

## Current Affairs

### October 2018



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**Editorial****Aadhaar Verdict: Shaping Digital Destiny**

After six years of litigation which included 38 days of hearing — next only to Kesavanand Bharati case in 1973 — the Supreme Court’s five-judge Constitution Bench has given a landmark judgment declaring Aadhaar as constitutional. Aadhaar has the distinction of being the world’s largest biometric unique identity programme for empowering 130 crore people. But debates on it have also brought to light issues concerning personal liberty, privacy and data protection. So, we must first understand the circumstances under which the programme was started.

After more than six decades of Independence, 60 per cent of India’s 1.2 billion people did not have a basic identity document. By and large local ID documents were used and they became unrecognisable when a person crossed the boundaries of his home state. For example, a ration card issued in Tamil Nadu wouldn’t be recognised in Delhi. That was perhaps why a majority of the country’s population did not have a bank account. The first question to anyone who wanted to avail a service — open a bank account, apply for a ration card or voter ID card, buy land or take a loan for his small business or agriculture or apply for government benefits — would invariably be: “Who are you?” Without an ID proof, it was virtually impossible for people to answer this question. They often ended up being denied such services.

Unscrupulous people manipulated the system by creating ghost and duplicate entities and usurped the benefits intended for the poor. It is well-known that only 15 paisa of each rupee spent on welfare programmes reached the intended beneficiaries.

Against this backdrop, a technologically complex identity programme, then called the Unique Identification (UID) Programme, was launched on a scale not known in human history. In 2016, Parliament provided the legislative basis to Aadhaar by enacting the Aadhaar Act. In the last eight years, the programme has turned out to be the world’s largest biometric identification programme — it caters to one-sixth of the planet’s population. Indians can take pride for creating such a sophisticated identity platform in such a short span of time

Aadhaar helped the government renovate the delivery system and ensure targeted, hassle-free, direct, portable, real time, auditable delivery of services, benefits and subsidies, free of middlemen. It is being used for distribution of foodgrains through fair price shops. Aadhaar has led to the elimination of crores of ghost and duplicate ration cards and fake MGNREGS job cards; it has checked frauds in pension payments and other government schemes including those that benefit students. In the past three years, it has saved the government more than Rs 90,000 crore. The World Bank’s Development Report on Digital Dividends 2016 estimated that the use of Aadhaar in all the Centre’s benefit and welfare schemes could save the government over US \$11 billion annually by reducing leakage, and through efficiency-related gains.

By directly connecting the state with the people, Aadhaar enhanced the government’s ability to serve the citizens better. Unfortunately, this was projected as an increase in the state’s power and led to Aadhaar being perceived as an instrument of state surveillance. India’s effort to provide unique identification to people and digitise its citizen databases, public or private, was mistaken as an exercise in the invasion of privacy. Its critics undermined the truth that Aadhaar empowers the people, not the state.

How can anyone claim state benefits funded by taxpayers' money without identifying oneself? The critics forgot that it was the state's responsibility to identify the beneficiaries in order to make sure that benefits reach those they were intended for. A section of people also perceived Aadhaar as a tool of denial and exclusion. Some critics also raised questions about the efficacy of Aadhaar technology. Others attempted to create technophobia by blowing out of proportion certain risks such as the possibility of biometric cloning or the hacking of databases. Every technology has some risks. A mature society must take measures to mitigate risks and not abandon the technology.

The Supreme Court's historic verdict has not only held Aadhaar to be constitutional but has ruled that Aadhaar ensures dignity of individuals and empowers marginalised section of the society. The Court has held that Aadhaar's architecture does not create a surveillance state. It has gone on to say that "the Aadhaar Act meets the concept of limited government, good governance and constitutional trust". The judgment has upheld the mandatory requirement of Aadhaar for PAN cards and income tax returns. This is indeed a victory for Indians, particularly the marginalised and underprivileged sections of the society.

Aadhaar will not only bring transparency in governance but will also cleanse the delivery system of fakes and duplicates and check impersonation in multiple areas such as examination and recruitment. It will help to curb tax evasion, money laundering, shell companies and benami transactions and bring in financial discipline and greater tax compliance. It will continue to help unite missing children with their loved near and dear ones. In a lighter vein, Bollywood would have to abandon its oft-repeated scripts — like twins getting separated.

The judgment is in line with last year's landmark privacy judgment and will set at rest many debates, apprehensions, and controversies around Aadhaar. The safeguards and restrictions mandated by the court on data security and usage by private companies will strengthen Aadhaar. It will help ensure that no deserving beneficiary — whether a senior citizen, people engaged in manual labour — is denied welfare for the lack of Aadhaar or a technical glitch.

The historic verdict is a victory for India and Bharat as it will shape our digital destiny. Aadhaar will undoubtedly be a game changer for the poor and the country as a whole.



**Art, Culture, Society and Social & National Issues****Rail Heritage Digitisation Project Launched****Why in news?**

- ❑ Union Railway Minister Piyush Goyal has recently launched the ‘**Rail Heritage Digitisation Project**’ of Indian Railways in collaboration with Google Arts and Culture Association. The first-of-its-kind project aims to showcase India’s rail heritage to the national and international audience in an online story-telling platform.

**Key Facts**

- ★ The project was completed after almost 2 years of research, inquiry and execution.
- ★ It is the largest cultural heritage digitisation project not only in India but possibly in the entire Asia Pacific Region.
- ★ The collaboration with Google Art and Culture has enabled the Indian Railways to digitise National Rail Museum, Rewari Steam Centre, three World Heritage Railways, CSMT Mumbai building and other prominent aspects of country’s rail heritage.
- ★ The partnership also includes the dimension of Wi-Fi. The Wi-Fi facility that has been set up in 711 stations currently and the railways plans to take it to over 6000 stations.
- ★ The railways will also be setting up 22 digital screens across different locations in India for showcasing the historical project.

**Background**

- ★ Being a 165-year-old organisation, the railways has a lot of material that needs to be preserved. The city of Mumbai especially has a special place in the Railways, as it was where the first Railway line was set up in India. It was on April 16, 1853 when the first train ran between Bori Bunder and Thane.
- ★ Since then Railways India not only expanded to be one of the largest networks in the world but also significantly contributed to the social, technological and economic development of this country.
- ★ The Indian Railways has also created one of the largest repositories of industrial heritage in the world. It has captured glimpses of its history and evolution in 33 rail museums & heritage galleries, four world heritage sites, hundreds of buildings, bridges, locomotives, coaches, other rolling stocks and artefacts.
- ★ The conservation of these industrial relics also helps in promoting tourism, preserving traditional skills and communication with people.
- ★ The digitisation of rail heritage hence will provide immense opportunity to contextualise artefacts and other heritage assets with stories, thus making them more meaningful to the next generation.
- ★ The digital heritage also removes the bottleneck of being physically there and thus providing universal access to the large repository of knowledge.

*Source: PIB*

## PM inaugurates Conference on Academic Leadership

### Why in news?

- ❑ Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Conference on Academic Leadership on Education for Resurgence on September 29th.
- ❑ The conference saw participation from the Vice-Chancellors and Directors of more than 350 universities. The event was jointly organised by UGC, AICTE, ICSSR, IGNC, IGNOU, JNU and SGT University.

### Theme of the Conference

- The theme of the Conference was to deliberate on the challenges facing the Indian education system and to work out a plan for a paradigm shift both in terms of achieving academic outcomes and also in the regulation of education.

### **The inauguration was followed by breakout sessions covering the following eight thematic areas:**

- ★ Improving pedagogy for learner-centric education – use of artificial intelligence for customised learning
- ★ From job seeking to job creating – improving innovation and entrepreneurship
- ★ Improving quality of research – focus on requirements of India
- ★ Bringing synergy among educational institutions – pooling of academic resources like sharing of libraries and exchange of knowledge
- ★ Building inclusive and integrated campuses – taking up activities which could bring emotional attachments of students to the campus
- ★ Participatory Governance models – facilitating the participation of students in governance processes
- ★ Building robust financial models – supplementing Government resources by getting funds from alumni and also from corporate (CSR)
- ★ Promoting value education by building in universal values and life skills into education.
- ★ Besides this, the valedictory session was chaired by Union Human Resources Minister Prakash Javadekar. During the session, each of the eight groups was supposed to make a presentation on the course of action that they had agreed upon. This was then debated further in the Plenary Session and it is expected that a comprehensive action plan would emerge from this deliberation for improving the higher education sector in the country.

### What is the Significance?

- ★ The conference is in continuation of the efforts being made by the Ministry for evolving an action plan for transformation of the higher education sector.
- ★ The first among this was held in Delhi during vice-chancellors' conference from July 26 to 28, 2018.

*Source: PIB*

## ○ Supreme Court has lifted the centuries-old practice of prohibiting women to enter the Sabarimala Temple

### Why in news?

- Condemning the prohibition as hegemonic patriarchy, the Supreme Court has lifted the centuries-old practice of prohibiting women to enter the Lord Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala, Kerala.

### What is the issue?

- ★ The legend has it that the temple deity Ayyappa followed celibacy all through his life.
- ★ Therefore, women devotees of menstruating age are considered “impure” by supporters of the ban and are prohibited from entering the temple, on the pretext that they would disturb the celibacy of the deity.

### Views of the court : Highlights

- ★ On one side we pray to goddesses; on the other, women of a certain age are considered ‘impure’. This dualistic approach is nothing but patriarchy practised in religion.
- ★ Exclusion on grounds of biological and physiological features like menstruation was therefore unconstitutional as it is violative of the right to equality and dignity of women.
- ★ Hence, Rule 3(b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Act of 1965, which mandates the prohibition in Sabarimala temple, ultra vires the Constitution. The Rule violated the fundamental right of a Hindu woman to offer worship at a place of her choice. Right to worship is equally available to men and women.

### Dissenting views:

- ★ Justice Indu Malhotra, the lone woman judge on the Constitution Bench, dissented from the majority opinion. She held that the determination of what constituted an essential practice in a religion should not be decided by judges on the basis of their personal viewpoints.
- ★ She held that essentiality of a religious practice or custom had to be decided within the religion. It was a matter of personal faith. Constitutional morality in a pluralistic society gave freedom to practice even irrational or illogical customs and usages.
- ★ Harmonization of fundamental rights with religion included providing freedom for diverse sects to practise their customs and beliefs. Therefore, the Judge held that there were strong, plausible reasons to show that Ayyappa devotees had attributes of a religious denomination.
- ★ They have distinct names, properties. Besides, the Sabarimala temple was not funded out of the Consolidated Fund.

