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Editorial

Security architecture without the mortar

In April this year, the government set up a Defence Planning Committee (DPC) to assist in the creation of "national security strategy, international defence engagement strategy, roadmap to build (a) defence manufacturing ecosystem, strategy to boost defence exports, and priority capability development plans". Earlier this month, it also decided to revive the Strategic Policy Group (SPG) within the overall National Security Council (NSC) system.

The government has set up/revived these committees only in its final year in office goes to show that it is cognisant of the fact that its national security performance has been found severely wanting. More so, given the sorry state of the country's national security, it hopes that further centralisation of national security and defence decision making in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) under the National Security Adviser (NSA), would salvage its national security reputation.

Deteriorating environment

India's national security environment has steadily deteriorated since 2014. Both the overall violence in Jammu and Kashmir and ceasefire violations on the Line of Control reached a 14-year high in 2017, a trend that refuses to subside in 2018. There are far more attacks on security forces and security installations in J&K, and militant recruitments and violence against civilians in the State than at any time in the past decade-and-a-half. The pressure from China is on the rise. While the government's spin managers valiantly claim that the surgical strikes of 2016 gave a befitting response to Pakistan, and the stand-off at Doklam conveyed to China that India is no pushover, the reality is that surgical strikes hardly made any significant gains, and the Chinese forces (by all accounts including a report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs) are back in the Doklam plateau with more force. The report goes on to fault the government for "continuing with its conventionally deferential foreign policy towards China". New Delhi's neighbourhood policy continues to be in the doldrums and there is a clear absence of vision on how to balance, engage and work with the many great powers in the regional and the broader international scene. The frenzied foreign policy activities we are witnessing today are essentially diplomatic firefighting and damage control of a government in its last lap.

Absence of defence reforms

India spends close to $50 billion annually on defence and yet there are serious concerns about the level of our defence preparedness. Notwithstanding the feel-good rhetoric about the Indian Army's readiness to fight a "two-and-a-half front war", it might be useful to speculate on the potential outcome of such a scenario. Rhetoric can neither make a country secure nor win wars. Even more worryingly, India might be ill-equipped to fight the wars of the modern age. What India requires then is not empty rhetoric but long-term strategic thinking of which there is little in sight.

One reason why there is little bang for the buck from the $50 billion lies in our almost non-functional higher defence organisation. India's defence policy is on auto-pilot with hardly any political oversight or vision. There is little conversation between the armed forces and the political class, and even lesser conversation among the various arms of the forces. This will soon become unsustainable for a country that aspires to be a modern great power.

Besides setting up or revamping these bureaucratic committees, there is little talk about serious defence reforms in the country. One of the most serious lacunas in our defence management is the absence of jointness in the Indian armed forces. Our doctrines, command structures, force deployments and defence acquisition continue as though each arm is going to fight a future war on its own. Not only do the various arms of the Indian armed forces plan their strategies in silos but even their rhetoric is partisan

In the neighbourhood

China has progressed a great deal in military jointmanship, and Pakistan is doing a lot better than India. In India, talk of appointing a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) has all but died down. Leave alone appointing a CDS, even the key post of military adviser in the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) remains vacant. And the government seems to mistakenly think that by having the NSA chair, the SPG and DPC will take care of the fundamental problems in the country's higher defence sector.

Recall also that the post of the NSA is not a legally-mandated one. So one might rightly wonder how an unelected and retired official with no parliamentary accountability has come to occupy such a crucial position in the country's national security decision making, and whether this is healthy in a parliamentary democracy.

The NSC, which replicates the membership of the Cabinet Committee on Security, almost never meets under the new regime, and the National Security Advisory Board, initially set up by the Vajpayee government, to seek 'outside expertise' on strategic matters, is today a space for retired officials. As a result, there is little fresh thinking within the government or perspective planning on the country's national security or defence.

All that the SPG and DPC would achieve is to further bureaucratise the national security decision making and centralise all national security powers under the PMO. While it is conceded that this might provide a little more coordination in decision making, let's be clear that these committees are hardly sufficient to get the country's national security system back on track. To expect the NSA to chair all these committees and then action their recommendations while at the same time running the country's national security affairs on a day-to-day basis is unrealistic, and would end up producing sub-optimal outcomes. Top-heavy systems hardly work well unless supported by a well-oiled institutional mechanism.

There is some hope that these committees would take a close, hard look at the state of modernisation and domestic defence industry in the country, both of which are in a sorry state. Under the present system, where the ratio of revenue to capital expenditure in defence is roughly 65:35%, any serious attempt at modernisation would be impossible. While the committees would be cognisant of this, there is precious little they could do now, just months before the government faces a crucial election.

No vision

At the end of the day, many of India's national security inadequacies stem from the absence of a national security/defence vision. Ideally, the country should have an overall national security document from which the various agencies and the arms of the armed forces draw their mandate and create their own respective and joint doctrines which would then translate into operational doctrines for tactical engagement. In the absence of this, as is the case in India today, national strategy is broadly a function of ad hocism and personal preferences.

Despite the government's credentials in the field of national security and defence, its appetite towards defence reforms has been lackluster, its willingness to create a broad national strategy has been non-existent, and, much of its energy geared towards utilizing national security issues for domestic political gains. Consequently, the state of India's national security and defence is worse off today compared to when it took office in May 2014. And in the meantime, we are becoming a country without a coherent national security purpose.

ELITE IAS

Art and Culture, Society, Social and National Issues

Rashtriya Ekta Diwas 2018 observed to commemorate 143rd birth anniversary of Sardar Patel

Why in news?

India observed Rashtriya Ekta Diwas, also known as National Unity Day, on October 31, 2018 to commemorate the 143rd birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Iron Man of India.

Key Facts

- On this occasion, Home Minister Rajnath Singh flagged off the '*Run for Unity*' from Major Dhyanchand Stadium. He also administered unity pledge to the participants.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated world's tallest '*Statue of Unity*' to the nation at Kevadiya in Narmada district of Gujarat. The Prime Minister also unveiled the '*Wall of Unity*', a wall created with the earth samples collected from various states across the country.

Statue of Unity

- The Statue of Unity is a dream project of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This project was announced on October 31, 2013 by Narendra Modi, when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat.
- For development of the project, Modi launched a country wide campaign to collect iron to build the Statue of Unity and iron was collected from around seven lakh villages across the nation.
- The statue will be 182m tall that is double the size of New York's Statue of Liberty (93 metres) and surpasses the height of Spring Temple Buddha in China (153 metres).
- The project will include an exhibition hall and audio-visual presentation on the life of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.
- The main structure will be completed at an expense of Rs 1345 crore, a part of Rs 2979 crore total amount allocated for the project.
- Out of the remaining cost, Rs 235 crore is being spent on the construction of exhibition hall and convention centre; Rs 83 crore is being spent on the bridge connecting the memorial to the main land; and Rs 657 crore rupees will be spent to maintain the structure for next 15 years.
- Around 75000 cubic meters of concrete, 5700 metric tonne of steel structure, 18500 steel rods and 22500 metric tonne of bronze is being used for this project.

About Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

- Born on October 31, 1875, Sardar Patel was a lawyer by profession.
- He was one of the founding fathers of the Republic of India and the architect of modern political India.
- Popularly known as the Iron Man, Patel was addressed as 'Sardar', which means Chief or leader.
- In 1946, during Congress elections thirteen out of sixteen states chose Sardar Patel as their president, who was the more popular candidate for the first Prime Minister of independent India than Jawaharlal Nehru. However, upon Mahatma Gandhi's behest he stepped down as a candidate and endorsed Jawaharlal Nehru instead.

- Eventually, Sardar Patel became the first deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister of India in 1947.
- He is acknowledged for the political integration of over 500 princely states into the independent Indian Union. He united 565 princely states to be part of India.
- In 1991, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel awarded the Bharat Ratna posthumously.
- The 'National Unity Day' or Rashtriya Ekta Diwas commemorates Sardar Patel every year on 31 October.

Source: The Hindu

Arunachal Pradesh, British Council sign MoU for cultural, educational cooperation

Why in news?

The state government of Arunachal Pradesh recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the British Council to strengthen educational and cultural cooperation, in order to support the knowledge ambitions and economic growth of the state.

The agreement aims to enhance the opportunities for the youth of Arunachal Pradesh and connect them to international expertise and ideas.

What is the significance?

- The agreement celebrates the British Council's 70th anniversary in India and seeks to strengthen the relationship for the next 70 years.
- It also celebrates the rich cultural connections that Arunachal Pradesh has had with the UK.

Key Provisions

- As per the provisions of the MoU, as many as 50 faculty members from government higher education institutions will be trained by the British Council every year, starting from December 2018.
- Polytechnic institutes, eight from central institutions established in Arunachal and 2 from officers of the higher education administration.
- Besides this, 50 students of higher and technical education institutes will be trained by the British Council in English language skills each year.

Civil Servants.

- It will also help develop capacity-building initiatives in the state and support improvements in the teaching of mathematics and science and capacity-building programmes for faculty and senior administrators of higher education institutions
- The agreement will also seek to increase student and academic mobility for Arunachal Pradesh.

Background

- The British Council has had a long association with both Arunachal Pradesh and the Northeast region of India.
- The council had recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the North Eastern Council (NEC), to strengthen educational and cultural cooperation in all eight states of the region.
- To strengthen employability and promote gender inclusion, the British Council had launched Premier Skills Guwahati earlier in 2018, in which UK Premier League coaches trained 57 Indian football coaches from the Northeast, including Arunachal Pradesh.
- Further, the British Council's Crafting Futures initiative had given artisans from the northeast access to a national platform, Lakme Fashion Week.
- Besides, in education, the British Council had offered scholarships to 6 women from the Northeast to pursue higher studies in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math.

Source: PIB

HRD Ministry launches the web portal of SPARC scheme

Why in news?

- The Union Minister of Human Resource Development, Prakash Javadekar recently launched the web portal of the scheme - "Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)" in New Delhi.

Objective

- The SPARC scheme aims at improving the research ecosystem of India's higher educational institutions by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian Institutions and the best institutions in the world.

About SPARC scheme

- The scheme was sanctioned by the Indian Government in August 2018 at a total cost of Rs 418 crore.
- It will be implemented up to March 31, 2020 and the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur has been chosen as the National Coordinating Institute to implement the programme.
- Under the scheme, 600 joint research proposals will be awarded for 2 years to facilitate strong research collaboration between Indian research groups with the best in class faculty and renowned research groups in the leading universities of the world, in areas that are at the cutting edge of science or with direct social relevance to the mankind, specifically India.

Key Features

- The scheme will help in improving the research ecosystem of India's higher educational institutions by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian Institutions and the best institutions from 28 selected nations to jointly solve problems of national and international relevance.
- As per the criteria mentioned above, 254 top Indian Institutes and 478 top ranked global Institutes have been already identified.

- The 28 selected nations include Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, UK and the US.
- The following 5 thrust areas and sub-theme areas in each thrust area have been identified for collaboration under SPARC based on emergent relevance and importance for the nation:
  - Fundamental Research
  - Emergent Areas of Impact
  - Convergence
  - Action-Oriented Research
  - Innovation-Driven
- Each thrust area will have a section chair and the main role of the chair would be to review shortlist and recommend the potential joint-proposals submitted under the SPARC scheme.
- The nodal institutions for each participating foreign country have been already been identified. The role of the institutions mainly include to help, handhold and coordinate with willing Participating Indian (PI) Institutions to forge an alliance with the Institutions of concerned participating foreign country, for academic and research collaboration. India's 25 such reputed Institutions have been notified as Nodal Institutions.

Eligibility

1. All Indian Institutions ranked in the overall top-100 or category-wise top-100 in the India Rankings (NIRF) are eligible to apply.
2. Only such private institutions that are falling in the above category, and also recognised under Section 12(8) of the UGC Act are eligible.
3. The partner institution shall be in the top-500 of Q5 World University Rankings or in the top-200 of Q5 World University Rankings by subject.

The SPARC scheme proposes to enable productive academic cooperation by supporting the following critical components that can catalyse impact making research:

(**i**) Visits and long-term stay of top international faculty/researchers in Indian institutions to pursue teaching and research.

(**ii**) Visits by Indian students for training and experimentation in premier laboratories worldwide.

(**iii**) Joint development of niche courses, world-class books and monographs, translatable patents, demonstrable technologies or action-oriented research outcomes and products.

(**iv**) Publication, dissemination and visibility through a high profile annual international conference in India.

Impact

- The scheme is expected to have a major impact in providing the best international expertise to address major national problems, expose Indian academicians to the best collaborators abroad, enable international faculty to stay in India for a longer duration, provide Indian students an opportunity to work in the world-class laboratories, to develop strong bilateral relationships in research and improve the international ranking of Indian Institutes.

Source: PIB, Economic Times

Union Cabinet approves constitution of high-level committee to monitor SDGs

Why in news?

☞ The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the constitution of a High-Level Steering Committee for periodically reviewing and refining the National Indicator Framework (NIF) for monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with associated targets.

Composition of the Committee

- The high-level committee will be chaired by Chief Statistician of India and Secretary under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).
- The members of the committee will include Secretaries of data source ministries and NITI Aayog.
- The Secretaries of other related Ministries will be special invitees to the committee with the function of reviewing of National Indicator Framework including refinement of the indicators from time to time.

Key Highlights

- The committee aims to mainstream SDGs into on-going national policies, programmes and strategic action plans to address the developmental challenges.
- The statistical indicators of NIF will be the backbone of monitoring of SDGs at the national and state level and will scientifically measure the outcomes of the policies to achieve the targets under different SDGs.
- Based on the statistical indicator, the MoSPI will bring out national reports on the implementation of SDGs. The report will facilitate the assessment of progress, identify challenges and give recommendations for follow up at the national level.
- The high-level steering committee will review the National Indicator Framework on regular basis for its improvement. Advanced IT tools will be used for close and effective monitoring.
- The data source Ministries / Departments will be responsible for providing regular information to MoSPI at required intervals and disaggregation for national and sub-national reporting of SDGs.

Impact

- The SDGs integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions of development. They are aimed at eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world with the basic motto of 'Sabka Saath SabkaVikash'.
- Further, the SDGs with 17 goals and 169 targets intend for the promotion of sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion, promoting integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems.
- The National Indicator Framework will help in outcome-based monitoring and reporting on progress on SDGs at the national level.
- However, there is no direct financial implication on the implementation of the National Indicator Framework.
- The SDGs are expected to bring change in the lives of people and the monitoring of progress of implementation of SDGs will benefit the entire nation.

Background

- The UN General Assembly in its 70th session considered and adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the next 15 years. The 17 SDGs came into force with effect from January 1, 2016.
- Though not legally binding, the SDGs have become de facto international obligations and have the potential to reorient domestic spending priorities of the countries during the next fifteen years.
- The countries are expected to take ownership and establish a national framework for achieving these goals.
- However, the implementation and success will rely on countries' own sustainable development policies, plans and programmes.
- The countries would be responsible for follow-up and review at the national level with regard to the progress made in implementing the goals and targets.

Source: The Hindu

Victims of child sexual abuse can file complaint at any time, irrespective of present age: WCD Ministry

Why in news?

☞ The Minister of Women and Child Development, Maneka Gandhi clarified recently that a victim of child sexual abuse can file a complaint at any time irrespective of his or her present age. She further urged the victims to report the cases through POCSO e-Box.

Key Facts

- The clarification came after WCD Ministry consulted with the Ministry of Law in view of the overriding provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act over other criminal laws and provisions of mandatory reporting of such offences.
- The Law Ministry after examining the provisions of POCSO Act with regard to the provisions of Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) advised that there appears no period of limitation mentioned in Section 19 in regard to reporting of the offences under the POCSO Act, 2012.

Key Highlights

- The Law Ministry noted that the POCSO Act does not provide for any period of limitation for reporting the child sexual offences.
- Following this, the WCD Ministry stated that 'now any victim, at any age, can complain about the sexual abuse faced by him or her as a child'.
- The WCD Minister stated that often, children are unable to report such crimes as the perpetrator in most cases is either a family member, a relative or closely known person.
- She said that studies have also shown that the child continues to carry the trauma of sexual abuse till very late in life. Hence, in order to overcome this trauma, many grown-up people have started coming out to report the abuse faced by them as children.

POSCO Act 2012

- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 came into force on November 14, 2012. The Act was passed in the Indian Parliament in May 2012.
- The Act under its ambit defines child as a person below the age-group of 18 and is gender neutral and have a clear definition for all types of sexual abuses like sexual harassment, penetrative or non-penetrative sexual abuse, and pornography.
- The Act also has defined the punishments following the kind and harshness of the offence that includes life time imprisonment for heinous crimes of sexual assaults and abuses.
- The Act under its ambit has tried to set up the standards of International Child Protection rights and has made it mandatory to report the sexual offences against any child. Punishment against the person trying the allegedly defame any person that also includes a child via false information is mentioned in this Act.

Source: The Hindu

UP Cabinet approves changing name of Allahabad to 'Prayagraj'

Why in news?

- The Uttar Pradesh Cabinet has approved the proposal of the state government to rename the city of *'Allahabad'* as *'Prayagraj'*. The decision has been vehemently opposed by the opposition parties.
- The move, however, fulfils the long-standing demand of seers before the Ardh Kumbh Mela in January 2019. Speaking ahead of the cabinet meeting, Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath had said that there was a proposal from the Akhara Parishad to rename Allahabad as Prayagraj ahead of 2019 Kumbh.
- The state's governor had already given his approval on the matter.

Why Akbar renamed Prayag as Allahabad?

- The city of Allahabad was originally known as Prayag in ancient times. Between 1574 and 1583, the 16th-century Mughal emperor Akbar founded a fort near the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna, known as Sangam, as he was impressed with its strategic position.
- In fact, Akbarnama states that, "For a long time [Akbar's] desire was to found a great city in the town of Piyag, where the rivers Ganges and Jamna join, which is regarded by the people of India with great reverence and which is a place of pilgrimage for the ascetics of the country and to build a choice fort there."
- Hence, Akbar named the fort and its neighbourhood as Ilahabad, which meant the "Abode of God", inspired by the religion he had founded, Din-i-Illahi. In the later years, Akbar's grandson Shah Jahan renamed the entire city as Allahabad.
- However, the area near the Sangam, which is the site of the Kumbh Mela, continued to be called Prayag.

Significance of the name Prayag

- The city's original name Prayag, which means a "place of offerings", comes from its position at the Sangam of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna and the mythical river, Saraswati. The place plays a central role in the Hindu scriptures.
- The city is also mentioned in the Veda as the location where Lord Brahma attended his first ritual sacrifice.
- It is also the site for historic Kumbh Mela, which is held once in every 12 years and it is also believed to be the same place where the drops of holy nectar fell.
- UP CM Yogi Adityanath while explaining the reason behind keeping the name Prayagraj said, "the confluence of two rivers is a 'prayag' and in Allahabad, three rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati meet. Hence, it is the king of 'prayags'. That is why it is 'Prayagraj'."

What critics say!

- There have been mixed reactions to the rechristening with critics saying that there have been quite a few name changes over the past few years.
- According to the opposition, when there is already an area called 'Prayag', there was no need to rename 'Allahabad' as 'Prayagraj'.
- The opposition claims that the change would diminish the importance that Allahabad had in the country's freedom movement.
- They also claim that the decision is an attempt to disturb and toy with the history of the nation and a political gimmick ahead of the Lok Sabha assembly polls, which are scheduled to be held in 2019.

Other major name changes

- The ruling government of Uttar Pradesh had earlier changed the name of **'Mughalsarai Junction'** to **'Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Junction'**.
- The Government had also previously re-named **'Mughalsarai'** as **'Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyay Nagar'** and **'Ardh Kumbh'** as **'Kumbh'**.

Background

- In 2017, seers belonging to different akharas had met CM Yogi in Lucknow and had urged him to change the name of Allahabad to Prayagraj ahead of the 2019 Ardh Kumbh fair to be held in the holy city.
- The Akhara Parishad in the meeting of Margdarshak Mandal had put forward the proposal to rename the city.

Source: The Hindu

Union HRD Ministry releases revised CBSE affiliation bye-laws

Why in news?

- The Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Prakash Javadekar has recently released the revised CBSE Affiliation Bye Laws to ensure speed, transparency, hassle-free procedures and ease of doing business with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).
- The revised affiliation byelaws indicate a major shift from the highly complex procedures to a simplified system based on preventing duplication of processes.
- Earlier this year, the HRD Ministry had directed the Board to completely revisit its affiliation bye laws to make the system more robust and quality driven.

CBSE

- CBSE is a national level Board conducting examinations for Classes X and XII. It affiliates schools across India and abroad upon fulfillment of various conditions as prescribed in its Affiliation Bye Laws.
- At present, 20783 schools are affiliated with the Board. The Affiliation Byelaws were first made in the year 1988 and were last modified in the year 2012.

Objective: To prevent duplication of affiliation process

- For issuing recognition under RTE Act and NOC, the state education administration verifies various certificates to be obtained from local bodies, revenue department, cooperatives department, etc.
- The CBSE re-verifies them after applications are received. This is very long process. Therefore, to prevent this duplication, schools will now be required to submit only two documents at the time of applying for affiliation, instead of 12-14 documents being submitted earlier.
- One document would be vetted by the head of district education administration validating all aspects such as building safety, sanitation, land ownership, etc; and another document would be a self-affidavit where the school would certify its adherence to fee norms, infrastructure norms, etc.

Key highlights of the revised affiliation byelaws

- The Board shall not revisit any of the aspects evaluated by the state during inspection; and the delay due to scrutiny and non-compliance of deficiencies in these documents shall be drastically curtailed.
- Inspection of schools will now be outcome-based and more academic and quality oriented, rather than focussing only on school infrastructure.
- The inspection will focus on academic excellence and progress of students over time, innovations and quality of pedagogy, capacity of teachers and teacher training, inclusive practises in school, quality of co-scholastic activities, whether curricular load is as per norms.
- This will not only help the Board and the school to track students' progress over time, but will also identify areas that would need further efforts.

- Regarding fee, the provisions include full fee disclosure to be made and no hidden charges to be levied by schools in the garb of fees.
- The bye laws clearly state that fee is to be charged as per the regulation of the appropriate government and fee revision shall be subject to laws, regulations and directions of the appropriate government.
- Also, for the first time, the byelaws encourage schools to promote environmental conservation through harnessing solar energy, rain water harvesting, greening of campus, recycling and segregation of waste, Swachhata on campus, etc.

The Process

- In the new byelaws, the school inspection will be done as soon as applications are received.
- On satisfactory inspection report, the Board will issue a Letter of Intent to the school, indicating its intention to affiliate the school.
- The school will then be expected to fulfil all the conditions laid down under the Post-Affiliation process, such as recruitment of qualified teachers, special educator, wellness counsellor, salaries through digital payment, etc.
- On complying with all these conditions, the school will submit an online commencement certificate latest by 31 March of the given year.
- Based on the certificate, the Board shall confirm affiliation of the school. Only then, the schools will be able to start new academic session under CBSE.

