a common vision on further deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in all areas.
- ❑ They expressed their satisfaction at the regular exchange of high-level visits and regarded the year 2018 as an extraordinary year, which saw visit by Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc in January 2018 to attend the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit in New Delhi and India's 69th Republic Day celebrations, state visit to India by late President Tran Dai Quang in March 2018 and the visits to Vietnam by Indian Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in June 2018 and the Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj in August 2018.
- ❑ The two leaders shared the view that defence and security cooperation has become an important pillar of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries and expressed their satisfaction at the growing defence exchanges in recent years.

- ❑ The two leaders agreed to effectively implement the Joint Vision Statement on Vietnam– India Defence Cooperation for the period of 2015-2020.
- ❑ The Vietnamese side appreciated Indian’s offer of the US\$500 million Line of Credit to the defence industry and agreed to accelerate procedures for its approval.
- ❑ The two sides agreed to step up experience sharing in the training of personnel for participation in the United Nations peace-keeping operations and cooperation in addressing war legacies in Vietnam and to strengthen criminal information exchange and law enforcement experience sharing.
- ❑ The two leaders expressed pleasure with the rapid growth of bilateral trade since relations were upgraded to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and expressed their confidence that the target trade volume of US\$15 billion would be achieved.
- ❑ They agreed to continue promoting bilateral investment, including cooperation projects between PVN and ONGC in oil and gas exploration on land, continental shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Viet Nam and encouraged the two sides to be more active in identifying models for cooperation, including those involving third country.
- ❑ They also agreed on the importance of stronger connectivity between Vietnam and India and urged utilisation of the US\$1 billion credit line for physical and digital connectivity projects under the India-ASEAN cooperation framework and called for an early mechanism between the two sides to enable utilisation of the Line of Credit for projects in Vietnam.

### **Conclusion**

- ☞ The talks concluded with Indian President Ram Nath Kovind extending his cordial invitation to President Nguyen Phu Trong to visit India in the near future. President Nguyen Phu Trong accepted the invitation with pleasure and agreed that the timing of the visit would be arranged through diplomatic channels.

*Source: PIB*

## **World Tolerance Summit held in Dubai**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The World Tolerance Summit (WTS) 2018 was inaugurated on November 16, 2018 in Dubai, UAE. The theme of the summit was ‘Prospering from Pluralism: Embracing Diversity through Innovation and Collaboration’.
- ☞ The two-summit was the biggest gathering of government leaders, ambassadors, change-makers and key figures from the public and private sectors. Over 2,000 ministers and government leaders from around the world participated in the event. It was held in the UAE for the first time.

### **Key Highlights**

- ❑ The summit is being held to commemorate the UN-designated International Day of Tolerance. UNESCO had declared November 16 as World Tolerance Day.
- ❑ The interactive summit will engage international thought leaders, decision-makers, and influencers in thought-provoking discussions in technology, social innovations and global networking can play an important role in creating a conducive environment to bring about positive change in people’s lives.

- ❑ The main aim will be to discuss the great importance of tolerance, peace, equality, and to celebrate diversity amongst people from all walks of life, regardless of varying political views, cultural and religious backgrounds.
- ❑ Through a wide array of activities, it will delve deep into the ways by which individuals, organisations and nations can be open-minded, understanding and accepting of others' opinions and beliefs in order to have a peaceful co-existence and cooperate in generating new ideas to build a prosperous and sustainable future.

### **WTS-Objective**

#### **The World Tolerance Summit aims:**

- ❑ Through a wide array of activities, it will delve deep into the ways by which individuals, To be a platform that serves as a meeting ground for international leaders from various countries to discuss and educate on the topic of cultural diversity, peace, and coexistence
- ❑ To promote an understanding of peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and harmony, while rejecting violence, extremism, hate, fanaticism, and discrimination
- ❑ To provide an innovative and creative solution to spreading awareness of tolerance to the Youth
- ❑ To make the best use of technology and social innovation for society's prosperity
- ❑ To promote education about the active implementation of tolerance in one's daily lifestyle.
- ❑ To emphasize and affirm the universal right for all to adhere qualities of tolerance in society.
- ❑ To encourage Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities among local and international institutions.
- ❑ To address key messages on women empowerment and gender equality for tolerant societies
- ❑ To send UAE's message of tolerance, peace, and love to the world

### **Significance**

- ❑ Education and knowledge are the keys to inculcate deep values of peace, harmony, tolerance for diversity and to enhance the social fabric of the community.
- ❑ Hence, the summit will play a crucial role in promoting tolerance and diversity which is the cue to peaceful co-existence between communities and regions.
- ❑ It will also help discover how technology can empower societies to unify people from different religions, creeds, class and colour and develop innovative ways to share positive messages to create cohesive and vibrant societies.

### **World Tolerance Day**

- ❑ The International Day for Tolerance was observed globally on November 16, 2018.
- ❑ The UN General Assembly through a resolution in 1996 invited the UN Member States to observe the International Day for Tolerance on November 16, 2018.
- ❑ The move followed up on the United Nations Year for Tolerance, 1995, proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993 at the initiative of UNESCO, as outlined in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance and Follow-up Plan of Action for the Year.

- ❑ To mark the day, the United Nations has launched a new campaign to promote tolerance, respect and dignity across the world.
- ❑ The global campaign, “TOGETHER” aims to reduce negative perceptions and attitudes towards refugees and migrants, and to strengthen the social contract between host countries and communities and refugees and migrants.
- **UNESCO-Madanjeet Singh Prize for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-Violence**
- ❑ UNESCO created ‘UNESCO-Madanjeet Singh Prize’ for the promotion of tolerance and non-violence in 1995, to mark the United Nations Year for Tolerance and the 125th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi,
- ❑ The prize rewards significant activities in the scientific, artistic, cultural or communication fields aimed at the promotion of a spirit of tolerance and non-violence.
- ❑ It is awarded every two years on the International Day for Tolerance, November 16.
- ❑ It may be awarded to institutions, organisations or persons, who have contributed in a particularly meritorious and effective manner to tolerance and non-violence.
- ❑ The 2018 winners are social entrepreneur and filmmaker Manon Barbeau (Canada) and the Coexist Initiative, a non-profit organization working to end violence against women (Kenya).

*Source: The Hindu*

## WTO to set up panels to rule on US tariff disputes

### Why in news?

- ☞ The World Trade Organization (WTO) agreed to hear grievances from a number of countries over new US steel and aluminium tariffs, as well as complaints from Washington over retaliatory duties.

### Key Facts

- ❑ The Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) of WTO approved the constitution of panels to review US decision to hit a long line of countries with tariffs of 25% on steel and 10% on aluminium.
- ❑ Earlier, the European Union, China, Canada, Norway, Mexico, and Russia all confirmed they would escalate their disputes by starting adjudication proceedings, while the US wants dispute panels against Canada, China and the EU.
- ❑ The Dispute Settlement Body will create separate panels for the complaints by the European Union, China, Canada, Mexico, Norway and Russia, after the US said it would not agree to a single panel to hear all of them. A seventh request from Turkey for a panel will be discussed during a meeting later.
- ❑ The DSB also agreed for a panel which will review “certain Chinese measures pertaining to the protection of intellectual property rights” as demanded by US.

## Background

- ❑ Earlier, US President Trump imposed the tariffs levying 25 percent on steel and 10 percent on aluminium import. While imposing the tariffs, US President Donald trump justified it and said ‘it’s a matter of national security’ and hence it is the ‘safeguard’ under WTO rule and out of purview the WTO’s remit. US departure from a decades-long strive for free trade, the exporter countries knocked the WTO door. They say the United States should compensate them for the damage, and have imposed their own tariffs in response.
- ❑ The tariff spat has escalated into an all-out trade war between the US and China and growing trade tensions between Washington and many of its traditional allies.

## Way Ahead

- ❑ The WTO decision to set up the panels follows rounds of failed consultations or discussions between the aggrieved parties and mark an escalation in an ongoing showdown at the WTO around Trump’s controversial trade policies.
- ❑ Under WTO regulations, parties in a dispute can block a first request for the creation of an arbitration panel, but if the parties make a second request, it is all but guaranteed to go through.
- ❑ The creation of a DSB panel usually triggers a long and often costly legal battle that sometimes takes years to resolve.

*Source: The Hindu*

## India to Chair Kimberley Process from January 2019

### Why in news?

- ☞ India was handed the Chairmanship of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) by the European Union during the KPCS Plenary 2018, which was held in Brussels, Belgium, from November 12-16, 2018. India will take over the role from January 1, 2019.
- ☞ Federica Mogherini, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission officially handed over the KPCS Chairmanship to India during the concluding day of the Plenary.

### Key Highlights

- ❑ India as a KPCS Chair will be committed to make the KPCS a stronger process in terms of inclusiveness, strengthened administration and implementation.
- ❑ It will also be committed to making it more efficient in terms of delivery of what it promises, more transparent and empathetic towards the living standards of people who are dependent on the production, trade and manufacture of diamonds.
- ❑ Further, recognizing the issues and challenges of Artisanal & Small-Scale Mining (ASM), India aims to support the ASMs with capacity building, technical assistance and education on valuation, differentiation between natural and lab-grown diamonds and the importance of legal and formal mining practices.

- ❑ The 4-day KPCS Plenary witnessed discussion on environmental challenges in diamond mining and industry responsibility.
- ❑ India held bilateral meetings during the event with Botswana, US, Russian Federation and the World Diamond Council to discuss on various issues related to KPCS and its working groups.
- ❑ On the sidelines of the Plenary, the Chair of Working Groups conducted meetings to discuss some key issues like KP statistics and confidentiality, synthetic diamonds and separate HS code for synthetic rough diamonds, issues relating to review visit and review mission and the issue of Central African Republic (CAR).

### **India and KPCS**

- ❑ India is the founding member of KPCS and is actively involved in KP activities to ensure that almost 99 per cent of the diamond trade in the world is conflict free.
- ❑ India is committed to maintaining KP as an efficient and effective process in order to ensure the conflict diamond free status.
- ❑ Further, it is at the forefront in addressing the issue of differentiation between Natural Diamonds and Lab Grown Diamonds and ensure responsible business in this area.
- ❑ India chaired the Ad hoc Committee on Review and Reform (AHCRR). The AHCRR held one joint session with Chairs of other Working Groups and 4 sessions with AHCRR committee members to discuss the issue of funding of Permanent Secretariat (PS), Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF), peer review mechanism and consolidation to the core document.

### **About KPCS**

- ❑ The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme is a process, which was established in 2000 to prevent “conflict diamonds” from entering the mainstream rough diamond market by a United Nations General Assembly Resolution following recommendations made by the Fowler Report.
- ❑ The process was set up “to ensure that diamond purchases were not financing violence by rebel movements and their allies seeking to undermine legitimate governments.”
- ❑ Since its launch, the Kimberley Process has contributed towards peace, security and prosperity.
- ❑ It has proven to be an effective multilateral tool for conflict prevention in stemming the flow of conflict diamonds.
- ❑ It has also made a valuable developmental impact in improving the lives of most people dependent on the trade in diamonds.
- ❑ Since August 2013, the Kimberley Process has 54 participants, representing 81 countries. The next session is slated to be held in India as with the nation as the Chair. Botswana and the Russian Federation will serve as Vice-Chair during the period of 2019-2020.

*Source: PIB*

## ○ India, China sign protocol on hygiene requirements for export of fish meal, fish oil

### Why in news?

☞ India and China recently signed a protocol on hygiene and inspection requirements for the exports during the visit of Hu Wei, the Vice Minister of China's General Administration of Customs.

### Key Highlights

- ❑ The Chinese delegation discussed issues regarding market access for products such as milk and milk products, agricultural goods like soy meal, fruits and vegetables, tobacco and pharmaceuticals.
- ❑ This is significant, as India has been seeking market access for these items from China.
- ❑ The protocol on hygiene and inspection requirements was signed for the export of fish meal and fish oil from India to China.
- ❑ The agreement would enable India to commence export of fish meal and fish oil to China. China had so far not allowed these exports from India.
- ❑ China imports fish oil to the tune of USD 143.29 million per year and fish meal worth USD 263.43 million.

### Background

- ❑ The Indian exports to China are an integral part of the bilateral trade relations between the two Asian countries. They focus mainly on primary products.
- ❑ In 1984, India and China signed a trade agreement to foster greater cooperation with each other.
- ❑ The principal items of Indian exports to China comprise ores, slag and ash, iron and steel, plastics, organic chemicals and cotton.
- ❑ India's cotton exports to China may see a fivefold jump in the marketing year starting October 1 (2018-19), after China in a move to counter US trade restrictions slapped a 25 per cent additional duty on imports of the fibre from the US on July 6, amid the trade standoff between the world's two biggest economies.
- ❑ during April 2017-January 2018, India shipped 57,549 tonnes to China and 296,805 tonnes to Bangladesh.
- ❑ At present, iron ore constitutes about 53 per cent of the total Indian exports to China. The other items that have the potential to be exported include marine products, oil seeds, salt, inorganic chemicals, plastic, rubber, optical and medical equipment and dairy products.

*Source: PIB*

## G20 Summit 2018

### Why in news?

- ☞ The G20 Summit 2018 concluded on December 1, 2018 in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Nineteen leaders of the world's biggest economies and representatives of the European Union held a meeting together as part of the G20 summit.
- ☞ It was the 13th meeting of Group of Twenty (G20) and the first G20 summit to be hosted in South America. President Mauricio Macri of Argentina assumed the presidency of G20 on November 30, 2017 for one year during an official ceremony in Kirchner Cultural Centre in Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- **The theme of the summit was '*Building Consensus for Fair and Sustainable Development*'.**

### G20 Leaders pledge to fight climate change

- ☐ In a joint declaration, the leaders of G20 nations, except for US President Donald Trump, reaffirmed their commitment to fight climate change by upholding the Paris Agreement.
- ☐ The United States reiterated its decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, and affirmed its strong commitment to economic growth, energy access and security, while protecting the environment.
- ☐ In fight against the climate change, the G20 leaders expressed their strong support for the countries that are signatories to the 2015 Paris Agreement, to implement their commitments set out in their nationally determined contributions.
- ☐ They took note of UN scientists' call for a more ambitious target of reducing the warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Experts say with only a single degree Celsius of warming so far, the world has already seen deadly wildfires, heat waves and hurricanes.
- ☐ The declaration states that the leaders look forward to "successful outcomes" of the COP24 Climate Change Conference, which began in Katowice, Poland on December 3.
- ☐ G20 leaders also recognise the importance of a multilateral approach to trade and importance of the reform of the World Trade Organisation, and renew their commitment to a rules-based international order.

## India's representation at the Summit

- ☛ PM Modi presented a 9-point agenda to G20 Member Nations, calling for strong and active cooperation to deal with fugitive economic offenders. The agenda was presented during the second session of the G20 Summit 2018 on International Trade, International Financial and Tax Systems.

### Highlights

- ☐ The agenda reads as, *“Cooperation in legal processes such as effective freezing of the proceeds of crime, early return of the offenders and efficient repatriation of the proceeds of crime should be enhanced and streamlined”*.
- ☐ *“Principles of United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNOTC), especially related to ‘International Cooperation’ should be fully and effectively implemented”*.
- ☐ The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was called upon to assign priority and focus to establish international cooperation that leads to timely and comprehensive exchange of information between the competent authorities and financial intelligence units.
- ☐ FATF will formulate a standard definition of fugitive economic offenders and should develop a set of commonly agreed and standardised procedures related to identification, extradition and judicial proceedings of fugitive economic offenders and to provide guidance and assistance to G-20 countries.
- ☐ It advocated setting up of a common platform for sharing experiences and best practices including successful cases of extradition, gaps in existing systems of extradition and legal assistance, etc.
- ☐ The G-20 forum should consider initiating work on locating properties of economic offenders who have a tax debt in the country of their residence for its recovery.
- ☐ Prime Minister Narendra Modi also stressed on cooperation among G20 countries on issues related to global economy, trade tensions, crude oil prices and terrorism. He highlighted the flagship programmes like the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna, MUDRA and Start-up India undertaken by his government to modernise the economy and promote inclusive growth.
- ☐ On the sidelines of the G-20 summit, the Prime Minister met Chinese President Xi Jinping and discussed how to strengthen bilateral ties between the two neighbours. He also met Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia who offered to supply oil to India.