### What is the significance of the verdict?

- ★ The Supreme Court's ruling establishes the legal principle that individual freedom prevails over purported group rights, even in matters of religion. Devotees of Lord Ayyappa do not constitute a separate religious denomination and that the prohibition on women is not an essential part of Hindu religion.
- ★ Beyond the legality of the practice, the court has also sought to grapple with the stigmatisation of women devotees based on a medieval view of menstruation as symbolising impurity and pollution.
- ★ The decision reaffirms the Constitution's transformative character and derives strength from the centrality it accords to fundamental rights.

### The Way ahead:

- ★ Devotion cannot be subjected to the stereotypes of gender. Stigma built around traditional notions of impurity has no place in the constitutional order, and exclusion based on the notion of impurity is a form of untouchability.
- ★ Any rule based on segregation of women pertaining to biological characteristics is indefensible and unconstitutional.

*Source: The Hindu, Indian Express*

### ○ **Ayodhya land dispute: SC declines to revisit its 1994 judgment and refer it to larger bench**

#### Why in news?

- ★ The Supreme Court has recently declined to refer the 1994 Ismail Farooqui judgment that mosques are not integral to Islam to a larger constitution bench.

#### Key Facts

- ★ The judgement was delivered by a three-judge bench with 2: 1 majority. The majority judgement was written by Justice Ashok Bhushan on behalf of himself and Chief Justice Deepak Misra. The third judge, Justice Abdul Nazeer presented a dissenting judgment.
- ★ The decision to not refer the issue of reconsideration of the 1994 observations on the Ayodhya-Ram Janmabhoomi land dispute case to a five-judge constitution bench paves the way for the apex court to hear the main Ayodhya land dispute.

#### The Judgment: Highlights

- ★ In the majority verdict, the apex court bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra said that the present case on Ayodhya land dispute shall be decided on its own facts and the Ismail Farooqui judgment would have no impact on it.
- ★ Justice Ashok Bhushan, who read out the majority judgement on behalf of himself and the CJI, said that the court has to find out the context in which the five-judge had delivered the 1994 judgement.
- ★ He said that the statement in Faruqui case was in the limited context of immunity claimed by the petitioners for the mosque from acquisition and added that it need not be read broadly to mean mosque can never be essential to practise of Islam.

- ★ Justice S Abdul Nazeer disagreed with the two judges and said whether mosque is integral to Islam has to be decided considering belief of religion and it requires detailed consideration.
- ★ He referred to the recent Supreme Court order on female genital mutilation and said that the present matter should be heard by a larger bench.
- ★ The civil suit on the land dispute will now be heard by a newly constituted three-judge bench on October 29 as Justice Misra is scheduled to retire as the CJI on October 2.

### **Background**

- ★ The issue whether mosque is integral to Islam had cropped up when the three-judge SC bench headed by CJI Misra was hearing a batch of petitions challenging the Allahabad High Court's 2010 verdict by which the disputed land on the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid area was to be divided in three parts.
- ★ The Allahabad high court, in a 2:1 majority ruling, had ordered that the 2.77 acres of land be divided equally among the three concerned parties -the Sunni Waqf Board, the Nirmohi Akhara and Ram Lalla represented by the Hindu Maha Sabha.

### **Ismail Farooqui judgement**

- ★ In 1994, the Supreme Court had ruled that namaz or prayers could be offered anywhere and that a mosque was not necessary.
- ★ This cleared the way for the government to acquire the land where the 16th century Babri mosque was demolished by large crowd of Hindu Kar Sevaks.
- ★ The site is considered to be Ram Janmabhoomi, or the birthplace of Lord Ram and so they feel that a Ram temple should be built at the site.

*Source: Indian Express*

## **○ Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, MP awarded best-performing states in 'Ease of Living Index' 2018**

### **Why in news?**

- ★ The state of Andhra Pradesh has topped the 'Ease of Living Index' rankings launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. It was followed by Odisha and Madhya Pradesh.
- ★ The three states were awarded best-performing states at the National Dissemination Workshop on Ease of Living Index, 2018, which was held in Delhi on September 24, 2018.

### **About Ease of Living Index**

- ★ The 'Ease of Living Index' is an initiative of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to help the cities undertake a 360-degree assessment of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
- ★ The Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry had decided in June 2017 to rank 116 cities (all smart cities and million plus cities) based on the liveability parameters.
- ★ The assessment on the set parameters formally began on January 19, 2018 and the Ministry released the first ever 'Ease of Living Index' covering 111 Indian cities on August 13, 2018

## Objective

- The index serves as a litmus test to help assess the progress made in cities through various initiatives.

## Evaluation

- ★ The framework mainly comprises four pillars including Institutional, Social, Economic and Physical, which are further broken down into 78 indicators across 15 categories.
- ★ Some of the indicators include governance, identity and culture, education, health, safety and security, economy, affordable housing, land use planning, public open spaces, transportation and mobility, assured water supply, waste-water management, solid waste management, power and quality of the environment.
- ★ All the cities were evaluated out of 100. While the 'physical' pillar (infrastructure) was given the highest weightage of 45, the institutional (governance) and social were weighed at 25 each and economy was given 5 weightage.

## Ease of Living Index and SDGs

- ★ The Ease of Living assessment standards are closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and aim to provide a strong impetus to India's effort for systematic tracking progress of SDGs in the urban areas.
- ★ Among the 17 SDG goals, 8 goals are directly linked to India's ease of living assessment framework with SDG 11.
- ★ The SDG 11 is aimed at making our cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable and is measured through a set of 30 indicators.

## Background

- ★ The first round of Ease of Living covered 111 cities. Gurugram was subsequently included in the assessment.
- ★ While four cities of West Bengal – Howrah, New Town Kolkata, Kolkata and Durgapur did not participate, Naya Raipur of Chhattisgarh and Amravati of Andhra Pradesh did not fulfil the parameters as they are green-field cities.
- ★ Besides collecting data on a range of metrics to evaluate the performance of the city administration, the exercise spread over four months also collected feedback from over 60,000 citizens to measure satisfaction on urban services.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Sikkim's first-ever airport inaugurated

### Why in news?

- Sikkim's first-ever airport was inaugurated by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on September 24, 2018 at Pakyong. The development is a historic occasion for the entire northeast region of India.

### Key facts

- ★ The airport was constructed by the Airports Authority of India. Until now, Sikkim was the only state in India remaining without a functional airport.
- ★ The airport is spread over 201 acres and is located on top of a hill about two km above Pakyong village at 4,500 feet above sea level.

### What are the benefits?

- ★ The airport's location makes it strategically relevant from the country's security point of view. The Indian Air Force (IAF) will find this airport convenient for the landing and taking off of its aircrafts.
- ★ With the new airport, the travelling time to Sikkim will be get cut down by almost 5 hours because, earlier, the nearest airport to which the tourists could fly down was Bagdogra in West Bengal.
- ★ Sikkim has been one of the favorite destinations for tourists, almost all throughout the year. Hence, from the tourist point of view, the airport will be a major booster, as it will help improve connectivity and save travel time for the tourists.

### Other Details

- ★ The airport is not only India's 100th functional airport but also one of the country's five highest airports.
- ★ The first commercial flight from Pakyong is scheduled to begin from October 4, when Spicejet will start its daily Kolkata-Sikkim flights.
- ★ Following this, SpiceJet will operate 78-seater Bombardier Q400 flights to and fro from Delhi, Kolkata and Guwahati every day under the Civil Aviation Ministry's Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) scheme.
- ★ Initially, the airport will cater only to domestic flights, but later it will also provide international flight services connecting Sikkim with other countries like Paro in Bhutan, Kathmandu in Nepal and Dhaka in Bangladesh.

*Source: The Hindu*

## India's first National Registry of Sexual Offenders Launched

### Why in news?

- In a first, the Union Government released a National Database of Sexual Offenders (NDSO) on September 20, 2018. With the launch, India became the ninth nation to maintain such a thorough database.

### Key Facts

- ★ The database would mainly include key details of the convicted sexual offenders such as their names, photographs, residential address, DNA samples, fingerprints, Aadhaar numbers and Personal Account Numbers (PANs).
- ★ It is an initiative under the National Mission for Safety of Women. Our correspondent reports, the database will be maintained by the National Crime Records Bureau under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- ★ On the occasion, the Home Minister also launched the Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) portal to check objectionable online content.
- ★ The portal "[cybercrime.gov.in](http://cybercrime.gov.in)" will receive complaints from citizens on objectionable online content related to child pornography, child sexual abuse material and sexually explicit material such as rape and gang rape.

### CCPWC Portal

- ★ The portal is convenient and user friendly, as it will enable complainants to report cases without disclosing their identity.
- ★ This will not only help the victims or complainants but also help the civil society organisations and responsible citizens to anonymously report complaints pertaining to child pornography, child sexual abuse material or sexually explicit material such as rape and gang rape.
- ★ The complainants would also be able to upload the objectionable content and URL to assist in the investigation by the state police.
- ★ The complaints registered through the portal will be handled by police authorities of the respective states and union territories.
- ★ Further, the portal will enable the victim or complainant to track his or her report by opting for “report and track” option using the registered mobile number.
- ★ The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) will proactively identify such objectionable content and take up with intermediaries for its removal.
- ★ The NCRB has already been notified as the Government of India agency to issue notices under Section 79(3)b of IT Act for the same.

### NDSO Portal

- ★ The database will comprise more than 4.5 lakh cases and will have the profiles of first-time offenders as well as repeat offenders. It will include offenders convicted under charges of rape, gang rape, POCSO and eve teasing.
- ★ The compilation will be done on the basis of information from prisons across the country. The offenders will be classified based on their criminal history to determine if they pose a serious danger to the community or not. It will help the investigating agency for the speedy trial of the cases.
- ★ It is an initiative under the National Mission for Safety of Women. It will be maintained by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) under the Union Home Ministry.
- ★ While currently, the database does not have the records of Juvenile offenders, they are likely to be included in the registry at a later stage.
- ★ The database will, however, be only available to the law enforcement agencies for investigation and employee verification.