Significance

- The new affiliation bye laws aim on achieving academic excellence through mandatory teacher training. Even the Principals and Vice Principals of every school are expected to undergo two days mandatory training.
- The revised bye laws will positively impact the existing and future schools by easing procedures and redirecting their focus towards improving the quality of education.

Source: PIB

Odisha launches 'Nirman Kusuma' scheme to assist children of construction workers

Why in news?

- The Chief Minister of Odisha, Naveen Patnaik recently launched 'Nirman Kusuma' programme to provide financial assistance to the children of the construction workers for their technical education in the state.
- The programme 'Nirman Kusuma' will help fulfil the dreams of the construction workers' children. The scheme would provide financial assistance to the children of construction workers for their education in Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and polytechnics.

Highlights of the Programme

- Under the programme, an ITI student will be entitled to get financial assistance worth Rs 23,600 and a diploma student will get assistance worth Rs 26,300 per annum.
- In total, around 1878 students are expected to be benefited from the programme.
- The state government has already deposited Rs 1.09 crore in the bank account of beneficiaries of the scheme for the academic year 2018-19.
- The government has also decided to increase the financial assistance given to girl students by 20 per cent. The girl students studying in class VI and above till post graduation level are currently being provided financial assistance by the state.
- Besides this, the state government has doubled the death benefits for the construction workers. Earlier, in case of death of a construction worker, the family was given Rs one lakh as compensation, now the amount has been increased to Rs two lakh.
- The government has also doubled the compensation given in case of an accident of a construction worker from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 4 lakh.

Source: Indian Express

Polity & Governance, Social Justice, Social Development

Assam NRC: Supreme Court fixes December 15 as deadline for filing claims for inclusion of names in NRC

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court of India has fixed December 15 as the deadline for filing of claims and objections by individuals excluded from the first draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) of Assam, published on July 30, 2018.
- The bench of Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice Rohinton Nariman allowed claimants for Assam NRC to rely on five documents, which were earlier objected to by NRC coordinator, to prove their citizenship.

These five documents are:

(1) Names in NRC, 1951

(2) Names in Electoral Roll up to March 24, 1971

(3) Citizenship Certificate and Refugee Registration Certificate

(4) Certified copies of pre-1971 Electoral Roll, particularly, those issued by Tripura

(5) Ration Card

- All these documents will be subjected to a thorough process of verification and would be accepted only after due and complete satisfaction of the genuineness.
- Earlier, the Supreme Court bench had earlier asked claimants to file their claims and objections within a period of 60 days starting from September 25.
- However, with the extension of the deadline, the court has set January 15, 2019 as the last date for the authorities to issue its notice. The verification of the documents will begin on February 1, 2019.

National Register of Citizens of Assam

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is a list that contains names of Indian citizens of Assam.
- Assam, which had faced influx of people from Bangladesh since the early 20th century, is the only state having an NRC, which was first prepared in 1951.
- The recently updated draft of the NRC includes the names of Indian citizens who have been residing in Assam before March 25, 1971.
- The first draft of the NRC for Assam was published on December 31, 2017 and it incorporated the names of 1.9 crore people out of the total 3.29 crore applicants.
- The top court had earlier said that the claims of those citizens, whose names do not figure in the draft NRC for Assam published on December 31, 2017 would be scrutinised and included in the subsequent list, if found genuine.

Final Draft of NRC: Related Issue

- The Assam government on July 30, 2018 released the second and final draft of the state's National Register of Citizens (NRC).
- As per the Draft, the total number of persons included in the list is 2,89,83,677 leaving a total of 40,70,707 as ineligible for inclusion.
- Out of 40,70,707 names, 37,59,630 names have been rejected and 2,48,077 names are kept on hold.

Source: Indian Express

Government notifies special courts for trial of benami transaction cases

Why in news?

- The Union Government has issued a notification stating that sessions courts in 34 states and union territories, will act as special courts for the trial of offences under the benami transaction law.

Key Highlights

- The Union Ministry of Finance stated in its notification that the session's courts were notified of the same after consultation with Chief Justices of High Courts under the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act, 1988 for the trial of offences punishable under the provision of the Act.
- In the case of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, the courts of additional session's judge in each district have been designated as the special court.
- Further, under the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act, every trial should be conducted as expeditiously as possible.
- The law also prescribes that every endeavour should be made by the special court to conclude the trial within six months from the date of filing of the complaint.

What is Benami transaction?

- Benami transaction refers to transactions made in a fictitious name, or the owner is not aware of the ownership of the property, or the person paying for the property is not traceable.
- The Indian Parliament passed the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act in August 2016 to curb the menace of black money. The bill sought to amend the Benami Transactions Act, 1988.
- The rules and all the provisions of the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act came into force on November 1, 2016.
- After coming into effect, the existing Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act, 1988 was renamed as the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions (PBPT) Act, 1988.

- The new legislation provided for seven years imprisonment and fine for those indulging in illegal transactions. The previous Act provided for up to three years of imprisonment or fine or both. It stated that the properties held as Benami are liable for confiscation by the government without payment of compensation.
- The act has amended the definition of benami transactions and establishes adjudicating authorities and an Appellate Tribunal to deal with benami transactions.
- Further, the act defines benami transactions, prohibits them and provides that violation of the PBPT Act is punishable with imprisonment and fine.
- It also prohibits recovery of the property held benami from benamidar by the real owner. The properties held benami are liable for confiscation by the Government without payment of compensation.

Source: The Hindu

Government sets up Strategic Policy Group to assist National Security Council

Why in news?

☞ The Union Government recently constituted the Strategic Policy Group, headed by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, to assist the National Security Council.

Members of the Strategic Policy Group

- The Members of the SPG will include Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog, Cabinet Secretary, Chiefs of the three defence services, RBI Governor, Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary, Finance Secretary, and Defence Secretary.
- The Secretary of the Department of Defence Production and Supplies; the Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister and the Secretary (R), Cabinet Secretariat will also be members of the panel.
- The other members are Secretary of Department of Revenue; Secretary of Department of Atomic Energy; Secretary of Department of Space; Director of Intelligence Bureau; and Secretary of National Security Council Secretariat.
- Representatives of other ministries and departments will be invited to the meetings of the group as and when necessary.

National Security Council

- The National Security Council is an executive government agency tasked with advising the Prime Minister's Office on matters of national security and strategic interest.
- The agency was established by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government on November 19, 1998, with Brajesh Mishra as the first National Security Advisor.

Terms of Reference of the Strategic Policy Group

- The Strategic Policy Group (SPG) will assist the National Security Council and undertake among other tasks, a long-term strategic review of country's security affairs.
- It will act as a principal mechanism for inter-ministerial coordination and integration of relevant inputs in the formulation of national security policies.
- The National Security Advisor will convene the meetings of the SPG and the cabinet secretary will coordinate implementation of the group's decisions by Union Ministries and Departments, and State Governments.

Source: Indian Express

Government constitutes GoM to look into sexual harassment at workplace

Why in news?

- The Union Government has recently constituted a four-member Group of Ministers (GoM) to examine and strengthen the existing legal and institutional frameworks for dealing with matters of sexual harassment of women at the workplace.

Composition

- The Group of Ministers will be headed by Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh.
- The other members of the group will include Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari, Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi.
- The GoM has been constituted in view of the felt need for broader consultation on the issue, from the point of view of developing appropriate recommendations and laying down a comprehensive plan of action and for ensuring its time-bound implementation.

Key Details

- The Group of Ministers will recommend action required for effective implementation of the existing provisions, as well as for strengthening the existing legal and institutional frameworks for addressing issues related to sexual harassment at workplace.
- The GoM will be required to examine the existing provisions for the safety of women and recommend further measures, within three months of its constitution.
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act is the key legislation for protecting women against sexual harassment in the workplace and to ensure effective redressal of complaints.

- Besides this, the Women and Child Development Ministry has also launched an Electronic Complaints Box that enables women, irrespective of their work status, to raise their voice against sexual harassment at workplace.
- Once a complaint is submitted to the 'SHe-Box', it will be directly sent to the concerned authority having jurisdiction to take action in the matter.
- The government would be putting into place a mechanism to regularly monitor the action taken on the complaints.

Background

- The GoM has been set up in the wake of #MeToo movement in India where a number of women publicly named the people who had harassed them at their workplace.
- One of the prominent names that came out in the midst of the shocking revelations was that of Minister of State for External Affairs M J Akbar, who faced allegations of inappropriate behaviour and sexual harassment from almost 20 women.
- The accusations forced the former editor of the Asian Age to step down from his Ministerial position.

Source: The Hindu

Foreigners seeking Indian visa must reveal criminal records now

Why in news?

- Foreigners applying for Indian visa will now have to declare their criminal records as a part of India's new visa format.
- The decision to introduce such a provision for processing of visa applications of the foreign nationals was taken by the Union Home Ministry following a request from the Women and Child Development (WCD) Ministry.

Objective

- The move aims to ensure placement of protective mechanisms to prevent travelling child sex offenders (TCSOs) from entering India and perpetrating sexual violence on children here.
- Hence, it aims to check child sexual abuse and a range of other crimes committed by travelers.

Key Highlights

- Under the new format, an appropriate questionnaire and a declaration will be incorporated in the visa application form, which will have to be filled by the visa applicants.
- The step aims to be a strong deterrent for perpetrators of heinous crimes such as child abuse. and paedophiles convicted in their countries of origin.
- There have been several instances where foreigners convicted of child abuse at home have travelled to India to run child sex rackets.

- The latest known crime involves an Australian, Paul Dean, who was convicted recently of abusing a host of differently-abled poor children from Vishakapatnam and Puri during his three-decade stay in India.
- In another instance, a US citizen John Jones was arrested recently by the Hyderabad police for circulating child sex abuse literature online.

Background

- travelling foreigners who were then not required to tell the Indian visa and passport authorities whether they had any criminal records back home.

Source: The Hindu,Times of India

India wins CAPAM International Innovations Awards 2018

Why in news?

- India has recently won the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management Award (CAPAM) 2018 for an initiative that envisages quality education for all.
- The initiative entitled '***Unnayan Banka***- Reinventing Education Using Technology of Banka District', state of Bihar has been awarded under the category 'Innovation Incubation'.

About Unnayan Banka Initiative

- It is an initiative that envisages 'quality education for all' especially for those at the bottom of the pyramid, using the latest technologies.
- It is a holistic model aimed at ensuring the overall development of youth starting from education to employability.
- 'Education' is one of the most important Millennium Development Goals. It is a great social mobiliser and must be everyone's birthright and it is the Union Government's endeavour to provide this to all children.
- Besides this, another initiative entitled ***'Unified Agriculture Markets'*** of Co-operation Department of Government of Karnataka was selected under the category of 'Innovation in Public Service Management'. The initiative has also been awarded the overall Gold Award at CAPAM Awards, 2018.
- The CAPAM is a non-profit association representing an international network of over 1100 senior public servants, Heads of Government, leading academics and researchers located in over 50 different countries across the Commonwealth.
- The association is guided by international leaders who believe in the value of networking, knowledge exchange and the promotion of good governance for the betterment of citizens in the Commonwealth countries.
- It has been announcing its International Innovations Awards (IIA) Programme bi-annually, since 1998.
- The CAPAM award celebrates the spirit of innovation in public service by recognising organisations that have made significant contributions to improve governance and services in the public sector.

Background

- The Union Government had sent entries for CAPAM International Innovations Awards, 2018 under a host of different categories.
- The CAPAM Innovation Awards were announced during the Annual General Members Meet, which was held on October 23, 2018 at Georgetown, Guyana.
- On the occasion, another significant development for India included the election of the Union Secretary in the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG), KV Eapen to the CAPAM board.
- The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) under the Union Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions is an institutional member of Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management.

Source: The Hindu

States, UTs set free over 900 prisoners under special remission scheme

Why in news?

- The Indian states and union territories released over 900 prisoners in the first phase of the centre's scheme for grant of special remission to specific categories of prisoners. The move was undertaken as a part of the commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
- The decision to give special remission to a specific category of prisoners was taken by the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on July 18, 2018. The prisoners will be released from prisons in three phases- on October 2, 2018, April 6, 2019 and October 2, 2019.

Key Highlights

- In the week-long first phase of special remission to prisoners, the States and UTs, after obtaining the approval of the competent authority in their jurisdictions, released over 900 prisoners.
- In the second and third phase, prisoners will be released on April 6, 2019 and October 2, 2019 respectively.
- The states and union territories have been advised to hold weeklong special functions in all prison premises based on the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi before the dates specified for the release of prisoners.
- At the time of their release, the prisoners will be taken to garland the statue of Mahatma Gandhi.
- They will also be gifted with books relating to Mahatma Gandhi and will also be provided with suitable counselling.

Prisoners eligible for special remission

- Women convicts of 55 years of age and above, who have completed 50 per cent of their actual sentence period.
- Transgender convicts of 55 years of age and above, who have completed 50 per cent of their actual sentence period.
- Male convicts of 60 years of age and above, who have completed 50 per cent of their actual sentence period.
- Physically challenged or disabled convicts with 70 per cent disability and more who have completed 50 per cent of their actual sentence period.
- Terminally ill convicts.
- Convicted prisoners who have completed two-thirds or 66 per cent of their actual sentence period.

Prisoners not eligible for special remission

- The special remission scheme is not available to prisoners who have been convicted for an offence for which the sentence awarded is death or where the death sentence has been commuted to life imprisonment.
- The cases of convicts involved in serious and heinous crimes like dowry death, rape, human trafficking and those convicted under POTA, UAPA, TADA, FICN, POCSO Act, Money Laundering, FEMA, NDPS and Prevention of Corruption Act also do not fall under the scheme.

Source: The Hindu

MeToo movement in India: NCW asks sexual abuse survivors to lodge formal complaints

Why in news?

☞ As the **#MeToo movement** gets bigger in India, the National Commission for Women (NCW) on October 10, 2018 urged the victims of sexual abuse to register their written complaints with authorities concerned, including with the National Commission for Women.

key facts

- The commission took note of the #MeToo accusations and noticed that in many such cases of sexual harassment, the victims do not want to go beyond naming and shaming the alleged offenders and lodge a formal complaint.
- The commission appreciated the bravery shown by those who have spoken out and came forward to help punish the persons responsible for such incidents. It condemned any act of invasion of private space of women.
- Taking a serious note of the instances of sexual harassment of women that have been figured in the media recently, the commission is of the considered view that such violation infringes the constitutional rights of women and the perpetrators of such violence need to be penalised as per law.

#MeToo movement gathers force in India

- Almost a year after the #MeToo movement took flight in the Hollywood with the Harvey Weinstein expose, the movement has now arrived in the Bollywood, Indian film industry; and is spreading through India.
- The #MeToo movement started after former Bollywood actress Tanushree Dutta alleged that Nana Patekar sexually harassed her on a movie set in 2008. However, Patekar has rejected Dutta's allegations and said he made the same denial 10 years ago.
- The movement has recently gained momentum in India as more women have begun sharing their experiences of sexual harassment on social media.
- To name a few, these brave women are actress Kangana Ranaut, actress Sandhya Mridul, writer-director-producer Vinta Nanda, singer Sona Mohapatra, journalist Avantika Mehta, writer Mahima Kukreja, reporter Anoo Bhuyan, journalist Sandhya Menon, and many more.
- Many well-known comedians, journalists, and actors have been named and shamed on social media as allegations of sexual misconduct continue to burst out.

#MeToo movement of Hollywood

- The #MeToo movement began as a hashtag on Twitter in 2017 amid the Harvey Weinstein incident. Created by Alyssa Milano, the movement soon found support with noted Hollywood actors Gwyneth Paltrow, Ashley Judd, Jennifer Lawrence, and Uma Thurman.
- The movement was chosen as the Person of the Year by the Time magazine. It also gave birth to the more militant Time's Up campaign.
- Before it became a hashtag, the Me Too Movement had been around for over 10 years. It was launched in 2006 by Tarana Burke, an activist from Harlem, to help underprivileged women of colour affected by sexual abuse.

Source: The Hindu

International Relations, India & the World and International Affairs

19th India-Russia Annual Bilateral Summit: India signs deal with Russia to buy S-400 Triumf Missiles

Why in news?

- India and Russia on October 5, 2018 signed a USD 5.43 billion deal for India to procure the S-400 Triumf missile system from Russia.
- The deal was signed following the 19th India-Russia Annual Bilateral Summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin and other delegates. Russian President Vladimir Putin was on a two-day visit to India.

S-400 Triumf Missile System deal

- After bilateral talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin, India and Russia signed the USD 5.43 billion deal for S-400 air defence system. The system is expected to be delivered by 2020.
- An upgraded version of the S-300 systems, the S-400 is a surface-to-air missile system that can take down enemies' aircraft in the sky from the surface itself.
- Known as Russia's most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system, S-400 is capable of destroying hostile bombers, jets, missiles and drones at a range of 380 km.
- The S-400 missile system was manufactured by Almaz-Antey and has been in service in Russia since 2007.

Fear of US Sanctions on India

- The procurement of the S-400 missile defence system deal could result in the US sanctions on India under the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) instituted by the US Congress on arms purchases from Russia.
- Under the CAATSA, the United States can impose sanctions on any country that has "significant transactions" with Iran, North Korea or Russia. The CAATSA was framed to punish Russia for the 2014 capture of Crimea from Ukraine, for its involvement in the Syrian civil war and for meddling in the 2016 US presidential election.
- China was the first buyer to seal a government-to-government deal with Russia in 2014 to procure the lethal missile system and Moscow has already started delivery of the S-400 missile systems to Beijing.
- The US has urged its allies to decline transactions with Russia, warning that the S-400 missile defence system would be a 'focus area' for it to implement punitive sanctions against a nation undertaking 'significant' business deals with the Russians.
- However, American lawmakers have allowed the possibility of a presidential waiver.

Key highlights of the India-Russia Joint Statement:

- Both the sides reaffirmed their commitment to the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between India and Russia.
- They reaffirmed that being multicultural, multilingual and multi-religious societies, India and Russia bring civilisation wisdom to address modern day challenges.
- Subsequent to the successful implementation of the Protocol on Foreign Office Consultations for the period 2017-18, they agreed to extend the period of Consultations for five more years (2019-2023) and signed a Protocol to this effect.
- They welcomed the agreements reached in November 2017 between their concerned authorities, for cooperation on internal security, drug trafficking and disaster management, including the Joint Action Plan for the period of 2018-2020.
- They showed their satisfaction with the implementation of the Cultural Exchange Programme for 2017-2019 signed in 2017.
- They reviewed the progress on the achievement of the goal to increase two-way investment to USD 30 billion by the year 2025.
- They noted that the first meeting of the Strategic Economic Dialogue between NITI Aayog of India and the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation would be held later in 2018 in Russia.
- They welcomed the start of consultations on the Free Trade Agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and its member states.
- They welcomed the holding of the India-Russia Business Summit on the margins of the 19th Annual Summit on October 4-5, 2018 in New-Delhi with the participation of large business delegations from both sides.
- They called for the development of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) through intensified efforts by finalising pending issues.
- They stressed the importance of India-Russia cooperation in outer space and welcomed the activity on setting up measurement data collection ground stations of the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System NavIC and the Russian Navigation Satellite System GLONASS.
- The Sides welcomed the conclusion of the contract for the supply of the S-400 Long Range Surface to Air Missile System to India.
- They affirmed "equality, mutual respect and non-interference as universally acknowledged norms of international law as reflected in the United Nations Charter and the 1970 Declaration on principles of international law concerning friendly relations and co-operation in accordance with the UN Charter."

India-Russia cooperation

☞ India-Russia cooperation is based on the 1971 Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation between the India and Russia; 1993 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation; 2000 Declaration on Strategic Partnership; and 2010 Joint Statement, elevating the Partnership to a Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership.

Source: PIB, The Hindu

○ 13th India-Japan Annual Summit: India, Japan sign various agreements, agree to start '2+2' dialogue

Why in news?

☞ Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Japan on October 28-29, 2018 to attend the India-Japan Annual Summit with the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

☞ After the summit, the two sides exchanged 32 MoUs or agreements including USD 75 billion currency swap agreement and agreed to '2+2' dialogue.

USD 75 billion currency swap agreement

❑ Japan and India entered into a USD 75 billion currency swap agreement that will boost Indian economy as it encounters a steep drop in the rupee's value. This swap arrangement would be 50 percent higher than the previous swap agreement. Japan had offered a USD 50 billion currency swap in 2013.

❑ This facility will enable the agreed amount of foreign capital being available to India for use as and when the need arises. Equally, Japan can also seek dollars from India in exchange for yen.

2+2 dialogue with Japan

❑ After the United States, India will now hold a 2+2 dialogue with Japan. Both the sides agreed for a 2+2 dialogue between Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers. The aim is to work towards world peace and stability.

Japan announced to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA)

❑ During the Summit, Japan announced to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA) by submitting the instrument of ratification on October 29, 2018. As of now, there are 70 countries that have signed the ISA Framework Agreement and 47 countries that have ratified it.

❑ Japan will be the 71st country to sign and 48th country to ratify the ISA Framework Agreement.

○ Japan agrees to provide 316 Billion Yen loan for seven major infrastructure projects in India

❑ Apart from these agreements, Japan agreed to provide loans of about 316.458 billion yen for seven major infrastructure projects in India. These include:

❑ Project for the Construction of Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet or high speed train

- Project for Renovation and Modernisation of Umiam-Umtru Stage-III Hydroelectric Power Station in Meghalaya
- Delhi Mass Rapid Transport System Project (Phase 3)
- North East Road Network Connectivity Improvement Project (Phase 3)
- Project for Sustainable Catchment Forest Management in Tripura

Government to Business/Business to Business agreements

- Memorandum of Understanding between KAGOME Co Ltd. of Japan and Union Ministry of Food Processing Industries
- Joint Venture Agreement between State Bank of India (SBI) and SBI Payment Services Pvt. Ltd; and Hitachi Payment Services Pvt Ltd
- Memorandum of Understanding between Nissan Steel Industry Co. Ltd. of Japan and Union Ministry of Food Processing Industries
- Letter of Intents and Acknowledgements of Private Sector Investment Project Proposals by 57 Japanese companies to make investment in India and 15 Indian companies to make investment in Japan.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

Sri Lankan Political Crisis

Why in news?

☞ Sri Lanka, one of Asia's oldest democracies is in the midst of a political turmoil, following the sudden dismissal of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe by President Maithripala Sirisena on October 26, 2018.