### **India, Japan & US held trilateral meeting on G20 sidelines**

- ❑ Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held their first trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the G-20 summit to discuss major issues of global and multilateral interests.
- ❑ PM Modi quoted that, “The ‘JAI’ (Japan, America, India) meeting is dedicated to democratic values...’JAI’ stands for victory (in Hindi).” The JAI meeting was a convergence of vision between the three nations.
- ❑ All three leaders agreed on free, open, inclusive and rules-based order to maintain peace and prosperity in Indo-Pacific region.

### **India, Russia & China held trilateral meeting on G20 sidelines**

- ❑ Prime Minister Modi, Russian President Vladimir V Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping held a Trilateral Meeting in Buenos Aires.
- ❑ The three leaders exchanged views on expanding mutual cooperation in international forums, and to encourage greater interaction among the three countries.
- ❑ They agreed on the importance of reform and strengthening of multilateral institutions which have benefitted the world, including the United Nations, WTO, and well-established and new financial institutions.

### **Informal BRICS Leaders’ Meeting**

- ❑ The leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa met on November 30, 2018 for the annual Informal BRICS Leaders’ Meeting on the margins of the G20 Summit in Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- ❑ They exchanged views on international political, security and global economic-financial issues, as well as challenges facing sustainable development.
- ❑ They reaffirmed full support for the rules-based multilateral trading system, as embodied in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), to ensure transparent, non-discriminatory, open and inclusive international trade.
- ❑ The leaders advocated for a strong Global Financial Safety Net with an adequately resourced, quota-based International Monetary Fund (IMF) at its centre. They extended their support to Brazil which is going to host 11th BRICS Summit in 2019.

### **India to host G20 Summit in 2022**

- ❑ India will host the G20 Summit in 2022, when the country celebrates its 75th year of Independence. The announcement was made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the ongoing meet of the G20 Leaders in Argentina.
- ❑ As India’s 75th Independence Day in 2022 is coinciding with the G20 Summit, the Prime Minister had requested Italy if it can host the summit in 2021 and allow India to host the G-20 countries for their annual summit in 2022.
- ❑ All the G20 leaders including Italy accepted the request.
- ❑ Japan is scheduled to host the G20 Summit in 2019, followed by Saudi Arabia in 2020.

## G20 or the Group of Twenty

- ❑ Formed in 1999, the G20 is an international forum of the governments and central bank governors from 20 major economies.
- ❑ Collectively, the G20 economies account for around 85 percent of the Gross World Product (GWP), 80 percent of world trade.
- ❑ To tackle the problems or the address issues that plague the world, the heads of governments of the G20 nations periodically participate in summits. In addition to it, the group also hosts separate meetings of the finance ministers and foreign ministers.
- ❑ The G20 has no permanent staff of its own and its chairmanship rotates annually between nations divided into regional groupings.
- ❑ The first G20 Summit was held in Berlin in December 1999 and was hosted by the finance ministers of Germany and Canada.

*Source: The Hindu, Indian Express*

## International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women observed

### Why in news?

- ☞ The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women was observed on November 25, 2018. The 2018 theme of the day is Orange the World: #Hear Me Too and like previous editions, the date marks the launch of 16 days of activism that will conclude on 10 December 2018, International Human Rights Day.

### Orange Day

- ❑ The **25th** of every month has been designated as Orange Day by the UN Women campaign Say No, UNiTE, which was launched in 2009 to mobilise civil society, activists, governments and the UN system in order amplify the impact of the UN Secretary-General's campaign, UNiTE to End Violence against Women.
- ❑ On the occasion, participants from across the world are encouraged to wear a touch of orange in solidarity with the cause, as the colour symbolises a brighter future and a world free from violence against women and girls.
- ❑ Besides, a host of public events are coordinated, among which iconic buildings and landmarks will be 'oranged' to recall the need for a violence-free future.

### Why do we need the Day?

- ❑ Violence against women and girls (VAWG), which is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in the world currently, remains largely unreported due to the impunity, silence, stigma and shame surrounding it.
- ❑ In general terms, it manifests itself in physical, sexual and psychological forms, encompassing:
  - Intimate partner violence (battering, psychological abuse, marital rape, femicide)
  - Sexual violence and harassment (rape, forced sexual acts, unwanted sexual advances, child sexual abuse, forced marriage, street harassment, stalking, cyber- harassment)
  - Human trafficking (slavery, sexual exploitation)
  - Female genital mutilation
  - Child marriage

- ❑ The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women issued by the UN General Assembly in 1993, defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”
- ❑ The adverse psychological, sexual and reproductive health consequences of VAWG affect women at all stages of their life.
- ❑ The early-set educational disadvantages not only represent the primary obstacle to universal schooling and the right to education for girls; down the line but they are also to blame for restricting access to higher education and even translate into limited opportunities for women in the labour market.
- ❑ While gender-based violence can happen to anyone, anywhere, some women and girls are particularly vulnerable - for instance, young girls and older women, women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex, migrants and refugees, indigenous women and ethnic minorities, or women and girls living with HIV and disabilities, and those living through humanitarian crises.
- ❑ Violence against women continues to be an obstacle to achieving equality, development, peace as well as to the fulfillment of women and girls’ human rights.
- ❑ All in all, the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - to leave no one behind - cannot be fulfilled without putting an end to violence against women and girls.

### **Background**

- ❑ Despite the adoption of the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by the UN General Assembly in 1979, violence against women and girls remains a pervasive problem worldwide.
- ❑ The General Assembly also issued a resolution that laid the foundation for the road towards a world free of gender-based violence.
- ❑ Another bold step in the right direction was embodied by an initiative launched in 2008 - UNiTE to End Violence against Women.
- ❑ The initiative aims to raise public awareness around the issue as well as increase both policymaking and resources dedicated to ending violence against women and girls worldwide.
- ❑ However, globally, there is still a long way to go, as till date, only two out of three countries have outlawed domestic violence, while 37 countries worldwide still exempt rape perpetrators from prosecution if they are married to or eventually marry the victim and 49 countries currently have no laws protecting women from domestic violence.
- ❑ In 2017, the European Union (EU) and the UN launched the **Spotlight Initiative**, which aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by raising the awareness of this issue, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### Why November 25?

- ❑ The women's rights activists have observed November 25 as a day against gender-based violence since 1981.
- ❑ The date was selected to honour the Mirabal sisters, three political activists from the Dominican Republic who were brutally murdered in 1960 by order of the country's ruler, Rafael Trujillo (1930-1961).
- ❑ On December 20, 1993, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women through a resolution, paving the path towards eradicating violence against women and girls worldwide.
- ❑ Finally, on February 7, 2000, the General Assembly adopted a resolution, officially designating November 25 as the International day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

*Source: The Hindu*

### Australia refuses to sign UN migration pact

#### Why in news?

- ☞ The Australian Government announced recently that it would not sign the UN Global Compact for Migration saying that the agreement would undermine its existing immigration policies.
- ☞ Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said that the government believes that the Compact is inconsistent with its well-established policies and not in Australia's interest.

#### Key Highlights

- ❑ According to the Australian government, the nation's immigration policy already promotes safe, orderly and regular migration.
- ❑ Hence, the government feels that adopting the pact would risk encouraging illegal entry to Australia and reverse the hard-won successes in combating the people-smuggling trade.
- ❑ Australia's harsh immigration policy detains asylum-seekers who try to reach the country by boat on remote Pacific islands.
- ❑ While the policy has led to a decline in people-smuggling, hundreds of people are now being held in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. Some have been there for years.
- ❑ The United Nations and human rights groups at home and abroad have criticised the nation's approach and the government has been under pressure over the deteriorating health of the people, many of them children, imprisoned on the islands.
- ❑ Australia has been under pressure to release detained child refugees

## Background

- ❑ The UN pact on migration was agreed upon in July 2018 following almost a year of negotiations and it is expected to help open up legal migration and better management of the movement of people around the world. The agreement is due to be adopted in December.
- ❑ The US has already rejected the UN Compact and a number of populist governments in Europe, including Poland and Hungary, have also said they will not sign it.
- ❑ Morrison's government is focusing on immigration ahead of elections due to take place in May next year. Earlier this week, the Prime Minister announced he would also seek to slash legal migration into Australia, from the current official cap of 190,000 people per year to about 160,000.

## Global Compact for Migration

- ❑ The global compact for migration will be the first, inter-governmentally negotiated agreement, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, to cover all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner.
- ❑ In the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, adopted in September 2016, the UN General Assembly decided to develop a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.
- ❑ The process to develop this global compact for migration started in April 2017. The General Assembly then held an intergovernmental conference on international migration in 2018 with a view to adopting the global compact.
- ❑ The global compact is a significant opportunity to improve the governance on migration, to address the challenges associated with migration and to strengthen the contribution of migrants and migration to sustainable development.

*Source: The Hindu, Indian Express*

## India, Maldives released Joint Statement

### Why in news?

- ☞ India and Maldives released a Joint Statement on November 17, 2018 after extensive talks between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and His Excellency Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, President of the Republic of Maldives in Male.
- ☞ PM Modi was on a one day visit to the Maldives to attend the historic swearing-in ceremony of Solih.

### Highlights

#### Bilateral Relations

- ☞ The two leaders, while noting the resilience of the relations between India and the Maldives, expressed confidence in the renewal of the close bonds of cooperation and friendship with the election of Solih as the President of the Maldives.

#### Peace and Security

- ☞ The leaders also agreed on the importance of maintaining peace and security in the Indian Ocean and being mindful of each other's concerns and aspirations for the stability of the region.

## Terrorism

- ☞ The leaders also expressed their unwavering commitment and support for increased cooperation in combating terrorism both within the region and elsewhere.

## Economic Development Partnership

- ❑ Maldives President Solih briefed Prime Minister Modi on the dire economic situation facing the country as he takes office.
- ❑ The two leaders discussed ways in which India can continue development partnership, particularly to help the new government in meeting its pledges to the people of the Maldives.
- ❑ The Maldives leader highlighted the pressing need for increased housing and infrastructure development as well as for establishing water and sewerage systems in the outlying islands.
- ❑ Modi assured the leader of India's firm commitment in assisting the nation to achieve sustainable social and economic development.
- ❑ Modi also conveyed India's readiness to extend help in every possible way and suggested that both sides should meet at the earliest to work out details as per requirements of the Maldives.

## Investment Opportunities

- ☞ Modi also welcomed the expanding opportunities for Indian companies to invest in the Maldives in different sectors for the mutual benefit of both countries.

## Visa Laws

- ❑ The two leaders, while recognising that nationals of both countries travel extensively between the two countries, agreed on the need for facilitating easier visa procedures.
- ❑ Further, Prime Minister Modi extended an invitation to President Solih to make a state visit to India at his earliest convenience. President Solih accepted the invitation with pleasure. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives is scheduled to make an official visit to India to hold further discussions and prepare for the forthcoming state visit of President Solih to India.

*Source: PIB*

## US exempts India, China from its sanctions for buying Iranian oil

### Why in news?

- ❑ The United States on November 5, 2018 temporarily exempted eight countries, including India from the US sanctions for buying Iranian oil.
- ❑ The announcement comes as the US imposed the toughest ever sanctions on Iran on November 5, 2018. The sanctions were announced against more than 700 individuals, entities, aircraft and vessels, as part of its largest ever single-day action targeting Iran. They cover Iran's banking and energy sectors and reinstate penalties for countries and companies in Europe, Asia and other continents that do not halt Iranian oil imports. Over 300 of those sanctions are new targets.
- ❑ While the US had previously wanted countries including India to completely halt oil purchases from Iran by November 4, it seems to have relented considering all the repercussions of the move on oil prices globally.

## Objective

- ☞ The main objective of the United States is to starve the Iranian regime of the revenue it uses to fund violent and destabilizing activities throughout the Middle East and around the world.

## Key Highlights

- ☐ Two among the exempted eight nations have already completely ended imports of Iranian crude and will not resume as long as the US sanctions regime remains in place.
- ☐ The US is looking to continue negotiations to get all of the nations to bring down their crude imports from Iran to zero.
- ☐ Over 20 importing nations have already zeroed out their imports of crude oil, taking more than 1 million barrels of crude per day off the market.
- ☐ The Iranian regime, since May till date, has lost over USD 2.5 billion in oil revenue.
- ☐ Besides this, 100 per cent of the revenue Iran receives from the sale of oil will be held in foreign accounts.
- ☐ Iran would only be able to use the money for humanitarian trade or bilateral non-sanctioned goods.

## Impact of sanctions on India

- ☐ India is the world's third-biggest oil consumer and it meets more than 80 per cent of its oil needs through imports.
- ☐ Iran is India's third-largest supplier after Iraq and Saudi Arabia and meets about 10 per cent of total needs. Currently, India pays Iran in Euros using European banking channels.
- ☐ India had previously resisted US's call to reduce crude oil imports from Iran to zero, citing the increasing energy needs of its 1.3 billion population.
- ☐ However, at the same time, India has taken steps to reduce its oil purchase from Iran, which has already declined substantially.

## Background

- ☐ In May 2018, US President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the 2015 landmark Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) terming it as disastrous".
- ☐ Under the Obama-era deal, which involved five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany, Iran had agreed to stop its nuclear programme in exchange for relief from economic sanctions.
- ☐ After the US' withdrawal from the deal, Trump signed fresh sanctions against Iran, which claims its nuclear programme is peaceful and for civilian purpose.
- ☐ The US, however, decided to grant narrow and temporary waivers to permit the continuation of three non-proliferation projects currently underway. The nation though warned that Iran will never come close to getting a nuclear weapon on President Trump's watch.

*Source: The Hindu*

## ○ **India asks WTO to set up panel against US for high import duty on steel, aluminium**

### Why in news?

- ☞ India's trade dispute with America has reached to a next level in the World Trade Organization (WTO), as India asked the WTO to form a panel against the USA for imposing high import duties on aluminium and certain steel products.
- ☞ India decision to urge WTO to set up panel came after both countries failed to resolve the issue in a bilateral talk process under the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism.

### What is the issue?

- ❑ Earlier US President Trump imposed the tariffs levying 25% on steel import and 10% on aluminium. While imposing the tariffs, US justified it by saying that it's a matter of national security and hence it is the 'safeguard' under WTO rule and out of purview the WTO's remit.
- ❑ This imposition of high import duties affected the exports of Indian businesses of these products. And India believes that US move is not in compliance with global trade norms.
- ❑ It is estimated that India exports steel and aluminium goods worth about \$1.6 billion a year to USA.
- ❑ India, Russia, Japan, China, European Union and Turkey have all dismissed US claim regarding the U.S. tariffs as "safeguards" under the WTO rules, entitling them to a combined \$3.5 billion in annual compensation. They dragged the US in the WTO for tariff imposition which triggered global trade tensions.