### Data storage

- ★ The national registry will maintain the data of the cases classified as posing low danger for a period of 15 years.
- ★ The data of the cases, which are classified as moderate danger, will be stored for 25 years.
- ★ The data for cases involving repeat and habitual offenders, criminals, convicted gang rapists and custodial rapes will be stored permanently.

- ★ With the roll out of the registry, India will become the ninth nation in the world to set up and maintain such a detailed database of sexual offenders.
- ★ The other nations to maintain such a database include the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, South Africa and Trinidad and Tobago.
- ★ While in the US, the database can also be accessed by the common public, in rest of the nations, it can only be accessed by the law enforcement agencies.

## **Swachh Vidyalaya Puraskar 2017-18**

### **Why in news?**

- ★ The Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Prakash Javadekar presented the Swachh Vidyalaya Puraskar 2017-18 on September 18, 2018 at Dr Ambedkar International Centre in New Delhi, as a part of the Swachhata Hi Seva campaign launched by PM Narendra Modi on September 15, 2018.
- ★ This year, for the first time, the award has been extended to private schools besides government and government aided schools.
- ★ The award was launched as a follow up to the Swachh Vidyalaya Initiative launched in 2014. Under Swachh Vidyalaya Initiative, a record number of 417796 toilets were constructed in 261400 schools, including 190887 girls' toilets in one year up to August 15, 2015.

### **Swachh Vidyalaya Puraskar 2017-18**

- ★ The methodology for the awards was evolved in consultation with the UNICEF and Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI), the Implementation and Technical partners for the awards.
- ★ The schools voluntarily applied online through a website and mobile App for the awards.
- ★ Schools were rated through a transparent mechanism on five broad parameters – Water, Toilet, Hand washing with Soap, Operations and Maintenance, and Behaviour Change and Capacity Building.
- ★ Out of 52 Awardee schools, 37 schools are from rural areas and 15 from urban areas.
- ★ A total of 45 schools are government/government aided; 7 are private schools; 24 are elementary and 28 are secondary/higher secondary schools.
- ★ The awardee schools also include 5 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas and 2 Navodaya Vidyalayas.
- ★ 4 States (Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh) and 9 districts (Pondicherry, Srikakulam, Chandigarh, Hisar, Karaikal, Latur, Nellore, South Goa, Vadodara) will also be awarded with Certificate of Recognition for having maximum number of schools awarded with National Swachh Vidyalaya Puraskar.
- ★ Awardee schools will be given an additional school grant of Rs 50,000 along with Certificate of Recognition.

## Background

- ★ The Swachh Vidyalaya Puraskar was launched in 2016-17 by the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry for Human Resource Development.
- ★ The award was framed to honour the schools that have done exemplary work in the field of water, sanitation and hygiene.
- ★ The award is conferred to ensure long term sustainability and behaviour change towards cleanliness.
- ★ It also provides a benchmark and roadmap for schools to make further improvements.

*Source: The Hindu*



**Polity & Governance, Social Justice and Social Development****Supreme Court upholds constitutional validity of Aadhaar Act****Why in news?**

- ❑ The Supreme Court has upheld the Aadhaar scheme as constitutionally valid. The court also upheld the passage of the Aadhaar Act as a Money Bill.

**Key Facts**

- ★ The court ruled that the Aadhaar programme served the “larger public interest” in ensuring that the poor have access to resources. It found that the programme eliminated any chance of duplication and that enrolment was fool proof.
- ★ However, the apex court’s five-judge constitution bench also struck down several provisions in the Aadhaar Act.

**Where Aadhaar is not required?**

- ★ Children cannot be denied any benefit due to not having Aadhaar. Hence, Aadhaar is not needed for school admissions.
- ★ Compulsory linking of mobile phone numbers to Aadhaar.
- ★ Aadhaar is not needed for opening a bank account and banking services.
- ★ CBSE, NEET, UGC cannot make Aadhaar mandatory to appear in entrance examinations.
- ★ No private entity can avail Aadhaar data which includes telecom companies and mobile wallets.

**Where Aadhaar is required?**

- ★ Linking of PAN with Aadhaar.
- ★ Mandatory for filing of IT returns and allotment of Permanent Account Number.
- ★ Aadhaar must for availing facilities of welfare schemes and government subsidies.

**Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act struck down:**

- ★ Section 57 was used by the government to compel private companies to demand Aadhaar verification for services.
- ★ The Court accepted the argument that no rationale exists for this power and declared it invalid.
- ★ Consequently, the Court has struck down linking of Aadhaar with mobiles and bank accounts. It has further directed that the data collected shall be deleted within six months.

## What was the contention against Aadhaar before the Supreme Court?

The main questions raised during the hearing on Aadhaar were:

- ★ Is the Aadhaar Act, 2016, constitutionally valid given that it was passed in Parliament as a Money Bill?
- ★ Why does every citizen need one identity proof — a unique identification number — to acquire government benefits? Can't this be done using other documents, like ration card or passport?
- ★ Does Aadhaar take away our right to privacy — upheld as a fundamental right by a nine-judge Constitution bench of the court in August last year.
- ★ What happens if Aadhaar data becomes a tool for mass surveillance by the state, as the movement and activities of users can be tracked by collecting metadata?

### Government's Argument

- ★ During the hearing, the government argued that Aadhaar would help weed out ghost beneficiaries of welfare schemes.
- ★ The government argued that is using Aadhaar as an enabler of various facets of the right to life of teeming millions of Indian residents including their right to food, the right to livelihood, the right to receive pensions and other social assistance benefits like scholarships etc. by the genuine beneficiaries.”

### The Supreme Court's Right to Privacy verdict:

- ★ On August 24, 2017, a nine-judge Bench ruled that the right to privacy is a fundamental right, a shot in the arm for the petitioners.
- ★ However, the court had also ruled that “besides national security, the State may have justifiable reasons for the collection and storage of data.
- ★ In a social welfare state, the government embarks upon programmes which provide benefits to impoverished and marginalised sections of society.
- ★ There is a vital State interest in ensuring that scarce public resources are not dissipated by the diversion of resources to persons who do not qualify as recipients.”

### About Justice B N Srikrishna report:

- ★ The Justice B N Srikrishna panel was appointed to recommend a data protection framework to the government.
- ★ It submitted its recommendations in July this year. The Srikrishna data protection report highlighted individuals' constitutional rights over their data and said efforts need to be made to protect data at any cost.
- ★ It recommended steps for protection of personal information, defining obligations of data processors as also rights of individuals, and mooting penalties for violation.

### The Way ahead:

- ★ Accepting the fact that Aadhaar empowers the marginalised sections of society and gave them an identity, the SC asked the Central government to introduce a robust data protection law as soon as possible.
- ★ Aadhaar will undoubtedly be a game changer for the poor and the country as a whole. Every technology has some risks.
- ★ A mature society must take measures to mitigate risks and not abandon the technology.

*Source: The Hindu*

### ○ **Supreme Court has declared Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code as unconstitutional**

#### Why in news?

- The Supreme Court has recently declared Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code as unconstitutional stating that the penal provision on adultery was manifestly arbitrary and dents the individuality of women.

#### What is the issue?

- ★ Section 497 perpetuates subordinate status of women, denies dignity, sexual autonomy, and is based on gender stereotypes.
- ★ Section 497 based on women as chattel, seeks to control sexuality of woman, hits the autonomy and dignity of woman.
- ★ Besides, Section 497 perpetrates subordinate nature of woman in a marriage. Therefore, it should be struck down for violation of Articles 14, 21.

#### Highlights of the judgement

- ★ Adultery might not cause of an unhappy marriage, but it could be result of an unhappy marriage.
- ★ In case of adultery, criminal law expects people to be loyal which is a command which gets into the realm of privacy.
- ★ Adultery can be ground for civil issues including dissolution of marriage but it cannot be a criminal offence.
- ★ Any provision treating woman with inequality is not Constitutional.
- ★ Mere adultery can't be a crime, unless it attracts the scope of Section 306 (abatement to suicide) of the IPC.

### ○ **What are the issues with Section 497 which the petitioners wanted to be addressed?**

- ★ The petitioners want the adultery law to be made gender neutral. This is because the law calls for the man to be punished in case of adultery, but no action is suggested for the woman.
- ★ As per Section 497, a woman whose husband has had sexual intercourse with another woman cannot file a complaint because the law makes no such provision for her.
- ★ Moreover, the adultery law in IPC reduces women to an object because no consent of the married woman is required for a man to have sexual intercourse with her. As per Section 497, if the woman's husband agrees, the act is not a crime. This is the reason many have called this law an anti-women law.

## Background

- ★ The adultery law had come up in court thrice in the past — in 1954, in 1985, and in 1988.
- ★ In 1954, the SC rejected that Section 497 violated the right to equality.
- ★ In 1985, it said that women didn't need to be included in the law as a party which can make complaints.
- ★ In 1988, the Supreme Court said that the adultery law was a “shield rather than a sword”.

## What is Section 497?

- Section 497 of the 158-year-old IPC says, “Whoever has sexual intercourse with a person who is and whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the wife of another man, without the consent or connivance of that man, such sexual intercourse not amounting to the offence of rape, is guilty of the offence of adultery, and shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to five years, or with fine, or with both. In such case the wife shall not be punishable as an abettor.”

*Source: The Hindu*

## Supreme Court allows live streaming of court proceedings

### Why in news?

- The Supreme Court of India has allowed live streaming and video recording of court proceedings across the country. The bench comprising Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices AM Khanwilkar and DY Chandrachud asked the government to frame rules in this regard under Article 145 of the Constitution.

### Key Facts

- ★ The top court stated that live streaming of court proceedings will bring accountability and transparency into the judicial system and serve the public interest.
- ★ The apex court had earlier reserved its verdict on the matter on August 24, saying it wanted to implement the concept of “open court” to decongest the court rooms.