Key facts

- President Maithripala Sirisena announced through a live television address that Ranil Wickremesinghe, with whom he had governed in a fragile coalition since 2015, had been dismissed and in his place, he had decided to appoint former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, the same man he had joined forces with Wickremasinghe in 2015 to defeat.
- The decision has created a wedge in the country's politics with parliamentarians showing more favour towards Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who has termed the sacking as illegal and is standing his ground despite attempts to replace him with Rajapaksa.
- Despite warnings of a possible breakout of extreme violence, President Sirisena suspended Parliament to give Rajapaksa time to muster enough support to survive any no-confidence vote.
- This was followed by the swearing in of 12 Cabinet ministers including one state minister and deputy minister on October 29. The new cabinet includes four MPs who switched sides from the alliance led by the ousted PM Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Executive Power in Sri Lanka

- In Sri Lanka, the President is the most dominant political force. The Prime Minister's role is limited to a deputy to the President, besides being the leader of Cabinet.
- However, in the latest development, the final call to decide whether the President has the power to straightway dismiss or replace a Prime Minister lies with the Sri Lankan Supreme Court.
- In 2015, Sri Lanka had amended its constitution to prevent the president from sacking any prime minister unless they had died, resigned or lost the confidence of parliament.

Background

- The president's move to consolidate power and invite Rajapaksa back into government starkly counters the promises he made to investigate the former government's actions during the country's long civil war.
- During his 10 years in power, Rajapaksa and his government were accused of authoritarianism, corruption and human rights abuses, especially against the country's Tamil minority.
- Rajapaksa oversaw the end of the 27-year Sri Lankan civil war in 2009 through a series of brutal military offensives in which the UN estimates up to 40,000 Tamil civilians died.
- His tenure was also marred by accusations his security forces were forcibly disappearing, torturing and murdering opposition politicians, aid workers, activists, journalists and dissidents.
- Tamil groups fear that an uneasy reconciliation process that began after the end of the 2009 civil war could be imperiled with the reinstating of Rajapaksa's regime.

Impact on India, other nations

- During his 10-year stint in the presidency, Rajapaksa had a sour relationship with the west.
- However, under him, Sri Lanka had grown closer to China with the nation pumping billions into huge infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka.
- Sirisena and Wickremesinghe's party had come in with the promise of lessening financial ties with China, in order to reduce the debt created due to such projects, which had pinched the country's economy.
- Hence, China's potential gains with the change in the government of Sri Lanka could possibly impact the broader rivalry between India and China across the Indian Ocean.

Source: The Hindu

United Nations Day 2018 observed across the world

Why in news?

- The United Nations Day was observed across the world on October 24, 2018, marking the 73rd anniversary of the UN Charter's entry into force.
- The Day was observed with an aim to celebrate everything that the UN represents and has achieved since its establishment in 1945. On this occasion, all the member states of the United Nations contributed finances to its operation to help further its goals.

2018 UN Day Concert

- The 2018 UN Day Concert was held in the General Assembly Hall at United Nations Headquarters in New York.
- The Concert was sponsored by the **Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations**.
- The theme of 2018 UN concert was "***Traditions of Peace and Non-violence***".
- It featured Sarod maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan accompanied by his sons Amaan Ali Bangash and Ayaan Ali Bangash, and the Refugee Orchestra Project conducted by Lidiya Yankovskaya.

When was the Day proclaimed?

- United Nations Day is part of United Nations Week, which runs from 20 to 26 October.
- In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly declared 24 October, the anniversary of the Charter of the United Nations, as the United Nations Day.
- In 1971, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a further resolution (United Nations Resolution 2782) declaring that United Nations Day shall be an international holiday and recommended that it should be observed as a public holiday by all United Nations member states.

Charter of the United Nations

- The UN Charter of 1945 is the foundational treaty of the United Nations.
- It was signed at the San Francisco War Memorial and Performing Arts Center in San Francisco, United States, on 26 June 1945, by 50 of the 51 original member countries.
- It entered into force on 24 October 1945, after being ratified by the original five permanent members of the Security Council.
- As a charter, it is a constituent treaty, and all members are bound by its articles.
- Furthermore, Article 103 of the Charter states that obligations to the United Nations prevail over all other treaty obligations.

Source: The Hindu

After Uruguay, Canada becomes second country to legalises use of cannabis

Why in news?

- Canada has recently legalised the possession and use of recreational cannabis. After Uruguay, it has become the second country and the largest country to do so.

Key Facts

- The Canadian government will also pardon the Canadians convicted of possession of marijuana. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau would pardon individuals convicted in the past for possession of up to 30 grams of marijuana.
- It means it would also ease their travelling to the US. Earlier, many Canadians who have a criminal record of possessing cannabis for recreational use mean they cannot enter the US.
- A conviction for possession of marijuana allows US Border Patrol agents to prevent Canadian residents from entering their country since Ottawa shares that database with Washington.It is expected that lakhs of people could benefit from the measure.

What is Cannabis?

- Cannabis is derived from the cannabis plant (cannabis sativa). It is also known as marijuana among other names. It is used as a psychoactive drug for medical or recreational purposes.
- Cannabis has mental and physical effects such as creating a "high" or "stoned" feeling, a general change in perception, heightened mood, and an increase in appetite.

Execution of sale

- The Government of Canada is preparing to send the mail to 15 million households, through which new cannabis laws will be explained and public awareness campaigns will take off.
- However, the government is concerned about the readiness of the police to tackle drug-impaired driving.
- Canadian provinces and municipalities have been preparing for months for the end of cannabis prohibition. They are also preparing out the details of places where recreational marijuana can be bought and consumed.
- This has created a patchwork of legislation across the country as jurisdictions choose more or less restrictive frameworks for selling and using cannabis.

Legality of cannabis

- Uruguay and Canada are the only countries that have fully legalized the consumption and sale of recreational cannabis nationwide. In the United States, nine states and the District of Columbia have legalized sales and consumption although it remains federally illegal. Court rulings in Georgia and South Africa have led to the legalization of personal cultivation and consumption of cannabis, but not legal sales.
- Countries that have legalized the medical use of cannabis include Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom (effective November 1, 2018).
- Others have more restrictive laws that only allow the use of certain cannabinoid drugs, such as Sativex or Marinol.
- In the United States, 31 states and the District of Columbia have legalized the medical use of cannabis, but at the federal level, its use remains prohibited for any purpose.
- The recreational use of marijuana is legal in nine US states, as well as in Washington DC.
- However, a number of analysts showing concerns regarding the shortage of the recreational marijuana in the first year of legalization as production and licensing would continue to be ramped up to meet the demand, with the marketplace still in its infancy.

Source: Indian Express

India, Qatar establish joint commission to strengthen bilateral relations

Why in news?

- India and Qatar recently established a joint commission to review all bilateral matters, as well as regional and global issues of mutual interest. A joint declaration was issued to this effect.
- The decision was taken following a meeting between Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, during former's visit to Qatar.

Highlights

- India and Qatar have decided to establish a joint commission to strengthen the relations between the two countries in various fields with a view to further the common interests of their people.
- The commission will be charged with the following tasks:
- Formulating the required basis to strengthen the relations between the two countries particularly in economic, commercial, cultural, scientific, technological, information technology and educational fields.
- Following up the implementation of the agreements concluded between the two countries
- Finding suitable solutions for the resulting problems of the implementation.
- Facilitating the exchange of information and expertise and encouraging bilateral consultation in service of cooperation between the two countries.
- The commission will be co-chaired by the Ministers of External Affairs and Foreign Affairs of the two countries or their representatives and may include representatives of the sectors concerned with bilateral cooperation in both the countries.
- Further, the commission will hold a meeting at a time agreed by both countries alternately in each country. Extraordinary session may be held at the consent of both the countries.

Key Facts

- Qatar is home to around 700,000 expatriate Indians and the Gulf nation is a reliable energy partner of India, supplying more than 50 per cent of India's natural gas imports.
- The India-Qatar bilateral trade stood at $9.9 billion in 2017-18.
- The Indian external affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj arrived in Qatar on October 28 on the first leg of her two-nation tour of West Asia that will also see her going to Kuwait.

Source: PIB

US to pull out of Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia

Why in news?

☞ US President Donald Trump confirmed on October 20, 2018 that the United States will pull out of the three-decade-old Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, which it had signed with Russia during the Cold War.

☞ Explaining the decision, Trump alleged that Russia has "violated" the agreement. He said that they have been violating it for many years.

Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty

- The INF treaty was signed in December 1987 between the then US President Ronald Reagan and his USSR counterpart Mikhail Gorbachev on the elimination of intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles.
- The treaty banned all nuclear and conventional missiles, as well as their launchers, with ranges of 500–1,000 km or 310–620 miles (short-range) and 1,000–5,500 km or 620–3,420 miles (intermediate-range).

Significance of the treaty

- The treaty offered a blanket of protection to the United States' European allies and marked a watershed agreement between two nations at the centre of the arms race during the Cold War.
- It was designed to provide a measure of some strategic stability on the continent of Europe.

What led US to withdraw from the agreement?

- The Trump Administration has repeatedly alleged that Russia has violated the treaty. The US insists the Russians have, in breach of the deal, developed a new medium-range missile called the ***'Novator 9M729'*** - known to NATO as the **SSC-8**. The missile would enable Russia to launch a nuclear strike at NATO countries at very short notice.
- In 2014, President Barack Obama had accused Russia of breaching the INF after it allegedly tested a ground-launched cruise missile. He, however, reportedly chose not to withdraw from the treaty under pressure from the European leaders, who said such a move could restart an arms race.
- Recently, NATO officially confirmed Russia's activity constituted a likely violation. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said earlier this month that the military alliance remained concerned about Russia's lack of respect for its international commitments, including the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.
- Stoltenberg stated that after years of denials, Russia recently acknowledged the existence of its new missile system **'9M729'**. However, Russia did not provide any credible answers on its new missile.
- Russia's failure to adhere to the agreement was also addressed in the most recent Nuclear Posture Review published by the Defense Department in February, which said Russia "continues to violate a series of arms control treaties and commitments."

Other Factors

- The INF treaty was a bilateral treaty between the US and the USSR. Hence, other nations such as China were free to develop and deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles without restraint.
- This led many in the Trump administration to feel that the INF treaty placed them at a growing disadvantage in their developing strategic rivalry with China.

Russia's reaction

- According to reports, a Russian foreign ministry source has said that the US's move is motivated by a 'dream of a unipolar world' where it is the only global superpower.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin plans to discuss the decision with US national security adviser John Bolton when he visits Russia this week.

Impact

- The withdrawal of the United States from the treaty could provoke an arms race across Europe, similar to the one that was occurring when the agreement was initially signed in the 1980s.

Source: The Hindu

World Bank launches first Human Capital Index, Singapore tops list

Why in news?

- The World Bank launched its first Human Capital Index (HCI) in Bali, Indonesia on October 11, 2018, as part of the World Development Report 2019.

Key Facts

- The indewx ranks countries based on their success in developing human capital.
- The index ranks 157 countries based on their education and health outcomes and the impact they are having on productivity. While Singapore tops the rankings, African countries occupying the bottom spots.

About Human Capital Index

Objective

- The human capital index, which has been modeled on the World Bank's existing doing business index that assesses national business conditions, aims to create a similar ranking for countries based on how well they look after their people.
- The index claims to seek to measure the amount of human capital that a child born today can expect to attain by age 18.
- The HCI index values are contended to convey the productivity of the next generation of workers, compared to a benchmark of complete standard education and full health.

The four key indicators of the index include:

1. Under 5 mortality rates
2. Expected years of Quality-Adjusted School
3. Adult survival rates
4. Rate of stunting for children aged below five years

- The main theme of the World Development Report (WDR) 2018 is ***"The Changing Nature of Work"***.
- As part of this report, the World Bank has launched a **Human Capital Project (HCP)**.
- The HCP programme is claimed to be a program of advocacy, measurement and analytical work to raise awareness and increase demand for interventions to build human capital.

The three main components of HCP include:

1. Cross-country human capital measurement metric called the **Human Capital Index (HCI)**
2. Programme of measurement and research to inform policy action
3. Programme of support for country strategies to accelerate investment in human capital

Significance

- The index draws attention to the fact that human capital is connected to productivity, it's connected to economic growth and it's more highly correlated than other kinds of infrastructure investment that heads of state and ministers of finance are much likely to go for because of the sooner visible outcomes.

World Banks's Human Capital Index	UN's Human Development Index
HCI uses survival rates and stunting rate as measure of health	HDI uses life expectancy as measure of health
HCI uses quality-adjusted learning as measure of education	HDI uses years of schooling as measure of education
HCI excludes per capita income	HDI includes per capita income
HCI excludes income component	HDI includes income component

Key Highlights

- The index measures the Index outcomes for each country as a fraction of maximum value of 1.
- It also measures the mortality rate for children under five, early childhood stunting rates due to malnutrition and other factors and health outcomes based on the proportion of 15-year-olds who survive until age 60.
- Further, it measures a country's educational achievement based on the years of schooling a child can expect to obtain by age 18, combined with a country's relative performance on international student achievement tests.
- Overall, the index found that on an average 56 percent of children born today will forego more than half their potential lifetime earnings because governments were not investing adequately to ensure their people are healthy, educated and ready for an evolving workplace.

Top Findings

- The index found that advanced economies such as North America and Europe mostly have HCI value of above 0.75, while South Asia and Sub Saharan Africa have the lowest HCI among the regions.
- Singapore topped the rankings list, followed by South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong. On the other hand, African countries with high childhood stunting rates and low access to formal education fared the worst in the rankings, with Chad and South Sudan taking up the two lowest spots. The United States was ranked 24th on the list, while the United Kingdom was ranked 15th.

- The World Bank predicts that in the lowest country ranked on the list, Chad, productivity and earnings potential would be only about 29 percent of what their potential would be under ideal conditions.
- In top-ranked Singapore, the earnings potential was 88 percent of potential, while in the United States, ranked 24th between Israel and Macau, productivity and earnings were measured at 76 percent of potential.
- The HCI for India was estimated at 0.44. The quality-adjusted learning was measured in the case of India by using the data as old as 2009.
- Besides, there were 28 countries, from Indonesia to Lesotho to Ukraine, who signed on as "early adopters" of the index to work with the World Bank to devise plans to improve their investment in health and education.
- Further, the index showed that a country ranked at 50 percent, such as Morocco and El Salvador, would lose 1.4 percentage points of annual GDP growth compared to its potential under ideal health and education conditions.
- The bank has warned that a wave of automation and artificial intelligence will eliminate many low-skilled jobs in the coming years, making it harder for people with low levels of education and poor health to compete for work.

Observations for India

☞ The children born in India today will be only 44 per cent as productive when they grow up as they could be if they enjoyed complete education and full health.

❍ **There has also been a marked improvement in the HCI components in India over the last five years:**

- **Probability of survival to age 5:** 96 out of 100 children born in India survive to age 5
- **Expected years of school:** In India, children who start school at the age 4 can be expected to complete 10.2 years of school by their 18th birthday
- **Harmonised test scores:** Students in India score 355 on a scale where 625 represents advanced attainment and 300 represents minimum attainment.
- **Learning-adjusted years of school:** Factoring in what children actually learn, expected years of school is only 5.8 years.
- **Adult Survival Rate:** Across India, 83 per cent of 15-year olds are expected to survive until the age of 60 years.
- **Healthy Growth (Not Stunted Rate):** 62 out of 100 children are not stunted. 38 out of 100 children are stunted and so at risk of cognitive and physical limitations that can last a lifetime.
- **Gender Differences:** The HCI in India is marginally better for females in comparison to that for males.

The Way Ahead

- The index concludes that for 56 per cent of the world's population the HCI is at or below 0.50 and for 92 per cent it is at or below 0.75.
- Hence, only 8 per cent of the population can expect to be 75 per cent as productive as they could be.
- Singapore's high score of 0.88 out of a maximum possible score of 1 was driven by a strong focus on quality education and an innovative health insurance system delivered by spending a relatively modest 4 per cent of gross domestic product on health care.

Source: The Hindu

India, Bangladesh sign agreements for enhancing waterways connectivity

Why in news?

- India and Bangladesh on October 25, 2018 signed several milestone agreements for enhancing inland and coastal waterways connectivity for trade and cruise movements. Bangladesh agreed to open its Chattogram and Mongla ports for trade with India.
- The decisions were taken during the 19th Standing Committee meeting under 'Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade' (PIWTT) held at New Delhi.

New Ports of Call

- An addendum to '**Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade' (PIWTT)** between India and Bangladesh has been signed for inclusion of Dhubriin India and Pangaonin Bangladesh as new Ports of Call.
- Both the countries signed an agreement to use **Chattogram and Mongla Ports** in Bangladesh for movement of goods to and from India.
- The two sides also agreed to consider **inclusion of Rupnarayan River (National Waterway-86) from Geonkhali to Kolaghat** in the protocol route and to declare Kolaghatin West Bengal as new Port of Call. Chilmari was agreed to as a port of call in Bangladesh.
- The new arrangement will facilitate **movement of flyash, cement, construction materials etc from India to Bangladesh** through Inland Water Transport (IWT) on Rupnarayan River.
- Both sides agreed to declare **Badarpur on river Barak (NW 16) as an Extended Port of Call** of Karimganj in Assam and **Ghorasal of Ashuganj in Bangladesh** on reciprocal basis.
- The Indian side proposed for **extension of the protocol routes from Kolkata upto Silchar in Assam**. Currently 3.5 MMT cargo is transported on protocol routes through inland waterways which is expected to increase substantially after the declaration of additional Ports of Call and extension of protocol routes.
- The **North Eastern states** would get connected to directly to the ports of Kolkata and Haldia in India and Mongla in Bangladesh through waterways which would facilitate movement EXIM cargo and would also reduce the logistic costs.
- All these agreements will facilitate easier movement of goods and passengers between the two countries, giving an impetus to trade and tourism.

Standard Operating Procedure for movement of passenger and cruise services

- Both the sides have also finalised the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for movement of passengers and cruise vessels on Inland Protocol route and coastal shipping routes.
- These river cruise services are likely to commence between Kolkata – Dhaka - Guwahati – Jorhat and back.

Joint Committees and Groups to be constituted

- It was also agreed that a Joint Technical Committee will explore the technical feasibility of **operationalisation of Dhulian-Rajshahi protocol route** upto Aricha and the **reconstruction and opening up of Jangipur navigational lock** on river Bhagirathi subject to the provisions of the Treaty between India and Bangladesh on Sharing of Ganga Waters at Farakka in 1996.
- This move has the potential to reduce the distance to Assam by more than 450 kms on the protocol routes.
- A Joint Monitoring Committee has also been constituted for overall monitoring of the **dredging works of Ashuganj-Zakiganj and Sirajganj-Daikhowa stretches** of Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route in Bangladesh that will be engaged with 80 percent financial contribution from India and rest by Bangladesh.

Other developments

- To bring about significant reduction in logistics cost and faster delivery of Bangladesh export cargo, **India proposed permitting 'Third country' EXIM Trade under Coastal Shipping Agreement** and PIWTT by allowing transhipment through ports on the East Cost of India.Bangladesh agreed to hold stakeholder consultations and revert on the matter.
- Both sides have also agreed for **development of Jogighopa as a hub or terminal for movement of cargo to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Bhutan** and notifying Munsiganj River terminal by Bangladesh Customs for routing third party Exim cargo through Kolkata Port.
- Both the sides discussed to make **Nakugaon Land Port in Bangladesh and Dalu ICP (India) operational** and to connect Gelephu (Bhutan) as tripartite cross-border route.
- Inclusion of **Dhamra Port, V.O. Chidambaranar Port (formerly Tuticorin Port) and Kamarajar Port** under Coastal Shipping Agreement was also deliberated upon.

Key take aways

- North-Eastern States of India to use Chattogram sea port and Mongla river ports in Bangladesh. This will restore pre-partition logistics arrangements, when the North-East was served by the then East Bengal ports.
- The deal will particularly help Tripura, which is nearly 2000 km away from Kolkata but a few hundred km from the Chattogram port.
- A cruise service will be launched between Kolkata and Dhaka from March 2019. The cruise operator, Exotic Heritage Group, has already booked the service for five years. Exotic heritage group already runs cruises on River Ganga.
- Setting up of a multi-modal transshipment hub at Jogighopa in Assam for movement of cargo to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Bhutan. Goods from Bhutan and the North-East can take the river route to Bangladesh and vice-versa through Jogighopa.

Source: PIB, The Hindu

The 12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit

Why in news?

☞ The 12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit began on October 18, 2018 in Brussels, Belgium. Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu led the Indian delegation at the two-day summit.

Key Facts

- **Theme 2018:** The theme of 12th Asia-Europe Meeting was '**Global Partners for Global Challenges**'.
- The 12th Asia-Europe Meeting brought together Heads of state of 30 European and 21 Asian countries, besides top representatives of the European Union and Secretary General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- The summit prioritised issues related to connectivity, trade and investment, sustainable development, climate change, terrorism, migration, maritime security and cyberspace.

Highlights: 12th ASEM Summit

- European Council President Donald TUSK chaired the summit. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini represented the EU.
- The ASEM summit brought together Heads of state of 51 European and Asian countries, representatives of the European Union and the Secretary General of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- Leaders agreed to further **connect both continents** to boost trade, improve security, preserve the environment and bring societies closer.
- They also discussed **foreign and security issues**. Leaders called for the complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula and they reaffirmed their support to the Iran nuclear deal, amongst others.
- The summit was also an occasion to discuss how to address **global challenges** such as climate change, migration, and digitalisation.

⇒ ***The ASEM summit was followed by the EU-Korea summit and the EU-ASEAN leaders' meeting on 19 October:***

EU-Republic of Korea summit: Take aways

- EU and South Korean leaders reaffirmed their **strong ties** and their commitment to strengthen their strategic partnership
- Leaders took stock of **bilateral relations**, including the implementation of the EU-South Korea **free trade agreement** in place since 2011.
- They discussed a number of foreign and security policy issues, including the **denuclearisation** of the Korean peninsula.
- In addition, leaders discussed how to boost **EU-South Korea cooperation** in areas such as climate change, research and development.
- President **Donald Tusk** and President **Jean-Claude Juncker** represented the EU. President Jae-in Moon represented the Republic of Korea (hereafter South-Korea).

EU-ASEAN leaders' meeting: Highlights

- European and Asian leaders highlighted the vital need of maintaining an **open world economy** and upholding the **rules-based trading system** with the World Trade Organisation (WTO)at its core.
- Leaders stressed the need to further strengthen and **reform the WTO** to help it meet new challenges and to improve its functioning.
- They also highlighted the importance of deeper **economic integration** both at the regional and global level.
- In the margins of the summit, the **EU and Singapore** signed a free trade agreement as well as an investment protection agreement.
- Creating **better links** between Europe and Asia was a central theme of the summit. Leaders agreed to strengthen Europe-Asia **sustainable connectivity** so as to bring countries, people and societies closer together.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

Global Hunger Index 2018: India ranks 103rd out of 119 countries

Why in news?