### Dispute settlement in WTO

- ❑ Disputes in the WTO are essentially about broken promises. WTO members have agreed that if they believe fellow-members are violating trade rules, they will use the multilateral system of settling disputes instead of taking action unilaterally. That means abiding by the agreed procedures, and respecting judgements.
- ❑ A dispute arises when one country adopts a trade policy measure or takes some action that one or more fellow-WTO members considers to be breaking the WTO agreements, or to be a failure to live up to obligations. A third group of countries can declare that they have an interest in the case and enjoy some rights.
- ❑ However, when any dispute arises between the member countries, consultation is the first step of the dispute settlement process in the organisation. If two countries are not able to reach a mutually agreed solution through consultation, a country can request for a WTO dispute settlement panel to review the matter.

### Impacts on India

- ❑ As per the experts, America's decision to impose tariffs will impact India's export of these goods and hit global trade. The entire basis of the US action is based on its own perception of security threat issue. This cannot be a ground to impose these duties.
- ❑ However, some experts are also in the opinion that dragging the US in the dispute over the issue is not a positive step, since India had a trade surplus with America.
- ❑ Both countries are also involved in several other disputes in the WTO, including in the areas of poultry, export incentives, solar and steel.
- ❑ In retaliation to the imposition of duties by the US, India had decided to increase customs duty on 29 American products such as almond, walnut, pulses and iron and steel items. The duties would come into effect from December 17.

*Source: The Hindu*



## Indian Economy and Economic Development

### Baba Kalyani committee submits report on India's SEZ policy

#### Why in news?

- ☞ The Baba Kalyani led committee constituted by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to study the existing SEZ policy of India submitted its report to Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu, in New Delhi on November 19, 2018.

#### Key Highlights

- ❑ The Committee's chairman, Baba Kalyani, while submitting the report to the Commerce Minister said that if India is going to become a USD 5 trillion economy by 2025 then the current environment of manufacturing competitiveness and services has to undergo a basic paradigm shift.
- ❑ The report notes that the success seen by services sectors like IT and ITES has to be promoted in other services sector like health care, financial services, legal, repair and design services.
- ❑ The Union Government has set the target of creating 100 million jobs and achieving 25 per cent of GDP from the manufacturing sector by 2022, as a part of its flagship 'Make in India' programme.
- ❑ The Government also plans to increase manufacturing value to USD 1.2 trillion by 2025.
- ❑ While these are ambitious plans to propel India into a growth trajectory, it requires an evaluation of existing policy frameworks to catalyse manufacturing sector growth.
- ❑ At the same time, the policy needs to be compiled with the relevant WTO regulations.

#### Background

- ❑ In June 2018, the Union Commerce Ministry set up a committee headed by Bharat Forge chairman Baba Kalyani to make its special economic zone (SEZ) policy compatible with World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules after the US challenged India's export subsidy programme at the multilateral trade body. The group was given three months time to submit its recommendations.
- ❑ India's SEZ Policy was implemented from April 1, 2000. Subsequently the Special Economic Zones Act, 2005 was passed by Parliament in May 2005 and received presidential assent on the June 23, 2005 and the Special Economic Zone Act was enacted.
- ❑ The SEZ Act, 2005, supported by SEZ Rules, came into effect on February 10, 2006.
- ❑ The commerce ministry has been consistently lobbying with the finance ministry to exempt units in the SEZs from the minimum alternate tax (MAT), imposed on them in 2011.

*Source: The Hindu*

## RBI initiates process to set up digital Public Credit Registry

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Reserve Bank of India has initiated the process to set up a digital Public Credit Registry to capture all the details of borrowers, including wilful defaulters and also the pending legal suits in order to check financial delinquencies.
- ☞ The public credit registry will also include data from entities like market regulator SEBI, the corporate affairs ministry, Goods and Service Tax Network and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India to enable the banks and financial institutions to get a 360-degree profile of existing and prospective borrowers on a real-time basis.

### What is PCR?

- ☐ The Public Credit Registry or PCR is a digital registry of authenticated granular credit information. It will work as a financial information infrastructure providing access to various stakeholders and enrich the existing credit information ecosystem.
- ☐ It would be the single point of mandatory reporting for all material events for each loan, notwithstanding any threshold in the loan amount or type of borrower.

### Key Highlights

- ☐ The Reserve Bank has invited expression of interest (EOI) for developing the registry from companies with a turnover of over Rs 100 crore in the last three years.
- ☐ Currently, there are multiple granular credit information repositories in India, with each having somewhat distinct objectives and coverage.
- ☐ Within the RBI, CRILC is a borrower level supervisory dataset with a threshold in an aggregate exposure of Rs 5 crore.
- ☐ Besides, there are other four privately owned credit information companies (CICs) operating in India.
- ☐ The RBI has mandated all its regulated entities to submit credit information individually to all four CICs.
- ☐ As per the EOI, the proposed solution should allow easy integration with ancillary information sources, like the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Sebi, GSTN, CERSAI, utility billers, Central Fraud Registry and Wilful Defaulter/Caution/Suit Filed Lists.
- ☐ Besides, borrowers would also be able to access their own credit information and seek corrections to the credit information reported on them.

### Significance

- ☞ The setting up of the Public Credit Registry is a significant move, as it comes amidst rising bad loans in the financial system.
- ☞ The non-performing assets in the banking system amount to about Rs 10 lakh crore.

### Background

- ☞ In June 2018, the RBI had announced to set up a PCR for India with a view to address information asymmetry, foster access to credit and strengthen the credit culture in the economy.
- ☞ Earlier, a high-level task force (HTF) was constituted by the RBI to review the current availability of information on credit, the adequacy of the existing information utilities and identify gaps that could be filled by a PCR.

*Source: The Hindu, Economic Times*

## ○ **Maharatna, Navratna & Miniratna Status of CPSEs: NPCC is now a Miniratna**

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Government has recently conferred the 'Miniratna status: Category –I' on the National Projects Construction Corporation Limited (NPCC).
- ☞ The empowerment of Miniratna Status will help NPCC in taking speedy decisions by enhancing the delegation of powers to the Board.
- ☞ NPCC has also been awarded with the ISO 9001:2015 Certification.

### National Projects Construction Corporation Limited

- National Projects Construction Corporation Limited (NPCC), a schedule 'B' Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under the administrative control of Ministry of Water Resources, was incorporated in 1957.
- It is a premier construction company having mandate with creation of infrastructure to provide impetus for economic development of the country.
- The Corporation is making continuous profit since 2009-10, having positive networth for the last six years and has ambitious business plan with enhanced order book position of Rs 11833 crore.

## ○ **Department of Public Enterprises: Nodal Government Agency for granting status to CPSEs**

- The Public Sector Enterprises are run by the Government under the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) of Union Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises.
- The Department of Public Enterprises is the Nodal Government agency to issue guidelines and regulation for the various state-owned CPSEs in India.
- The DPE also makes policies and guidelines for the performance evaluation and improvement of the PSUs/ CPSEs.
- The government grants the status of Maharatna, Navratna, and Miniratna to Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) based upon the profit made by these enterprises.
- The Maharatna, Navratna and Miniratna statuses give financial and administrative power to the companies to a certain extent.
- The Maharatna category has been the most recent one, created in 2009, while the other two have been in function since 1997.
- Apart from these, PSUs in India are also categorised based on their special non-financial objectives and are registered under Section 8 of Companies Act, 2013.

## Total number of Maharatna, Navratna and Miniratna PSEs

As on August, 2018, there are **8 Maharatnas, 16 Navratnas and 60 Miniratna Category - I and 15 Miniratna Category - II** Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs). There are nearly 300 CPSEs in total.

## Maharatna Status of CPSEs

In 2009, the Union Government established the Maharatna Status. The Maharatna Company Board has the highest authority in the matter of finance and investments.

## Eligibility criteria

- The CPSEs shall fulfill the following eligibility criteria to be considered for grant of Maharatna status:
- Should already hold the Navratna status
- Should be listed on Indian stock exchange with minimum prescribed public shareholding under SEBI regulations
- Average annual turnover of more than Rs 25000 crore during the last 3 years
- Average annual net worth of more than Rs 15000 crore during the last 3 years
- Average annual net profit after tax of more than Rs 5000 crore during the last 3 years
- Should have significant global presence or international operations

## Investment ceiling

- Maharatna Status raises a company's investment ceiling from Rs 1000 crore to Rs 5000 crore. The Maharatna firms can decide on investments of up to 15 percent of their net worth in a project.
- The CPSEs shall fulfill the following eligibility criteria to be considered for grant of Maharatna status:
- Should already hold the Navratna status
- Should be listed on Indian stock exchange with minimum prescribed public shareholding under SEBI regulations
- Average annual turnover of more than Rs 25000 crore during the last 3 years
- Average annual net worth of more than Rs 15000 crore during the last 3 years
- Average annual net profit after tax of more than Rs 5000 crore during the last 3 years
- Should have significant global presence or international operations
- Maharatna Status raises a company's investment ceiling from Rs 1000 crore to Rs 5000 crore. The Maharatna firms can decide on investments of up to 15 percent of their net worth in a project.

## Navratna status of CPSEs

### Eligibility criteria

- ❑ The CPSEs shall fulfill the following eligibility criteria to be considered for grant of Navratna status:
- ❑ Must have 'Miniratna Category – I' status along with a Schedule 'A' listing.
- ❑ Should have obtained 'excellent' or 'very good' rating under the Memorandum of Understanding at least thrice in the last five years of operations
- ❑ Should have a composite score of 60 or above out of possible 100 marks in the 6 selected performance parameters:-
  1. Net profit to net worth
  2. Manpower cost to total cost of production/services
  3. Profit before depreciation, interest and taxes to capital employed
  4. Profit before interest and taxes to turnover
  5. Earnings per share
  6. Inter-sectoral performance

### Investment ceiling

- ☞ Navratna Status allows the companies to invest up to Rs 1000 crore or 15 percent of their net worth on a single project or 30 percent of their net worth in the whole year (not exceeding Rs 1000 crores).

## Miniratna Status of CPSEs

### Eligibility criteria

- ❑ The CPSEs which have made profits in the last three years continuously and have positive net worth are eligible to be considered for grant of Miniratna status.
- ❑ The Miniratnas are divided in two categories – I and II.
  1. Category I: Miniratnas that have made profits for the last three years continuously or earned a net profit of Rs 30 crores or more in one of these three years. There are 60 such companies.
  2. Category II: Miniratnas that have made profits continuously for the last three years and must have a positive net worth. There are 15 such companies in this category.

### Investment ceiling

- ☞ The Miniratna Category - I PSEs are allowed to invest up to Rs 500 crore or equal to their net worth, whichever is lower. The Miniratna Category - II PSEs can invest up to Rs 300 crore or up to 50 percent of their net worth, whichever is lower.

*Source: The Hindu, Economic Times*

## ○ Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu launches logo and brochure of ‘Logix India 2019’

### Why in news?

- ☛ Union Minister of Commerce and Industry and Civil Aviation, Suresh Prabhu has recently launched the logo and brochure of ‘Logix India 2019’.
- ☛ Logix India will enable effective international trade logistics and help provide efficient and cost-effective flow of goods on which other commercial sectors.

### Logix India 2019

- ☐ Logix India 2019 is scheduled to take place in New Delhi from January 31 to February 2, 2019.
- ☐ This mega logistics event will be organised by the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) as a major initiative to improve logistics cost effectiveness and operational efficiencies for India.
- ☐ FIEO will focus on investment opportunities in infrastructure development, warehouse consolidation, technology integration, and skilling of manpower.
- ☐ Over 20 countries are sending delegations to explore logistics partnerships with India and FIEO is focusing on logistical solutions for difficult to reach markets.
- ☐ Over 100 international delegates are expected to attend Logix India 2019.

### India’s Logistics Industry

- ☐ As per the Economic Survey 2017-18, India’s logistics industry, worth around USD 160 billion, is likely to touch USD 215 billion in the next two years.
- ☐ This sector provides employment to more than 22 million people and is expected to grow at the rate of 10.5 per cent over the next 5 years.
- ☐ India ranked at 44<sup>th</sup> position in the World Bank’s ‘Logistics Performance Index 2018’.

### Need for integrated Logistics sector development in India

- ☐ Considering the need for India to have more robust trade relations with countries in Africa, Latin America, Central Asia, Middle East and ASEAN, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry is working on an integrated logistics strategy.
- ☐ The need for integrated Logistics sector development has also been felt for in view of the fact that the logistics cost in India is very high compared to developed countries.
- ☐ High logistics cost reduces the competitiveness of Indian goods both in domestic as well as export market.
- ☐ Logistics is the backbone of EXIM trade and creates business opportunities and employment. Logistics sector is expected to grow to USD 360 billion by 2032 from the current USD 115 billion.

*Source: PIB*

## Yuva Sahakar Scheme Launched

### Why in news?

- ☛ Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Radha Mohan Singh on November 14, 2018 launched the 'Yuva Sahakar-Cooperative Enterprise Support and Innovation Scheme' of the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC).
- ☛ The NCDC has come up with this youth-friendly scheme for attracting youth to cooperative business ventures. It has created a dedicated fund with liberal features enabling youth to avail the scheme.

### Yuva Sahakar-Cooperative Enterprise Support and Innovation Scheme

- ❑ The scheme will be linked to Rs 1000 crore 'Cooperative Start-up and Innovation Fund (CSIF)' created by the NCDC.
- ❑ It would have more incentives for cooperatives of North Eastern region, Aspirational Districts and cooperatives with women or SC or ST or PwD members.
- ❑ The funding for the project will be up to 80 percent of the project cost for these special categories against 70 percent for others.
- ❑ The scheme envisages 2 percent less than the applicable rate of interest on term loan for the project cost up to Rs 3 crore including 2 years moratorium on payment of principal.
- ❑ All types of cooperatives in operation for at least one year are eligible to avail of the scheme.
- ❑ It would encourage cooperatives to venture into new and innovative areas.
- ❑ The scheme is expected to meet the needs of youth.

### National Cooperative Development Corporation

- ❑ The NCDC has the unique distinction of being the sole statutory organisation functioning as an apex financial and developmental institution exclusively devoted to cooperative sector.
- ❑ It supports cooperatives in diverse fields apart from agriculture and allied sectors.
- ❑ It is an ISO 9001:2015 compliant organisation and has a distinctive edge of competitive financing.
- ❑ It has extended financial assistance of Rs 63702.61 crore during 2014-2018 (as on November 13, 2018), which is 220 percent more than Rs 19850.6 during 2010-14.
- ❑ Being the most preferred financial institution in the world of cooperatives, it has also initiated Sahakar 22, a Mission for Doubling Farmers' Income by 2022.

*Source: PIB*

## ○ India, ADB sign USD 200 million loan agreement to improve highways in Bihar

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Union Government on November 26, 2018 signed a USD 200 million loan agreement to finance widening and upgrading of about 230 kilometers state highways in Bihar to all-weather standards with road safety features.

### Bihar State Highways III Project (BSHP-III)

- ☐ The project involves upgrading State Highways to standard two-lane width with road safety features and paved shoulders including reconstructing, widening, and strengthening culverts and bridges.
- ☐ The Project will also build institutional capacity of the State for road design and maintenance and incorporate appropriate new technologies in the State's road sub-sector.
- ☐ The improved roads will contribute to savings in vehicle operating cost and travel time, reduce vehicle emissions, and improve road safety.
- ☐ It will establish a State-level Road Research Institute to improve technical and management capacity of the Road Agency Staff.
- ☐ The loan will complement the efforts of Bihar Government to upgrade all State Highways to meet the minimum two-lane standard with better surfaces and improved road safety.

### ADB's support

- ☞ This BSHP-III project was approved by the ADB Board in October 2018. This loan is in continuation of ADB's support in the development of the road sector in Bihar.
- ☞ Since 2008, ADB has provided four loans to Bihar, amounting to USD 1.43 billion, to upgrade about 1453 km of State Highways and to construct a new bridge over the Ganga River near Patna.