### The Hearing: Key Highlights

- ★ During the hearing, Attorney General KK Venugopal, appearing on behalf of the Centre, had said that live streaming could be introduced as a pilot project in the CJI's court on matters of constitutional importance and had also submitted suggestions on the guidelines for the live streaming.
- ★ Venugopal had said that the success of this project would determine whether live streaming should be introduced in other courts of the apex court and in courts across the country.
- ★ He had also suggested that live streaming should be delayed by 70 seconds to allow the Judges to mute the sound when a lawyer misbehaves or if the matter is sensitive, like dealing with individual privacy or national security.

## Article 145 of the Constitution

- ❑ Under the article's provisions, the Supreme Court may from time to time make rules for regulating generally the practice and procedure of the Court, subject to the provisions of any law made by the parliament with the approval of the President of India.

### Some of the rules include:

- ★ rules as to the persons practising before the Court
- ★ rules as to the procedure for hearing appeals and other matters pertaining to appeals including the time within which appeals to the Court are to be entered
- ★ rules as to the proceedings in the Court for the enforcement of any of the rights conferred by Part III
- ★ rules as to the proceedings in the Court under Article 139A
- ★ rules as to the granting of bail, stay of proceedings
- ★ rules providing for the summary determination of any appeal which appears to the Court to be frivolous or vexatious or brought for the purpose of delay
- ★ Besides, under the article, subject to the provisions of clause (3), rules made under this article may fix the minimum number of Judges who are to sit for any purpose, and may provide for the powers of single Judges and Division Courts.
- ★ Under the article, the minimum number of Judges who are to sit for the purpose of deciding any case involving a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of this Constitution or for the purpose of hearing any reference under Article 143 shall be five.
- ★ Further, it states that no judgment shall be delivered by the Supreme Court save in open Court, and no report shall be made under Article 143 save in accordance with an opinion also delivered in open Court.
- ★ The article also states that no judgment and no such opinion shall be delivered by the Supreme Court save with the concurrence of a majority of the Judges present at the hearing of the case, but nothing in this clause shall be deemed to prevent a Judge who does not concur from delivering a dissenting judgment or opinion.

### Background

- ★ The bench was hearing petitions including those filed by senior advocate Indira Jaising, law student Snehil Tripathi and NGO 'Centre For Accountability and Systemic Change' on the issue.
- ★ Jaising, in her PIL, had sought video-recording of proceedings on matters of national importance. She, however, highlighted the need to include safeguards to prohibit unauthorised reproduction of broadcasts.
- ★ While considering her petition, the court had earlier observed that live streaming of court proceedings will help the litigant instantaneously know what happened to his case and how his lawyer performed his case before the court.
- ★ The court had also considered a petition by law student Swapnil Tripathi, who had challenged the ban imposed on interns entering courtrooms on miscellaneous days

- ★ The court had then asked the student to submit guidelines to the Attorney General regarding the creation of a live streaming room in the apex court premises exclusively for law interns and law students
- ★ During the proceedings, the counsel of the NGO had suggested that instead of forming a TV Channel or live streaming, the proceedings should be video recorded and hosted on the official website of the apex court.
- ★ The apex court had earlier termed the proposal of live streaming of the court proceedings as the “need of the hour”.

*Source: The Hindu, Indian Express*

## President signs Ordinance banning Instant Triple Talaq practice

### Why in news?

- President Ram Nath Kovind on September 19, 2018 signed the Ordinance banning the practice of Instant Triple Talaq. The ordinance was cleared by the Union Cabinet earlier on the same day itself. The ordinance makes instant triple talaq a punishable offence.

### Key Facts

- ★ The ordinance has similar provisions as mentioned in original the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill 2017, which was cleared by the Lok Sabha in December 2017. However, the bill was stuck in the Rajya Sabha.
- ★ It faced a stiff resistance in the Rajya Sabha where several opposition lawmakers argued over the criminal provisions in the draft law.
- ★ In view of the growing opposition, the Government on August 9, 2018 approved three amendments in the instant triple talaq bill, making it permissible for a magistrate to give bail for the offence.

### Amendments approved in August 2018

- ★ The amendment mandates that the magistrate can decide on releasing the husband on bail only after hearing the wife. However, the **offence remains non-bailable**. Under a non-bailable law, bail cannot be granted by police at the police station itself. The government has not struck down the three year jail penalty for the husband or the provision that only empowers a magistrate to release the accused on bail.
- ★ Another amendment allows **only a woman**, or a close relative, to file a police case against her husband for instant triple talaq.
- ★ The third amendment makes the offence of **instant triple talaq “compoundable”**, where a magistrate can use his powers to settle the dispute between a husband and his wife. It allows a wife to drop the case, if husband returns to her later and they arrive at a compromise.
- ★ Now, the **ordinance will be placed before the Parliament** and the bill would still need to be passed by the Rajya Sabha as the Supreme Court had held that “re-promulgation of ordinances is a fraud on the constitution” and hence not allowed. It cannot become a “parallel source of legislation”.

## ○ Provisions of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017

- ★ The bill says that “any pronouncement of talaq by a person upon his wife, by words, either spoken or written or in electronic form or in any other manner whatsoever, shall be void and illegal.”
- ★ It makes instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat illegal and void, be it in any form- spoken form, in writing or by electronic means such as email, SMS and WhatsApp or in any other manner whatsoever.
- ★ It defines ‘talaq’ as ‘talaq-e-biddat’ pronounced by a Muslim man resulting in instant and irrevocable divorce. Talaq-e-biddat refers to the practice under Muslim personal laws where pronouncement of the word ‘talaq’ thrice in one sitting by a Muslim man to his wife results in an instant and irrevocable divorce.
- ★ It makes declaration of **talaq a cognizable and non-bailable offence**. A husband declaring talaq can be imprisoned for up to three years along with a fine.
- ★ Any offence committed under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 will be treated as cognisable and non-bailable.
- ★ It envisages entitling divorcee Muslim women for maintenance. It gives power to wife, upon whom talaq is pronounced, to approach a magistrate seeking subsistence allowance for herself and her minor children.
- ★ A married Muslim woman will be entitled to **custody of her minor children** in the event of pronouncement of talaq by her husband, which will be determined by the Magistrate.
- ★ The Bill will help in ensuring gender justice and gender equality of married Muslim women and will help them in practising their fundamental rights of non-discrimination and empowerment.

*Source: Indian Express, The Hindu*

## HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017 comes into force

### Why in news?

- ❑ The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on September 11, 2018 issued a notification for bringing the Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017 in force with effect from September 10, 2018.
- ❑ The HIV/AIDS Act, 2017 safeguards the rights of people living with HIV and affected by HIV.

### Provisions of HIV/AIDS Act, 2017

- ★ The provisions of the Act address HIV-related discrimination, strengthen the existing programme by bringing in legal accountability, and establish formal mechanisms for inquiring into complaints and redressing grievances.
- ★ The Act seeks to prevent and **control the spread of HIV and AIDS**, prohibits discrimination against persons with HIV and AIDS.
- ★ **Informed consent and disclosure of HIV status:** The Bill requires that no HIV test, medical treatment, or research will be conducted on a person without his informed consent.

- ★ Every HIV infected or affected person below the age of 18 years has the **right to reside in a shared household** and enjoy the facilities of the household.
- ★ The Act also **prohibits any individual from publishing information or advocating feelings** of hatred against HIV positive persons and those living with them.
- ★ **Guardianship:** A person between the age of 12 to 18 years who has sufficient maturity in understanding and managing the affairs of his HIV or AIDS affected family is competent to act as a guardian of another sibling below 18 years of age in the matters relating to admission to educational establishments, operating bank accounts, managing property, care and treatment.
- ★ **Role of the Ombudsman:** An ombudsman shall be appointed by each state government to inquire into complaints related to the violation of the Act and the provision of health care services.
- ★ It **penalises “propagation of hatred”** against HIV affected person where a violator could be punished with a minimum jail term of three months to a maximum of two years and can be fined up to Rs 1 lakh.
- ★ It makes **Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) a legal right** for all HIV/AIDS patients.
- ★ It adopted **”test and treat” policy** which means any person testing positive will be entitled for free treatment by the state and central government. Earlier, this was restricted by a CD4 count rate.
- ★ Every person in the care and custody of the state shall have right to HIV prevention, testing, treatment and counseling services.

### **Grounds on which discrimination against HIV positive persons is prohibited**

- The 2017 Act lists various grounds on which discrimination against HIV positive persons and those living with them is prohibited. These include the denial, termination, discontinuation of unfair treatment with regard to:
  - (i) Employment
  - (ii) Educational establishments
  - (iii) Health care services
  - (iv) Residing or renting property
  - (v) Standing for public or private office
  - (vi) Provision of insurance (unless based on actuarial studies)
- The requirement for HIV testing as a pre-requisite for obtaining employment or accessing health care or education is also prohibited.

### **Court proceedings as per the Act**

Cases relating to HIV positive persons shall be disposed off by the court on a priority basis.

In any legal proceeding, if an HIV infected or affected person is a party, the court may pass orders that the proceedings can be conducted

- (a) by suppressing the identity of the person,
- (b) in camera,
- (c) to restrain any person from publishing information that discloses the identity of the applicant.

*Source: The Hindu*

## NOTA option removed from Rajya Sabha, Legislative Council polls

### Why in news?

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) recently withdrew the provision of NOTA (None of the above) option from ballot papers of the Rajya Sabha and the state's Legislative Council polls as per the Supreme Court directive.

### Background

- ★ The Supreme Court on August 21, 2018 ruled that the 'None of The Above' (NOTA) option will not be applicable for voting in the Rajya Sabha elections. NOTA could continue to be an option in the direct elections such as the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies.
- ★ A bench of CJI Dipak Misra and justices A M Khanwilkar and D Y Chandrachud had set aside the EC's notification allowing the NOTA option in the ballot papers for the Rajya Sabha polls.
- ★ The CJI led bench held that the NOTA option is meant only for the general public in direct elections and not for the polls held by the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote as done in the Rajya Sabha.
- ★ The NOTA decision by SC was taken on a petition filed by Gujarat Congress leader Shailesh Manubhai Parmar to do away with the 'NOTA' option in Rajya Sabha elections. He filed the petition in regard to the Rajya Sabha election in 2017, in which Congress leader Ahmed Patel was contesting.
- ★ The trigger for the petition was the decision of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to use NOTA for Rajya Sabha elections in Gujarat in 2017. The ECI had issued two circulars on January 24, 2014 and November 12, 2015, giving the Rajya Sabha members the option to press the NOTA button in the Upper House polls.