- As per the 2018 Global Hunger Index (GHI), published on October 10, 2018, the level of hunger and undernutrition worldwide fell to 20.9, down from 29.2 in the year 2000.
- As per the index, India was ranked 103rd out of 119 qualifying countries. The Global Hunger Index 2018 report was prepared jointly by global NGOs namely, Concern Worldwide (Ireland) and Welthungerhilfe (Germany).

Key facts

- In the countries included in the GHI, the share of the **undernourished population** stood at 12.3 percent in 2015–2017, down from 17.6 percent in 1999–2001.
- 27.9 percent **children under five years of age were stunted** based on data from 2013–2017, down from 37.1 percent in 1998–2002.
- 9.3 percent **children under-5 years were wasted**, slightly down from 9.7 percent in 1998–2002.
- The **under-five mortality** rate was 4.2 percent as of 2016, down from 8.1 percent in 2000.

Country-wise findings

- GHI projections show that at the pace of hunger reduction observed since 2000, approximately 50 countries will fail to reach low hunger levels by 2030; at present, 79 countries have failed to reach that designation according to the 2018 GHI.
- Zimbabwe, Somalia, and CAR have the **highest rates of undernourishment**, ranging between 46.6 and 61.8 percent.
- Timor-Leste, Eritrea, and Burundi have the **highest stunting rates** with at least half of the children suffering from stunting in each country.
- **Child Wasting** is most prevalent in Djibouti (16.7 percent), India (21.0 percent), and South Sudan (28.6 percent).

- The **highest under-five mortality rates** are in Somalia (13.3 percent), Chad (12.7 percent), and CAR (12.4 percent).
- The six countries with **alarming levels of hunger** are Chad, Haiti, Madagascar, Sierra Leone, Yemen, and Zambia.
- One country suffering from an **extremely alarming level of hunger is the Central African Republic (CAR)**, which has the highest 2018 GHI score of 53.7 and has been suffering from instability, sectarian violence, and civil war since 2012.
- In Burundi, Congo, Eritrea, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria, violent conflict, political unrest, and extreme poverty have prompted forced migration, which is closely associated with food insecurity.
- However, this year's GHI includes 27 countries with moderate levels of hunger and 40 countries with low levels of hunger.
- Few countries have made improvement since 2000. Angola, Ethiopia and Rwanda, which had extremely alarming hunger levels in 2000, have seen reductions in their GHI scores of 20 points or more.

India's rank

☞ In the 2018 Global Hunger Index, India was ranked 103rd out of 119 qualifying countries. With a score of 31.1, India suffers from a serious level of hunger.

Region-wise findings

- At the regional level, the 2018 GHI scores for **South Asia and Africa south of the Sahara**, at 30.5 and 29.4, respectively, are dramatically higher than those of other regions, indicating serious levels of hunger.
- The GHI scores for East and Southeast Asia, the Near East and North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe, and the Commonwealth of Independent States range from 7.3 to 13.2, indicating low or moderate hunger levels.
- Even regions with low or moderate GHI scores include countries where hunger and undernutrition are tremendously high.
- In **Latin America and the Caribbean** (GHI score of just 9.0), the Caribbean island nation of Haiti is one of just seven countries with GHI scores that are considered alarming or extremely alarming and nother country among these seven countries is Yemen of the East and North Africa region (GHI score of 13.2).
- In South Asia and Africa south of the Sahara, the rates of undernourishment, child stunting, child wasting and child mortality are unacceptably high.
- **South Asia has the highest child stunting and child wasting rates** of any region, followed by Africa south of the Sahara. In terms of undernourishment and child mortality, Africa south of the Sahara has the highest rates, followed by South Asia.
- South Asia's child wasting rate constitutes a critical public health emergency. The child wasting rate for the region is amplified by India, which has the region's largest population and highest level of child wasting at 21 percent.

- Child stunting in South Asia is also very high. Since 2000, the rate of stunting in the region has fallen from approximately half of all children to over a third, but this still constitutes the highest regional child stunting rate world wide.
- In **Africa south of the Sahara**, the 2015–2017 undernourishment rate, at 22 percent, increased marginally since 2009–2011 and is the highest regional rate of all regions in the report.
- The under-five mortality rate in the Africa south of the Sahara is also high. The 10 countries with the world's highest under-five mortality rates are all located in this region.

Insufficient progress to reach Sustainable Development Goals

- Despite these improvements, the question remains whether the world will achieve United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, which aims to end hunger, ensure food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030.
- As per the index, the world is still far from a world without malnutrition. The index covers four indicators of stunting, wasting, severe wasting and overweight among children under 5, and reveal insufficient progress to reach the World Health Assembly targets for 2025 and the Sustainable Development Goals set for 2030.
- Accelerated progress will be needed to achieve SDG targets in child survival.

Global Hunger Index and how it is calculated?

- The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is a tool designed to comprehensively measure and track hunger at global, regional, and national levels.
- GHI scores are calculated each year to assess progress and setbacks in combating hunger.
- GHI scores are calculated using a three-step process.
  - Firstly, values are determined for each country in four indicators- **Undernourishment, Child Wasting, Child Stunting** and **Child Mortality**.
  - Secondly, each of the four component indicators is given a standardised score on a 100-point scale based on the highest observed level for the indicator.
  - Thirdly, standardised scores are aggregated to calculate the GHI score for each country, with each of the three dimensions (inadequate food supply; child mortality; and child under nutrition.

Source: The Hindu

India-Azerbaijan sign protocol on trade, economic cooperation

Why in news?

☞ India and Azerbaijan signed a protocol on trade and economic, science and technology cooperation on October 12, 2018, during the 5th meeting of India-Azerbaijan Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade and Economic, Science and Technology Cooperation (IA-IGC) that was held from October 11-12, 2018 in New Delhi.

Key Highlights

- During the meeting, both India and Azerbaijan exchanged views on current economic situation and reviewed the current status of bilateral trade, investment and their cooperation in the fields of trade, economy, science and technology.
- The nations emphasised to further strengthen and expand their cooperation in trade and investment, transportation, energy and hydro-carbons, SMEs, agriculture, food safety and environmental protection, tourism, culture, health and pharmaceuticals, space technology, education and scientific research, chemicals and petrochemicals and mining.
- The trade turnover between India and Azerbaijan in January-August 2018 was USD 657.9 million.
- The two nations felt that the bilateral trade was far below the potential and there was a need to step up the cooperation to enlarge the trade basket and increase bilateral trade and investment.
- The two nations also agreed to take measures to enhance trade relations and expand business relations between the two countries.
- The nations also decided to send trade delegations to raise awareness regarding economic developments and reforms in the two countries and have regular exchange of information about trade exhibitions, fairs, conferences and other business events.
- They also agreed to convene the next meeting of the India-Azerbaijan Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Science and Technology co-operation in Baku.
- The dates for the meeting will be mutually agreed through diplomatic channels.

India-Azerbaijan Relations

- India and Azerbaijan have age-old historical relations and shared traditions.
- India's diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan were established on February 28, 1992. The Indian resident mission was opened in Baku in March 1999 and Azerbaijan opened its first resident mission in New Delhi in October, 2004.

Agreements signed

- An agreement on economic and technical cooperation was signed in June, 1998.
- Air service agreement and a protocol of intergovernmental commission were signed in April 2012.
- Agreements on Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) in civil and commercial matters, MLAT in criminal matters and extradition treaty were signed in April 2013.

- A protocol on cooperation between the foreign ministries of India and Azerbaijan was signed in May 2013.
- Besides, agreements on visa exemption regime for diplomatic, official and service passport holders, bilateral investments, double taxation avoidance, cultural, tourism and educational cooperation are under discussions.

Trade

- India's bilateral trade with Azerbaijan has been growing steadily in recent years. India's pharmaceutical sector is well known in Azerbaijan and many Indian pharmaceutical companies are represented in Azerbaijan either through their own representative offices or through tie ups with local dealers.
- The main items of direct and indirect export from India include clothes and textiles, tea, meat, food processing equipment, electronic cards, boilers and other plant equipment. The primary import of India from Azerbaijan is crude oil.
- A few Indian manufactured automobiles and mobile telephone handsets made their debut into Azerbaijan in 2010.
- Azerbaijan has proven natural gas reserves of about 2.55 billion cubic meters, while proven oil reserves was estimated at 2 billion tones.
- In 2012, Indian software development companies were given contracts by Azerbaijani banks and insurance companies. Some engineering consultancy companies have bagged projects in the cement and power sector respectively.
- Coming to the Indian Diaspora in Azerbaijan, there are about 400 Indian residents in the nation.

Source:PIB, The Hindu

India elected to UN Human Rights Council

Why in news?

- India was on October 12, 2018 elected to the United Nations' Human Rights Council ' for a period of three years beginning January 1, 2019.
- India secured 188 votes in the Asia-Pacific category, the highest number of votes among all candidates. Following the election, India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin said that India's win with the highest number of votes reflects the country's standing in the international community.

Key Highlights

- The 193-member UN General Assembly held elections for new members to the UN Human Rights Council.
- The countries needed a minimum of 97 votes to get elected to the Council.
- 18 new members were elected to UNHRC by absolute majority through a secret ballot.
- India got the highest number of votes among all 18 countries in the five regional categories.
- In the Asia Pacific category, India got 188 votes followed by Fiji with 187 and Bangladesh 178 votes.
- The new members will serve a term of three years beginning January 1, 2019.

Background

- India had been looking to win the seat at the UNHRC in the Asia Pacific category.
- India had previously been elected to the Geneva-based Human Rights Council for the 2011-2014 and 2014-2017. Its last term had ended on December 31, 2017 and in accordance with the rules, it was not eligible for immediate re-election since it had already served two consecutive terms.
- Along with India, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Fiji and Philippines had also staked a claim in the same regional group.
- So in total, there were five nations vying for five seats in the Asia Pacific category. India's election to the Council was hence, all but certain.

UNHRC

- The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) was established by the UN General Assembly in March 2006 as its principal body dealing with human rights.
- The body's main mission is to promote and protect human rights around the world.
- The UNHRC comprises 47 elected members states. The states are elected for a three-year term on a regional group basis.
- **On the basis of equitable geographical distribution, the council seats are allocated to the five regional groups as follows:**
  1. **African States:** 13 seats
  2. **Asia-Pacific States:** 13 seats
  3. **Eastern European States:** 6 seats
  4. **Latin American and Caribbean States:** 8 seats
  5. **Western European and other States:** 7 seats
- ☞ All five of the General Assembly's regional groups had submitted competition-free slates, meaning that all candidates, regardless of their rights records, were virtually assured seats on the council.
- ☞ Former President of Chile Michelle Bachelet assumed the role of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in September this year, succeeding Jordanian diplomat Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, who had in June this year released a first-ever report on Kashmir that was rejected by India.

Source: The Hindu

Malaysian government decides to abolish capital punishment

Why in news?

☞ The Malaysian Cabinet on October 11, 2018 decided to abolish the death penalty for all crimes and halt all pending executions. The decision is a rare move against capital punishment in Asia.

☞ The government has taken the decision to scrap capital punishment following strong domestic opposition to the practice. The amendments to the laws with capital punishment are expected to be tabled in the Parliament on October 15.

Key Highlights

- Capital punishment is currently mandatory in Malaysia for a wide range of crimes including murder, drug trafficking, treason, kidnapping, possession of firearms and acts of terror.
- The sentence is carried out in the nation by hanging, a legacy which has lived on since the British colonial rule.
- The decision will have a huge effect on those on a death row, such as the two women accused of assassinating the estranged half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in 2017.
- A Malaysian court had ruled last year that the case could proceed against Indonesian national Siti Aisyah and Doan Thi Huong of Vietnam after Kim Jong-Nam's murder at Kuala Lumpur Airport.
- The International Human Rights group, Amnesty International, labelled the Malaysian government's decision to abolish capital punishment as an encouraging sign.
- In April 2017, the Amnesty International had ranked Malaysia at the 10th spot in the use of the death penalty among the 23 countries that carried out capital punishment in 2016. Between 2007 and 2017, 35 individuals were hanged in the nation.
- Overall, a total of 1267 prisoners are currently on a death row, making up 2.7 per cent of the 60,000-strong prison population.

Impact

- According to Amnesty International, the move would be a major advance. It said that the death penalty has been a "terrible stain" on Malaysia's human rights record and death row prisoners often have to wait years for their appeals to be processed.
- The international body urged the Malaysian government to "completely abolish the death penalty for all crimes, with no exceptions."
- The Current Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad's alliance won a stunning election upset on May 9, ousting a scandal-tainted coalition in the first change of government since independence from Britain in 1957. The new government's promises included eradicating corruption and bolstering human rights.

Rest of the World on Capital Punishment

- Around 142 countries across the world have rejected capital punishment as a form of punishment for crimes.
- Only 23 countries retain the death penalty. However, in Asia, many nations including India, China, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam still impose capital punishment.
- According to Amnesty International's report on capital punishment in 2017, China is believed to be the 'world's top executioner'.
- Overall, 993 executions were recorded in 2017 in 23 countries. However, Amnesty says that these numbers do not include the "thousands" that it says are believed to have been executed in China, which classifies this information as a state secret.
- Excluding China, Amnesty says Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Pakistan, in that order, carried out 84 per cent of all executions in 2017.
- In Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand have death penalty laws.

Capital Punishment in India

- India does not have a mandatory death penalty. Though murder is punishable by death under Article 302 of the Penal Code, in Mithu v. State of Punjab, the Supreme Court of India had ruled that the mandatory death penalty is unconstitutional.
- In Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab, the Supreme Court had held that the death penalty was constitutional only when applied as an exceptional penalty in 'the rarest of the rare' cases.
- The crimes punishable by death in India include murder, terrorism-related offenses, rape, kidnapping, drug trafficking, treason and military offences.

The following offenders are excluded from the death penalty in India:

- **Individuals below age 18 at time of crime:** According to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000, individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of the crime cannot be executed.
- **Pregnant Women:** According to a 2009 amendment, a pregnant woman sentenced to death must be granted clemency.
- **Intellectually Disabled:** According to the Indian Penal Code, individuals who were mentally ill at the time of the crime and who did not understand the nature of the act or know that the act was wrong or against the law cannot be held criminally liable.
- **Mentally ill:** According to the Indian Penal Code, individuals who were mentally ill at the time of the crime and who did not understand the nature of the act or know that the act was wrong or against the law cannot be held criminally liable.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

Aung San Suu Kyi becomes first person to lose honorary Canadian citizenship

Why in news?

☞ Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi on October 3, 2018 became the first person to be stripped of the honorary Canadian citizenship for her role in gross human rights violations against the Rohingya people.

Key Facts

☞ The Canadian Senate formally revoked the symbolic honour that was bestowed on Suu Kyi in 2007. Senators unanimously adopted a genocide motion tabled by Independent Senator Ratna Omidvar in the red chamber.

What led Canada to revoke Suu Kyi's honorary citizenship: United Nations Report on Rohingyas

- Suu Kyi, the Burmese State Counsellor, has been widely criticised for turning a blind eye to the violence and military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine state that forced more than 700000 Rohingya Muslims to seek refuge in Bangladesh, creating one of the world's biggest refugee crisis.
- A United Nations fact-finding mission recently found that the Myanmar military was committing genocide against the Rohingyas, the minority Muslim population; and other ethnic minorities and in the middle of all this, Suu Kyi had failed in her duty to protect her own citizens.
- The report names six military commanders in Myanmar who should be investigated for genocide in Rakhine state and for crimes against humanity in other areas.
- The report condemns Suu Kyi for failing to use her power to prevent the genocide and fulfil her responsibility to protect the civilian population, thus, leading to mass murder, rape and displacement.

Rohingyas: The Dispute

- Myanmar passed its Citizenship Law in 1982 in which it recognised eight races and 130 minority groups but it excluded the minority Rohingya Muslims from citizenship.
- Later, it passed a second law that limited the Rohingya Muslim residence to two townships in the western state of Rakhine, which borders Bangladesh.
- The second law for Rohingyas also restricted them to have only two children, a restriction that does not apply to majority Buddhist population.
- According to Myanmar government, the Rohingyas are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh who were brought to Myanmar by the Britishers as builders and settlers.
- The ethnic group has become the prime target of the violence. The Rakhine State, the epicentre of the conflict, has Buddhist as a majority in groups and Rohingya Muslims as a minority.

Who are the Rohingya people?

- The Rohingya people, a Muslim ethnic-minority group, are a stateless Indo-Aryan people from Rakhine State of Myanmar.
- There were an estimated 1 million Rohingya living in Myanmar. As of September 2017, nearly half of them have fled to other countries.
- Described by the United Nations in 2013 as one of the most persecuted minorities in the world, the Rohingya population are denied citizenship under the 1982 Burmese citizenship law.
- The Rohingyas have faced military crackdowns in 1978, 1991–1992, 2012, 2015 and 2016–2017.
- The United Nations officials have described Myanmar's persecution of the Rohingya as ethnic cleansing, besides warnings of an unfolding genocide.

Source : The Hindu

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Indian Economy and Economic Development

IMF predicts India to grow at 7.3 per cent in 2018-19

Why in news?

- India's growth rate is predicted to increase to 7.3 per cent in 2018 and 7.4 per cent in 2019, as per the latest World Economic Outlook report released by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on October 9, 2018. In 2017, India had recorded a growth rate of 6.7 per cent. 2018 World Economic Outlook for 2019 due to the recent increase in oil prices and tightening of global financial conditions.
- According to the report, the acceleration reflects a rebound from transitory shocks (the currency exchange initiative and implementation of the national Goods and Services Tax), with strengthening investment and robust private consumption.
- from ongoing structural reform, but have been marked down by just under 0.5 percentage point relative to the April 2018 WEO. 0.32 per cent, respectively, from its annual April's World Economic Out look.
- 6.2 per cent in 2019, reflecting a slowing external demand growth and necessary financial regulatory tightening. The nation's slow growth projection for 2019 is also a result of the latest round of US tariffs on Chinese imports.

  The report stated that the 0.2 percentage point downgrade to the 2019 growth forecast is attributable to the negative effect of recent tariff actions, assumed to be partially offset by policy stimulus.
- It further noted that over the medium term, growth is expected to gradually slow to 5.6 per cent as the economy continues to make the transition to a more sustainable growth path with continued financial de-risking and environmental controls.
- In India, the report said that important reforms have been implemented in the recent years, including the Goods and Services Tax, the inflation-targeting framework, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, and steps to liberalise foreign investment and make it easier to do business.
- It further said that in India, a high-interest burden and risks from rising yields require continued focus on debt reduction to establish policy credibility and build buffers. It stated that these efforts should be supported by further reductions in subsidies and enhanced compliance with the Goods and Services Tax.
- It also said inflation in India is on the rise, estimated at 3.6 per cent in fiscal year 2017/18 and projected at 4.7 per cent in fiscal year 2018/19, compared with 4.5 per cent in fiscal year 2016/17, amid accelerating demand and rising fuel prices.
- The report said that aggregate growth in the emerging market and developing economy group stabilised in the first half of 2018.

Significance

- If the projections are true, then India will regain the tag of the fastest growing major economies of the world, crossing China with more than 0.7 percentage point in 2018 and an impressive 1.2 percentage point growth lead in 2019.
- China was the fastest growing economy in 2017 as it was ahead of India by 0.2 percentage points.
- Overall, Asia continued to register strong growth as per the report, supported by a domestic demand-led pickup in the Indian economy from a four-year-low pace of expansion in 2017.
- The IMF's flagship World Economic Outlook was released in Bali during the annual meeting of the IMF and the World Bank.

Source: The Hindu, Business Standard

ILC submits 2nd Report on Cross Border Insolvency

Why in news?

- The Insolvency Law Committee (ILC) has submitted its 2nd Report on Cross Border Insolvency to Arun Jaitley, Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs.

Key Facts

- The ILC was constituted by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to recommend amendments to Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code of India, 2016,
- The ILC recommended the adoption of the UNCITRAL Model Law of Cross Border Insolvency, 1997 as it provides for a comprehensive framework to deal with cross border insolvency issues.
- The Committee also recommended a few steps to ensure that there is no inconsistency between the domestic insolvency framework and the proposed Cross Border Insolvency Framework.

UNCITRAL Model Law of Cross Border Insolvency, 1997

- The UNCITRAL Model Law has till now been adopted in 44 countries and forms part of international best practices in dealing with cross border insolvency issues. The model law gives precedence to domestic proceedings and protection of public interest.
- The advantages of the model law include greater confidence generation among foreign investors, adequate flexibility for seamless integration with the domestic Insolvency Law and a robust mechanism for international cooperation.

Four major principles of UNCITRAL Model Law

The model law deals with four major principles of cross-border insolvency, namely:

- Direct access to foreign insolvency professionals and foreign creditors to participate in or commence domestic insolvency proceedings against a defaulting debtor
- Recognition of foreign proceedings & provision of remedies
- Cooperation between domestic and foreign courts & domestic and foreign insolvency practitioners
- Coordination between two or more concurrent insolvency proceedings in different countries. The main proceeding is determined by the concept of centre of main interest (COMI).

Significance

- Considering that many Indian companies have a global footprint and many foreign companies have presence in multiple countries including India, having Cross Border Insolvency Framework under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code becomes necessary.
- Although the proposed Framework for Cross Border Insolvency will help dealing with Indian companies having foreign assets and vice versa, it still does not provide for a framework for dealing with enterprise groups, which is still work in progress with UNCITRAL and other international bodies.
- The inclusion of the UNCITRAL Model Law of Cross Border Insolvency in the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code of India, 2016 will bring Indian Insolvency Law on a par with that of matured jurisdictions.

Source: Live Mint

Ongoing Issues Related to the Section 7 of the RBI Act, 1934

Why in news?

☞ The Union Ministry of Finance has recently clarified that "*the autonomy for the Central Bank, within the framework of the RBI Act, is an essential and accepted governance requirement*".

Key facts

- The Ministry also stated that both the Government and the Central Bank need to be guided by public interest and the requirements of the Indian economy and for this purpose, extensive consultations on several issues take place between both the bodies from time to time. The final decisions are then communicated to the public.
- The clarification came in the wake of widespread rumours about government's decision to invoke never-before-used powers by invoking Section 7 of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Act, 1934, allowing it to issue directions to the RBI Governor on matters of public interest such as liquidity for NBFCs, capital requirement for weak banks and lending to SMEs.

What is the issue?

- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on October 30, 2018, during a meeting of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC), blamed the RBI for failing to stop a lending spree during 2008-2014 that left banks with USD 150 billion of bad debt.
- RBI Governor Urjit Patel and officials from the Securities and Exchange Board of India, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) and the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) attended the meeting to discuss the liquidity crunch.
- Acharya said in a speech on October 26, 2018 that undermining a central bank's independence could be "*potentially catastrophic*", an indication that the regulator is pushing back hard against government pressure to relax its policies and reduce its powers.