*Source: Business Standard*

## ○ Government launches 'PAiSA' Portal under National Urban Livelihoods Mission

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on November 26, 2018 launched the 'PAiSA' - Portal for Affordable Credit and Interest Subvention Access, a centralised electronic platform for quicker processing of loans under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM).

### Key Facts

- ☐ PAiSA is yet another effort by the government to connect directly with the beneficiaries, ensuring that there is greater transparency and efficiency in delivery of services.
- ☐ All 35 States and Union Territories (UTs) & all scheduled commercial banks, RRBs and Cooperative Banks are expected to be on board the PAiSA portal the year end.
- ☐ The web platform was designed and developed by Allahabad Bank, the nodal bank under the scheme.

## **National Workshop on Municipal Finance and Urban Planning**

- ❑ The 'PAiSA' portal was launched during the course of a daylong National Workshop on Municipal Finance and Urban Planning organised by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- ❑ The workshop provided a platform to identify key areas of concern regarding municipal finance and urban planning and exploring the options available to resolve them by inviting senior experts to shed light on best practices.
- ❑ More than 300 delegates comprising officers from the states, urban local bodies, town planning offices across the country and banks participated in the workshop.

## **○ Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM)**

- ❑ The Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Urban Livelihoods Mission extends coverage to all the 4041 statutory cities and towns, there by covering almost the entire urban population.
- ❑ The mission aims to provide the shelter equipped with essential services to the urban homeless in a phased manner to reduce poverty and vulnerability of the urban poor households.
- ❑ The scheme addresses the livelihood concern of the urban street vendors by facilitating with suitable space, institutional credit, and social security and skills to the urban street vendor for accessing emerging market opportunities.
- ❑ The core belief of National Urban Livelihoods Mission is that the poor are entrepreneurial and have innate desire to come out of poverty. The challenge is to unleash their capabilities to generate meaningful and sustainable livelihoods.
- ❑ NULM believes that any livelihood promotion programme can be scaled up in a time bound manner only if driven by the poor and their institutions.

*Source: PIB*

## **○ RBI eases hedging norms for overseas borrowings to 70% from current 100%**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has eased the norms for External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs) by reducing the mandatory hedging provision to 70 percent from the current 100 percent.

### **What is Hedging'?**

- ☞ *Hedging* refers to an investment process required to reduce the risk of adverse price or currency movements.
- ☞ A borrower has to hedge in a manner that the projected cash flows match the expectation of the borrowers, irrespective of the fluctuations in the foreign currency.

### Key Facts

- ❑ The RBI also clarified that the ECBs raised prior to this circular will be required to mandatorily roll over their existing hedge only to the extent of 70 percent of outstanding ECB exposure.
- ❑ The relaxed norms will apply to the ECBs with a maturity period between three and five years.
- ❑ The relaxation in hedging is for Indian companies raising foreign currency-denominated ECBs under Track I of the ECB framework. The Track I refer to medium-term foreign currency-denominated ECB with a minimum average maturity of three to five years.
- ❑ The easing of hedging norms comes at a time when the economy faces liquidity issues, particularly among the Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFC).
- ❑ For the same purpose, the RBI had earlier eased hedging rules by reducing the minimum tenure for borrowing through the ECB route to three years from five years. It had also reduced the tenure required for exemption from mandatory hedging to five years from 10 years.

### Significance

- ❑ The move is likely to boost the local credit market.
- ❑ It will increase the exposure of Indian companies borrowing abroad to fluctuations in the foreign exchange market.
- ❑ The move will also help in improving dollar inflows into the economy at a time when some foreign currency deposits are likely to mature.

### External Commercial Borrowings (ECB)

- ❑ ECB is an instrument used to facilitate the access to foreign money by Indian companies, corporations and PSUs (public sector undertakings).
- ❑ ECBs include commercial bank loans, buyers' credit, and suppliers' credit, securitised instruments such as floating rate notes and fixed rate bonds etc., credit from official export credit agencies and commercial borrowings from the private sector window of multilateral financial Institutions.
- ❑ ECBs cannot be used for investment in stock market or speculation in real estate.

*Source: Economic Times*

## Ease of Doing Business Grand Challenge Launched

### Why in news?

- ☞ Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 19, 2018 launched the Ease of Doing Business grand challenge on resolving seven identified ease of doing business problems with the use of cutting-edge technologies.
- ☞ The Doing Business Ranking is an annual assessment conducted by the World Bank that measures aspects of regulation affecting 10 areas of the life of a business, evaluating 190 countries on 10 specific indicators.
- ☞ The scores are based on the measures implemented by the Government departments, however, they also reflect the experience of industry users that is counted in the rankings.
- ☞ The 10 indicators include starting a business, dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registering property, getting credit, protecting minority interests, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency.

- ☞ From a user's perspective, ease of doing business signifies the ease of getting permission, license, registration or a service from a government agency. There are established processes within each government agency for issuing of such permissions or services.
- ☞ Hence, the grand challenge seeks to invite innovative ideas from individuals, startups or other enterprises to implement artificial intelligence, Big Data Analytics, Internet of Things (IoT), Blockchain and other cutting-edge technologies for re-engineering related Government processes to eliminate physical interface, improve service delivery, enhance transparency and reduce cost and time.

### **Key Highlights**

- ❑ The EODB grand challenge is open to all young Indians, start-ups and private enterprises. The main purpose is to provide solutions to complex problems using current technology.
- ❑ The platform for the grand challenge will be the Start-up India portal.
- ❑ The date for closing of applications is January 1, 2019 and the final results will be declared on February 1, 2019.
- ❑ The top 3 teams for each problem statement would be awarded cash prizes worth Rs 1 lakh, Rs 2 lakh and Rs 3 lakh respectively.
- ❑ The government would be working with all the winners for solution development and implementation.

### **Background**

- ❑ In the World Bank's Doing Business Report (DBR, 2019) released on October 31, 2018 India recorded a jump of 23 positions from 100 in 2017 to 77 in 2018, among a total of 190 countries.
- ❑ India also recorded the highest improvement in two years by any large country since 2011 in the Doing business assessment by improving its rank by 53 positions.
- ❑ India improved its rank in 6 out of 10 indicators and has moved closer to international best practices (Distance to Frontier score) on 7 out of the 10 indicators.
- ❑ In the grant of construction permits, India's rank improved from 181 in 2017 to 52 in 2018, an improvement of 129 ranks in a single year.
- ❑ In Trading across Borders, India's rank improved by 66 positions moving from 146 in 2017 to 80 in 2018.
- ❑ The World Bank has recognised India as one of the top improvers for the year. This is the second consecutive year for which India has been recognised as one of the top improvers.

*Source: Business Standard, The Hindu*

## ○ Ministry of Food Processing Industries issues guidelines for ‘Operation Greens’

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) has recently approved the operationalisation strategy for Operation Greens.
- ☞ The Operation Greens was announced in the Budget speech of 2018-19 with an outlay of Rs 500 crores to stabilise the supply of Tomato, Onion and Potato (TOP) crops. It will ensure availability of TOP crops throughout the country round the year without price volatility.
- ☞ The Strategy will comprise of a series of measures as decided by the Ministry:

### Short term Price Stabilisation Measures

- ☐ NAFED will be the Nodal Agency to implement price stabilisation measures.
- ☐ MoFPI will provide 50 percent of the subsidy on transportation of Tomato Onion Potato (TOP) Crops from production to storage; and hiring of appropriate storage facilities for TOP Crops.

### Long Term Integrated value chain development projects

- ☐ Capacity Building of FPOs & their consortium
- ☐ Quality production
- ☐ Post-harvest processing facilities
- ☐ Agri-Logistics
- ☐ Marketing / Consumption Points
- ☐ Creation and Management of e-platform for demand and supply management of TOP Crops

### Assistance and eligibility

- ☐ The pattern of assistance will comprise of grants-in-aid at the rate of 50 percent of the eligible project cost in all areas, subject to maximum Rs 50 crores per project.
- ☐ Eligible Organisation who will be eligible to participate in the programme would include State Agriculture and other Marketing Federations, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPO), cooperatives, companies, Self-help groups, food processors, logistic operators, supply chain operators, retail and wholesale chains; and central and state governments.
- ☐ The applicant fulfilling the eligibility criteria under the scheme is required to submit the online application on SAMPADA portal of the ministry attaching therewith complete documents.

### Major objectives of Operation Greens

- ❑ Operation Greens was announced on the line of "Operation Flood" to promote Farmer Producers Organizations, agri-logistics, processing facilities and professional management. The major objectives are:
- ❑ Enhance value realisation of TOP farmers by targeted interventions to strengthen TOP production clusters and their FPOs
- ❑ Price stabilisation for producers and consumers by proper production planning in the TOP clusters
- ❑ Reduction in post-harvest losses by creation of farm gate infrastructure, development of suitable agro-logistics, and creation of appropriate storage capacity linking consumption centres
- ❑ Increase in food processing capacities and value addition in TOP value chain
- ❑ Setting up of a market intelligence network to collect and collate real time data on demand and supply and price of TOP crops

*Source: PIB*



## Environment and Ecology

### NGT forms committee to check air quality during functions at hotels, banquets

#### Why in news?

- ☞ The National Green Tribunal (NGT) on November 13, 2018 formed a committee to stop activities that lead to degradation of the environment, taking note of pollution and traffic congestion during functions at banquet halls, farmhouses and hotels in Delhi.
- ☞ Delhi's air quality has been deteriorating rapidly and continues to be in the 'severe' category.

#### **Joint Committee headed by the Delhi Government's Urban Development Secretary**

- ❑ The green panel formed a joint committee with representatives of municipal corporations, the Central Ground Water Authority, the Delhi Jal Board, the Delhi Police and the Delhi Pollution Control Committee.
- ❑ The Committee will be headed by the Delhi Government's Urban Development Secretary. Justice SP Garg, former Delhi High Court judge, will also oversee the working of the committee. The Chief Secretary of Delhi will provide all the requisite logistic support and assistance for functioning of committee.

#### What the committee will do?

- ❑ The tribunal has asked the committee to prepare an action plan in this regard within a month.
- ❑ An action plan on sewage disposal, groundwater extraction, rainwater harvesting, municipal solid waste management, systems for groundwater recharge will be worked upon in the first meeting.
- ❑ It will have to form a plan to check air quality due to traffic congestions and noise pollution because of use of DJ sets, loudspeakers and crackers etc. in the functions.
- ❑ The action plan must involve all the stakeholders, particularly students and senior citizens.
- ❑ The committee will have the authority to close venues flouting norms and remove every illegal structure.
- ❑ It will look into allegations of whether members of the applicant are running swimming pools by illegally drawing groundwater without valid sanctions and drawing groundwater from critical or over-exploited areas without any mechanism for groundwater harvesting and recharge.
- ❑ The re-use of water, after being disinfected as per norms, can be used for swimming pools and such water may be used for flushing by installing double piping system or utilised for plantation or gardening.
- ❑ It will monitor compliance of Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, and sewage discharge including decentralised waste processing facilities, installation of CCTV camera, GPS system in garbage collection vans. etc.

*Source: Indian Express*

## Gujarat launches intensive project to conserve Gir lions

### Why in news?

- ☞ Gujarat government on November 20, 2018 launched a Rs 351-crore project for the conservation of the Gir lions. The project is launched in the backdrop of the Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) outbreak that claimed 23 Asiatic lions lives in their only dwelling Gir National park in Saurashtra.
- ☞ This intensive project will also include an emergency ambulance van akin to the 108 emergency services.

### Canine distemper

- ❑ Canine distemper is a viral disease that affects a wide variety of animal families, including domestic and wild species of dogs, coyotes, foxes, pandas, wolves, ferrets, skunks, raccoons, and large cats, as well as pinnipeds, some primates, and a variety of other species. Canine distemper is also sometimes termed as hardpad disease.
- ❑ Canine distemper is caused by a single-stranded RNA virus of the family Paramyxoviridae (the same family of the viruses that causes measles, mumps, and bronchiolitis in humans).
- ❑ It affects several body systems, including the gastrointestinal and respiratory tracts and the spinal cord and brain, with common symptoms that include high fever, eye inflammation and eye/nose discharge, labored breathing and coughing, vomiting and diarrhea, loss of appetite and lethargy, and hardening of nose and footpads.
- ❑ The Gujarat government put on hold approval to 10 mines in the Gir region in view of the environmental issues related to the eco-sensitive zones 10 km around Gir.
- ❑ Wildlife experts and forest officials have been complaining for long that mining and commercial activities around the lion sanctuary have increasingly become a threat to the tranquil existence of the wild beasts.

### Modern technology for conservation

- ❑ The Government said that modern technology would also be used in lion conservation. The movements of nocturnal animals like the lions and others will be tracked through closed-circuit television cameras (CCTV) and camera-mounted drones.
- ❑ They are also planning to bring in a project on the lines of E-eye, which has been successful in the Corbett National Park.

### E-eye

- ❑ E-Eye is a 24/7 all-weather large-scale intelligent technology, capable of providing live-feed wildlife supervision in vulnerable areas and sanctuary perimeters, collecting and interpreting wildlife crime data to alert law enforcement before violations occur.
- ❑ The E-eye apparatus protects areas by helping in monitoring the hard-to-access regions, manage patrols, detect intruders, and keep rangers accountable. It also helps reserve managers study wildlife.
- ❑ The government has also decided to set up five Safari Parks. Accordingly, a lion safari will come up at Gandhinagar, a Tiger Safari at Kevadia near the Statue of Unity and two leopard safari parks will be set up in Mandvi in Surat district and Dangs in South Gujarat.

*Source: The Hindu*

## India's Wildlife Crime Control Bureau wins UN Environment award

### Why in news?

- ☞ The United Nations Environment has awarded India's Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) with the Asia Environment Enforcement Award, 2018 for the excellent work done by the Bureau in combating transboundary environmental crime.
- ☞ The Asia Environmental Enforcement Award recognises the excellent work done by government officials and teams from the bureau who is diligently involved in combating transboundary environmental crime.

### Key Facts

- ☐ The Asia Environment Enforcement Awards publicly recognise and celebrate excellence in enforcement by government officials and institutions and teams combating transboundary environmental crime in Asia.
- ☐ The awards are given to outstanding individuals or government organisations and teams that demonstrate excellence and leadership in enforcement of national laws to combat transboundary environmental crime in one of the following eligibility criteria areas: collaboration, impact, innovation, integrity and gender leadership.
- ☐ India's Wildlife Crime Control Bureau has been conferred the award in the Innovation category.
- ☐ The bureau has adopted innovative enforcement techniques that have dramatically increased enforcement of transboundary environmental crimes in India.
- ☐ It has developed an online Wildlife Crime Database Management System to get real-time data in order to help analyze trends in crime and devise effective measures to prevent and detect wildlife crimes across India.

### Background

- ☐ The WCCB's wildlife crime database management system has been successfully used to analyze trends, help put in preventive measures as well as for successfully carrying out operations such as Operation Save Kurma, Thunderbird, Wildnet, Lesknow, Birbil, Thunderstorm, Lesknow-II along with other enforcement agencies.
- ☐ The result of the same is the arrest of 350 wildlife criminals and huge seizures of tiger and leopard's skin and bones and other trophies including rhino horn, elephant ivory, turtles, tortoises, mongoose raw hairs as well as mongoose hair brushes, protected birds, marine products, live Pangolin as well as its scales and deer antlers across all the states.

*Source: Times of India*

## COP24: UN Conference on Climate Change begins in Poland

### Why in news?

- ☞ The 24th meeting of Conference of Parties (COP24) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) began on December 3, 2018 at Katowice, Poland.