### NOTA

- ★ The Election Commission has made an arrangement in the voting system through which it can record that there is the percent of people who have not considered voting to anyone.
- ★ In the December 2013 assembly elections, the Election Commission of India had directed to provide the option of None of the above, or NOTA buttons in the electronic voting machine.
- ★ That is, now the people have an option in the Lok Sabha and state elections which can be exercised if they do not like any of the candidates.
- ★ The NOTA button in the EVM machine has a pink colour so that it could be recognised easily.
- ★ NOTA gives an option to dismiss candidates. It is not that their votes are not counted in the time of counting votes. They are very much counted and it is also assessed how many people voted for the NOTA.
- ★ During the time when there was no NOTA option available to people in India, if anybody in the election thought that according to him no candidate is good enough to vote then he would not go to vote.
- ★ In such situations, people were deprived of voting rights. This is the reason why the option of the NOTA was discussed so that the process of fairness in the election process and politics could be ensured. Let us note that in many countries including India, Greece, Ukraine, Spain, Colombia and Russia, the option of NOTA is applicable.

*Source: The Hindu*

## o Supreme Court Verdict related to Candidates Contesting Elections

### Why in news?

- ★ The Supreme Court has ruled recently that candidates cannot be disqualified from contesting elections merely because charges have been framed against them in a criminal case.

### Key Facts

- ★ The ruling was delivered by a five-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court, which was chaired by Chief Justice Dipak Misra and comprised Justices RF Nariman, AM Khanwilkar, DY Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra.
- ★ The judgment came on a batch of petitions filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, former Chief Election Commissioner JM Lyngdoh and NGO Public Interest Foundation.

### The Judgement: Key Highlights

- ★ The constitution bench held that candidates cannot be disqualified merely because charges have been framed against them in a criminal case.
- ★ The bench also directed the legislature to consider framing a law to ensure decriminalisation of politics. Noting the steady rise in criminalisation of politics in India, the bench issued the following directions for curbing the same:
  - ★ All candidates seeking to contest elections must declare their past criminal charges/ records.
  - ★ Political parties must also display the full details of the criminal charges faced by their candidates on their official website.
  - ★ Parliament must make a law to ensure candidates with criminal records don't enter public life or take part in law making.
  - ★ The Election Commission also must ensure that candidates clearly specify the details of their pending cases or criminal past at the time of filing their nominations in bold letters.
  - ★ Political parties should also issue a declaration and give wide publicity in electronic media about the criminal past of the candidates.

### Background

- ★ In its petition filed in 2011, the petitioner Public Interest Foundation had essentially sought guidelines or framework to deal with the menace of criminalisation of politics and had demanded that those charged with serious offences be debarred from contesting elections.
- ★ The NGO had also demanded to lay down a time frame of six months during which trial of such persons is concluded in a time-bound manner.
- ★ The question before the top court in the current case was whether such disqualification should run from the date of framing of charge by the court instead of waiting for the conclusion of the trial.
- ★ The matter was initially referred to a three-judge bench and then it was referred to a five-judge Constitution bench.
- ★ The five-judge Bench commenced hearing on the petitions on August 9 and the final day of hearing was on August 28.

*Source: Indian Express*

## Revisiting Sec 124-A of IPC – Sedition

### Why in news?

- ❑ The Law Commission is in the process of revisiting the section 124-A of Indian Penal Code. It calls for a thorough reconsideration and presents the various issues related to it before the public for a national debate.

### Sec 124 A of IPC

- ★ Sec 124-A deals with sedition, and was introduced by the British colonial government in 1870.
- ★ It says that the act of Sedition is to bring hatred or contempt towards the Government established by law in India.
- ★ In this case, the punishment may be of imprisonment for life and fine, or imprisonment for 3 years and fine.
- ★ It was actually brought to suppress the freedom struggle prevalent then.

### What does the previous Law Commission report say?

- ★ In an earlier report in 1968, the Law Commission had rejected the idea of repealing the Section.
- ★ In 1971, the panel wanted the scope of the section to be expanded.
- ★ It called for covering the Constitution, the legislature and the judiciary, in addition to the ‘government to be established by law’.
- ★ It meant that ‘disaffection’ against all these institutions should not be tolerated.
- ★ The only dilution it mooted was to modify the wide gap between the two jail terms prescribed (either three years or life).
- ★ It called for fixing the maximum sanction at seven years’ rigorous imprisonment with fine.

### What are the concerns?

- ★ It is an irony to retain a provision that was used extensively to suppress the freedom struggle.
- ★ It is to be noted that, Britain itself abolished it 10 years ago.
- ★ Also, there have been repeated instances of misuse of the Section.
- ★ The foremost objection is that the definition of sedition remains too wide.
- ★ Under the present law, it offers scope to consider as seditious
- ★ strong criticism against government policies and personalities
- ★ slogans voicing disapprobation of leaders
- ★ depictions of an unresponsive or insensitive regime
- ★ In recent times the core principle enunciated by the Supreme Court in this regard has been forgotten.
- ★ It specifies that incitement to violence or tendency to create public disorder are the essential ingredients of the offence.

### What is the way forward?

- ★ As long as sedition is seen as a reasonable restriction on free speech on the ground of preserving public order, it will be difficult to contain its mischief.
- ★ There are thus two ways of undoing the harm that sedition provision does to citizens' fundamental rights:
- ★ It can be amended so that there is a much narrower definition of what constitutes sedition
- ★ The second and best course is to repeal the section altogether

*Source: The Hindu*

### ○ **Government constitutes Lokpal Search Committee headed by Justice Ranjana Desai**

#### Why in news?

- Government has constituted eight-member search committee headed by former Supreme Court judge, Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, to recommend names for posts of Lokpal chairperson and members. The selection process of Lokpal is underway as per guidelines of laid down in Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

#### Committee's Terms of Reference:

- The search committee will start functioning soon. It will recommend names for Lokpal chairperson and members. It can also consider names other than those recommended by the search committee.

#### Lokpal Act: Highlights

- ★ The Act allows setting up of anti-corruption ombudsman called Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayukta at the State-level.
- ★ The Lokpal will consist of a chairperson and a maximum of eight members.
- ★ The Lokpal will cover all categories of public servants, including the Prime Minister. But the armed forces do not come under the ambit of Lokpal.
- ★ The Act also incorporates provisions for attachment and confiscation of property acquired by corrupt means, even while the prosecution is pending.
- ★ The States will have to institute Lokayukta within one year of the commencement of the Act.
- ★ The Act also ensures that public servants who act as whistleblowers are protected.

#### Power and Function

- ★ The Lokpal will have the power of superintendence and direction over any investigation agency including CBI for cases referred to them by the ombudsman.
- ★ As per the Act, the Lokpal can summon or question any public servant if there exists a prima facie case against the person, even before an investigation agency (such as vigilance or CBI) has begun the probe. Any officer of the CBI investigating a case referred to it by the Lokpal, shall not be transferred without the approval of the Lokpal.
- ★ An investigation must be completed within six months. However, the Lokpal or Lokayukta may allow extensions of six months at a time provided the reasons for the need of such extensions are given in writing.
- ★ Special courts will be instituted to conduct trials on cases referred by Lokpal.

*Source: PIB*

## ○ President clears ordinance to set up a board of eminent personalities to run MCI

### Why in news?

- President Ram Nath Kovind has recently given his assent to promulgate an ordinance that seeks to establish a committee to run the Medical Council of India, until Parliament passes legislation to replace the body with a new commission.

### Key Facts

- ★ The presidential assent came after the Union Cabinet cleared the ordinance .
- ★ since the term of the elected body of the Medical Commission of India is slated to end soon, a need was felt to appoint a committee comprising professionals of great eminence to run its affairs.
- ★ Hence, the ordinance supersedes the MCI and the powers of the council have been vested in a Board of Governors (BoG).

### Composition of the Board

- ★ The Board of Governors who would run the MCI will include Niti Aayog member VK Paul, AIIMS Director Randeep Guleria, PGIMER's Director Jagat Ram, BM Gangadhar of NIMHANS Bengaluru and AIIMS Professor Nikhil Tandon. and doctors S Venkatesh and Balram Bhargava.
- ★ The Director General health services S Venkatesh and Director General ICMR Balram Bhargava will be the ex-officio members of the board.

### Highlights

- ★ A bill to replace the Council with a National Medical Commission is pending in Parliament. The National Medical Commission is expected to replace the Medical Council of India as the top medical education regulator in the country.
- ★ In March 2018, the Union Cabinet had made amendments to the National Medical Commission Bill after considering recommendations made by a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare.
- ★ The bill proposes setting up of four autonomous boards to oversee undergraduate and post-graduate courses, assess and accredit medical institutes and register practitioners under the National Medical Commission.
- ★ The bill also proposes a common entrance exam and licentiate exams that all medical graduates will have to clear to get practicing licences.
- ★ The bill was sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee following protests by the medical fraternity across the country on the grounds that it would lead to more corruption in the medical field.

## The Background

- ★ The Supreme Court of India had in May 2016 directed the centre to set up an oversight committee with the authority to oversee all statutory functions of MCI till the new legislation comes in, following allegations of corruption against MCI office bearers and probes into opaque accreditation to medical colleges.
- ★ Several MCI members have been accused of taking bribes to fast-track accreditation.
- ★ In 2017, another oversight committee was set up with the approval of the top court after expiry of the one year term of the first panel.
- ★ In July 2018, the committee resigned citing instances of 'non-compliance of their instructions by MCI'.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Supreme Court constitutes committee to look into jail reforms

### Why in news?

- The Supreme Court has recently constituted a three-member committee to look into the problems of jails in India and suggest reform measures.
- The committee headed by former SC judge Justice Amitava Roy will look into the aspect of jail reforms across the country and suggest measures to deal with them.

### Highlights

- ★ The committee, chaired by SC judge Amitava Roy, would comprise two officials from the Union Government.
- ★ The committee's duties will include looking into the problems of jails across the country including overcrowding in prisons, issue of human rights of prisoners and issues concerning women prisoners languishing in cells for years. After studying the problems, the committee would be required to suggest measures to deal with them.
- ★ The Supreme Court had on August 27 reserved its order on the issue of constituting a committee to deal with issues pertaining to jails and suggest reforms for prisons across the country.