Section 7 of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Act, 1934

- The Section 7 of the RBI Act empowers the Central Government to consult and give instructions to the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to act on certain issues, that the government considers serious and in public interest.
- The Central Government may give such directions to the Bank from time to time, after consultation with the Governor of the Bank, consider necessary in the public interest.
- Once the Section 7 is invoked, the general superintendence and direction of the affairs and business of the Bank is entrusted to a Central Board of Directors which may exercise all powers and do all acts exercised or done by the Bank.
- It is considered that such a move could be a last resort for the Government to increase liquidity, ease pressure on banks and businesses, and boost economic growth.

Has the Section 7 been invoked earlier?

- The Section 7 had never been used in independent India till now. It was neither even used when the country was close to economic crisis in 1991 and nor in the aftermath of the 2008 recession crisis.
- It is not yet clear how this Section operates since it has never been used till now.
- The talks of invoking Section 7 began for the first time during the matter related to power generation which was taken up by the Allahabad High Court in which a case was filed by power producers challenging the RBI's February 12 circular. The High Court at that time ruled that invoking of the section could be considered. However, the government at that point did not invoke the section.

Source: Economic Times, Indian Express

Government's crop insurance scheme to cover crop loss in wild animal attacks

Why in news?

- The Union Government has decided to cover damages done to crops in case of wild animal attacks under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna in select districts on an experimental basis.
- The information was shared by Union Agricultural Minister Radha Mohan Singh. The minister said that the government also brought certain horticultural crops under the ambit of Fasal Bima Yojna ambit on an experimental basis.

Key Highlights

- The Government's Fasal Bima Yojna did not previously cover damages incurred to an individual or a limited number of cultivators during unprecedented localised events such as waterlogging, landslide and hailstorms.
- However, now under its new provisions, the protection scheme will cover all these events.
- The provisions of the crop insurance scheme were amended in consultation with various stakeholders and the amendments have been implemented from this month.
- The amended provisions also stipulate penalties in cases of delay in clearing the insurance claims for crop damages.

Provision of Penalties

- The Government has decided to incorporate the provision of penalties for States and Insurance Companies for the delay in settlement of insurance claims under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).
- Under the new provisions, the farmers will be paid 12 per cent interest by insurance companies for the delay in settlement claims beyond two months of prescribed cut-off date.
- The state governments will be required to pay 12 per cent interest for the delay in the release of the state share of subsidy beyond three months of prescribed cut-off date submission of requisition by insurance companies.
- The new provisions come at the onset of the rabi season, which starts from October 1.
- Besides, the new guidelines also detail a Standard Operating Procedure for evaluation of insurance companies and remove them from the scheme if found ineffective in providing services.
- The new operational guidelines address the current challenges faced while implementing the scheme by putting forth effective solutions.

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna

- The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna was launched on February 18, 2016 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- The scheme provides a comprehensive insurance cover to the farmers against the failure of the crop. Thus, it helps in stabilising the income of the farmers.
- The scheme covers all food & oilseeds crops and annual commercial and horticultural crops for which past yield data is available and for which requisite number of Crop Cutting Experiments (CCEs) are being conducted under General Crop Estimation Survey (GCES).
- The scheme is implemented by empanelled general insurance companies. The selection of Implementing Agency (IA) is done by the concerned state government through bidding.
- The scheme is compulsory for loanee farmers availing Crop Loan /KCC account for notified crops and voluntary for other others. The scheme is being administered by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Source: PIB, Business Standard

Union Government launches Award Scheme under 'Saubhagy'

- The Government recently 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.
- Eight States which have already achieved more than 99 percent household electrification prior to launch of Saubhagya scheme are ineligible for participation under the award scheme.
- These eight states are Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Punjab and Tamil Nadu.
- All the remaining States and their Discoms are eligible for the award.

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

- There will be two quantum of award in each of the three categories.
- Under first quantum of award, the 1st DISCOM or Power Department that achieves 100 percent household electrification by November 30, 2018 would be provided cash award of Rs 50 Lakh.
- The Principal Secretary (Power) of the State will distribute this cash prize amongst employees of the concerned DISCOM / Power Department.
- From this amount, Rs. 20 Lakh will be given to the division of DISCOM/Power Department with highest number of households electrified.
- from managing Director to Lineman.
- The second quantum of award includes cash award of Rs 100 crore as grant to the concerned DISCOM to be spent in distribution infrastructure development in their area of operation.
- Other DISCOMs or Power Department of the States that achieves 100 percent household electrification by December 31, 2018 would be provided certificate of appreciation for five officials of any level from Managing Director to Lineman.

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.

  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.
- 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: PIB

Government to create special fund to boost fish production by 2020

Why in news?

☞ The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently gave its approval for the creation of a special Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF).

Key Facts

- The fund size is estimated to be around Rs 7,522 crore, out of which around Rs 5,266.40 crore would be raised by the Nodal Loaning Entities (NLEs), Rs 1,316.6 crore through beneficiary's contribution and Rs 939.48 crore through budgetary support from the central government.
- The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), National Cooperatives Development Corporation (NCDC) and all scheduled Banks will be the nodal loaning entities.

Highlights

- The creation of the special fund will enable the creation of fisheries infrastructure facilities both in marine and inland fisheries sectors.
- It aims to boost fish production and help achieve the target of producing 15 million tonnes of fish by 2020, which was set under the Blue Revolution.
- It will also support the government's aim to achieve sustainable growth of 8 -9 per cent and thereafter take the fish production to the level of about 20 million tonnes by 2022-23.
- The fund will also boost employment opportunities for over 9.40 lakh fishermen and other entrepreneurs in fishing and allied activities.
- It will also attract private investment in the creation and management of fisheries infrastructure facilities.
- Further, it will encourage the adoption of new technologies in the fisheries sector.

Other Details

- The fund would provide concessional finance to the state governments, union territories and state entities, cooperatives, individuals and entrepreneurs, for taking up the identified investment activities of fisheries development.
- Under the fund, loan lending will be over a period of five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23 and maximum repayment will be over a period of 12 years inclusive of a moratorium of two years on repayment of principal.
- India's fish production is estimated at around 12 million tonnes annually.

Source: PIB, Business Standard

IBBI notifies IBBI (Mechanism for Issuing Regulations) Regulations, 2018

Why in news?

- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) on has recetly notified the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (Mechanism for Issuing Regulations) Regulations, 2018.
- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (Code) is a modern economic legislation. The Issuing Regulations are effective from October 22, 2018.
- The Section 240 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 empowers the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board to make regulations subject to the conditions that:

  (a) Regulations carry out the provisions of the Code

  (b) Regulations are consistent with the Code and the rules made there under

  (c) Regulations are made by a notification published in the official gazette

  (d) Regulations are laid, as soon as possible, before each House of Parliament for 30 days

Mechanisms for issuing regulations

- Section 196 (1) (s) of the Code requires the IBBI to specify mechanisms for issuing regulations, including the conduct of public consultation processes, before notification of regulations.
- Hence, the IBBI notified the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (Mechanism for Issuing Regulations) Regulations, 2018 (Issuing Regulations) to govern the process of making regulations.
- The Issuing Regulations provide that for the purpose of making or amending any regulations, the IBBI shall upload the following documents on its website for seeking comments from the public-
- Draft of proposed regulations
- Specific provision of the code under which the board proposes regulations
- A statement of the problem that the proposed regulation seeks to address
- An economic analysis of the proposed regulations
- A statement carrying norms advocated by international standard setting agencies and international best practices, if any, relevant to the proposed regulation
- The manner of implementation of the proposed regulations
- The manner, process and timelines for receiving comments from the public

Procedure to be followed post issuing notification of regulations

- The IBBI will now allow at least 21 days for public to submit their comments.
- It will consider the public comments received and upload the same on its website along with a general statement of its response on the comments, not later than the date of notification of regulations.
- If the Governing Board decides to approve regulations in a form substantially different from the proposed regulations, it will repeat the process under the Issuing Regulations.

- The regulations will be notified promptly after it is approved by the Governing Board and the date of their enforcement shall ordinarily be after thirty days from the date of notification.
- However, where the IBBI is of the opinion that certain regulations are required to be made or existing regulations are required to be amended urgently, it may make regulations or amend the existing regulations with the approval of the Governing Board, without following consultation.

Source: PIB

Ease of Doing Business Index 2019

Why in news?

☞ The World Bank on October 31, 2018 released the Doing Business Report 2019 titled as ***'Doing Business 2019: Training for Reform',*** assessing and ranking countries on the basis of ease of doing business in the year 2018.

Key Facts

- As per the 2019 Report, India jumped 23 places on the Ease of Doing Business Index to 77th rank, up from 100th rank last year.
- This year, India's Distance to Frontier score improved to 67.23 from 60.76 in the previous year.
- The Doing Business assesses 190 economies and covers 10 indicators which span the lifecycle of a business.
- It ranks countries on the basis of Distance to Frontier (DTF), a score that shows the gap of an economy to the global best practice.

India's progress in Ease of Doing Business Index

- 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.
- The most striking improvements have been registered in the indicators related to **'Construction Permits'** and **'Trading across Borders'**.

Six indicators where India improved its rank

S. No.	Indicator	2017	2018	Change
1	**Construction Permits**	181	52	+129
2	**Trading Across Borders**	146	80	+66
3	**Starting a Business**	156	137	+19
4	**Getting Credit**	29	22	+7
5	**Getting Electricity**	29	24	+5
6	**Enforcing Contracts**	164	163	+1
	Overall rank	100	77	+23

- India as one of the top improvers
- The World Bank has recognized India as one of the top improvers for the year. This is the second consecutive year for which India has been recognized as one of the top improvers.
- India is the first BRICS and South Asian country to be recognised as top improver in two consecutive years.
- India recorded the highest improvement in two years in the Doing business assessment by improving its rank by 53 positions.
- India is now placed at first position among South Asian countries as against 6th in 2014. **Comparison** India's improvement in the Ease of Doing Business ranking is significant considering that in 2017 as well, India had improved its rank by 30 places by being placed at 100th rank, a rare feat a diverse country like India.
- The continued efforts of the Government have led to India's improved rank by 53 positions in last two years and by 65 positions in last four years. **Year 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, Overall rank** 142, 130, 100, 77, **DTF score** 53.97, 56.05, 60.76, 67.23.
- Such an improvement is accredited to commitment of the Government to carry out comprehensive and complex reforms. The government identified corrective measures based on feedback received and undertook regular review of reforms for removing bottlenecks in their implementation.

Key Findings of 2019 Doing Business Report

- Doing Business took note of record 314 regulatory reforms introduced by 128 countries between June 2, 2017, and May 1, 2018 for making it easier to do business in all areas measured by Doing Business.
- The top 10 economies in the ease of doing business rankings are New Zealand, Singapore, Denmark, Hong Kong SAR, Korea, Georgia, Norway, United States, United Kingdom and FYR Macedonia.
- The economies with the most notable improvement in Doing Business 2019 are Afghanistan, Djibouti, China, Azerbaijan, India, Togo, Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, Turkey and Rwanda.
- Around one-third of all business regulatory reforms recorded by Doing Business 2019 were in the economies of Sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa implemented a total of 107 reforms.
- Brazil, Russia, India and China, the BRICS economies, introduced a total of 21 reforms, with getting electricity and trading across borders the most common areas of improvement.
- The 10 top economies in the ranking share common features of regulatory efficiency and quality including mandatory inspections during construction, automated tools used by distribution utilities to restore service during power outages and automated specialised commercial courts.
- Training opportunities for service providers and users are positively associated with the ease of doing business score.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

WEF's Global Competitiveness Index 2018: US tops; India ranked 58th

Why in news?

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) has recently released the Global Competitiveness Report 2018. The report publishes the Global Competitiveness Index, ranking 140 countries on the basis of 98 indicators organised into 12 pillars.
- These 12 pillars are Institutions; Infrastructure; ICT adoption; Macroeconomic stability; Health; Skills; Product market; Labour market; Financial system; Market size; Business dynamism; and Innovation capability.

India's rank on the Global Competitiveness Index 4.0

- India was ranked as the 58th most competitive economy with a score of 62.0 on the Global Competitiveness Index 2018. India jumped five spots from 2017, the largest gain among G20 economies.
- As per the report, India leads the region in all other areas of competitiveness except for health, education and skills. As per the report, India's greatest competitive advantages include its market size and innovation.
- India ranked highest among South Asian countries. Sri Lanka was ranked 86th, Bangladesh 103rd, Pakistan 107th and Nepal 109th.

Key Highlights

- The report states that the global economy is projected to grow nearly 4 percent in 2018 and 2019.
- On the list of 140 economies, the **United States topped the list** with a score of 85.6, followed by Singapore and Germany at the second and the third positions respectively.
- Other countries in the **top 10** include Switzerland (4th), Japan (5th), Netherlands (6th), Hong Kong (7th), United Kingdom (8th), Sweden (9th) and Denmark (10th).
- In **Europe**, Sweden is ranked the highest among the Nordic economies at 9th position, while France (17th) is among the top 20. Countries such as Germany and Switzerland set the global standards for innovation.
- Chile (33rd) leads the **Latin America and the Caribbean region** by a wide margin, ahead of Mexico (46th) and Uruguay (53rd). Insecurity and weak institutions are two of the biggest challenges for most countries in the region.
- Competitiveness performance in the **Middle East and North Africa** remains diverse, with Israel (20th) and the United Arab Emirates (27th), leading the way in their respective regions.
- 17of the 34 **sub-Saharan African** economies are among the bottom 20. Mauritius (49th) leads the region, ahead of South Africa and nearly 91 places ahead of Chad (140th).
- India remained the "**South Asia**'s main driving force" with 58th rank.
- Among the **BRICS** economies, China topped the list at 28th place with a score of 72.6, followed by Russia, India, South Africa and Brazil respectively.

Global Competitiveness Index 4.0

- The 2018 edition of the Global Competitiveness Report introduced the new Global Competitiveness Index 4.0 (GCI 4.0). The new index sheds light on an emerging set of drivers of productivity and long-term growth in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- The GCI 4.0 provides novel insights on four factors that will grow in significance as the Fourth Industrial Revolution gathers pace. These four factors are human capital, innovation, resilience and agility.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

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Environment and Ecology

PM inaugurates first assembly of International Solar Alliance

Why in news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 2, 2018 inaugurated the first Assembly of the International Solar Alliance at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi in the presence of the United Nations' Secretary General Antonio Guterres.
- The same event saw the inauguration of the **second IORA Renewable Energy Ministerial Meeting** and the **2nd Global RE-Invest** (Renewable Energy Investors' Meet and Expo).

What is the significance?

- The International Solar Alliance could replace OPEC as the key global energy supplier in the future.
- Effect of increased use of renewable energy is now visible in India.
- India is working towards the goals of the Paris Agreement through an action plan.
- The target is to generate 40 percent of India's total energy requirements in 2030 by non fossil fuel based sources.
- India is developing with a new self-confidence of "Poverty to Power."
- Besides solar and wind power, India is working on biomass, biofuel and bio-energy.
- Modi announced the launch of the National Energy Storage Mission that will look at manufacturing, deployment, technology development and policy framework.

International Solar Alliance (ISA)

- International Solar Alliance (ISA) is an alliance of 121 solar resource rich countries, lying fully or partially between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.
- ISA was jointly launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the then President of France, Francois Hollande on November 30, 2015 in Paris on the side-lines of the 21st Conference of Parties (CoP 21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- The ISA Framework Agreement was opened for signature on November 15, 2016 in Marrakech, Morocco on the side-lines of CoP-22.
- ISA became the first full-fledged treaty based international intergovernmental organization headquartered in India on December 6, 2017, in conformity with the ISA Framework Agreement and 30 days after ratification by the 15th country, Guinea.
- The Governing Structure of the ISA consists of an Assembly, a Council and a Secretariat. The ISA Assembly provides guidance, direction and advice to the Secretariat for undertaking the activities.
- ISA has presently four ongoing programmes: Scaling Solar Applications for Agricultural Use, Affordable Finance at Scale, Scaling Solar Mini Grids and Scaling Solar Rooftop catering to the needs of solar energy in specific areas.
- Agreement of the ISA. 47 of these countries have ratified the ISA treaty.

Source: The Hindu

CII, UN Environment sign MoU for environmental cooperation

Why in news?

- The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) on October 4, 2018 signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the UN Environment for coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development.
- The agreement was signed by Director-General of CII, Chandrajit Banerji and Executive Director at UN Environment, Erik Solheim at CII's headquarters in Delhi.

Key Highlights

- The agreement aims to cover all major areas of interest common to both CII and UN Environment.
- It aims to provide a framework of cooperation and facilitate cooperation in areas including environment, climate change, renewable energy, energy efficiency, resource conservation and management, water sanitation, smart cities and urban infrastructure.
- The major activity planned under the agreement includes the #Un-plastic Initiative of the CII and UN Environment that will begin with a 'Call to Action', which will include commitments by the industry to take action to curb plastic pollution.
- Further, the CII will work towards voluntary codes in Indian industry on the issue of plastics. Outside India, the CII will engage with industry forums it is linked to in different countries, especially in Africa through its annual CII-Africa Conclave.

Significance

- The initiative builds upon the momentum generated on the World Environment Day, 2018, whose theme was, 'Beat Plastic Pollution'.
- It is also in sync with the pledge undertaken by India earlier this year to eliminate all single-use plastic in the country by 2022. The single-use plastic includes items such as plastic cutlery, plastic straws and plastic bags.
- The pledge is the most ambitious of the global actions to combat plastic pollution that are taking place in 60 nations around the world. The move aims to drastically stem the flow of plastic from the 1.3 billion people living in the fastest growing economy in the world.

The Way Ahead

- Plastic pollution has been found across the globe, from the most remote oceanic islands to the more popular ones.
- As a result of it, millions of tonnes of plastic enter the seas each year, choking the marine life, most of it in Asia.
- On the occasion of the World Environment Day, India announced that it would be joining the UN's clean seas campaign, which will establish programmes to monitor and tackle pollution along the country's 7,500km coastline.
- India also announced a national marine litter action campaign and a programme to measure how much plastic enters India's coastal waters.
- Besides this, India has also pledged to make 100 national monuments including the Taj Mahal, litter-free.

Source: The Hindu

International Day for Disaster Reduction 2018

Why in news?

- The International Day for Disaster Reduction was observed across the world on October 13, 2018 to promote a global culture of risk-awareness and disaster reduction.
- The day celebrated how people and communities around the world are reducing their exposure to disasters and raising awareness about the risks associated with them.

Theme

- The theme of the 2018 International Day for Disaster Reduction was *'Reducing Disaster Economic Losses'*.
- The 2018 theme continues as part of the "Sendai Seven" campaign, centred on the seven targets of the Sendai Framework. This year focuses on Target C of the Sendai Framework, which is, 'reducing disaster economic losses in relation to global GDP by 2030'.

Sendai Seven Campaign

- In 2016, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) launched the Sendai Seven campaign, which was centred on the seven targets of the Sendai Framework.
- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 is the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda, with seven targets and four priorities for action.
- The campaign seeks to create a wave of awareness about actions taken to reduce mortality around the world.
- The campaign is an opportunity for all, including governments, local governments, international organisations, the private sector and the UN family to promote best practices at the international, regional and national level across all sectors, in order to reduce disaster risk and disaster losses.

Seven targets of Sendai Framework

- Substantially reduce global disaster mortality by 2030
- Substantially reduce the number of affected people globally by 2030
- Reduce direct disaster economic loss in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2030
- Substantially reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services by 2030
- Substantially increase the number of countries with disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020
- Substantially enhance international cooperation to developing countries by 2030
- Substantially increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems by 2030.

When was the day proclaimed?

- In 1989, the UN General Assembly through a resolution had designated the second Wednesday of October as International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction.
- Later on December 21, 2009, the Assembly adopted a new resolution on in which it designated 13 October as the date to commemorate the Day and it also changed the day's name to International Day for Disaster Reduction.
- The main objective of the observance is to raise awareness of how people are taking action to reduce their risk to disasters.

Source: The Hindu

Break Free From Plastic Movement: Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Nestle found to be worst plastic polluters

Why in news?

- The 'Break Free From Plastic Movement' on October 9, 2018 revealed that Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Nestle are among the companies that contribute most to ocean pollution with single-use plastics.
- As per the study, Coca-Cola, Pepsi and Nestle were the most frequent companies in contributing to ocean pollution, identified in 239 cleanups and brand audits spanning 42 countries and six continents.

Key highlights

- Between September 9 and 15, 2018, over 10000 volunteers carried out 239 plastic cleaning actions on coasts and other natural environments in 42 countries.
- Over 187,000 pieces of plastic trash were audited, identifying thousands of brands which package their products in the single-use plastics that pollute oceans and waterways globally.
- Coca-Cola was the top polluter in the global audit. The organisation discovered Coke-branded plastic used bottles in 40 of the 42 participating countries.
- The audit found that Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestle, Danone, Mondelez International, Procter & Gamble, Unilever, Perfetti van Melle, Mars Incorporated, and Colgate-Palmolive were the most frequent multinational brands collected in cleanups.
- These brands were found in at least ten of the 42 participating countries.
- Overall, polystyrene, which is not recyclable in most locations, was the most common type of plastic found, followed closely by PET, a material used in bottles, containers, and other packaging.

Region-wise highlights

- The top polluters in Asia were Coca-Cola, Perfetti van Melle and Mondelez International brands. These brands accounted for 30 percent of all branded plastic pollution counted by volunteers across Asia.
- In **Asia** a week-long cleanup and audit at the Philippines' Freedom Island in 2017 discovered that Nestle and Unilever are the top polluters.
- In **North and South America**, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Nestle brands were the top polluters identified, accounting for 64 and 70 percent of all the branded plastic pollution, respectively.

- In **Latin America,** brand audits put responsibility on the companies that produce useless plastics and the governments that allow corporations to place the burden from extraction to disposal.
- In **Europe,** Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Nestle brands were again the top identified polluters, accounting for 45 percent of the plastic pollution found in the audits there.
- In **Australia**, 7-Eleven, Coca-Cola, and McDonald's brands were the top polluters identified, accounting for 82 percent of the plastic pollution found.
- In **Africa**, ASAS Group, Coca-Cola, and Procter & Gamble brands were the top brands collected, accounting for 74 percent of the plastic pollution there.

Facts on Plastic Pollution

- Every year, world uses 500 billion plastic bags and at least 8 million tonnes of plastic end up in the oceans, the equivalent of a full garbage truck every minute.
- 50 percent of the plastic we use is single-use or disposable plastic.
- Over 1 million plastic bottles are purchased in every one minute.
- Plastic makes up 10 per cent of all of the waste generated in the world.