### Key Facts

- ❑ The Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama declared the UN COP24 climate summit open and handed over the presidency of the talks to Michal Kurtyka, Poland's Deputy Environment Minister in the presence of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.
- ❑ Delegates from nearly 200 nations began talks to tackle deep political. The COP24 will be hosting over 28000 people. They will include CEOs, mayors, governors and other leaders from civil society at large.
- ❑ Over 100 events will highlight action in transport, water, land-use, energy, the fashion industry, representing the wide spectrum of climate action. The Conference will continue till December 14, 2018.

### What is the significance?

- ❑ The COP24 is very significant as it is expected to finalise guidelines for implementation of the Paris Agreement adopted in 2016.
- ❑ The COP24 climate summit will see nations try to agree on ways of implementing the the 2015 Paris treaty to limit temperature rises and avert global warming.

### What is conference of parties?

- ❑ The **United Nations Climate Change Conferences** are yearly conferences held in the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- ❑ They serve as the formal meeting of the UNFCCC Parties (Conference of the Parties, COP) to assess progress in dealing with climate change, and beginning in the mid-1990s, to negotiate the Kyoto Protocol to establish legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.
- ❑ From 2005 the Conferences have also served as the “Conference of the Parties Serving as the Meeting of Parties to the Kyoto Protocol” (CMP); also parties to the Convention that are not parties to the Protocol can participate in Protocol-related meetings as observers.
- ❑ From 2011 the meetings have also been used to negotiate the Paris Agreement as part of the Durban platform activities until its conclusion in 2015, which created a general path towards climate action.
- ❑ The first UN Climate Change Conference was held in 1995 in Berlin

### **Paris Agreement on Climate Change**

- ❑ In December 2015, 195 countries pledged to slow the process of global warming in Paris by signing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.
- ❑ The primary objective is to limit the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels.
- ❑ Efforts will be made to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels so that it will be possible to reduce the risks and impacts of climate change.
- ❑ Parties should take action to conserve and enhance, as appropriate, sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases including forests.
- ❑ With a view to contribute to sustainable development and to achieve the long term temperature goal of 2°C, the COP established the global goal on adaptation of enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change.

### **India to reaffirm its support for Paris Agreement**

- ❑ Union Environment Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan is leading the Indian delegation at the conference. India expects that COP24 frames pragmatic guidelines and gives due consideration to challenges and priorities of developing countries.
- ❑ India asserts its strong support to the objective of the Paris Agreement to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping the global temperature rise well below 2 degrees Celsius from pre- industrial revolution period.
- ❑ During the COP-24, India is expected to highlight its concern for climate change and reaffirm its commitments for finalization of the Paris Agreement Work Programme.
- ❑ India will be setting up a Pavilion to create awareness about India's positive climate actions in various sectors of the economy. The theme of Pavilion is 'One World One Sun One Grid'. This theme was highlighted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the first assembly of the International Solar Alliance in October 2018.

*Source: The Hindu, Wiki*

### **EU aims to be first carbon neutral economy by 2050**

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

- ☞ plan to cut emissions and make the bloc carbon neutral by 2050.

#### **Key Highlights**

- ❑ The European Union comprises 28 members, which together form one of the world's biggest and hence, most polluting economies. Hence, it is keen to play its part and become the first major world player to be "climate neutral".
- ❑ The European Union's strategic long-term vision relies on its member states to take action.
- ❑ Under the climate neutral goal, the member states will submit their draft national climate and energy plans to the EU by the end of 2018.
- ❑ According to EU's climate commissioner, while more homes will be insulated and transport will be modernised, the key plank of any successful strategy will be to reduce fossil fuel use in energy production by 80 per cent by 2050.

- ❑ This implies increasing investments in clean energy from two per cent of Europe’s GDP to 2.8 per cent, representing an additional spend of between 175 and 290 billion Euros per year.
- ❑ The announcement comes at a time when delegations from more than 200 countries are due to convene in Poland for the upcoming COP24 climate summit, which aims to renew and build on the Paris deal and limit global warming.

### **Objective**

- ❑ The proposed strategy does not intend to launch new policies, nor does the European Commission intend to revise 2030 targets.
- ❑ The strategy is meant to set the direction of travel of climate and energy policy and to frame what the European Union considers as its long-term contribution to achieving the Paris Agreement temperature objectives.
- ❑ The strategy is “an invitation” to European citizens, businesses and institutions “to show leadership” and to put forward ideas to limit emissions.

### **Significance**

- ❑ The bloc’s strategy would help reduce the cost of energy imports by two to three trillion euros by 2050.
- ❑ The plans will cover commitments already made to reduce greenhouse emissions by 40 per cent before 2030, while the strategy now aims “for a climate neutral Europe by 2050”.

### **Background**

- ❑ While leaders across the world have been trying to keep the 2015 Paris Agreement afloat, one of the world’s leading economies, the United States continues to hold on its stand of rejecting the treaty and promising to withdraw from it.
- ❑ Syria, which was the last remaining holdout previously, agreed to sign the Paris agreement in November 2017.
- ❑ The accord is to take effect in 2020, and the UN Environment Program (UNEP) now warns that its two-degree goal is already out of date.
- ❑ Experts also warn that the temperature rise is on track to surpass three degrees by 2100 and urge governments to do more than first planned if global warming is to be reined in at all.

*Source: The Hindu*



## Science and Technology, Defense, Health

### ISRO successfully launches communication satellite GSAT-29

#### Why in news?

- ☞ The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on November 14, 2018 successfully launched communication satellite GSAT-29 aboard its heavy-lift Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark III (GSLV MkIII-D2).
- ☞ The launch took place at 05.08 hours from the second launch pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh. The countdown for the launch had begun at 2.50 pm on November 13. The GSLV Mark-III rocket weighs around 640 ton and has a height of 43.4 meters.

#### Key Highlights

- ❑ The launch vehicle injected India's second high-throughput communication satellite GSAT-29 into its planned geostationary transfer orbit just over 17 minutes into its flight.
- ❑ After injection, ISRO's Master Control Facility at Hassan assumed the control of the 3,423 kg satellite.
- ❑ In the coming days, three orbit raising maneuvers will be executed to position the satellite in the Geostationary Orbit at its designated location, at an estimated height of 36,000 km from the earth.
- ❑ Two massive boosters with solid propellant constitute the first stage, the core with liquid propellant form the second stage and the cryogenic engine completes the final stage.
- ❑ GSAT-29 is a multiband, multi-beam communication satellite, intended to serve as test bed for several new and critical technologies. The mission life of the satellite is over ten years.
- ❑ It carries Ka/Ku-band high throughput communication transponders, which are intended to cater to the communication requirements of users, including those in remote areas.
- ❑ The satellite will mainly aim to increase hi-speed communication facilities in the northeast, Jammu & Kashmir and other far-flung areas of the nation.
- ❑ The satellite also carries few other systems such as Q/V-band communication payload, for experimenting with the evolving technologies in satellite science.
- ❑ It also carries a Geo High Resolution Camera, which will carry out high resolution imaging and an Optical Communication Payload, which will demonstrate data transmission at a very high rate through optical communication link.

## Significance

- ❑ The success of GSLV MkIII-D2 marks an important milestone in Indian space programme towards achieving self-reliance in launching heavier satellites. The success of this flight also signifies the completion of the experimental phase of GSLV Mark III.
- ❑ The first successful mission of GSLV Mark III was an experimental suborbital flight in 2014.
- ❑ Subsequently, GSLV Mark III-D1 launched GSAT-19, a high throughput communication satellite, with a lift-off mass of 3150 kg, into GTO on June 5, 2017.
- ❑ The current launch will help to bridge the digital divide.

## GSLV Mk III

- ❑ GSLV Mk III is a three-stage heavy lift launch vehicle developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- ❑ This is the second test flight of the launch vehicle. Its success will prove its reliability for future commercial launches.
- ❑ The same class of rocket is scheduled to be used for the upcoming Chandrayaan-II mission in January 2019 as well as the Gaganyaan mission.
- ❑ The four-ton class vehicle comprises three stages, beginning with the two solid strap-on motors on both the sides of the middle stage. The middle stage uses liquid fuel and the upper one is a cryogenic engine.

*Source: The Hindu*

## PM Modi lays foundation stone of City Gas Distribution Projects

### Why in news?

- ☞ Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 22, 2018 laid the foundation stone of City Gas Distribution (CGD) Projects in 65 Geographical Areas (GAs) in 129 districts under the 9th CGD bidding round, remotely from Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi.
- ☞ The PM also launched the 10th CGD Bidding Round in 50 GAs spread over 124 districts in 14 states. Speaking on the occasion, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister, Dharmendra Pradhan said that the Government is working to move towards creating a gas-based economy.

### Key Facts

- ❑ Currently, the share of gas in the India's energy mix is just over 6 per cent and the aim is to reach the 15 per cent figure, while the world average is 24 per cent.
- ❑ India aims to bring down its carbon emission level and a number of initiatives have been taken in this direction such as LED bulbs, BS VI fuel, bio-energy, International Solar Alliance, Pradhan Mantri Ujjawala Yojana, and providing clean piped gas supply to more cities.
- ❑ India would also be enhancing the LNG terminal capacity, renegotiating Indo-Qatar Gas deal and encouraging positive Indo-US engagement in this direction.
- ❑ India is not only focusing on increasing the use and supply of gas, but also on producing gas through agro-wastes and other products and including the same into the CGD network.
- ❑ India has also increased its focus on promoting the usage of environment-friendly clean fuel, natural gas as a fuel and feedstock across the country to move towards a gas based economy.
- ❑ Accordingly, the development of CGD networks has been focused to increase the availability of cleaner cooking fuel such as PNG and transportation fuel (CNG) to all the citizens of the country.

### Impact

- ❑ The expansion of CGD network will benefit industrial and commercial units by ensuring the uninterrupted supply of natural gas.
- ❑ The move will also expand the potential coverage of CGDs to about 50 per cent of country's population, spreading over 35 per cent of the area.
- ❑ Around 46.5 lakh households and 32 lakh CNG vehicles are currently availing the benefit of clean fuel through existing CGD networks.

### Implementation

- ❑ Around 96 cities and districts in different parts of the country were covered for development of CGD networks till September 2018.
- ❑ As per commitment made by various entities in the 9th bidding round, around 2 crore PNG (Domestic) connections and 4600 CNG stations are expected to be installed across the country in the next 8 years.
- ❑ Various pre-project activities for this GAs have already commenced and efforts are being made to commence the physical works at the site.

### Background

- ❑ To boost the expansion of PNG/CNG network in India, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) launched 9th CGD bidding round in April, 2018 for 86 Geographical Areas (GAs) covering 174 districts in 22 States/ Union Territories.
- ❑ After the processing of the received bids, grants of authorisation were issued to the successful bidders to develop CGD network for 84 GAs.
- ❑ Now, the PNGRB has also initiated the process of 10th CGD bidding round for additional 50 new GAs covering 124 districts in 14 States to increase the potential coverage to about 53 per cent of the country's area covering 70 per cent of country's population.

*Source: The Hindu, PIB*

## ISRO successfully launches HySIS satellite aboard PSLV-C43

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on November 29, 2018 successfully launched a hyperspectral imaging satellite (HySIS), an earth observation satellite along with 30 foreign commercial satellites from Sriharikota launch centre in Andhra Pradesh.
- ☞ The satellites were launched through Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C43) from the first launch pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. This was the 45th launch flight of the polar satellite launch vehicle (PSLV) rocket.

### Key Facts

- ❑ PSLV is a four stage launch vehicle with alternating solid and liquid stages. PSLV-C43 is the Core Alone version of PSLV which is the lightest version of PSLV.
- ❑ HySIS is an earth observation satellite developed by ISRO. It is the primary satellite of the PSLV-C43 mission. The mass of the satellite is about 380 kg.
- ❑ The satellite was placed in 636 km polar sun synchronous orbit with an inclination of 97.957 deg. The mission life of the satellite is expected to be 5 years.
- ❑ The foreign satellites launched along with HySIS include 1 Micro and 29 Nano satellites from 8 different countries.
- ❑ All these satellites were placed in a 504 km orbit by PSLV-C43. Out of the 30 commercial satellites, 23 are from the United States.
- ❑ These satellites have been commercially contracted for launch through Antrix Corporation Limited, the commercial arm of ISRO.

### Significance

- ❑ This is the first time that a full-fledged hyperspectral imaging satellite has been launched. The hypex technology is still an evolving science and has become a new global trend.
- ❑ Hyperspectral imaging combines the power of digital imaging and spectroscopy. It collects and processes information from across the electromagnetic spectrum.

### HySIS Mission

- ❑ The satellite, which can see in 55 spectral or colour bands from 630 km above the ground, will be used for a range of applications like agriculture, forestry and assessment of coastal zones, inland waters, soil and other geological environments.
- ❑ The primary goal of the hyper spectral imaging satellite would be to study the earth's surface in visible, near infrared and shortwave infrared regions of the electromagnetic spectrum.
- ❑ Being an advanced earth observation satellite, it will also be used by the military for surveillance purpose.
- ❑ The satellite carries two payloads -one to capture images in the visible near-infrared (VNIR) range of the light spectrum and another in the shortwave infrared (SWIR) range.
- ❑ The hi-tech imaging will enable distinct identification of objects, material or processes on the Earth by reading the spectrum for each pixel of a scene from space.
- ❑ The optical imaging detector array chip in the HySIS satellite has been designed by Isro's Ahmedabad-based space applications centre and manufactured by its electronic arm, semiconductor laboratory, Chandigarh.
- ❑ The satellite will provide Earth observation service till 2023.

*Source: The Hindu*

## ○ Emergency Response Support System: Himachal Pradesh becomes first state to launch Single Emergency Number

### Why in news?

- ☛ Himachal Pradesh has become the first Indian state to launch a single emergency number '112' which will connect to police, fire, health and other helplines through an Emergency Response Centre (ERC) in the state.
- ☛ The emergency number was launched by Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh under the Emergency Response Support System (ERSS).
- ☛ For the project, the Union Government provided financial assistance of Rs 4.71 crore for the project from the Nirbhaya fund. The Central government has allocated Rs 321.69 crore under Nirbhaya fund to implement the ERSS project across the country.

### '112 India' mobile app and ERSS state website

- ☐ This single emergency number '112' service is part of the Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) which includes a '112 India' mobile app integrated with panic button of smartphones.
- ☐ To ensure safety of women, a 'SHOUT' feature has been introduced in '112 India' mobile app to seek immediate assistance from registered volunteers in the vicinity apart from assistance from ERC. The SHOUT feature is exclusively available for women.
- ☐ The mobile app can be downloaded from the Google App store and Apple.
- ☐ The '112 India' mobile app will now subsequently be rolled out in all States and Union Territories to help people across the country access the unified emergency services.
- ☐ An ERSS state website has also been designed for ease of citizen in availing immediate assistance.
- ☐ Anybody in distress, especially women, can call 112 from landline or mobile phone or by using the ERSS. The ERSS would help in optimum utilisation of manpower and prompt action on all the emergency calls. In addition to this, problems related to coordination would also be simplified
- ☐ To increase the effectiveness of emergency response, the ERC has been integrated with location-based services provided by telecom service providers.

### Objectives

- ☐ Providing a single emergency response number across the country
- ☐ Providing 24x7 efficient and effective response system which can receive input from various voice and data services such as voice call, SMS, email, Internet of Things, panic buttons in public transport etc.
- ☐ Identification of location of person in distress connecting through voice or data
- ☐ Automated response system for timely dispatch of field resources such as police to the location of incidence using the system
- ☐ GPS (Global Positioning System) enabled dispatch of vehicles to locate nearest vehicles
- ☐ Integration with existing Dial 100, Dial 108 and other emergency response systems
- ☐ Integrate with other relevant systems like CCTNS etc.
- ☐ Provide standardized and easy to use mobile apps, IoT (Internet of Things) enabled applications on a Pan-India basis.