### Background

- ★ The Supreme Court had said on August 8, 2018 that it would constitute a committee under the chairmanship of its retired judge to look into the problems in jails, on a day-to-day basis and suggest measures to tackle the problems.
- ★ The SC bench comprising Justices M B Lokur, S Abdul Nazeer and Deepak Gupta had expressed its displeasure saying that the government had collected a huge amount under the orders of the apex court but the funds were not being utilised properly.
- ★ The Attorney General K K Venugopal had also agreed with the court on setting up a committee for jail reforms.

- ★ The court had earlier expressed its displeasure that several states had not yet appointed the board of visitors who regularly inspect prisons to ensure that they are being run in accordance with the rules.
- ★ The court had also earlier passed a slew of directions over unnatural deaths in jails and on prison reforms across India.
- ★ The bench was hearing a matter relating to inhuman conditions in 1,382 prisons across India.

*Source: The Times of India*

## India has only 19 judges per 10 lakh people: Law Ministry

### Why in news?

- The Union Law Ministry had prepared a document in March 2018, as per which India has 19 judges per 10 lakh people on an average.

The document reveals that while the subordinate courts have a shortage of 5748 judicial officers, the 24 high courts have a total of 406 vacancies.

### Key Highlights

- ★ The law ministry data revealed that the judge-population ratio in India is 19.49 per million (10 lakh) people.
- ★ The data is a part of a document that the Ministry had prepared for discussion in the Parliament.
- ★ The data reveals that the judiciary faces a combined shortage of over 6,000 judges, including over 5,000 in the lower courts.
- ★ The document states that the working strength of the lower judiciary is 16,726, while the approved strength is much higher at 22,474.
- ★ In the case of high courts, while the approved strength is 1079, the actual strength is 673.
- ★ On the other hand, in the case of the Supreme Court that has a sanctioned strength of 31 judges, there are a total of six vacancies.
- ★ Overall, the data reveals that the total number of vacancies in the SC, HCs and the lower courts come to around 6160 judges.

### Background

- ★ The debate on the ratio of judges in comparison to the population of the nation was re-ignited in April 2016 by the then Chief Justice of India T S Thakur.
- ★ The government had then pointed out that in the 245th report, the Law Commission had observed that filing of cases per capita varies substantially across geographic units as filings are associated with economic and social conditions of the population.

- ★ In fact, recently in August 2018, Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad urged the chief justices of 24 high courts to speed up recruitment of judicial officers for the lower judiciary, as according to him one of the main reasons for high pendency was the inordinate delay in filling up the vacancies of judicial officers.
- ★ The Minister urged the chief justices to hold timely examination and interviews to recruit judges for lower courts.
- ★ The Minister in his letter pointed out that there were a total of 2,76, 74,499 cases pending in the district and subordinate courts of the country.

*Source: Indian Express*

## **Assam NRC: SC orders resumption of filing of claims from September 25**

### **Why in news?**

- The Supreme Court on September 19, 2018 ordered resumption of filing of claims and objections by around 40 lakh people who were left out in the draft National Register of Citizens (NRC) of Assam.

### **Key Facts**

- ★ The process of filing claims and objections by the people who have been left out will commence on September 25, 2018 and will remain open for the next 60 days.
- ★ The apex court granted this second opportunity to the citizens keeping in mind the “magnitude” of the issue.
- ★ The bench will now hear the matter on October 23, 2018 and has sought the view of Prateek Hajela, coordinator of Assam NRC on stance of the central government with regard to applicability and non-applicability of certain documents for inclusion of names in the NRC. The draft Assam NRC was published in July 2018.

### **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.
- ★ 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: The Hindu, Indian Express*



**International Relations, India & the World and International Affairs****2+2 Dialogue: India-US sign historic COMCASA agreement****Why in news?**

- India and the United States signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) during their first-ever 'two plus two' dialogue, which was held in New Delhi on September 6, 2018.

**Key Facts**

- ★ The key agreement will open up the way for the sale of more sensitive US military equipment to India. It will help India obtain critical and encrypted defence technologies for the Indian defence platforms from the US.
- ★ The high-level talks were held between the foreign and defence ministries of the two nations. India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman hosted the US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and US Secretary of Defense James Mattis for the inaugural dialogue.

**Joint Statement: Key Highlights****Defence and Security**

- ★ The Ministers reaffirmed the strategic importance of India's designation as a Major Defense Partner (MDP) of the United States and committed to expand the scope of India's MDP status and take mutually agreed upon steps to strengthen defence ties further and promote better defence and security coordination and cooperation.
- ★ The Ministers also noted the rapid growth in bilateral defence trade and the qualitative improvement in levels of technology and equipment offered by the United States to India in recent years.
- ★ They welcomed the inclusion of India by the United States among the top tier of countries entitled to license-free exports, re-exports, and transfers under License Exception Strategic Trade Authorisation (STA-1) and also committed to explore other means to support further expansion in two-way trade in defence items and defence manufacturing supply chain linkages.
- ★ The Ministers welcomed the signing of a Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) that will facilitate access to advanced defence systems and enable India to optimally utilise its existing U.S.-origin platforms.
- ★ The Ministers also announced their readiness to begin negotiations on an Industrial Security Annex (ISA) that would support closer defence industry cooperation and collaboration.
- ★ The two sides also committed to the creation of a new, tri-services exercise and to further increase personnel exchanges between the two militaries and defence organisations.
- ★ The Ministers further reviewed the recent growth of bilateral engagements in support of maritime security and maritime domain awareness and committed to expand cooperation.

- ★ The Ministers also committed to start exchanges between the US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) and the Indian Navy, underscoring the importance of deepening their maritime cooperation in the western Indian Ocean.
- ★ They further reaffirmed their commitment to continue to encourage and prioritise co-production and co-development projects through the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) and to pursue other avenues of defense innovation cooperation.
- ★ They then welcomed the conclusion of a Memorandum of Intent between the US Defense Innovation Unit (DIU) and the Indian Defence Innovation Organization – Innovation for Defence Excellence (DIO-iDEX).

### **Terrorism**

- ★ The Ministers announced their intent to increase information-sharing efforts on known or suspected terrorists and to implement UN Security Council Resolution 2396 on returning foreign terrorist fighters.
- ★ They committed to enhance their ongoing cooperation in multilateral forums such as the UN and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).
- ★ They reaffirmed their support for a UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism that will advance and strengthen the framework for global cooperation and reinforce the message that no cause or grievance justifies terrorism.
- ★ They further denounced any use of terrorist proxies in the region, and in this context, they called on Pakistan to ensure that the territory under its control is not used to launch terrorist attacks on other countries.
- ★ On the eve of the 10-year anniversary of the 26/11 Mumbai attack, they called on Pakistan to bring to justice expeditiously the perpetrators of the Mumbai, Pathankot, Uri, and other cross-border terrorist attacks.
- ★ The Ministers welcomed the launch of a bilateral dialogue on designation of terrorists in 2017, which is strengthening cooperation and action against terrorist groups, including Al-Qaida, ISIS, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Hizb-ul Mujahideen, the Haqqani Network, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, D-Company, and their affiliates.
- ★ The two sides further reaffirmed their commitment to ongoing and future cooperation to ensure a stable cyberspace environment and to prevent cyber-attacks.

### **Indo-Pacific region**

- ★ The Ministers reviewed cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region and noted that the common principles for the region articulated in the India-U.S. Joint Statement of June 2017 have been further amplified by President Donald Trump at Danang, Vietnam on November 10, 2017, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Singapore at the Shangri-La Dialogue on June 1, 2018.
- ★ Both sides committed to work together and in concert with other partners toward advancing a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, based on recognition of ASEAN centrality and on respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, rule of law, good governance, free and fair trade, and freedom of navigation and over flight.
- ★ Noting the importance of infrastructure and connectivity for the Indo-Pacific region, both sides emphasised on the need to work collectively with other partner countries to support transparent, responsible and sustainable debt financing practices in infrastructure development.

## Afghanistan

- ★ The Ministers reaffirmed their shared commitment to a united, sovereign, democratic, inclusive, stable, prosperous, and peaceful Afghanistan.
- ★ The two sides expressed support for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process.
- ★ The United States acknowledged India's longstanding and ongoing contributions of economic assistance to Afghanistan and also welcomed India's enhanced role in Afghanistan's development and stabilisation.

## North Korea

- India welcomed the recent U.S.-North Korea summit and the two sides pledged to work together to counter North Korea's weapons of mass destruction programs and to hold accountable those countries that have supported them.

## India's bid to join NSG

- The United States welcomed India's accession to the Australia Group, the Wassenaar Arrangement, and the Missile Technology Control Regime and reiterated its full support for India's immediate accession to the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

## Bilateral Trade

- ★ The Ministers recognised the importance and the potential for increasing bilateral trade, investment, innovation, and job creation in both countries.
- ★ Both sides committed to further expanding and balancing the trade and economic partnership consistent with their leaders' 2017 joint statement, including by facilitating trade, improving market access and addressing issues of interest to both sides.
- ★ In this regard, both sides welcomed the ongoing exchanges between the Ministry of Commerce of India and the Office of the United States Trade Representative and hoped for mutually acceptable outcomes.

## Nuclear Power

- India and the US both look forward to full implementation of the civil nuclear energy partnership and collaboration between Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) and Westinghouse Electric Company for the establishment of six nuclear power plants in India.

## People-to-people ties

- Observing the strong ties of family, education, business and the spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation that unite their people, the Ministers highlighted the unmatched people-to-people ties between their countries and recognised the benefits to both nations and the world from these ties, including the free flow of ideas and collaboration in health, space, oceans, and other areas of science and technology.

*The next 2+2 meeting is scheduled to be held in the United States in 2019.*

### **Background**

- ★ The 2+2 talks were agreed upon by US President Donald Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during their meeting in June 2017. However, since then they were postponed twice, first in April this year and then in July.
- ★ From the last quarter of 2017, the dialogue was pushed to April 18-19, 2018 in Washington but it had to be postponed because the then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was asked to quit by President Trump in March 2018 and Pompeo had not been confirmed to the post.