What is Break Free From Plastic Movement?

- The 'Break Free From Plastic Movement' is a global movement that envisions a future free from plastic pollution.
- The movement was launched in September 2016 with nearly 1300 international organisations joining the movement to demand massive reductions in single-use plastics and to push for lasting solutions to the plastic pollution crisis.
- These organisations share the common values of environmental protection and social justice

Source: The Hindu

Global temperature could exceed 1.5°C in just 12 years: UN report

Why in news?

☞ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) approved a Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C on October 6, 2018 at Incheon, South Korea.

Key Facts

- In the new assessment, IPCC issued its the most extensive warning on the risks of rising global temperatures and said that limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society.
- The special report titled 'Global Warming of 1.5°C' traces the impact of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.
- The report says that going past 1.5°C is dicing with the planet's liveability and the temperature could be exceeded in just 12 years, by 2030.
- The IPCC released their report after three years of research and a week of intense debate between scientists and government officials.
- The report will be a key scientific input into the Katowice Climate Change Conference in Poland in December 2018, when governments review the Paris Agreement to tackle climate change.

Objective

- The special report states that the world is completely off track from achieving its climate goal and is instead heading towards an increase of 3 degree Celsius.
- It highly emphasises on limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial level. One of its key messages is that the world is already seeing the consequences of 1°C of global warming through more extreme weather, rising sea levels and diminishing Arctic sea ice.

Highlights of the Report

- Human activities are estimated to have caused approximately 1.0°C of global warming5 above pre-industrial levels, with a likely range of 0.8°C to 1.2°C. Global warming is likely to reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052 if it continues to increase at the current rate.
- Warming from anthropogenic emissions including greenhouse gases and aerosols from the pre-industrial period to the present will continue to cause further long-term changes in the climate system, such as sea level rise, with associated impacts, but these emissions alone are unlikely to cause global warming of 1.5°C
- Climate-related risks for natural and human systems are higher for global warming of 1.5°C than at present but lower than at 2° C. These risks depend on the magnitude and rate of warming, geographic location, levels of development and vulnerability and on the choices and implementation of adaptation and mitigation options
- The climate models project robust differences in regional climate characteristics between present-day and global warming of 1.5°C and between 1.5°C and 2°C. The differences include increases in mean temperature in most land and ocean regions, hot extremes in most inhabited regions, heavy precipitation in several regions and the probability of drought and precipitation deficits in some regions.
- By 2100, the global mean sea level rise is projected to be around 0.1 metre lower with global warming of 1.5°C compared to 2°C and the sea level will continue to rise well beyond 2100 and the magnitude and rate of this rise will depend on future emission pathways.
- On land, the impact on biodiversity and ecosystems, including species loss and extinction, is projected to be lower at 1.5°C of global warming compared to 2°C.

How to limit global warming to 1.5°C?

- The report finds that limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require rapid and far-reaching transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport and cities.
- It notes that limiting global warming to 1.5°C is possible within the laws of chemistry and physics but doing so would require unprecedented changes.
- It states that to achieve this, global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide (CO_2) would need to fall by about 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching 'net zero' around 2050.
- This means that any remaining emissions would need to be balanced by removing CO_2 from the air.

- On the other hand, allowing the global temperature to temporarily exceed or 'overshoot' 1.5°C would mean a greater reliance on techniques that remove CO2 from the air to return global temperature to below 1.5°C by 2100.
- The report, however, noted that the effectiveness of such techniques are unproven at a large scale and some may carry significant risks for sustainable development.
- Limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared with 2°C would reduce challenging impacts on ecosystems, human health and well-being, making it easier to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Source: The Hindu

Sikkim wins FAO's Future Policy Award 2018 for being world's first 100 percent organic state

Why in news?

☞ North-eastern state Sikkim has won the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) Future Policy Award 2018 for being the world's first 100 percent organic state.

Key Facts

- Sikkim defeated 51 nominated policies from 25 countries, winning the Gold Prize of the Future Policy Award 2018, also known as "Oscar for Best Policies".
- Moreover, Future Policy Award's Silver Prize 2018 was awarded to the policies from Brazil, Denmark and Quito (Ecuador).

Sikkim's policy and achievement

- Sikkim implemented a phase out policy of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and achieved a total ban on sale and use of chemical pesticides in the state.
- The transition benefitted more than 66000 farming families.
- Sikkim tourism sector got benefitted greatly from the state's transition to 100 percent organic as the number of tourists increased by over 50 percent between 2014 and 2017.

Future Policy Award's Silver Prize 2018

- **Brazil's National Policy for Agroecology and Organic Production** (PNAPO, 2012) helped 5300 municipalities to invest 30 percent or more of their school feeding budgets in organic and agroecological products purchased from family farmers.
- **Denmark's Organic Action Plan** (2011-2020, updated in 2015) has helped Denmark in having the highest market share of organic products in the world, with almost 80 percent of Danes purchasing organic food.
- **Quito's Participatory Urban Agriculture Programme** (AGRUPAR, 2002) led to the growth of over 3 600 urban gardens on 32 hectares. More than 21000 people got trained under the programme.

Other awards

- The Vision Award 2018 of the FAO was conferred upon the **TEEBAgriFood**, an initiative of "The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity" (TEEB) by UN Environment. TEEBAgriFood developed a comprehensive evaluation framework for food systems to value food more accurately.
- The three **Honourable Mentions** of the Future Policy Award 2018 went to the Good Food Purchasing Policy of Los Angeles, USA (2012); the Agriculture Development Programme of Ndiob, Senegal (2017); and to the From Arms to Farms Programme of Kauswagan, the Philippines (2011).

The Future Policy Award 2018: Topic and Organisers

- Every year, the World Future Council chooses a topic for the Future Policy Award on which policy progress is particularly urgent.
- The world's best laws and policies promoting agroecology were awarded the 2018 Future Policy Award.
- The 2018 Award highlighted policies that scale up agroecology to contribute to the protection of life of small-scale food producers, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement climate resilient agricultural practices.
- This year's award was co-organised by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Future Council (WFC) and IFOAM – Organics International.
- The award was supported by Green Cross International; DO-IT – Dutch Organic International Trade, Sekem Group, Egypt; and EcorNaturaSi, Italy.

Source: Business Standard

ICFRE signs two MoUs to spread awareness on forests and environment

Why in news?

- The Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Dehradun recently signed two Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS) and Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS).

Key Facts

- The agreements were signed to launch 'Prakriti' programme, which aims to promote awareness about forests and environment and stimulate interest among the students of NVS and KVS in maintaining a balanced environment and for acquiring skills that reflect care and protection towards forests, environment and society.
- The main objective behind the agreements is to provide a platform for the school children to learn practical skills towards sustainable use of the resources.

Highlights

- The two agreements have been signed for a period of 10 years. They aim to make the Indian youth more sensitive towards national and global issues of environment and thus, help them become responsible citizens.
- The agreements also aim to mobilise a cadre of youth for raising a peoples' movement, which is committed to the conservation of forest and environment.
- The collaboration will enable transfer of knowledge to students and teachers of NVS and KVS on environment, forest, environmental services and contemporary areas of forestry research through lectures and interactive sessions by ICFRE scientists.
- Under the agreement, visits of students and teachers of NVS and KVS schools will also be arranged to the field and laboratories of ICFRE institutes for a first-hand experience.

About ICFRE

- The Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) is an autonomous council under the Union Environment Ministry.
- The council mainly guides, promotes and coordinates forestry research, extension and education at the national level through its nine institutes and five centres located across the country.
- Presently, the council's activities are focused on contemporary issues of national and international importance particularly in the areas of climate change, forest productivity, biodiversity conservation and skill development.

Source: Business Standard

No sale of Bharat Stage-IV vehicles across the country from April 1, 2020

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court has recently ruled that no Bharat Stage-IV vehicle shall be sold across the country with effect from April 1, 2020. The Bharat Stage VI (BS-VI) emission norm would come into force from April 1, 2020 across the country.
- The ruling was made by a three-judge bench headed by Justice Madan B Lokur. The bench clarified that only BS-VI compliant vehicle will be sold in India from April 1, 2020.

No grace period for automobile manufacturers beyond April 2020

- The court ruled for no grace period for automobile manufacturers for the sale of BS-VI non-compliant vehicles after April 1, 2020.
- Earlier, advocate Aparajita Singh, assisting the apex court as amicus curiae, had opposed the Union Government's move to give time till June 30, 2020 to automobile manufacturers to sell their BS-VI non-compliant four-wheelers manufactured till March 31, 2020.
- Singh also opposed the government's proposal to give grace period till September 30, 2020 for the sale of BS-VI non-compliant heavy transport vehicles.
- However, the automobile manufacturers justified the grace period to sell their vehicles contending that India was switching from BS-IV emission norms to BS-VI within a short span of time and they should be granted reasonable time to sell their stock.

Why BS-VI grade fuel?

- The Bharat stage emission standards were instituted by the Government to regulate the output of air pollutants from motor vehicles. The BS-IV norms were in force across the country since April 2017.
- In 2016, the Union Government decided to switch over to BS-VI grade fuel directly from BS-IV skipping BS-V, after Environment Pollution Control Authority in its April 2017 report told the apex court that only BS-VI emission standards complaint vehicles should be allowed to be sold from April 1, 2020.
- India had switched over to BS-IV grade fuel in April 1, 2017 following the directions of the court banning BS-III grade fuel.

What are Bharat Stage norms?

- Bharat Stage emission standards were introduced in 2000 in line with recommendations made by RA Mashelkar Committee.
- These emission standards were set up by the Union Government to regulate the output of air pollutants from internal combustion engine equipment, including motor vehicles.
- The different norms are brought into force in accordance with the timeline and standards set up by the Central Pollution Control Board which comes under the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change.
- The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) in its 'The Auto Fuel Policy 2003' had recommended implementing BS-VI norms by 2023 by compressing the technology development time by one year.

Source: The Hindu

Environment Ministry launches Harit Diwali, Swasth Diwali campaign

Why in news?

- The Union Ministry of Environment has launched Harit Diwali, Swasth Diwali campaign. The campaign was first launched in 2017-18 to encourage school children in Delhi and NCR to take the pledge to ensure a green and healthy Diwali by minimising the bursting of crackers.
- The Environment Ministry has initiated the campaign on the similar lines this year but extended it to include pan-India.

Key Highlights

- In 2017, a large number of school children especially from eco-clubs participated and took a pledge to minimise bursting of crackers and discourage others including their neighbours and friends from bursting of crackers.
- During the intensive campaign, the children were advised to celebrate Diwali in an environment-friendly manner by gifting plant sapling to their relatives and friends along with sweets and undertake cleaning of houses, neighbourhoods, schools, collect old books and unused notebooks gift to needy children, donate old warm clothing, blankets to night-shelters and other homeless people.

- The children were also encouraged to light up their houses and their schools with candles and diyas.
- The campaign was extremely successful and the air quality had not deteriorated post-Diwali in 2017 unlike what was experienced in 2016.
- This year the campaign has been extended Pan-India. The Harit Diwali-Swasth Diwali campaign is now merged with 'Green Good Deed' movement that has been initiated for the conservation and protection of the environment.
- The Ministry is encouraging all schools and colleges to be part of this campaign.

Air pollution: Hazards

- Air pollution is a serious health issue in the country especially in the northern parts during winter seasons.
- It is attributed to dust, burning of crops in certain states, burning of garbage construction and prevailing climatic conditions.
- The pollution has serious impacts on the health of children, aged people and people suffering from respiratory ailments.
- The festival of Diwali, which is celebrated by most people through the practice of bursting crackers, falls during the same period.
- The crackers not only contain combustible chemicals that include potassium chlorate powdered aluminum, magnesium, salts of barium, copper, sodium, lithium, strontium but also emit smoke on combustion of these chemicals along with the sound.
- As a result, there has been a significant impact on the environment and health of the people and animal and birds.
- The airborne pollution has also been rising above safe limits during winter in many cities.
- The pollution levels in Delhi in 2016, especially post Diwali, reached such levels that the government had to declare an emergency situation, which had socio-economic consequences like closing down of schools, construction sites and power stations.

Source: The Hindu

Seychelles launches world's first sovereign Blue Bond

Why in news?

☞ The Republic of Seychelles has recently launched the world's first Sovereign Blue Bond, a financial instrument designed to support sustainable marine and fisheries projects.

Key Facts

- The bond raised USD 15 million from international investors. The bond demonstrates the potential for countries to harness capital markets for financing the sustainable use of marine resources.
- With this, Seychelles became the first nation to pioneer such a novel financing instrument.

The World Bank assisted in developing the Blue Bond and helped the country in reaching out to the three investors:

- Calvert Impact Capital
- Nuveen
- U.S. Headquartered Prudential Financial Inc.

Highlights of the Blue Bond

- The Blue Bond is a part of an initiative that combines public and private investment to mobilise resources for empowering local communities and businesses.
- Proceeds from the bond will be utilized for the expansion of marine protected areas, improved governance of priority fisheries and the development of the Seychelles' blue economy.
- Proceeds from the bond will also contribute to the World Bank's South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Governance and Shared Growth Program, which supports countries in the region to sustainably manage their fisheries and increase economic benefits from their fisheries sectors.
- Grants will be provided through the Blue Grants Fund and will be managed by the Seychelles' Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT)
- Loans will be provided through the Blue Investment Fund and will be managed by the Development Bank of Seychelles (DBS).
- It will greatly assist Seychelles in achieving a transition to sustainable fisheries and safeguarding oceans.
- The Seychelles blue bond is partially guaranteed by a USD 5 million guarantee from the **World Bank (IBRD)** and is further supported by a USD 5 million concessional loans from the **Global Environment Facility (GEF)** which will partially cover interest payments for the bond.
- A World Bank team comprising experts from its Treasury, Legal, Environmental and Finance groups worked with investors in structuring the blue bond.
- The business case for a sovereign blue bond was initially identified through support to Seychelles from **HRH Prince of Wales' Charities International Sustainability Unit**.
- **Standard Chartered** acted as placement agent for the bond and Latham & Watkins LLP advised the World Bank as external counsel.
- **Clifford Chance LLP** acted as transaction counsel for the bond.

Seychelles and its rich marine resources

- The Seychelles is an archipelagic nation consisting of 115 granite and coral islands in the Indian Ocean, off East Africa. It is home to numerous beaches, coral reefs and nature reserves as well as rare animals such as giant Aldabra tortoises.
- As one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, Seychelles is balancing the need to develop economically and protect its natural resources. After tourism, the fisheries sector is the most important industry in the country, contributing significantly to annual GDP and employing 17 percent of the population.

Source: Business Standard

Supreme Court prohibits plying of 15-year-old petrol, 10-year-old diesel vehicles in Delhi-NCR

Why in news?

☛ The Supreme Court has prohibited the plying of 15-year-old petrol and 10-year-old diesel vehicles in the Delhi-NCR (national capital region) in a move to deal with the prevailing "very critical" and "horrible" pollution situation in Delhi-NCR.

The Highlights

- The apex court directed that a list of 15-year-old petrol and 10-year-old diesel vehicles will be published on the website of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and transport departments of the NCR area.
- The bench directed the CPCB to immediately create a social media account on which citizens could lodge their complaint about pollution directly, which will be acted upon by the task force responsible for implementation of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP).
- It permitted the court-mandated Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA) to take preventive measures under the **Graded Response Action Plan** without strict adherence to pollution stages defined in the plan.
- The Transport Departments of NCR will immediately announce that all the diesel vehicles more than 10 years old and petrol vehicles more than 15 years old shall not ply in NCR in terms of the order of the National Green Tribunal dated April 7, 2015 that was challenged in the court and the civil appeal was dismissed.

Graded Response Action Plan

- The Graded Response Action Plan is aimed at tackling air pollution in Delhi-NCR and adjoining areas and it is designed to take urgent corrective action, when air quality declines.
- First of its kind, the Plan envisages to roll out a host of emergency measures like the closure of power plants and schools.
- It also includes issue of advisories asking people to avoid polluted areas and restrict outdoor movement.

NGT order dated April 7, 2015

- National Green Tribunal (NGT) on April 7, 2015 banned plying of 15-year-old petrol, 10-year-old diesel vehicles in Delhi-NCR.
- It asked the governments and concerned agencies to ensure within 20 hours that all entry points have units to check pollution levels, weight and age of vehicle. The ruling was given by a bench headed by NGT chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar.

Source: The Hindu

NMCG approves 12 projects worth Rs 929 crore under Namami Gange programme

Why in news?

- The Executive Committee (EC) of the National Mission for Clean Ganga on October 29, 2018 approved 12 projects worth Rs 929 crore under the Namami Gange programme in its 16th meeting.
- The committee sanctioned two sewage treatment plants for Delhi, various projects for Uttar Pradesh, two projects for West Bengal, and two projects under CSR category.

Two Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) for Delhi

- The committee sanctioned two Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) for Delhi for creating 340 MLD (Millions of Liters per Day) waste treatment capacity at a cost of Rs 580 Crore.
- The first STP will be of 318 MLD capacities at Coronation Pillar.
- The second is a project in Chattarpur assembly constituency where various sewage pumping stations and 9 STPs of total 22.5 MLD capacity will be constructed.
- Sewage flow will be collected and pumped to STPs for treatment.
- The treated water will be used for development and rejuvenation of eight nearby water bodies and for irrigation purpose.
- The Central Government will fund Rs 256 Crore for the project.

Uttar Pradesh

- The Committee approved various projects for Uttar Pradesh at a total cost of Rs 128 crore.
- The Common Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) in Mathura Industrial Area of 6.25 MLD capacity for textile printing units will be upgraded.
- The Rampur Drain in Rampur will be treated using the NSN-Technology based Bio Oxygenation.
- Treatment of 30 drains and third party inspection of 123 drains in the state was also approved.
- For inspection and monitoring of industries, STPs and CETPs by third party technical institutions, Rs 0.98 Cr has been sanctioned for strengthening of UP Pollution Control laboratories to enable UP Pollution Control Board to monitor and inspect all Grossly Polluting Industries, STP & CETPs.

West Bengal

- For West Bengal, the committee sanctioned two projects at a cost of Rs 50 crore.
- One project was approved for upgrading the STP in Kancharapara from 13 MLD to 18 MLD capacity, along with its operation and maintenance for the next 15 years.
- Another project was sanctioned for Hilsa fisheries improvement at Farraka barrage. Implementation of this project will increase the natural stock of Hilsa in the river Ganga. The project will also study and monitor Hilsa migration across the Farakka barrage in the main river Ganga.

Projects sanctioned under CSR category

- Under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) category, the committee sanctioned two more projects that will be funded by corporate groups.
- INDORAMA Charitable Trust will fund the Ghat and Crematoria Work at Badrinath and Gangotri in Uttarakhand at a cost of Rs 26.33 crore.
- Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) will take up renovation and beautification of Ganga River Bank at Katwa, West Bengal at a cost of Rs 0.35 crore.

Source: The Hindu, PIB

Green fund approves $1 billion to assist poor countries to tackle climate change

Why in news?

Green Climate Fund, the UN-backed fund has approved more than $1 billion for 19 new projects to help developing countries tackle climate change. The decision was taken during a four-day meeting in Manama, Bahrain that ended late on October 20, 2018.

Key Facts

- The officials overseeing the Climate Fund also agreed to start seeking fresh money next year as its initial capital of about $6.6 billion will soon be used up.
- The green fund, considered a key vehicle for climate-related development programs, was originally meant to receive over $10 billion from rich countries by 2018.
- However, US President Donald Trump's decision to withhold $2 billion of the $3 billion pledged by his predecessor, Barack Obama, has contributed to a shortfall in its projected assets.
- The funding was approved for projects linked to geothermal energy in Indonesia, greener cities in Europe and the Middle East and protection for coastal communities in India.
- Besides this, host nation Bahrain put forward a request to approve funding for a project aimed at protecting its freshwater resources.
- The request led to a debate between the delegates present, in which the environmentalists pointed out that the Gulf nation could pay for the project itself using the money it has made off its vast reserves of oil and gas.
- The contested project was eventually approved, but with only $2.1 million of the $9.8 million requested by Bahrain.
- In other decisions, the decision on a funding bid by China was postponed after concerns' from Japan and the United States about the possibility that the money could be used to subsidise research into new technology.

Background

- The debates within the Green Climate Fund have often split Western countries and large emerging economies such as China, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.
- The fund's former director, Howard Bamsey, resigned in July 2018 after a "very difficult and disappointing" meeting.
- The recent meeting has taken place weeks before a summit in Katowice, Poland, on the future of the 2015 Paris climate accord.
- The meeting is also expected to be centred on funding to help developing countries mitigate and adapt to global warming.

About Green Climate Fund

- The Fund is a unique global platform to respond to climate change by investing in low-emission and climate-resilient development.
- It was established to limit or reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in developing countries and to help vulnerable societies adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.
- Given the urgency and seriousness of this challenge, the Fund is mandated to make an ambitious contribution to the united global response to climate change.

Source: Economic Times

Government launches air quality warning system in Delhi to combat air pollution

Why in news?

☞ The Union Environment Ministry recently unveiled an air quality early warning system for the Delhi region. The system has been designed with the help of American and Finnish models to predict extreme air pollution levels.

Objective

- The system has been launched by the Union Government in Delhi, keeping in view the city's deteriorating air quality. An associated website has also been launched along with it.
- The system will help combat air pollution in the National Capital by getting information 2-5 days in advance. It will also give signs for necessary actions.

Key Highlights

- The system called - **Air Quality Early Warning System** - will have an in-built web-based dissemination tool to inform public and enforcement agencies about episodic high pollution events in advance. Such information may be helpful for the general public in planning their outdoor activities.
- The system will also make it easier for government's pollution watchdogs to alert stakeholders and the general public about air quality 48 hours in advance. The move will give them adequate time to take precautionary measures.
- The system has been jointly developed by the scientists of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) Pune, National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting, Noida and India Meteorological Department (IMD).
- Besides this, the Central Pollution Control Board has constituted a 41 member-team, which will continuously monitor the air pollution levels and report to the board.

Air Quality Index

- The air quality in New Delhi was 204 on October 14, 2018. The city's air quality usually breaches the 'severe' zone, when the AQI reading shoots up to five times above the safe limit, in November.
- On November 9, 2017, AQI shot up to 486 on a scale of 0-500, underscoring conditions that prompted the Delhi government to declare a public health emergency and describe Delhi as a 'gas chamber'.