*Source: The Hindu*

## IAF, US air force conduct joint exercise ‘Ex Cope India 2018’

### Why in news?

- ☞ The fourth edition of the series of bilateral joint exercise, ‘Ex Cope India-18’, began between the air forces of the United States and India on December 3, 2018 in West Bengal, India.
- ☞ The 12-day exercise will be held from December 3-14 at Air Station Kalaikunda and Air Station Arjan Singh in Panagarh airbase. This is the first time that the exercise is being planned at two Air Force bases.
- ☞ **Aim:** The main aim of exercise is to provide operational exposure and undertake mutual exchange of best practices towards enhancing operational capability.

### Key Highlights

- ❑ The Cope India exercise is being held after a gap of eight years, with the last one having taken place in 2010.
- ❑ The exercise is a long-standing bilateral US Pacific Air Forces-sponsored Field Training Exercise, conducted with the Indian Air Force.
- ❑ It focuses on enhancing mutual cooperation between the US and India and building on the existing capabilities, aircrew tactics and force employment.
- ❑ It showcases efforts and commitment of the two nations to build a free and open Indo-Pacific region.
- ❑ Around 200 men from the US Air Force with 15 aircraft from the 18th Wing, Kadena Air Base, Japan and 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard will take part in the exercise alongside men from the Indian Air Force.
- ❑ While the air force of the United States (USAF) is participating with 12 X F15 C/D and 03 X C-130, the IAF is participating with the Su-30 MKI, Jaguar, Mirage 2000 , C-130J and AWACS aircraft.

### Cope India

- ❑ Cope India is a series of joint Air Force exercises held between the Indian Air Force and the United States Air Force, in India.
- ❑ The first such exercise, which required many months of preparation, was conducted at the air force station in Gwalior in February 2004.
- ❑ The exercise included flight tests, practice and demonstrations as well as lectures on subjects related to aviation.
- ❑ There were also media functions and social interactions held among troops of the two countries.
- ❑ The exercise has now evolved to incorporate subject matter expert exchanges, air mobility training, airdrop training and large-force exercises, in addition to fighter-training exercises.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti Launched

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Defence Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman on November 27, 2018 formally launched ‘Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti’ in New Delhi.
- ☞ During the event, salient inventions and innovations achieved by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and Ordnance Factories (OFs) that have resulted in successful filing of Intellectual Property Right (IPR) applications were showcased.
- ☞ The Minister also highlighted that while India has always been a knowledge hub since ancient times, but due to lack of awareness on modern legal framework for protection of IP rights, the nation’s knowledge and creativity have often not been utilised to its full potential.

### Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti:

- ❑ Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti has been instituted by the Department of Defence Production as a part of the ongoing initiatives to enhance self-reliance in defence.
- ❑ The mission aims to provide a boost to the IPR culture in indigenous defence industry.
- ❑ The Directorate General of Quality Assurance (DGQA) has been entrusted with the responsibility of coordinating and implementing the programme.
- ❑ The end objective of the programme is to inculcate IP culture in Indian defence manufacturing ecosystem.

### Background

- ❑ The Intellectual Property Right has emerged as a key ingredient of an ecosystem which stimulates innovation and ingenuity.
- ❑ An IP Facilitation Cell was established in April 2018, which has worked tirelessly to achieve ambitious targets of training 10,000 personnel of OFB and DPSUs on IPR and facilitate filing of at least 1,000 new IPR applications.

*Source: The Hindu*

## NASA's InSight Mars explorer lands safely on the Red Planet

### Why in news?

- ☞ NASA's InSight explorer successfully touched down on Mars on November 26, 2018, after an almost seven-month journey through deep space. This is the eighth time in human history that NASA has executed a successful landing on the red planet and the first in six years.
- ☞ The landing kicks off a two-year mission for the InSight lander to study Mars' deep interior. Operated by NASA, the explorer is built by scientists in the United States, France and Germany.

### InSight Mission

- ❑ InSight stands for Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport. It has been designed to study the "inner space" of Mars: its crust, mantle, and core.
- ❑ The lander's two-year mission will be to study the deep interior of Mars to learn how all celestial bodies with rocky surfaces, including the Earth and the Moon, were formed.
- ❑ It was launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California on May 5, 2018. It touched down November 26 near Mars' equator on the western side of a flat, smooth expanse of lava called Elysium Planitia.
- ❑ The explorer will carry out mission objectives on the surface of Mars for a period of two years (one Martian year, plus 40 Martian days) till November 24, 2020.
- ❑ The landing signal was relayed to NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, California, through one of NASA's two small experimental Mars Cube One (MarCO) CubeSats, which launched on the same rocket as InSight and followed the lander to Mars.
- ❑ They are the first CubeSats sent into deep space. After successfully carrying out a number of communications and in-flight navigation experiments, the twin MarCOs were set in position to receive transmissions during InSight's entry, descent and landing.

### Significance

- ❑ InSight will study the interior of Mars and send back valuable information, which will help NASA prepare better to send astronauts to the Moon and later to Mars.
- ❑ The mission's objective is to determine what Mars is made of and how it has changed since it formed more than 4 billion years ago.
- ❑ The results could help solve the mystery of how the Red Planet became the dry, desolate world that we see today.

## Challenges Ahead

- ❑ InSight's surface-operations phase began a minute after touchdown. One of its first tasks was to deploy its two decagonal solar arrays, which will provide power. The process began 16 minutes after landing and took another 16 minutes to complete.
- ❑ The verification of the successful deployment of the spacecraft's solar panels will come from NASA's Odyssey spacecraft, which is currently orbiting Mars.
- ❑ The deployment of the spacecraft's solar panels is significant, as it is solar powered.
- ❑ InSight will begin to collect science data within the first week after landing, though the teams will focus mainly on preparing to set InSight's instruments on the Martian ground.
- ❑ At least two days after touchdown, the engineering team will begin to deploy InSight's 5.9-foot-long (1.8-meter-long) robotic arm so that it can take images of the landscape.
- ❑ Within two or three months, the arm will deploy the mission's main science instruments, the Seismic Experiment for Interior Structure (SEIS) and Heat Flow and Physical Properties Package (HP3) instruments.

## How is InSight different from previous Mars landings?

- ❑ Unlike the rovers that landed previously on Mars like Opportunity and Curiosity, which trundle across Mars in search of interesting rocks, InSight is designed to sit still.
- ❑ Using its dome-shaped seismic sensor, scientists hope to detect tiny tremors associated with meteorite impacts, dust storms and "marsquakes" generated by the cooling of the planet's interior.
- ❑ As seismic waves ripple through, they will be distorted by changes in the materials they encounter — perhaps plumes of molten rock or reservoirs of liquid water, revealing what's under the planet's surface.

*Source: The Hindu*

## World-class township for autistic children, adults to be built in Kolkata

### Why in news?

- ☞ The India Autism Centre (IAC), a world-class autism township is being planned to be built near Kolkata, where children and adults suffering from the developmental disorder would receive training, treatment and boarding facilities.
- ☞ The one-of-its-kind initiative is a joint effort between a private firm and the state government. It is expected to come up over a 52-acre plot at Sirakol in South 24 Parganas in the next five years.

### Key Highlights

- ❑ The township is expected to be built at an estimated cost of Rs 500 crore. It will be built under Section 8 of Companies Act, 2013
- ❑ The construction work for the township will begin in 2019 and it is expected to be completed by 2023. The soft launch of the project has been scheduled for January 2019.
- ❑ The centre will be the first of its kind in India as well as abroad, with housing facilities for 350 residents and daycare centre for over 200 children, adolescents and adults.
- ❑ It will have provisions for training teachers, who would be dealing with those suffering from the disorder.
- ❑ It will also have an administrative wing and a guest house, to accommodate parents of those receiving training at the institute.

- **Significance: The Township is expected to ensure holistic development of those suffering from autism.**

### **Background**

- The project was announced during the Bengal Global Business Summit (BGBS) in January 2018.
- West Bengal Finance Minister Amit Mitra, during the BGBS meet in January, had highly appreciated the initiative and promised all support to it.
- The project will involve international tie-ups and it is expected to be very different from any of the centres in India till now.

*Source: The Hindu*

- **26th General Conference on Weights and Measures redefines standard definition of Kg**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The 26th meeting of the General Conference on Weights and Measures (CGPM) was held from November 13-16, 2018 at Palais des Congrès, Versailles, France. The CGPM is the highest international body of the world for accurate and precise measurements.

### **Significance**

- The 26th CGPM was special and historic, as the members voted for the redefinition of 130-years-old “Le grand K – the SI unit of kg” in terms of the fundamental Planck’s constant (h). The new definitions will come into force on May 20, 2019.
- The International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM), the main executive body of CGPM has the responsibility of defining the International System of Units (SI).
- The revision of the SI is the culmination of many years of intensive scientific cooperation between the National Metrology Institutes (The National Physical Laboratory for India) and the BIPM.
- The dissemination of SI units for the welfare of society and industries in the country is the responsibility of Legal Metrology, Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of India.
- Out of five draft resolutions, the revision of the International System of Units and the definition of timescales are important.
- The most important is the resolution on the revision of the International System of Units.
- The definition of the seven base units namely, second, metre, kilogram, ampere, Kelvin, mole and candela has been changed from being linked to artefacts to being based on the fundamental constants on nature.

## New Definitions

- ❑ **Kilogram:** The definition of the kilogram has been changed from being the mass of prototype sanctioned by the 1st CGPM held in Paris in 1889 and deposited at the BIPM to the Planck constant, which is a physical constant.
- ❑ **Metre:** The definition of the metre has been changed to link it to the speed of light. Similarly, there is a change in the definition of time also.

## Impact

- ❑ The change in the definitions will result in uniform and worldwide accessible SI system for international trade, high- technology manufacturing, human health and safety, protection of the environment, global climate studies and the basic science underpinning these.
- ❑ The units are expected to be stable in the long term, internally self-consistent and practically realizable being based on the present theoretical description of nature at the highest level.

## New Definition of Kilogram

- ❑ New Definition: *The kilogram is defined by taking the fixed numerical value of the Planck constant  $h$  to be  $6.626\ 070\ 15 \times 10^{-34}$  when expressed in the unit  $J\ s$ , which is equal to  $kg\ m^2\ s^{-1}$ , where the meter and the second are defined in terms of  $c$  and  $\Delta\nu$ .*
- ❑ When it comes into force on May 20, 2019, the new kilogram definition will do away with the comparisons to the International Prototype.
- ❑ It will enable the national labs to create their own standard for the kilogram because it will be reproducible.
- ❑ However, it is important to note that Kilogram won't be changing, just the way it is defined.
- ❑ Thereon, the process for realizing a kilogram will rely on a tool called **Kibble balance**.

## What is Kibble Balance?

- ❑ Kibble balance is a self-calibrating electromechanical balance and provides the measurements of mass, traceable in terms of electrical parameters and provides linkage of macroscopic mass to the Planck constant( $h$ ).
- ❑ The national labs of UK, US, Canada and Germany have successfully developed Kibble balance for 1 kg with an uncertainty of measurement in order of 10<sup>-8</sup>.
- ❑ The NPL-India, in association with the Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of India is looking forward for the development of 1 kg Kibble balance.

## Advantages of Kibble Balance

- ❑ The main advantage of the tool would be that the national prototype of kilogram would not have to be sent to BIPM for calibrations.
- ❑ Further, the accuracy and stability of the Kibble balance would be very high, which is very important where low weights with high accuracies are essential, for example in pharmaceuticals and biotechnologies.

## How does it work?

- ❑ The tool uses coils and magnets wherein the current in the coil exerts a known force and that current can be measured to sufficient accuracy.
- ❑ As the definition of current has already been established in terms of magnetic-field force, it can be used to derive an upward force from which the mass of an unknown object can be compared. When the forces are equal, the mass of the unknown object can be measured.
- ❑ The voltage and current measurements are based on Planck's Constant.
- ❑ **Significance:** As Kibble balances already exist in national metrology labs, the kilogram can now be recreated across the planet.

*Source : The Hindu*

## International Space Station completes 20 years

### Why in news?

- ☞ The International Space Station (ISS) turned 20 years old on November 20, 2018. The project was kicked by Russian space agency Roscosmos when it launched its Zarya module from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on November 20, 1998.
- ☞ The launch was followed by NASA's Unity module. The pair was joined in low-earth orbit, which kick-started a 13-year construction effort of the most ambitious construction project in the history of humanity. The result of the effort was a habitable artificial satellite, which currently serves as a giant orbiting observatory and laboratory.

### ISS History

- ❑ On November 20, the International Space Station reached a two-decade milestone since the launch of its first module.
- ❑ On this day in 1998, aerospace engineers from Russia and the United States celebrated the lift-off of the Russia-built, US-funded unit Zarya ("sunrise") as it took off from Kazakhstan's Baikonur Cosmodrome.
- ❑ The first component of the ISS made its way into orbit where it served as the foundation of an international space exploration program that continues today.
- ❑ The most significant thrust for the success of the project was the co-operation between former Cold War rivals- the United States and Russia (part of Soviet Union that disintegrated in 1990).

- ❑ Zarya would not have been possible had the two nations not kept aside the decades of nuclear tensions to share the expertise both sides had accumulated during and after the Space Race of the 1960s to further the common good.
- ❑ Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US tapped Russia's skilled but idle space industry to help bring down costs and expedite Ronald Reagan's 1984 vision of a "permanently manned space station."
- ❑ In their audacious bid to create a continuously inhabited structure 250 miles above the Earth, the long-time adversaries found a common ground.

### **How Zarya became ISS?**

- ❑ ISS's first crew included Astronaut Bill Shepherd and cosmonauts Yuri Gidzenko and Sergei Krikalev, who climbed aboard the station on November 2, 2000. At that time, the station wasn't as big as it is today.
- ❑ Over the next two decades, space agencies based in 15 countries including the UK, Italy, Japan, Canada, France, Denmark, Germany and Spain jointly contributed to transform the complex technological instrument into a vast space station with 15 pressurised components.
- ❑ Over 136 space flights from seven different types of craft were deployed to deliver parts to the engineers. The large modules were delivered on 42 assembly flights, 37 on US shuttles, five on Russian Proton and Soyuz rockets.
- ❑ Several additions like Canada's robotic appendage Canadarm2 and Japan's Kibo Laboratory Module helped the ISS grow to nearly the size of a football field.

### **Facts about ISS**

- ❑ It is the largest manned object in space, 357ft long, just a yard short of a full-length football field.
- ❑ It weighs 419,725kg including the weight of spacecrafts. The space station can accommodate as many as six spacecrafts at one time.
- ❑ It is the single most expensive object ever built at £93.4bn.
- ❑ It is the third brightest object in the Earth's night sky after the moon and Venus.
- ❑ The space station travels at a speed of 4.791 miles per second, fast enough to go to the moon and back in a single day.
- ❑ It orbits the earth approximately once every 90 minutes or 16 times in a 24-hour period.
- ❑ It passes over 90 per cent of the earth's population in the course of its orbital path.
- ❑ The living space in the station includes six sleeping quarters, a gym and a 360-degree bay window, but only two bathrooms.
- ❑ The zero gravity causes astronauts to float while doing their daily activities.
- ❑ The orbiting station has been continuously occupied since November 2000.
- ❑ On September 2, 2017, Nasa's Peggy Whitson set the record of being the longest-serving human in space.