The talks were re-scheduled for July 2018 but then were postponed again by the US due to unavoidable reasons. The postponement came in the backdrop of growing differences between India and the U.S. over the Iran nuclear deal.

- ★ The bilateral ties between India and the US have been slightly stressed this year due to US sanctions on Russia and Iran. India's relations with both these nations are age-old. India relies heavily on Iranian crude oil despite cutting the volume of purchase.

*Source: The Hindu, Indian Express*

### **India, France sign MoU to form working group for Gaganyaan Mission**

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

- India and France on September 6, 2018 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to constitute a working group for Gaganyaan Mission, India's first manned space mission.
- The announcement regarding the same was made at the 6th Bengaluru Space Expo by French space agency CNES President, Jean-Yves Le Gall.

#### **Key facts**

- ★ The French space agency CNES and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will be combining their expertise in fields of space medicine, astronaut health monitoring, life support, radiation protection, space debris protection and personal hygiene systems.
- ★ The ambit of the cooperation includes ISRO's access to space hospital facilities in France.
- ★ Both the sides have decided that infrastructure such as CADMOS centre for development of microgravity applications and space operations or the MEDES space clinic will be used for training of future Indian astronauts.
- ★ French-Indian space cooperation includes climate monitoring, with a fleet of joint satellites devoted to research and operational applications.
- ★ The two countries also have plans to work on Mars, Venus and asteroids.

## Gaganyaan - India's maiden human spaceflight programme

- ★ The Gaganyaan mission was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his 72nd Independence Day speech.
- ★ It is India's first manned space mission that will be launched by ISRO by 2022.
- ★ The mission will send a three-member crew to space for a period of five to seven days.
- ★ The crew will do microgravity experiment during the mission.
- ★ The crew will be selected by Indian Air Force (IAF) and ISRO jointly after which they will undergo training for two-three years.
- ★ GSLV Mk-III launch vehicle, having the necessary payload capability for this mission, will be used to launch Gaganyaan.
- ★ The programme will make India the fourth nation in the world to launch a Human Spaceflight Mission. So far, only the USA, Russia and China have launched human space flight missions.

*Source: The Hindu, PIB*

## United States announces closure of Palestinian mission in Washington

### Why in news?

### Washington DC.

- efforts to bring about peace with Israel and attempted to prompt an investigation of Israel by the International Criminal Court. leadership. The PLO, the internationally-recognised representative of the Palestinian people, opened the mission in 1994.

### What are the causes?

- ★ The US State Department said that the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) office failed to take steps to advance the start of direct and meaningful negotiations with Israel.
- ★ It added that the PLO leadership has condemned a US peace plan they have not yet seen and refused to engage with the US government with respect to peace efforts and otherwise. The department further blamed the Palestinians for being unwilling to negotiate.
- ★ Palestinian leaders described the US move of closing the Palestinian mission in Washington as a declaration of war on peace efforts by the administration of President Donald Trump.
- ★ PLO Secretary-General Saeb Erekat called the decision a “dangerous escalation.” He added that this is yet another affirmation of the Trump administration's policy to collectively punish the Palestinian people. the Palestinian people and land.

## US – Palestinian Issue

- ★ The Palestinian leadership, which sees East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state, suspended contacts with the US after the nation recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December 2017 and moved its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in May 2018.
- ★ The move was opposed by Palestinians and by many nations across the world including some of America's closest allies. The Palestinians insisted that the status of the city is an issue to be negotiated between them and the Israelis.
- ★ Previously, the US had announced that it would cut more than \$200m in economic aid for the Palestinians. The US had planned to give the Palestinians \$251m for good governance, healthcare, education and funding for civil society in the current 2018 budget year that ends on September 30.
- ★ The US also pulled out its support for the UN agency responsible for 5 million Palestinian refugees. It also decided to cut more than \$20m in foreign aid meant to support hospitals in East Jerusalem. The hospitals treat Palestinian patients who require cancer and eye treatments.

*Source: The Hindu*

## India, Morocco sign MoU to enhance cooperation in MSME Sector

### Why in news?

- ★ India and Morocco recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for deepening cooperation between Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sectors of the two countries.

### Key Facts

- ★ The MoU was signed by Ravindra Nath, CMD of National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC), and Rabri Barrazouka, Director General, Maroc PME of Morocco in Rabat, Morocco. The MOU will facilitate transfer of Indian technologies and products to Morocco.
- ★ The MoU was signed during the bilateral meeting between India and Morocco. Alka Arora, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of MSME, led the official delegation along with CMD NSIC to Morocco and held bilateral meetings with Othman El Ferdaous, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Trade and Digital Economy of Morocco.
- ★ Both the sides discussed the ways and means to synergise the strengths of both countries in MSME Sector in terms of capacity building, sharing of experiences, exchange of business delegations for creating linkages, JVs and technology transfers.

### India-Morocco bilateral relations

- ★ Morocco mainly relies on its exports of minerals and ores and Service sector. It has very small MSME sector in manufacturing, whereas India has strong MSME sector especially in manufacturing.
- ★ Over the years, India and Morocco have enjoyed cordial and friendly relations and bilateral relations have witnessed significant growth.
- ★ India is one of the major markets for Moroccan phosphate and its derivatives.
- ★ An India-Morocco joint venture in fertilizer sector in Morocco, called IMACID, was set up in November 1999. At present, the JV is producing around 430000 MT per annum of phosphoric acid, nearly all of which is imported by India.

- ★ The Moroccan phosphate company, OCP, has invested in Paradip Phosphates Ltd. in India.
- ★ Other main items of export to India are metallic ores and metal scrap, semi-finished products and inorganic chemicals.
- ★ pharmaceuticals, agricultural implements, chemicals, spices and manufactured metals. phosphate by India.
- ★ The quantum of bilateral trade, which was USD 1.63 billion in 2010, reached to USD 2.04 billion in 2011. However, in 2014, it decreased and stood at USD 1.36 billion.
- ★ Indian exports to Morocco in 2014 decreased by 21.6 percent, compared to the previous year while Moroccan exports to India registered an increase of 10.2 percent in 2014.
- ★ Indian industry and business associations such as CII, FICCI and ASSOCHAM have institutional arrangements with Moroccan industry and business associations.

*Source: PIB*

## Two Koreas sign agreement on denuclearisation of Korean Peninsula

### Why in news?

- ❑ North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in on September 19, 2018 signed an agreement on denuclearisation, reducing military tensions and defusing crisis on the Korean peninsula.
- ❑ The talks were hosted by North Korea in its capital city Pyongyang. The North Korean leader welcomed the South Korea President at the Sunan International Airport, at the start of Moon's three-day visit to the nation.

### Significance

- ★ It's the third meeting between Moon and Kim but the first to take place outside the 'truce village' of Panmunjom, on the border.
- ★ Previously, two different South Korean Presidents were hosted by Kim's father, the late Kim Jong II for summit sessions at the capital in 2000 and 2007.
- ★ The main agenda of the Moon-Kim meeting was to enhance ties between the two Koreas and push the talks on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

### Highlights

- ★ North Korea has agreed to permanently dismantle engine testing facilities and missile launch pads in the presence of international inspectors.
- ★ The North Korean leader stated that his regime is also willing to take additional steps in accordance with the June 12 North Korea-US Joint Declaration, such as dismantle the country's largest nuclear facility in Yongbyon if the US takes corresponding measures.
- ★ The Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Centre is a major complex and its permanent closure would be a significant move towards ensuring that the North gives up its nuclear arsenal.
- ★ Besides this, Kim Jong Un pledged to visit Seoul, which would be the first visit by a North Korean leader to the South since the Korean War.

- ★ The leaders of the two militaries, South Korean defence Minister Song Young-moo and North Korea's Minister for the People's Armed Forces No Kwang-chol also signed a declaration, agreeing to a wide range of steps aimed at further reducing military tension on the Korean Peninsula.
- ★ Both the leaders want the US to sign off on formally ending the Korean War, which still technically continues because no peace treaty was signed.

### **Background**

- ★ The historic talks are taking place between the two Koreas as the US effort to get North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program lost its momentum, just a few months after US President Trump met with Kim in June for a summit in Singapore.
- ★ Though North Korea claimed to have shut down one of its nuclear test sites, reports emerged that North Korea was building new ballistic missiles at a factory just outside its capital.

*Source: The Hindu*

### **State of food security and nutrition in the world:UN Report**

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

- ❑ As per a UN report on the 'state of food security and nutrition in the world' that was published on September 11, 2018, the number of undernourished globally increased to 821 million in 2017, which means that one in every nine people, does not have enough to eat.
- ❑ The report states that with food deprivation on the rise due to conflict and climate change, more people went hungry in 2017 than at any time in the previous decade. It was published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), World Food Programme (WFP), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

#### **Three key drivers of Hunger:**

- ★ Intensification of conflict and violence
- ★ Economic downturn
- ★ Effects of extreme climate change

#### **The Report: Key Highlights**

- ❑ The report revealed that the number of undernourished people in the world has been on the rise since 2014, reaching an estimated 821 million in 2017, from around 804 million in 2016. The levels are the same as almost a decade ago.
- ❑ The share of undernourished people in the world population, the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU), is estimated to have reached 10.9 percent in 2017.

### Regions worst affected by undernourishment

- ★ The situation is worsening in South America and most regions of Africa.
- ★ Africa remains the continent with the highest prevalence of undernourishment, affecting almost 21 percent of the population (more than 256 million people).
- ★ The situation is also deteriorating in South America, where the PoU has increased from 4.7 percent in 2014 to a projected 5.0 percent in 2017.
- ★ In the case of Asia, its decreasing trend in undernourishment seems to be slowing down significantly.
- ★ The projected PoU for Asia in 2017 is 11.4 percent, which represents more than 515 million people.
- ★ Without increased efforts, the world will fall far short of achieving the SDG target of eradicating hunger by 2030.

### Child stunting, exclusive breastfeeding

- ❑ The report reveals that overall, there has been a progress regarding stunting and exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life. The number of stunted children decreased from 165.2 million in 2012 to 150.8 million in 2017, showing a 9 percent decline. Yet, the number is still unacceptably high.
- ❑ In 2017, 40.7 percent of infants below six months of age were exclusively breastfed, up from 36.9 percent in 2012. The rates of exclusive breastfeeding in Africa and Asia are 1.5 times than those in Northern America where only 26.4 percent of infants under the age of six months receive breast milk exclusively.