AQI	Remark	Color Code	Possible Health Impacts
0-50	Good		Minimal impact
51-100	Satisfactory		Minor breathing discomfort to sensitive people
101-200	Moderate		Breathing discomfort to the people with lungs, asthma and heart diseases
201-300	Poor		Breathing discomfort to most people on prolonged exposure
301-400	Very Poor		Respiratory illness on prolonged exposure
401-500	Severe		Affects healthy people and seriously impacts those with existing diseases

Measures taken to reduce air pollution in Delhi

- According to the Union Government, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPBC) is proactively doing research in adjoining areas and sending reports of affected places to the concerned department. The government is also taking steps to reduce emission from vehicles.
- The Delhi Government also rolled out its emergency action plan - Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) for the second year in a row on October 15.
- The plan, which was first implemented in 2017, aims to fight 'very poor' and 'severe' air pollution level.
- Under the emergency action plan, stringent measures will be implemented such as a ban on diesel generator (DG) sets in Delhi.
- If the air quality deteriorates further and reaches the 'severe' or 'emergency' categories, other stringent measures including the ban on construction activities, ban on stone crushers and hot mix plants, enhancing parking fees and rolling out the odd-even road rationing scheme will be implemented.
- The measures listed under GRAP to control 'moderate' and 'poor' levels of pollution are generally enforced in the summer and monsoon months and measures to control 'very poor' and 'severe' categories of pollution will be enforced from October 15 to March 15 of the following year.
- The move comes at a time when the city has already encountered nine days of 'poor' air quality in the first two weeks of October.
- In November 2017, schools were shut when air quality turned 'severe' for more than a week.

Background

- In May, Delhi was declared the world's most polluted city, according to the air quality data compiled by the World Health Organisation (WHO) for megacities with a population of 14 million or more.
- While Greater Cairo in Egypt was adjudged the second most polluted city, Bangladesh's capital Dhaka was placed third, Mumbai fourth and Beijing fifth.
- However, new measures including the installation of the early warning system in the capital have helped it become better equipped to fight air pollution in 2018.

Source: The Hindu

Science and Technology, Defense, Health

Analytical Report of National Health Profile 2018

Why in news?

☞ The Government has recently released an Analytical Report of the National Health Profile 2018. This is the 12th edition of the health profile.

Key Facts

- The report was prepared by the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence (CBHI), under the aegis of the Directorate General of Health Services. CBHI has been publishing National Health Profile every year since 2005.
- The National Health Profile 2018 covers demographic, socio-economic, health status and health finance indicators, along with comprehensive information on health infrastructure and human resources in health.

National Health Resource Repository (NHRR)

- The National Health Resource Repository is the country's first ever national healthcare facility registry of authentic, standardized and updated geo-spatial data of all public and private healthcare establishments.
- It provides understanding the health indicators of the country and an opportunity to monitor the situation. It indicates that significant progress has been made in the country for various health outcomes.
- The vision of the NHRR project is to strengthen evidence-based decision making and develop a platform for citizen and provider-centric services by creating a robust and secured IT-enabled repository.
- NHRR will be the ultimate platform for comprehensive information of both, Private and Public healthcare establishments including Railways, ESIC, Defense and Petroleum healthcare establishments.
- Under the Collection of Statistics Act 2008, over 20 lakh hospitals, doctors, clinics, diagnostic labs, pharmacies and nursing homes would be listed under the NHRR on over 1400 variables.
- This repository will enable advanced research towards ongoing and forthcoming healthcare challenges arising from diseases, environment, etc.
- Approximately 4000 trained professionals are working to approach every healthcare establishment for information collection.

Objective

- The aim of the project is to develop a comprehensive platform for over 25 lakh healthcare establishments.
- The platform will be very useful for all key stakeholders – government, private health establishments and the public.
- NHRR will cohesively work with Ayushman Bharat - National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM) and Central TB Division (CTD) on an integrated plan for the larger benefit of ensuing Hospital empanelment and private sector engagement.

National census for all healthcare facilities

- The NHRR project involves conducting a national census for all public and private healthcare facilities including hospitals, doctors, clinics, blood banks, pharmacies, diagnostic labs etc.
- Each healthcare establishment shall be visited by field operational teams from IQVIA Consulting & Information Services India Pvt Ltd (formerly IMS Health), the implementation partner for the NHRR project.
- The information collected in the national census will be kept confidential and shall be used for statistical purposes only.

What are the benefits?

- The key expected outcomes of the NHRR project are to provide comprehensive data on all health resources including private doctors, health facilities, chemists, and diagnostics labs.
- It will establish a National Health Resource Repository for evidence based decision making, aligned with the Digital India mission.
- It will enhance the coordination between central and state government for optimisation of health resources and improving accessibility of data at all levels, including State HODs.
- It will create a reliable, unified registry of country's healthcare resources showing the distribution pattern of health facilities and services between cities and rural areas.
- It will generate real-world intelligence to identify gaps in health and service ratios, and ensure judicious health resource allocation and management.
- It will identify key areas of improvement by upgrading existing health facilities or establishing new health facilities keeping in view the population density, nature, health condition, distance, etc.
- It will enhance center and state government coordination to ensure intelligent use of health resources to ensure superior health access, service delivery and improve accountability for effective centre-to-state funding.
- It will improve the visibility of Private providers to enable Public-Private Partnerships.

Source: PIB

China to launch its own artificial moon by 2020

Why in news?

- The People's Republic of China is planning to launch its own *'artificial moon'* by 2020 to replace streetlamps and lower electricity costs in its urban areas.
- According to reports, a city in China's south-western Sichuan province, Chengdu, is developing "illumination satellites" that will shine in tandem with the real moon, but just eight times brighter.
- The illumination satellites are being developed by the Tian Fu New Area Science Society in close coordination with other universities and institutes, including the Harbin Institute of Technology and China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp.

Key Highlights

- China's first man-made moon will launch from Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan.
- The first test will be experimental and if it goes well, three more artificial moons will be launched in 2022. The satellites are expected to carry great civic and commercial potential.
- The satellites could replace streetlamps in urban areas, saving an estimated 1.2 billion yuan ($170 million) a year in electricity costs for Chengdu, if they could illuminate an area of 50 square kilometres by reflecting light from the sun.
- The extraterrestrial source of light could help rescue efforts in disaster zones during blackouts.

Background

- The artificial moon project was announced by Wu Chunfeng, head of Tian Fu New Area Science Society, the organisation responsible for the project at an innovation and entrepreneurship conference in Chengdu on October 10.
- However, China is not the first country to try beaming sunlight back to Earth. In the 1990s, Russian scientists reportedly used giant mirrors to reflect light from space in an experimental project called Znamya or Banner.
- Besides the current project, China has a number of other ambitious projects in the pipeline, including the **Chang'e-4** lunar probe.
- The probe named after the moon goddess in Chinese mythology is going to be launched later this year. If it succeeds, it will be the first rover to explore the "dark side" of the moon.

Source: The Hindu

ESA, JAXA send spacecraft on 7-year mission to Mercury

Why in news?

- In a first-of-its-kind mission, the European and Japanese space agencies launched the **Bepi Colombo spacecraft** carrying two probes into orbit on October 20, 2018 for a joint mission to Mercury, the planet closest to the sun.

Key Facts

- The unmanned spacecraft successfully separated and was sent into orbit from French Guiana as planned to begin a seven-year journey to Mercury, arriving in 2025.
- The UK-built spacecraft has been launched to determine whether the plant, which is the closest to the Sun, contains water.
- Through the mission, scientists hope to build on the insights gained by NASA's Messenger probe, which ended its mission in 2015 after a four-year orbit of Mercury.

Highlights

- The spacecraft has been named after Italian scientist Giuseppe "***Bepi***" Colombo. During its 5.2 billion miles journey, the spacecraft will make a complex series of fly-bys, one of Earth, two of Venus and six of Mercury to help it slow down enough to avoid the huge gravitational pull of the Sun.
- The spacecraft will arrive at its destination in December 2025. When it arrives, it will release two probes - Bepi and Mio - that will independently investigate the surface and magnetic field of Mercury.
- The ESA-developed Bepi will operate in Mercury's inner orbit, and JAXA's Mio will be in the outer orbit to gather data that would reveal the internal structure of the planet.
- Mercury's extreme temperatures, the intense gravity pull of the sun and blistering solar radiation make for hellish conditions.

- Hence, the probes are designed to cope with temperatures varying from 430 degrees Celsius (806 F) on the side facing the sun, and -180 degrees Celsius (-292 F) in Mercury's shadow.
- Despite being the nearest to the Sun, the tilt of the planet signifies that some of its areas are permanently in shade and temperatures can fall to minus 180 degrees Celsius, allowing ice to form on the planet.
- Through the mission, the researchers also look to learn more about Mercury's magnetic field.
- While it was thought that the planet was solid all the way through, some of the previous missions discovered a magnetic field suggesting that it may have a molten interior.

Background

- Only two spacecraft have been to Mercury until now. The first one was NASA's 'Mariner 10', which flew past the planet in 1974 and 1975 and second was US space agency's 'Messenger', which orbited the planet between 2011 and 2015.
- Though the spacecraft sent home a great deal of information, they also raised more questions.

Source: The Hindu

Location tracking devices, emergency buttons mandatory for new public service vehicles

Why in news?

☞ The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has notified that all new public service vehicles, except auto rickshaws and e-Rickshaws, registered on and after January 1, 2019 will have to be mandatorily equipped with Vehicle Location Tracking (VLT) and Emergency Buttons.

Key Facts

- In case of older public service vehicles, registered up to December 31, 2018, the respective State Governments will notify the date by which these vehicles have to install Vehicle Location Tracking Device and Panic Buttons.
- The VLT device manufacturers would assist in providing the back end services for monitoring the device.
- With such regulation, the Ministry aims to ensure safety of passengers especially women.

Operational procedure for implementation of VLT cum Emergency buttons

- The Ministry has sent an advisory to all the states as well in this regard. The States are required to ensure execution of this order and check fitment and functional status of the VLT device in the public service vehicles at the time of checking of the vehicles for fitness certification.
- Command and Control Centres will be setup by the State or VLT manufacturers or any other agency authorised by the State Government.
- These centres will provide interface such as state emergency response centre, the transport department or Regional Transport Offices and its designated agencies.
- These centres will also provide feed to the 'VAHAN' data base or the relevant data base of the State with regard to the over speeding device 'healthstatus'.
- The details of each VLT device will be uploaded on the VAHAN database by the VLT device manufacturer using its secured authenticated access.

- The VLT device manufacturers or their authorised dealers will install the VLT devices in public service vehicles and register the devices along with details of vehicle on the corresponding backend systems in real-time.
- The public service vehicle owners have to ensure that the VLT devices installed in their vehicles are in working condition and regularly send required data to the corresponding backend system.
- VLT device manufacturers will get their devices tested for conformity of production every year after the first certification from the testing agencies referred to in Rule126 of the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989.
- The testing agencies will upload the details of the VLT devices certified by them on the VAHAN data base.
- The State or Union Territories will publish Internet Protocol address (IP address) and Short Message Service Gateway (SMS gateway) details of their respective emergency response system where VLT devices will send the emergency alerts on press of emergency button.

VAHAN: The Integrated Solution for Vehicle Registration

- VAHAN is a highly flexible and comprehensive system that takes care of all the activities of Vehicle Registration, leaving the Transport Department to deal with more important business issues.
- The software enables the processes at RTO/DTO/MLO/SDM involving vehicle registration, fitness, taxes, permits and enforcement to get computerised.
- The State Transport Department is governed by both Central Motor Vehicle Regulation (CMVR) and state specific Motor Vehicle Regulation (State MVR). Consequently, VAHAN was conceptualized as a product that would capture the functionalities as mandated by CMVR as well as state MVRs.

Source: PIB, Live Mint

Researchers develop web-based tool to monitor fake news on social media

Why in news?

- Researchers from the University of Michigan in the US have developed a web-based tool to monitor fake news on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.
- The tool uses a Platform Health Metric called the ***'Iffy Quotient'***, which draws data from two external entities: NewsWhip and Media Bias/Fact Checker.

How does it work?

- The NewsWhip is a social media engagement tracking firm, which collects URLs from hundreds of thousands of sites each day and then gathers information on, which of these sites have engagements on Facebook and Twitter.
- The Iffy Quotient queries NewsWhip for the top 5000 most popular URLs on the two social media platforms.
- Then the tool checks to see if those domain names have been flagged by Media Bias/Fact Check, which is an independent site that classifies various sources based on their reliability and bias.
- The tool divides the URLs into three categories based on the media bias and fact checklists:

Iffy: If the site is on the Questionable Sources or Conspiracy lists

OK: If the site is on any other list, such as Left-Bias, Right-Bias or Satire

Unknown: If it is not on any list.

Key Findings

- The first report issued by the researchers confirmed what was suspected about the 2016 US presidential election, the Iffy Quotient increased dramatically on both Facebook and Twitter during the elections.
- It also showed that the two social media platform companies have made progress since early 2017 on their promises to crack down on misinformation, but one has succeeded more than the other.
- While the Facebook Iffy Quotient has seen a steady decline since early 2017 and has now returned to its early 2016 levels, the Twitter Iffy Quotient has not shown much decline and is still nearly twice its level in early 2016.
- Though Facebook and Twitter Iffy coefficients were roughly comparable through most of 2018, Facebook's is now somewhat lower.
- The contrast between Facebook and Twitter is even more pronounced in an engagement-weighted version of the Iffy Quotient, which can be taken as a rough proxy for the fraction of total user attention.

Source: Live Mint, Business Standard

Pakistan to send first manned space mission in 2022

Why in news?

- Pakistan has decided to launch its first manned mission in 2022, the same year that India has planned to launch its own manned space mission.
- The decision was taken during Pakistan's federal cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan on October 25, 2018.
- The cabinet approved the plan of sending an astronaut to space for the first time in 2022 with China's help.

Collaboration with China

- For the mission, an agreement between Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO) and a Chinese company has already been signed.
- Pakistan and China already have robust defence ties and Pakistan is one of the top buyers of Chinese military hardware.
- Earlier in 2018, Pakistan had launched two satellites into orbit, using a Chinese launch vehicle.
- The satellites were launched aboard a Chinese Long March (LM-2C) rocket from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre located at the Gobi desert, China.
- The satellites included a remote sensing satellite (PRSS1), a dual-purpose Earth observational and optical satellite, and PAK-TES-1A.
- Developed by Space and Upper Atmospheric Research Commission (SUPARCO), the PAK-TES-1A satellite was launched to enhance satellite manufacture capabilities in the country that would help end Pakistan's dependency on commercial satellites for information related to weather, environment and agriculture.
- The satellites had to be transported to China as Pakistan lacks the infrastructure to launch objects to space.

Space Race with India?

- Pakistan's plan to send a human to space is aimed for the same year that India plans to launch its own manned human space mission.
- The major difference between the two missions is that while ISRO's mission will be their own, Pakistan will do so with China's help.
- India's ambitious space mission was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his Independence Day address this year. If successful, the mission would make India the fourth nation in the word to do so.
- China had launched its first manned space mission in 2003, becoming the third country in the world to independently develop a manned spaceflight, after Russia and the United States.

Source: The Hindu

One lakh benefitted under Ayushman Bharat in one month of its launch

Why in news?

☞ Union Health Minister JP Nadda on October 21, 2018 announced that nearly a month after the roll out of the health insurance scheme 'Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)' (Ayushman Bharat), one lakh people have availed of the ambitious programme.

Key Facts

- The Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, considered as the world's largest health insurance programme, was launched pan-India by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Jharkhand on September 23, 2018.
- Earlier, on October 5, Indu Bhushan, CEO of the National Health Agency, announced that around 38000 people have availed of the scheme within two weeks of launch of the PMJAY.
- Over 9000 hospitals have been empanelled for the scheme, and 32 states and Union territories have signed MoUs with the Centre to implement the programme.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (Ayushman Bharat or AB-NHPM)

- Ayushman Bharat, the government-sponsored health insurance scheme, will provide free coverage of up to Rs 5 lakh per family per year in any government or even empanelled private hospitals all over India.
- The Ayushman Bharat programme will be funded with 60 percent contribution from the Centre and the remaining from the states.
- The benefit cover will also include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses. All pre-existing conditions will be covered from day one of the policy.
- A defined transport allowance per hospitalisation will also be paid to the beneficiary.
- The payment for treatment will be done on package rate which will be defined by the Government in advance basis. The package rates will include all the costs associated with treatment. The States and UTs will have the flexibility to modify these rates within a limited bandwidth.
- For beneficiaries, it will be a cashless and paper less transaction.

What are the objectives?

- Launched with an aim to help the poor and the economically deprived, the scheme will be available for 10.74 crore beneficiary families and about 50 crore Indian citizens.
- This scheme will strengthen the healthcare services in India. Around 13000 hospitals in the country have been coordinated for the implementation of the scheme.
- The scheme aims to target poor and vulnerable population of the country, based on the Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011 (SECC) database. There will be no cap on family size and age in the scheme.
- The scheme allows the beneficiary to take cashless benefits from any public or private empanelled hospitals across the country.
- The scheme will work in partnership with NITI Aayog to operationalise a robust, modular and interoperable IT platform which will involve a paperless and cashless transaction.
- The National Health Agency (NHA), the apex body implementing the scheme, has launched a website (mera.pmjay.gov.in).

Source: PIB

NITI Aayog launches guidelines for public-private partnership in treatment of NCDs

Why in news?

- NITI Aayog on October 17, 2018 launched the model guidelines for Public-Private partnership in Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).
- Under the guidelines, the private partner will invest in upgrading, building and deploying human resources. They will be responsible for operational management and service delivery.

Highlights

- The model guidelines suggest that the state governments will provide the required physical space.
- They also suggest that the tariff structure for the services offered under the NCD care facility may be linked to the existing state and central government health insurance scheme.
- Further, in case a government health insurance scheme is introduced in a state after the adoption of CGHS tariff, the tariff rates would be revised in accordance with the newly introduced scheme in the state.
- Besides, all the services in the NCD care facility will be offered by a single entity, be it a trust, company and consortium under the PPP arrangement.
- All categories including trusts, companies will also be allowed to bid for the project and no restrictions will be imposed on any of these categories.

Significance

- The newly issued guidelines will help streamline private participation and encourage world-class infrastructure and patient care in the health sector.
- The model guidelines have been framed by NITI Aayog keeping in mind the fact that the contribution of non-communicable diseases (NCD) to the overall disease burden in the country has increased over the years.
- In the past, many district hospitals in the country focused mainly on communicable diseases and reproductive and child health. As a result of this, the capacity for handling NCD cases has not been adequately developed.
- Hence, NITI Aayog and the Union Healthy Ministry worked along with the state governments and representatives from the healthcare industry to develop the Model Concessionaire Agreements (MCA) to supplement efforts for the provision of prevention and treatment services for non-communicable diseases (Cardiac Sciences, Oncology, and Pulmonary Sciences) at the district hospitals particularly especially in tier 2 & 3 cities.

Source: PIB

Indian Navy inducts first deep submergence rescue vessel to rescue distressed submarines

Why in news?

- The Indian Navy recently inducted its first Deep Submergence Rescue Vessel (DSRV) at its base in Mumbai, enhancing its operational capabilities. The second DSRV would be added to its base in Vishakhapatnam by 2019.
- With the move, India joined a select list of international navies with the ability to search, locate and provide assistance to downed or disaster-struck submarines at high sea.

Key Facts

- The DSRV can reportedly be deployed at short notice for providing assistance to submarines in distress.
- The rescue vessel, complete with an associated kit in fly away configuration, can be crucial in quickly locating submarines through the vast expanse of sea and can be mobilised by air and water for rapid rescue.
- Some DSRV vessels are air transportable in very large military cargo.
- The DSRV that was inducted by India can be mobilised from the naval base in Mumbai to nearest mounting port by air, land and sea.
- The second DSRV is expected to be inducted at Visakhapatnam in 2019.

Significance

- Most of these are capable of rescuing 24 people at depths of up to 600m in one go.
- Besides for rescue operation, the vessels are also deployed for various other missions including to lay cables on the sea bed.

Which countries presently have DSRVs?

- The countries that currently have DSRVs in their naval fleet include Singapore, United States, China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, UK, Sweden and Australia.
- Each of these countries have their own version of DSRVs based on their specific needs and the requirements of their respective naval fleets.

Background

- The induction of the DSRV is a part of the Indian Navy's efforts to enhance its operational capabilities, at a time when China is ramping up its maritime presence in critical sea lanes that are of strategic importance to India.
- Last year, the Indian Navy operationalised a new concept of deployment of warships in the Indian Ocean region to effectively counter China's growing presence in the strategically key waters.
- The "new mission-based deployment" involves deploying mission-ready ships and aircraft along critical sea lanes of communications.

Source: The Hindu

Draft National Policy on Electronics 2018

Why in news?

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) on October 10, 2018 released the draft of the National Policy on Electronics 2018, aiming for a turnover of USD 400 billion in domestic electronics manufacturing industry by 2025.
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology will coordinate with the concerned ministries and departments to provide incentives to industry for robust expansion of electronics hardware manufacturing. MeitY will work out the details and facilitate decisions by the government.

Highlights of the Draft National Policy on Electronics 2018

- The policy targets production of one billion mobile handsets by 2025, valued at USD 190 billion (about Rs 13 lakh crore).
- It is targeted to export 600 million mobile handsets valued at USD 110 billion (about Rs 7 lakh crore).
- 20 greenfield and three brownfield electronic manufacturing cluster projects have been sanctioned with the project outlay of Rs 3898 crore, including Rs 1577 crore from the Government of India.
- It promotes a forward looking and stable tax regime, including advance intimation to the industry to plan investments in the form of Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP) in various segments of electronics, with a sunset clause should be promoted.
- It mentions that government would levy cess on identified electronic goods to be considered to generate resources for promotion of certain critical sub-sectors of electronics manufacturing such as semiconductor wafer fabrication and display fabrication units.

Objective of Draft National Electronics Policy 2018

- The draft policy also aims to promote ease of doing business for the entire Electronic System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) sector.
- It aims to encourage industry-led research and development and innovation in all sub-sectors of electronics.
- The policy aims to also push the startup ecosystem in emerging technology areas such as 5G, Internet of Things, artificial intelligence and machine learning, and their applications in areas such as defence, agriculture, health, smart cities and automation.
- It involves development of core competencies in all the sub-sectors of electronics, including electronic components and semiconductors, telecommunication equipment, medical electronics, defence electronics, automotive electronics, industrial electronics, strategic electronics, etc.

Measures proposed

- Promotion of manufacturing of electronic goods covered under the Information Technology Agreement (ITA-1) of the World Trade Organization
- Exempting the import duty on equipment not being manufactured in the country to reduce capital expenditure for setting up of a unit or for expansion of existing units
- Replacing the M-SIPS (Modified Special Incentive Package Scheme) with schemes that are easier to implement such as interest subsidy and credit default guarantee to encourage expansion in electronics manufacturing sector

First National Policy on Electronics

- The first National Policy on Electronics (NPE) was rolled out in 2012.
- The NPE 2012 provided the road map for the development of Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) sector in the country.
- Implementation of the Schemes/ Programmes under the aegis of NPE 2012 successfully consolidated the foundation for a competitive Indian ESDM value chain.
- The Government now seeks to build on that foundation to propel the growth of ESDM industry in the country.