*Source: The Hindu*

## NASA, SpaceX to launch test flight on January 7

### Why in news?

- ☞ The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) of the United States is planning to send humans to space for the first time in eight years, in a historic flight through SpaceX Crew Dragon.
- ☞ Prior to the historic launch, as a part of the preparation, the space agency will shoot out a test flight on January 7, 2019. The announcement comes as the race between Boeing and SpaceX to launch their first crewed space missions is heating up.

### Key Highlights

- ❑ NASA has announced an updated schedule for the two companies on the road to sending astronauts to space from American soil.
- ❑ The SpaceX will send its Crew Dragon capsule on its maiden voyage to the International Space Station on January 7.
- ❑ The SpaceX Crew Dragon can seat three astronauts, but will be uncrewed for its first test flight, which will be launched from NASA's Kennedy Space Center, Florida.
- ❑ This flight will be known as Demo-1 (or DM-1). It will undergo an in-flight abort test sometime before its first crewed flight in June.
- ❑ NASA astronauts Bob Behnken and Doug Hurley will be the first two astronauts to test the commercial spaceflight.

### Significance

- ☞ The flight aims to provide NASA with performance data from the SpaceX spacecraft and also help the agency certify if transportation system is ready for taking astronauts between the Earth and the International Space Station.

### Background

- ❑ Boeing's first uncrewed test flight is currently scheduled for March 2019, almost two months behind SpaceX.
- ❑ Both companies have to complete abort tests before their first crewed tests, which will happen in June for SpaceX and August for Boeing.
- ❑ In August 2018, NASA announced the astronauts who will be flying in these missions, which would see the United States send people to space in American spacecraft again, after the agency grounded its fleet in 2011.
- ❑ Since 2011, Russia's Soyuz spacecraft was being used by the astronauts to travel to and from the Earth to the International space station.
- ❑ NASA now expects the first operational mission with commercial crew to take place in August 2019, with a second to follow in December.
- ❑ Those dates could change depending on the results of test flights, but it appears that the world is close to seeing an actual commercial spacecraft ferrying real passengers out of this world.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Odisha government announces new Biotechnology Policy'

### Why in news?

- ❑ The state government of Odisha on November 15, 2018 announced a new Biotechnology Policy 2018 to attract investments in the sector at the concluding day of the Make in Odisha Conclave, held in its capital city Bhubaneswar.
- ❑ Speaking on the occasion, Odisha's Science and Technology Minister B N Patra said that the government will provide its full support for the development of the biotechnology sector by forming Public Private Partnership, bio-incubation centres and bi-tech finishing schools.

### Objective

- ☞ The state government aims to make the state a top biotech investment destination in the country.

### Key Highlights

- ❑ The development of the biotech sector will be based on three key pillars - innovation, entrepreneurship and investment.
- ❑ Towards the same, the state government plans to collaborate with various international organisations to provide cutting edge technology in the biotech sector in order to provide innovation and fellowship and grant.
- ❑ The new Biotechnology Policy was prepared after a wide range of discussion and inputs from various industries and stakeholders.
- ❑ As per the policy, all biotechnology units shall be allotted land at a concessional rate as per the Industrial Policy Resolution of the state government. An additional subsidy of 25 per cent shall be available to reputed anchor tenants.
- ❑ The policy provides attractive incentives for the stakeholders to invest in Odisha.

### What is the significance?

- ❑ Biotechnology is one of the emerging technologies that has excellent potential to grow in Odisha.
- ❑ In the wake of IT transforming the country and the world, the state government has realised that biotech is another such emerging technology and that the state should take full advantage of it.

*Source: The Hindu*

## India, Russia conduct joint military exercise ‘INDRA 2018’

### Why in news?

- ☞ The joint military exercise between India and Russia, ‘INDRA 2018’ aimed at combating insurgency under the aegis of United Nations (UN) began on November 18, 2018 in India.
- ☞ The joint exercise is being conducted at Babina Field Firing Ranges, Babina Military Station in Uttar Pradesh. The training exercise that will span across eleven days will see participation from company-sized contingents of the 5th Army of the Russian Federation and a Mechanised Infantry Battalion of India including induction and de-induction of the Russian contingent.

### Objective

- ☞ The main aim of the exercise is to practice joint planning and conduct to enhance the interoperability of the two armies in the peacekeeping, enforcement environment under the aegis of the United Nations.

### Highlights

- ❑ The main focus of the exercise will be on training on enhancing team building, special tactical level operations such as cordon and search, house intervention, handling and neutralisation of improvised explosive devices and integrated employment of force multipliers.
- ❑ The primary focus of the tactical field exercise will be to share best practices amongst the militaries and work on the existing skills of the troops to equip them to deal with exigencies at hand.
- ❑ The topics chosen for the exercise are both live and contemporary affecting both the nations alike.
- ❑ The training will be supervised by a joint directing panel comprising of senior officials of both the national contingents.
- ❑ The tenth counterterrorism exercise in the series of Exercise INDRA is aimed at sending a strong message to the world with an intent of appreciation of interoperability between Indian and Russian Armies for joint tactical level operations in the peacekeeping environment.

### Background

- ❑ In October 2017, the first-ever tri-services joint exercise was held between the Indian and Russian Armed Forces in the Eastern Military District of Russia.
- ❑ Prior to that, the exercise was conducted as a single service exercise alternately between the two countries.
- ❑ In 2017, the exercise was upgraded to involve all the three Services of the Armed Forces- Army, Navy and Air Force. The exercise has been held regularly since 2003.

*Source: The Hindu*

## **Indian Navy - Indonesian Navy bilateral exercise 'Samudra Shakti' begins**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The inaugural edition of Indian Navy -Indonesian Navy Bilateral Exercise 'Samudra Shakti' began on November 12, 2018 at Surabaya, Indonesia. The exercise will conclude on November 18, 2018.
- ☞ The Indian Naval Ship (INS) Rana of the Eastern Fleet based at Visakhapatnam under the Eastern Naval Command arrived at the port of Surabaya to participate in the exercise.

### **Objective**

- ❑ The exercise aims to strengthen bilateral relations, expand maritime co-operation, enhance interoperability and exchange best practices.
- ❑ The strategic partnership between both the two nations was elevated to 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Indonesia in May 2018.

### **Highlights of the Bilateral Exercise 'Samudra Shakti'**

- ❑ The exercise began with a Harbour Phase scheduled from November 12 to 15 encompassing planning and briefing on various activities, professional interactions, cross deck visits, sports fixtures and social interactions.
- ❑ The harbour phase will be followed by a Sea Phase scheduled from November 16 to November 18 and would include operations such as Joint Manoeuvres, Helicopter Operations, Surface Warfare exercise, ASW exercise and Anti Piracy exercises.
- ❑ The participation of INS Rana seeks to promote India's solidarity with Indonesia towards ensuring good order in the maritime domain and to strengthen existing bonds between the navies of the two nations.

### **Background**

- ❑ During the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Indonesia in May 2018, both the nations agreed to step up their defence and maritime cooperation, raising the level of their ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership.
- ❑ India agreed to develop the strategically important Indonesian port Sabang in the Indian Ocean, close to the Andamans and both the sides unveiled a vision document for the Indo-Pacific region, the first of its kind between India and a South-East Asian country, to deal with the increasing presence of China in the area.

*Source: The Hindu*

## IIT-Madras develops India's first microprocessor 'Shakti'

### Why in news?

- ☞ The researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras) have designed India's first indigenous microprocessor, which will reduce dependency on imported microchips and the risk of cyber attacks.
- ☞ The microprocessor called '*Shakti*' was designed, developed and booted by IIT Madras with a microchip fabricated in the Semi-Conductor Laboratory of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) at Chandigarh. It has been developed at an outlay of about Rs 11 crore.

### Objective

- ❑ The 'Shakti' project is aimed at developing industrial-grade microprocessors and other components of the microprocessor ecosystem.
- ❑ It is partly funded by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), as part of two-decade-old efforts to develop indigenous microprocessors.

### Highlights

- ❑ The design of the microprocessor originates from an open source instruction set architecture (ISA), a set of basic instructions called RISC V, which makes it customisable to any device.
- ❑ The RISC-V is an open, free ISA, enabling a new era of processor innovation through open standard collaboration.
- ❑ It delivers a new level of free, extensible software and hardware freedom on architecture, paving the way for the next 50 years of computing design and innovation.
- ❑ The ISA is basically the programming or machine language and provides commands to the processor instructing it on the functions to be executed.
- ❑ The concept to design the chip was germinated in 2011 and some preliminary works were then carried out. Bluespec, an open-source high-level synthesis language, went into making the chips.
- ❑ Initially, the researchers created a normative design to show the feasibility. Different devices may need a different type of hardware and may be even new features or instructions.

### Significance

- ❑ The microprocessor will reduce dependency on imported microchips and the risk of cyber attacks..
- ❑ It could be used in mobile computing, wireless and networking systems, besides reducing reliance on imported microprocessors in communication and defence sectors.
- ❑ It may also provide power to mobile phones, surveillance cameras and smart meters.
- ❑ The brains of all computing and electronic devices, many such microprocessors that are connected are used to operate larger high-speed systems and supercomputers.

## Background

- ❑ Launched in 2014, the ‘Shakti’ microprocessor was designed at the Reconfigurable Intelligent Systems Engineering (RISE) Laboratory at the IIT-Madras’ department of computer science and engineering.
- ❑ In July, an initial batch of IIT-M-designed 300 chips, ‘RISECREEK’, was developed at Intel’s facility at Oregon, US, and later booted the Linux Operating System. Now, developed in the country, the microprocessor is completely indigenous.
- ❑ While the microprocessor fabricated in India was in a 180nm facility, the one in the US was in a 20nm lab.
- ❑ According to Prof Kamakoti Veezhinathan, lead researcher at IITM’s RISE laboratory, “180nm, though outdated, is relevant as many applications across the world look for limited frequency.”
- ❑ The chip can be used for any application where conventional power is available. The one fabricated in the US consumes less power and hence can be used in mobiles.
- ❑ The microprocessor has already attracted the attention of Indian industry and IIT-M is in touch with more than 13 companies involved in strategic and commercial applications.

## About Parashakti

- ❑ After ‘Shakti’, the research is now ready with ‘Parashakti’, an advanced microprocessor for supercomputers.
- ❑ The super scaler processor will be ready by December 2018 and it will go into desktops and 32 of them interconnected may go into supercomputers.

*Source: The Hindu*

## SIMBEX 2018

### Why in news?

- ☞ The 25th edition of SIMBEX, “Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise” is scheduled to be held from November 10- 21, 2018 in the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal.
- ☞ The 2018 edition marks the silver jubilee of SIMBEX. To mark the historical occasion, the navies of both nations are undertaking exercises over an extended geography.

### Indian Fleet

- ☞ The Indian Navy is being represented this year by the Ranvir class destroyer – INS Ranvijay, two Project 17 multirole stealth frigates – INS Satpura and INS Sahyadri, the Project 28 ASW corvette - INS Kadmatt, the Project 25A missile corvettes, INS Kirch, the OPVs INS Sumedha and INS Sukanya, the Fleet Support Ship, INS Shakti, a Sindhughosh Class submarine, INS Sindhukirti, the P8I Long Range Maritime Patrol and ASW aircraft from INAS 312, Dornier 228 Maritime Patrol aircraft from INAS 311, Mk 132 Hawk AJTs from INAS 551 and integral helicopters such as the UH3H, Seaking 42 B, Seaking 42C and Chetak utility helicopters.

## Singaporean Fleet

- ☞ The Singapore Navy is being represented by two Formidable Class stealth frigates - RSS Formidable and RSS Steadfast, one Littoral Mission Vessel - RSS Unity, two Missile Corvettes, RSS Vigour and RSS Valiant, an Archer class Submarine, RSS Swordsman, 'Swift Rescue' a Deep Sea Rescue Vehicle (DSRV), a Fokker F50 maritime reconnaissance aircraft, embarked S70B helicopters and Scan Eagle unmanned aerial systems.

## Highlights

- ❑ The 2018 edition of the bilateral maritime exercise will be the largest edition since 1994 in terms of scale and complexity.
- ❑ The initial harbour phase will be held at Port Blair, the capital of Andaman and Nicobar Islands from November 10-12, which will be followed by sea phase from November 12-16 in the Andaman Sea.
- ❑ The second harbour phase will be held from November 16- 19 at Visakhapatnam – 'the City of Destiny'.
- ❑ The harbour phase would include programmes such as a silver jubilee commemoration ceremony, various professional and training interactions, 10 Km 'Friendship Run' during the Annual Vizag-Navy Marathon, social evening and joint cultural programmes to commemorate the 25th anniversary.
- ❑ The final sea phase would be held in the Bay of Bengal from November 19-21.
- ❑ The SIMBEX 2018 will witness a diverse range of exercises at sea ranging from live weapon drills including multiple missile firings, Heavy Weight Torpedo (HWT) and medium range gun/ anti submarine rocket firings, advanced Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) exercises, submarine rescue demonstrations, integrated Surface and Anti-Air Warfare (AAW), Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) operations and cross deck helicopter flying among others.

## Significance

- ☞ The number of missiles and torpedo firings being undertaken in this year's edition will be the largest the Indian Navy has undertaken with any foreign Navy till date, which indicates the growing trust and operational comfort between the two navies.
- ☞ This year would also witness the highest numbers and variety of platforms fielded by both sides. Over the years the two navies have increased their interoperability to a level that could be matched by few other navies.

### About SIMBEX

- ❑ Simbex is an acronym for Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercises.
- ❑ Bilateral cooperation between Singapore and India was first formalised when RSN ships began training with the Indian Navy in 1994.
- ❑ The modest endeavour to exchange best practices in the field of Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), has in the recent years evolved into a complex high stakes exercise with both nations attaching premium in terms of time, complex advanced exercises and type of platforms involved.
- ❑ Simbex is aimed to increase interoperability between the RSN and IN as well as develop common understanding and procedures for maritime security operations.
- ❑ The scope of the current exercise includes wide-ranging professional interactions during the Harbour Phase scheduled and a diverse range of operational activities at sea during the Sea Phase.
- ❑ The previous edition of the exercise was held off Singapore in the South China Sea in May 2017.

*Source: The Hindu*

### India's nuclear submarine INS Arihant completes first 'deterrence patrol'

#### Why in news?

- ☞ Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 5, 2018 announced that India's first indigenous nuclear submarine INS Arihant has successfully completed its "first deterrence patrol".
- ☞ The development signifies that the underwater warship has completed its maiden long-range mission with "live" nuclear-tipped missiles. On the occasion, Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated all those involved in the process, especially the crew of INS Arihant for the great accomplishment.

#### Key Highlights

- ❑ The 6,000-tonne INS Arihant, which was under development for three decades under a highly classified programme, comes under the direct control of the Nuclear Command Authority headed by PM Modi.
- ❑ Following the successful completion of its "deterrence patrol", INS Arihant can now be considered a fully functional underwater ballistic missile delivery platform.
- ❑ The ballistic missile submarine is a strategic asset as it can fire city-destroying missiles from anywhere in the ocean and remain undetected for a long time.
- ❑ It can also sneak closer to the coast of an enemy nation and fire ballistic missiles deep into their territory, which otherwise cannot be reached by land-based short-range ballistic missiles.

## **India's nuclear triad completed**

- ❑ India's long-awaited nuclear triad, the capability to fire nuclear weapons from land, air and sea, is finally operational almost five decades after it was first conceived for credible strategic deterrence and 20 years after the Pokhran-II tests.
- ❑ INS Arihant has completed India's nuclear triad by adding maritime strike capability to land and air based delivery platforms.
- ❑ All the big five nuclear nations including the US, Russia, France, China and the UK are already full-fledged nuclear triad powers.
- ❑ China reportedly began combat patrols of an armed nuclear-powered submarine in 2015.
- ❑ Pakistan last year tested its submarine-launched Babur missile and in the process completed its nuclear triad since it already possesses land-based ballistic missiles as well as tactical nuclear bombs that it can drop from its fighter aircraft.