Source: PIB

Indian Air Force launches its first mobile health app 'MedWatch'

Why in news?

- The Indian Air Force launched an innovative mobile health application called ***'MedWatch'*** on October 8, 2018, on the occasion of its 86th anniversary. It was launched by Air Chief Marshal BS Dhanoa, Chief of the Air Staff.
- The app has been conceived by the doctors of IAF and developed in-house by the Directorate of Information Technology (DIT) with zero financial outlay.

Functions of the App

- The app ***'MedWatch'*** will provide correct, scientific and authentic health information to air warriors and citizens of India.
- It comprises a host of features including information on basic first aid, health topics and nutritional facts.
- It also contains reminders for timely medical review, vaccination and utility tools like health record card, BMI calculator, helpline numbers and web links.

Significance

- ***'MedWatch'*** is the first such health app to be built by any of the three armed forces. It is an initiative of the Indian Air Force.
- Before its launch, it was displayed and showcased to the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi.

Air Force Day

- The Air Force Day is celebrated every year on October 8 to pay rich tribute to the untiring efforts and supreme sacrifice made by veterans, who laid a strong foundation for the service.
- It was celebrated for the first time on October 8, 1932. The day was observed to increase the awareness about the importance of Indian Air Force in any organisation of the national security.
- The Indian Air Force has been involved in various operations and wars including World War II, Indo-Pakistani War of 1947, Sino-India War, Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, Operation Cactus, Operation Vijay, Kargil War, Congo Crisis, Operation Poomalai and Operation Pawan.

Source: The Hindu

India-Japan bilateral maritime exercise 'JIMEX 18' begins at Visakhapatnam

Why in news?

- The third edition of Japan-India Maritime Exercise (JIMEX), JIMEX 18, began on October 7, 2018 at Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.
- The Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) Ships under the command of Rear Admiral Tatsuya Fukada, Commander of Escort Flotilla-4 (CCF-4), would be participating in the exercise along with the ships of Eastern Fleet of the Indian Navy from October 7 to 15, 2018.

Indian and Japanese fleet

- The Japanese fleet includes JMSDF Ships Kaga, an Izumo Class Helicopter Destroyer; and Inazuma, a Guided Missile Destroyer.
- The Indian Navy will be represented by three indigenously designed and built warships and a Fleet Tanker. The ships participating are multipurpose stealth frigate INS Satpura; Anti-Submarine Warfare Corvette, Missile Corvette INS Kadmatt; and the Fleet Tanker INS Shakti.
- In addition, one submarine, P8I Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft and a number of integral helicopters would also be participating in the exercise.
- The Indian ships participating would be under the command of Rear Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi, Flag Officer Commanding of the Eastern Fleet.

JIMEX-18

- JIMEX-18 is aimed to enhance interoperability, improve understanding and imbibe the best practices of each other.
- JIMEX 18 will comprise a Harbour Phase and a Sea Phase of four days each.
- The Harbour Phase of the exercise will include professional and social interactions between ship's crews, sports fixtures and operational planning for the Sea Phase.

- The Sea Phase would include Anti-Submarine Warfare Exercises, VBSS (Visit, Board, Search and Seizure) Drills, Gun Firings, Cross Deck Helo Operations and coordinated operations in Anti-Submarine/ Anti-Air threat scenarios.
- The second edition of JIMEX was conducted in December 2013 off Chennai.
- The conduct of JIMEX-18 after five long years is indicative of resurgence of the Indo-Japanese defence relations and the continued efforts of both Governments to work closely to enhance safety and security in keeping with 'rule based order'.
- Also, the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force is a regular participant in the Malabar series of exercises between Indian and US Navies. In addition, the ships of the two navies have been working in close coordination in Anti-Piracy Operations in the Gulf of Aden (GoA) for the past few years.
- JMSDF Ships also participated in the recently concluded MALABAR 18 off Guam (along with Indian and US Navy units) in the Pacific Ocean in Jun; and in biennial multilateral exercise RIMPAC-18 off Hawaii, USA.

Source: The Hindu

Rafale Combat Aircraft: Related Issues

Why in news?

- India in September 2016 signed an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) with France to procure 36 Rafale fighter jets in fly-away condition for •7.8 billion.
- As a part of the contract, India will also get the latest weapons like the Meteor and Scalp missiles, besides a five-year support package that assures high availability of the fighter. Under the deal, it was decided that India will pay 15 per cent in advance.
- The first Rafales are expected to be delivered by 2019, and India is set to have all 36 jets within six years.

What is Rafale?

- Introduced in 2001, Rafale is a twin-engine, canard-delta wing, multirole combat aircraft designed and built by French company Dassault Aviation. The aircraft is considered one of the most potent combat jets globally.
- The fighter jet, equipped with a wide range of weapons, is intended to perform air supremacy, interdiction, aerial reconnaissance, ground support, in-depth strike, anti-ship strike and nuclear deterrence missions.
- The aircraft is fitted with an onboard oxygen generation system (OBOGS) which suppresses the need for liquid oxygen re-filling or ground support for oxygen production.
- It is capable of carrying out a wide range of missions including air-defence/air-superiority, reconnaissance, close air support dynamic targeting, air-to-ground precision strike/interdiction, anti-ship attacks, nuclear deterrence and buddy-buddy refuelling.

- It is distinct from other European fighters of its era, as it is almost entirely built by one country, involving most of France's major defence contractors, such as Dassault, Thales and Safran.
- Many of the aircraft's avionics and features, such as direct voice input, the RBE2 AA active electronically scanned array (AESA) radar and the optronique secteur frontal infra-red search and track (IRST) sensor, were domestically developed and produced for the Rafale programme.
- The aircraft is available in three main variants: Rafale C single-seat land-based version, Rafale B twin-seat land-based version and Rafale M single-seat carrier-based version.

Which countries are currently using the aircraft?

- The Rafale fighter jets are being produced for both the French Air Force and for carrier-based operations in the French Navy.
- It has been marketed for export to several countries and was selected for purchase by the Indian Air Force, the Egyptian Air Force, and the Qatar Air Force.
- The Rafale has been used in combat over Afghanistan, Libya, Mali, Iraq and Syria.
- The Rafale is referred to as an 'omnirole' aircraft by Dassault, as the company claims that it has the capability to perform several actions at the same time, such as firing air-to-air missiles at a very low altitude, air-to-ground and interceptions during the same sortie.
- Several upgrades to the weapons and avionics of the Rafale are planned to be introduced by 2018.

Why does India need Rafale aircraft?

- The Indian government felt the need to revamp its IAF fleet by introducing multi-role combat aircraft considering the prevalent security environment.
- After the Kargil experience, the Indian Armed Forces and the Defence Ministry were of the opinion that the combat ability of the Indian Air Force to strike targets required radical improvement.
- The Defence Ministry came to a conclusion that an aircraft adds to the combat strength of the forces only when it is loaded with the requisite weaponry, which enables it to strike targets. This need was first recorded in 2001.

Earlier deal and why it didn't work out?

- In June 2001, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) had approved the Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for the procurement of 126 medium multi-role combat aircraft.
- The IAF conducted technical and flight evaluations in 2011and shortlisted Rafale and Eurofighter Typhoon.
- In January 2012, IAF announced the Rafale as the preferred bidder and contract negotiations had begun with its manufacturer, Dassault Aviation.

- It was proposed that 18 Rafales would be supplied to the IAF by 2015 in fly-away condition, while the remaining 108 would be manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) in India under transfer of technology agreements.
- However, the deal stalled due to a lack of agreement on various terms of RFP compliance and cost-related issues. The transfer of technology remained the primary issue of concern between the two sides

Current Controversy

- India's main opposition party had raised an issue over Dassault partnering with Anil Ambani's Reliance Defence, a private company instead of state-owned HAL.
- Both French government and Dassault had issued a press release stating it was Dassault's decision to choose Reliance Defence.

Source: The Hindu

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More News

○ James P. Allison, Tasuku Honjo jointly awarded with 2018 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine

☞ The Nobel Assembly at Karolinska Institutet on October 1, 2018 awarded the 2018 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine jointly to James P. Allison and Tasuku Honjo "for their discovery of cancer therapy by inhibition of negative immune regulation".

☞ Cancer kills millions of people every year and is one of humanity's greatest health challenges. The laureates James P. Allison and Tasuku Honjo successfully established an entirely new principle for cancer therapy by stimulating the ability of immune system to attack tumour cells.

PM Modi receives UN's Champions of the Earth award

❑ Prime Minister Narendra Modi received the UN Champions of the Earth award, the highest environmental honour of the United Nations on October 3, 2018. The award was presented by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres at a special ceremony in New Delhi.

❑ Prime Minister Modi has been selected in the leadership category for his pioneering work in championing the International Solar Alliance, a global partnership to scale up solar energy. Through the award, the UN Environment is recognising Modi for his bold environmental leadership on the global stage.

○ Frances H. Arnold, George P. Smith, Sir Gregory P. Winter win 2018 Nobel Prize in Chemistry

☞ The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences on October 3, 2018 awarded the 2018 Nobel Prize in Chemistry with one half to Frances H. Arnold "for the directed evolution of enzymes" and the other half jointly to George P. Smith and Sir Gregory P. Winter "for the phage display of peptides and antibodies".

☞ The all three of them harnessed the power of evolution which is revealed through the diversity of life. They took control of evolution and used it for purposes that bring the greatest benefit to humankind.

☞ Enzymes produced through directed evolution are used to manufacture everything from biofuels to pharmaceuticals

Gita Gopinath becomes first woman Chief Economist at IMF

❑ India-born Gita Gopinath was appointed as the Chief Economist of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on October 3, 2018, becoming the first woman to hold the position. She has also become the second Indian to hold the position, after former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan.

❑ Gopinath would be succeeding Maurice Obstfeld, who is to retire at the end of 2018. She will be assuming the post of economic counselor and director of the IMF's Research Department.

❑ Gopinath is the third woman in the history of Harvard to be a permanent member of its esteemed economics department and the first Indian since the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen to hold that position. She became a tenured Professor there in 2010.

World Mental Health Day 2018 observed globally

- The World Mental Health Day was observed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on October 10, 2018 with an aim to raise awareness of mental health issues around the world and mobilising efforts in support of mental health.
- The theme of 2018 World Mental Health Day was 'Young People and Mental Health in a Changing World'. The age of adolescence and the early years of adulthood are a time of life when many changes take place. These can also be the times of stress and anxiety. If not managed and handled well, these feelings can lead to mental illness.

International Day of the Girl Child observed

- The International Day of the Girl Child was observed across the world on October 11, 2018. The day aims to highlight and address the needs and challenges faced by girl children while promoting their empowerment and the fulfilment of their human rights.
- The 2018 theme of the International day is 'With Her: A Skilled GirlForce'. Under the theme, the International Day will mark the beginning of a year-long effort to bring together partners and stakeholders to advocate for and draw attention and investments to the most pressing needs and opportunities for girls to attain skills for employability.

Denis Mukwege, Nadia Murad win 2018 Nobel Peace Prize

- The Norwegian Nobel Committee on October 5, 2018 awarded the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize to Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad "for their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict".
- Both Mukwege and Murad made a crucial contribution to focus attention on combating war crimes. Both of them have helped to give greater visibility to war-time sexual violence, so that the perpetrators can be held accountable for their actions.

Tushar Mehta appointed as Solicitor General of India

- Senior Advocate Tushar Mehta was on October 10, 2018 appointed as the Solicitor General of India with effect from the date of assumption of charge of the office for a period till June 30, 2020 or until further orders.
- His appointment was approved by the Appointment Committee of Cabinet. Presently, Mehta is serving as the Additional Solicitor General (ASG) of India. He was appointed ASG in 2014 after the Modi government came to power.
- The post of the Solicitor General of India has been lying vacant for the last 11 months after Senior Advocate Ranjith Kumar resigned on October 20, 2017. The Solicitor General is the second highest ranking law officer of the Union Government after the Attorney General.

Nikki Haley resigns as US Ambassador to United Nations

- Indian-American Nikki Haley on October 9, 2018 resigned as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations. President Donald Trump made the formal announcement of her resignation and applauded her work. He cited that Haley wanted to take a break.
- Haley, former South Carolina governor, gave no reasons for her exit, however, dismissed speculations that she was planning to run for Presidential bid in 2020. Rather, she said she would be campaigning for Trump's re-election in two years from now.

Asian Para Games 2018: India records best-ever show with 72 medals

- India on October 13, 2018 concluded its campaign at the 2018 Asian Para Games in Jakarta, Indonesia with a record medal haul, winning a total of 72 medals that included 15 gold, 24 silver and 33 bronze medals. India was placed ninth in the overall tally.
- In the last edition in 2014, India had won 33 medals including 3 gold, 14 silver, 16 bronze medals. India recorded its best-ever show in the Asian Para Games by bagging 72 medals, including 15 gold. On the concluding day of the competition, Indian shuttlers added two gold and 3 bronze medals.

International Day for Eradication of Poverty observed globally

- The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty was observed across the world on October 17, 2018. This year's theme of the day is 'coming together with those furthest behind to build an inclusive world of universal respect for human rights and dignity.'
- The year 2018 marks the 25th anniversary of the declaration of the day by the UN General Assembly, in its resolution dated December 22, 1992.
- The year also marks the 70th anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There is a fundamental connection between extreme poverty and human rights and the people living in poverty are disproportionately affected by many human rights violations.

Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen dies of cancer at 65

- Paul Gardner Allen, the billionaire co-founder of Microsoft, an investor, entrepreneur and philanthropist, passed away on October 15, 2018. He was 65. He died in Seattle from complications related to Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, the less-common Hodgkin's disease.
- Paul Allen co-founded Microsoft with his childhood friend Bill Gates in 1975 before becoming a billionaire philanthropist. Apart from his role in Microsoft, Allen influenced many aspects of modern life from technology and science to sports and music and invested in conservation, space travel, arts and culture and professional sports.

RBI approves appointment of Sandeep Bakshi as MD & CEO of ICICI Bank

- Private sector lender ICICI Bank on October 16, 2018 announced that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) approved the appointment of Sandeep Bakshi as the Managing Director (MD) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of ICICI Bank for three years.
- Sandeep Bakshi, in his 32 years at ICICI, he has looked after the insurance, corporate and lending businesses of the group. Under his leadership, the company redesigned various products, re-engineered the distribution architecture and made significant improvement in productivity.

PM Modi launches National Police Memorial; announces Award in name of Subhas Chandra Bose

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 21, 2018 dedicated the National Police Memorial to the nation on the occasion of the Police Commemoration Day 2018. The National Police Commemoration Day is observed on 21 October every year to pay homage to the 10 men of the Central Reserve Police Force killed in an ambush by Chinese troops in 1959 in Ladakh's Hot Spring area.
- The National Police Memorial consists of Central Sculpture, a Wall of Valour and a State of Art Museum dedicated to the memory of the martyred police personnel. A 30-foot granite pillar, weighing around 238 tonnes, has been installed at Chanakyapuri, Delhi to honour the policemen. The sculpture was conceptualised by Advaita Gadanayak of the National Gallery of Modern Art.

UN Chief appoints Noirin O'Sullivan as Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security

- United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on October 31, 2018 appointed the Noirin O'Sullivan of Ireland as the Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security.
- O'Sullivan succeeds Fadzai Gwaradzimba of Zimbabwe. She brings extensive experience in international safety and security management, strategic management and leadership. The Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security serves as a Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security (USG/DSS).

New Supreme Court Judges

- Justices Hemant Gupta, R Subhash Reddy, M R Shah and Ajay Rastogi were on November 2, 2018 sworn-in as the Judges of the Supreme Court. Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi administered oath of office to the four judges.
- Earlier on November 1, 2018, President Ram Nath Kovind issued a notification appointing these four judges as the Supreme Court judges.
- Prior to this elevation, Justice Gupta served as the Chief Justice of the Madhya Pradesh High Court; Justice Rastogi as the Chief Justice of the Tripura High Court; Justice Shah as the incumbent Chief Justice of the Patna High Court; and Justice Reddy as the Chief Justice of the Gujarat High Court.

Strength of Supreme Court Judges

- With their elevation, the number of judges at the Supreme Court rose to 28. The sanctioned strength of Supreme Court judges in 31. Two judges, namely, Justice Kurian Joseph and Justice Madan B Lokur are set to retire in November and December 2018 respectively.

Recommendation by Supreme Court Collegium

- On October 30, 2018, the Supreme Court Collegium comprising CJI Ranjan Gogoi, Justice Madan B Lokur, Justice Kurian Joseph, Justice A K Sikri and Justice S A Bobde recommended the names of these four judges as they "*are more deserving and suitable in all respects than other Chief Justices and senior Judges of High Courts..*".
- The Collegium Resolution stated that it has taken into consideration combined seniority on all-India basis of Chief Justices and senior puisne Judges of High Courts, apart from their merit and integrity.

- Justice Hemant Gupta, Justice R. Subhash Reddy, Justice MR Shah, and Justice Ajay Rastogi stand 4, 5, 17 and 25 positions respectively in the combined seniority of High Court Judges on all-India basis.
- The Collegium also noted that the High Courts of Punjab & Haryana, Gujarat and Rajasthan have remained unrepresented in the Supreme Court since long.

Anupam Kher resigns as Chairman of Film and Television Institute of India

- Anupam Kher on October 31, 2018 resigned as Chairman of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), citing international film and TV assignments.
- Anupam Kher took office as the Chairman of the prestigious organisation in October 2017. Prior to Kher, Gajendra Chauhan was the Chairman of FTII. Chauhan left office in March 2017. He offered his resignation through a letter addressed to the Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore.

Far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro wins Brazil's Presidential election

- Far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro was on October 28, 2018 declared as the winner of Brazil's 2018 Presidential Elections by a wide margin. Bolsonaro swept the election results with 55.1 per cent of the votes cast, as against 44.8 per cent votes of his opponent, Fernando Haddad from the left-wing Workers' Party (PT).
- Bolsonaro had also won the first round of the elections in October amid a field of 13 candidates, but he had fallen short of the 50 per cent needed to win out rightly and avoid a runoff against Haddad. The clear victory of Bolsonaro now marks a rightward swing in the largest democracy of Latin America, which was governed by the left-wing party for 13 years between 2003 and 2016.
- Since the past two years, the country had been led by a conservative, Michel Temer, who was elected following the impeachment of former President Dilma Rousseff. However, Temer had become deeply unpopular with Brazilians.

Former Delhi CM Madan Lal Khurana passes away

- Madan Lal Khurana, former Delhi Chief Minister, passed away on October 27, 2018 after a prolonged illness. He was 82.
- The veteran BJP leader was suffering from a chest infection and fever since the past few days and was feeling breathless since 27th morning. He had suffered a brain haemorrhage about five years ago and was ailing since then. He is survived by his wife, a son and two daughters.
- He along with Vijay Kumar Malhotra, Kedar Nath Sahani and Kanwar Lal Gupta founded the Delhi chapter of the Jan Sangh, which in 1980 transformed into BJP. The party had suffered badly in 1984 general elections, which was held after the death of Indira Gandhi. Khurana is credited with reviving the party in the capital, New Delhi. He worked tirelessly and his efforts earned him the title of 'Dilli Ka Sher' (Lion of Delhi).

PM Narendra Modi awarded with prestigious Seoul Peace Prize 2018 for 'Modinomics'

- The Seoul Peace Prize Committee on October 24, 2018 conferred the 2018 Seoul Peace Prize on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his contribution to world peace through his economic vision, 'Modinomics'. With this, PM Modi became the 14th recipient of this coveted award.
- The committee assessed over a hundred candidates proposed by over 1300 nominators from around the world and decided to bestow the Prize on PM Modi, calling him 'the perfect candidate for the 2018 Seoul Peace Prize'. The nominating group consists of 300 Korean nationals and 800 internationals.

Virat Kohli becomes fastest batsman to reach 10,000 ODI runs

- Virat Kohli on October 24, 2018 became the fastest batsman to score 10,000 runs in one-day internationals, reaching the milestone in just 205 innings. With the feat, he surpassed the record held by Sachin Tendulkar, who had achieved the feat in 259 innings.
- Virat Kohli became the fifth Indian batsman and 13th overall to reach 10000 ODI runs.The other Indians in the elite 10K club include Tendulkar (18426), Sourav Ganguly (11221), Rahul Dravid (10768) and MS Dhoni (10123).
- Tendulkar was the first in history to breach the 10,000 mark in ODIs. He got there in 2001 against Australia in Indore.

Asma Jahangir wins UN Human Rights Prize posthumously

- Asma Jahangir, late Pakistani human rights activist and lawyer was posthumously announced as one of the winners of the UN Human Rights Prize on October 26, 2018.The announcement was made through the official Twitter account of President of the UN General Assembly Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces.
- Jahangir was chosen for the prize along with three other including Rebeca Gyumi of Tanzania, Brazil's first indigenous lawyer Joenia Wapichana and Ireland's human rights organisation Front Line Defenders,
- Before Jahangir only three Pakistani women, Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan (1978), Benazir Bhutto (2008) and Malala Yousufzai (2013) have been accorded the honour.

Ethiopia appoints Sahle-Work Zewde as first female president

- Ethiopia on October 25, 2018 appointed diplomat ***Sahle-Work Zewde*** as its first-ever female President. The position of the President is largely ceremonial in the nation.
- Zewde was appointed by the Ethiopian lawmakers through a unanimous vote. She would be replacing Mulatu Teshome Wirtu who resigned on October 24. Prior to her appointment, she was serving as the UN's top official at the African Union.
- She is now expected to serve two six-year terms as President.

Invest India wins UN Investment Promotion Award for promoting renewable energy investment

- The 'Invest India' initiative of the Union Government on October 22, 2018 won the top United Nations Investment Promotion Award in recognition of its efforts to boost investments in the renewable energy sector in India.
- The award was presented by Armenian President Armen Sarkissian to Deepak Bagla, the CEO of Invest India, in Geneva, Switzerland at the inauguration of the World Investment Forum organised by the UN Convention on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Irish Author Anna Burns wins Man Booker Prize 2018 for her novel 'Milkman'

- Irish Author Anna Burns on October 16, 2018 won the Britain's renowned Man Booker Prize 2018 for her third novel 'Milkman'. Burns received the award from Prince Charles' wife Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall, as well as 50000 pounds (USD 65900) as the prize money.
- Milkman is an exploration of Northern Ireland's three decades of violence told through the voice of a young woman. The novel chronicles the struggles of a middle sister in a family as she confronts rumour, social pressures and politics amid violent sectarian divisions in her community.

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