## **Background**

- ❑ India has had the land-based Agni missiles for long, with the over 5,000-km Agni-V inter-continental ballistic missile now in the process of being inducted and fighter jets jury-rigged to deliver nuclear weapons. However, INS Arihant gives it much more nuclear teeth and credibility.
- ❑ The triad's underwater leg in the shape of nuclear-powered submarines armed with ballistic missiles, called SSBNs, is considered to be the most secure, survivable and potent platform for retaliatory strikes.
- ❑ Unlike land-based missiles and fighter-bombers that can conceivably be destroyed in pre-emptive enemy strikes, SSBNs can remain undetected in deep seas for months at the end.
- ❑ INS Arighat, the second SSBN under-construction at the ship-building centre at Vizag, was launched in November 2017 and is slated to become operational by 2020.
- ❑ It will be followed by the launch of two 7,000-tonne submarines code-named S-4 and S-4\*, which will be armed with six missiles each instead of the four each in INS Arihant and INS Arighat, by around 2020-2022. The design of 13,500-tonne S-5 submarines is also underway.

*Source: The Hindu*



## More News

### ○ **Cabinet approves renaming of ‘Jharsuguda Airport, Odisha’ as ‘Veer Surendra Sai Airport, Jharsuguda’**

The Union Cabinet approved renaming of Jharsuguda Airport, Odisha as “Veer Surendra Sai Airport, Jharsuguda”. Veer Surendra Sai is a well-known freedom fighter of Odisha.

Renaming of the Jharsuguda airport in his name will fulfill long-pending demand of the Odisha Government, which reflects the sentiments of the local public of the respective area. It will also be a befitting tribute to the contribution of Surendra Sai, the revered personality associated with the State.

### 3rd Ayurveda Day

The Ayurveda Day was observed across India on November 5, 2018 on the occasion of the Dhanawantari Jayanti or Dhanteras with an aim to further promote Ayurveda as the main stream system of medicine.

The theme of the 3rd Ayurveda Day was “Ayurveda for Public health”. Every year, the Ministry of AYUSH observes Ayurveda Day on the occasion of Dhanawantari Jayanti (Dhanteras).

Ayurveda is perceived as one of the well documented systems of medicine, equally relevant in modern times. Prevention of disease and promotion of health is the main aim of Ayurveda. Lord Dhanvantari is considered as divine propagator of Ayurveda. He holds the virtues of granting health and wealth.

### ○ **PM Narendra Modi inaugurates Inland Multi-Modal Terminal Port in Varanasi**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 12, 2018 inaugurated an Inland Multi-Modal Terminal Port on river Ganga at Ramnagar in Varanasi.

Constructed at the cost of Rs 207 crore, this inland waterways terminal is the first of the four Multi-Modal Terminals being constructed on National Waterways-I on River Ganga as part of the World Bank-aided Jal Marg Vikas project of the Inland Waterways Authority of India. The other three terminals are under construction at Sahibganj, Haldia and Gazipur.

### **Ladakh’s LAMO Centre wins UNESCO Asia-Pacific Award, 2 Mumbai projects get Honourable Mention**

The LAMO Centre of Ladakh won the 2018 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation on November 9, 2018. This aristocratic house was restored from a state of partial ruin.

The centre won the ‘Award of Distinction’ for its systematic restoration project that used local building materials and indigenous construction techniques while skilfully introducing modern amenities to assure its ongoing use. Apart from Ladakh’s centre, two Mumbai projects fetched Honourable Mention under the 2018 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards.

## **Lucknow stadium renamed after Atal Bihari Vajpayee ahead of India-West Indies T20I match**

The newly-built Ekana International Stadium of Lucknow was on November 5, 2018 renamed after former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The stadium will now be known as ‘Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee International Cricket Stadium’.

The stadium was renamed just ahead of the first-ever international cricket match - the T20 International between India and West Indies. The city hosted its first international match at the stadium on November 6, 2018 when India played against West Indies in the second T20 International match.

## **Union Minister Ananth Kumar passes away**

Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Ananth Kumar passed away on November 12, 2018 at a private hospital in Bengaluru. He was 59. He was diagnosed of lung cancer just three months ago and had returned to Bengaluru recently after undergoing treatment in the United States and Britain.

He was among a few party leaders, besides former CM B.S.Yeddyurappa, who can be credited for the growth of BJP in Karnataka, bringing the party to power in 2008 and making it the first saffron government in South India.

## **UNSC lifts asset freeze, travel ban imposed on Eritrea after 9 years**

The United Nations Security Council in a unanimous vote on November 14, 2018 agreed to lift the sanctions imposed against Eritrea, after nine years.

The Security Council had imposed an arms embargo, asset freeze and a travel ban on Eritrea, amidst claims that the northeast African nation, supported al-Shabab militants in Somalia. However, Eritrea has always denied the accusations.

The 15-member council adopted a UK-drafted Resolution 2444, calling for an end to the nine-year-old embargo on the impoverished country as it rebuilds relations with its neighbouring nation Ethiopia following almost decades of animosity, conflict and standoff.

## **Government to release Rs 75 commemorative coin to mark anniversary of Tricolour hoisting by Bose**

The Union Ministry of Finance on November 13, 2018 decided to release a Rs 75 commemorative coin on the occasion of 75th anniversary of the hoisting of Tricolour for the first time by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose at Port Blair.

During his visit to Andaman in on December 30, 1943, Subhash Chandra Bose hoisted the Tricolor for the first time on free Indian soil at Cellular Jail of Port Blair, much before India attained Independence declaring the island as the free territory from the British rule.

## **Amnesty International strips Myanmar’s Aung San Suu Kyi of ‘Ambassador of Conscience’ Award**

Amnesty International on November 12, 2018 stripped Myanmar’s de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi of its highest honour, the ‘Ambassador of Conscience’ award, over her indifference to atrocities committed by the Myanmar military against an increasing intolerance of freedom of expression.

The Amnesty International, an international human rights group, named Suu Kyi as its 2009 Ambassador of Conscience Award recipient when she was still under house arrest for her opposition to Myanmar’s oppressive military.

However, considering her failure to speak out and her shielding of the security forces from accountability for the violence against the Rohingya, the organisation withdrew the honour from her.

### **World Toilet Day observed globally**

The World Toilet Day was observed across the world on November 19, 2018. The day’s main focus is to inspire action to tackle the global sanitation crisis and ensure that everyone has a safe toilet by 2030. This is part of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6: sanitation and water, which aims to ensure availability and sustainable management of sanitation and water for all by 2030.

The 2018 theme of the International Day is ‘toilets and nature’. This year’s campaign is based on the narrative: When nature calls, we have to listen and act. The theme focuses on the need to build toilets and sanitation systems that work in harmony with the environment.

## **UNICEF appoints Indian athlete Hima Das as India’s first ever Youth Ambassador**

The United Nations Children’s Fund-India (UNICEF) on November 14, 2018 appointed Asian Games gold-medalist sprinter Hima Das as India’s first ever Youth Ambassador.

UNICEF India works along with the Central Government to ensure that children born in India get the best start in life, thrive and develop to his or her full potential.

Recently, Hima clinched a Gold medal in Women’s 4x400 metre relay event at the 2018 Asian Games, held from August 18 to September 2, 2018 at Jakarta, Indonesian. She also won Silver in the Women’s 400m Race event with a clock timing of 50.59 seconds.

### **International Day of Persons with Disabilities observed globally**

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities was observed globally on December 3, 2018 with the theme “Empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”.

The international day aims to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development. It also aims to increase awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in every aspect of life, be it political, social, economic or cultural.

## 2018 Theme

This year's theme focuses on empowering persons with disabilities for an inclusive, equitable and sustainable development as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda pledges to *"leave no one behind"*.

Persons with disabilities, as both beneficiaries and agents of change, can fast-track the process towards inclusive and sustainable development and promote resilient society for all, including in the context of disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action, and urban development.

On the occasion, the UN Secretary-General will launch a flagship report titled "UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development | 2018 – Realizing the SDGs by, for and with persons with disabilities".

### Sunil Arora appointed as new Chief Election Commissioner

President Ram Nath Kovind on November 26, 2018 appointed Sunil Arora as the new Chief Election Commissioner. He would be succeeding OP Rawat who retired on November 24.

The 62-year-old Arora was appointed to the Election Commission on August 31, 2017. He was brought in last year to fill the vacancy created by former CEC Nasim Zaidi's retirement.

He is now expected to take charge of his new post on December 2, 2018.

Sunil Arora is a 1980 batch IAS officer of the Rajasthan Cadre, who has held top positions in various government departments and ministries.

### Mary Kom clinches gold in World Boxing Championship

Mary Kom created history on November 24, 2018 by winning her sixth world championship gold at the 10th World Women's Boxing Championships, held in New Delhi, India.

Speaking on her historic win, Mary Kom said that it is very special as she was under pressure, especially because of the change in her weight category. "I won my last Worlds gold in 2010 and then the change of weight for Olympics happened. The pressure was something I always felt but don't know how to put this gold alongside the earlier five," she reasoned.

### Former US President George H.W. Bush passes away

George Herbert Walker Bush, the 41st President of the United States who helped steer America through the end of the Cold War, passed away on November 30, 2018. He was 94. He is survived by four sons namely George W Bush, Jeb, Neil and Marvin and a daughter Dorothy Bush Le Blond.

President Bush was suffering from Parkinson's disease that forced him to use a wheelchair in recent years, and he had been in and out of hospitals in recent months as his health declined.

Earlier, he was admitted to a hospital with a blood infection on April 23, 2018, one day after the funeral of his wife Barbara Bush, and remained there for 13 days.

### **Wipro Chairman Azim Premji conferred highest French civilian honour**

Indian business tycoon and philanthropist Azim Premji was bestowed with the highest French civilian distinction Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur (Knight of the Legion of Honour) in Bengaluru on November 28, 2018.

Premji, who is the chairman of Wipro, received the award for his outstanding contribution to developing the information technology industry in India, his economic outreach in France and his laudable contribution to the society as a philanthropist through the Azim Premji Foundation and Azim Premji University.

### **Arvind Saxena appointed as Chairman of UPSC**

The President of India, Ram Nath Kovind on November 28, 2018 appointed Arvind Saxena as the new Chairman of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

The term of his appointment will be from the date he enters the Chairman office till August 7, 2020 when he attains the age of 65 years or till further orders, whichever is earlier.

The Government had appointed Saxena as the acting Chairman of UPSC in June 2018. He took over charge from Vinay Mittal who had completed his term.

### **IFFI 2018: Donbass wins the Golden Peacock Award**

The movie 'Donbass' directed by Sergei Loznitsa won the coveted Golden Peacock Award at the 49th International Film Festival of India (IFFI), which concluded in Goa on November 28, 2018.

The Golden Peacock Award carries a cash prize of Rs 4 million (Rs 40 lakhs) to be shared equally between the Producer and the Director, a Trophy and the citation.

Donbass movie tells the story of a hybrid war taking place in a region of Eastern Ukraine, involving an open armed conflict alongside mass killings and robberies by separatist gangs. A journey through Donbass unfolds as a series of curious adventures. It is about a world lost in post-truth and fake identities.

Donbass is also the official submission of Ukraine for the 'Best Foreign Language Film' category at the 91st Academy Awards in 2019. It was selected as the opening film in the Un Certain Regard section at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival.

### **Lijo Jose Pellissery won Best Director Award for Ee.Ma.Yau**

Lijo Jose Pellissery won the Best Director Award for his 2018 film 'Ee.Ma.Yau'. The film is a satire on death and how it affects human lives. The Best Director gets the Silver Peacock Award and a cash prize of Rs 1.5 million (Rs 15 lakhs).

Set in Chellanam, a coastal village in Kerala, the film shows the plight of a son who tries to arrange a worthy funeral for his father; however, meets unpredictable obstacles and reactions from different quarters.

**Chemban Vinod won Best Actor Award**

Chemban Vinod won the Best Actor (Male) Award for his portrayal in Ee.Ma.Yau of 'Eeshi', a son who tries to arrange a worthy funeral for his father but is met with unpredictable obstacles.

Best Actor (Male) is honoured with the Silver Peacock Trophy and a cash prize of Rs 1 million (Rs 10 lakhs).

**Anastasiia Pustovit won Best Actor (Female) Award**

Anastasiia Pustovit won the Best Actor (Female) Award for her portrayal as a 'Larysa', a teenage girl in the Ukrainian film 'When the Trees Fall'.

Best Actor (Female) is honoured with the Silver Peacock Trophy and a cash prize of Rs 1 million (Rs 10 lakhs).

**Milko Lazarov's Aga won Special Jury Award**

Milko Lazarov won the Special Jury Award for his film 'Aga'; the film focuses on the story of Sedna and Nanook, an elderly couple from Yakutia, and the particular challenges they face in the midst of a frigid landscape.

The Special Jury Award carries a cash prize of Rs 1.5 million (Rs 15 lakhs), a Silver Peacock Award and a citation.

**Alberto Monteras II won Best Debut Feature Film of a Director**

Alberto Monteras II received the Centenary award for 'Best Debut Feature Film of a Director' for his Filipino Movie 'Respeto'.

**Salim Khan won IFFI 2018 Special Award**

Salim Khan, the celebrated actor, story-screenplay-dialogue writer of Hindi films was honoured with the IFFI 2018 Special Award for his Lifetime Contribution to Cinema.

The prestigious award consisting of a cash prize of Rs 1 million (Rs 10 lakhs), Certificate, Shawl and a Scroll was conferred upon Khan for his outstanding contribution to cinema.

**ICFT –UNESCO Gandhi Medal**

'Walking with the Wind', directed by Praveen Morchhale, won The ICFT –UNESCO Gandhi Medal instituted by the International Council for Film, Television and Audiovisual Communication, Paris and UNESCO.

'Walking with the Wind' tells the story of a 10 year old boy in Himalayan Terrain, who mistakenly breaks his friend's school chair. The criteria for the Gandhi Medal reflect UNESCO's fundamental mandate of building peace in the mind of men and women, particularly human rights.

'Los Silencios', the Portuguese, Spanish movie directed by Beatriz Seigner got the special mention under ICFT-UNESCO Gandhi medal category.

## **26 November: Indian Constitution Day**

The 69th Constitution Day was observed across India on November 26, 2018 to mark the adoption of the Indian Constitution by the Constituent Assembly.

The Constitution of India was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949 and it came into force on January 26, 1950.

### **UIDAI CEO Ajay Bhushan Pandey appointed as new revenue secretary**

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet on November 17, 2018 appointed Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) CEO Ajay Bhushan Pandey as the new revenue secretary. He will succeed current Finance and Revenue Secretary Hasmukh Adhia, who is retiring on November 30.

According to the notification by the Appointments Committee, Pandey will continue to hold the charge as the CEO of UIDAI and GSTN Chairman until further orders. Pandey is a 1984 batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Maharashtra cadre.

### **Alexander Zverev upsets world no. 1 Novak Djokovic to claim ATP World Tour Finals**

Alexander Zverev on November 18, 2018 upset world number one Novak Djokovic in straight sets 6-4, 6-3 to claim the season-ending ATP Finals and ended the year with the biggest victory of his career.

With the win, the 21-year-old became the youngest champion of the season-ending event since Djokovic claimed the first of his five titles a decade ago and the first from Germany since 1995.