### Anaemia

- ★ The prevalence of anaemia among women of reproductive age has risen incrementally from 30.3 percent in 2012 to 32.8 percent in 2016 with no region showing a decline.
- ★ One in three women of reproductive age globally is still affected by anaemia, with significant health and development consequences for both women and their children.

### Wasting (low weight for height)

- ★ In 2017, 7.5 percent of children under the age of five, around 50.5 million, were affected by wasting, which consequently puts them at a higher risk of mortality.
- ★ An analysis from 2013 indicated that 875 000 deaths (or 12.6 percent of all deaths) among children under five years of age were related to wasting, of which 516 000 deaths (7.4 percent of all deaths among under-fives) were related to severe wasting.

### Child overweight and adult obesity

- ★ Since 2012, the global proportion of overweight children remains relatively stagnant, with 5.4 percent in 2012 and 5.6 percent (or 38.3 million) in 2017. Among these 38.3 million overweight children, 25 percent live in Africa and 46 percent live in Asia.
- ★ On the other hand, Adult obesity rates continue to rise each year, from 11.7 percent in 2012 to 13.2 percent in 2016. This means that in 2017 more than one in eight adults, or more than 672 million, in the world is obese.
- ★ Adult obesity is highest in Northern America and the rate of increase in adult obesity is also the highest there. While Africa and Asia continue to have the lowest rates of obesity, an increasing trend can also be observed.

## How to improve hunger level globally?

- ★ Firstly, the report stresses that since climate variability is already undermining food production, actions to mitigate disaster risk reduction and preparedness should be taken on an immediate basis, as the situation will only get worse as temperatures are expected to continue to rise and become more extreme.
- ★ Then it highlights the importance of the 1000 days period between the conception of a child and the child's second birthday. It stated that the period is a window of opportunity to prevent both child stunting and overweight and promote child nutrition, growth and development with lasting effects.
- ★ It also points out that exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months and adequate complementary foods and feeding practices up to two years of age are key to ensuring normal child growth and development.
- ★ It further states that the access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food must be framed as a human right, with priority given to the most vulnerable.
- ★ It also states that policies must pay special attention to the food security and nutrition of children under five, school-age children, adolescent girls and women in order to halt the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition.
- ★ Further, it says that a shift is needed towards nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems that provide safe and high-quality food, promoting healthy diets for all.

*Source: The Hindu*

## ○ **PM Modi, Bangladeshi PM Sheikh Hasina jointly launch construction of Indo-Bangla Pipeline Project**

### Why in news?

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina on September 18, 2018 jointly launched the construction of India-Bangladesh Friendship Product Pipeline Project through video conferencing.
- ★ The project will go a long way in strengthening the Indo-Bangla ties. It is a new milestone in the history of cooperation between India and Bangladesh.
- ★ Both the sides had entered into an agreement for the construction of the pipeline in April 2018 during Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale's visit to Dhaka.

### India-Bangladesh Friendship Product Pipeline Project

- ★ The 130-kilometre pipeline will connect **Siliguri in West Bengal** in India and **Parbatipur in Dinajpur district** of Bangladesh.
- ★ The six-kilometre Indian leg of the pipeline project will be implemented by the **Assam-based Numaligarh Refinery Limited** and the remaining 124 kilometres of the pipeline project will be implemented by **Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation**.
- ★ The capacity of the pipeline will be **1 million metric tons** per annum.

- ★ Bangladesh would initially receive **2.5 lakh tonnes of diesel every year** and it would gradually be increased to 4 lakh tonnes.
- ★ The project will **replace the existing practice of sending diesel by rail** covering a distance of 510 kilometers.
- ★ The estimated **project cost will be Rs 346 crore** and it will be completed in 30 months time.
- ★ This will be the **first such pipeline** through which refined diesel will be supplied to Parbatipur depot from Numaligarh of Assam in India.

### Significance

- ★ The first consignment of diesel from India reached Bangladesh in March 2016 through rail wagons. The Parbatipur Depot formally received 2268 MT diesels from the NRL through rail wagons.
- ★ Through the rail wagons, Bangladesh so far imported 57000 MT diesel from India till July 2018 and it is expected that 50000 more diesel will be brought from India in August-December 2018 through the same way.
- ★ Currently, imported oil is stored in Chattogram depot after unloading it from the ship at Chattogram Port. Later, the oil is brought to Khulna Daulatpur depot through coastal tanks and carried to Parbatipur again through rail wagons. This requires additional time and money as well as transport.
- ★ The pipeline will solve these problems. Through the cross-border pipeline, India will supply fuel oil from its Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL), located at Golaghat in the northeastern state of Assam, while Bangladesh will receive the oil at Parbatipur depot of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) in Dinajpur.

### Dhaka-Tongi-Joydebpur Railway Project

- ★ The two leaders also inaugurated the construction of the third and fourth dual gauge rail lines of Dhaka-Tongi section and Double Line on Dhaka-Joydebpur section of Bangladesh Railway.
- ★ Once the project gets completed, the train communication in the south-western region through Padma Bridge and in the northern region through Bangabandhu Jamuna Bridge, and on Chattogram-Sylhet routes from Dhaka would be easier and faster.
- ★ A total of 96 kms of dual-gauge tracks along with other necessary infrastructures would be constructed from Kamalapur to Joydebpur railway stations under the project.
- ★ This railway project would not only help carry passengers but also transport goods.

*Source: The Hindu*

## International Day of Peace 2018 observed globally

### Why in news?

- ❑ The International Day of Peace was observed across the world on September 21, 2018 to recognise the efforts of those who have worked hard to end conflict and promote peace. The International Day of Peace is also a day of ceasefire.
- ❑ **2018 Theme: "The Right to Peace - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 70"**
  - ★ This year's theme celebrates the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a milestone document in the history of human rights.
  - ★ The Declaration was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948 as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. It was drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world.
  - ★ The Universal Declaration is the most translated document in the world, available in more than 500 languages. It states in Article 3, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person" and these elements build the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

### Background

- ★ The International Day of Peace was established in 1981 by resolution 36/67 of the United Nations General Assembly to coincide with the opening session of the assembly, which was held annually on the third Tuesday of September. The first International Day of Peace was observed in September 1982.
- ★ In 2001, the General Assembly, by unanimous vote, adopted resolution 55/282, which established 21 September as an annual day of non-violence and cease-fire as well.
- ★ On this day, the United Nations invites all nations and people to honour a cessation of hostilities during the Day, and to commemorate the Day through education and public awareness on issues related to peace.

*Source: The Hindu*



**Indian Economy and Economic Development****□ Government approves constitution of High Level Advisory Group to review India's global trade strategy**

- ★ The Union Commerce Minister, Suresh Prabhu, has approved the constitution of a High Level Advisory Group (HLAG) to make recommendations for identifying opportunities and addressing challenges in order to find a way forward for India in the contemporary global trade scenario.
- ★ The key responsibility of the group will be to consider ways for boosting India's share and importance in global merchandise and services trade, managing pressing bilateral trade relations and mainstreaming new age policy making.
- ★ To examine the prevailing international trade dynamics and rising protectionist tendencies, especially on the part of major economies.
- ★ To examine non-engagement by some countries on outstanding trade negotiation issues and commitments, including the Doha Development Agenda and their insistence on pursuing negotiating mandates.
- ★ To build consensus and common understanding.
- ★ To suggest a way forward for India in light of the examination, taking into account its interests and sensitivities.
- ★ To provide options for a balanced approach for the global community to build on achievements thus far and create a conducive global trade framework and move forward in a harmonious and consensual manner that is acceptable to all.

**Composition of the Group**

- ★ The HLAG will be chaired by Surjit S Bhalla, who is the Director of Oxus Research and Investments.
- ★ The group may consider possible approaches and suggest a pragmatic framework for India's future engagement in international trade.
- ★ It may also suggest the manner in which India can play a more proactive and constructive role in working with the international community in exploring and building consensus on resolving emergent trade-related issues.
- ★ The High-Level Group would meet regularly over the next two months and make specific implementable recommendations in light of its terms of reference on each of the areas, to facilitate the formulation of future trade policies.
- ★ The group may also invite special dignitaries whose inputs may be considered necessary. The Centre for WTO Studies (CWTOS) in New Delhi shall provide the secretariat to the group.

*Source: Economic Times, Business Standard*

## Financial Inclusion Index, Jan Dhan Darshak app launched

### Why in news?

- The Union Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs, Arun Jaitley launched the Financial Inclusion Index (FII) recently. The index was launched after the Finance Minister's annual performance review meeting with the CEOs of public sector banks.

### Key Facts

- ★ The annual index will be released by the Department of Financial Services (DFS) under the Ministry of Finance by the end of this year and it would rate states on their performance on last-mile banking services availability.
- ★ The index will be a measure of access and usage of a basket of formal financial products and services that includes savings, remittances, credit, insurance and pension products.

### The index will include the following three measurement dimensions:

- (i) Access to financial services
- (ii) Usage of financial services
- (iii) Quality

### Key Highlights

- ★ The single composite index gives a snapshot of the level of financial inclusion that would guide the macro policy perspective.
- ★ The various components of the index will help measure financial services for use of internal policy making. The index can also be used directly as a composite measure in development indicators.
- ★ Further, the index enables fulfilment of G20 Financial Inclusion Indicators requirements.
- ★ It will also facilitate researchers to study the impact of financial inclusion and other macroeconomic variables.

### Jan Dhan Darshak App

- ★ As a part of financial inclusion initiative, the Department of Financial Services (DFS) under the Ministry of Finance along with the National Informatics Centre (NIC) has jointly developed a mobile application called 'Jan Dhan Darshak'.
- ★ The application will act as a guide for the common people in locating a financial service touch point at a given location in the country.
- ★ The app will be in a unique position to provide a citizen-centric platform for locating financial service touch points across all providers such as banks, post office and common service centres (CSC).
- ★ These services could be availed as per the needs and convenience of the common people.
- ★ Over 5 lakh financial service touch points including bank branches, ATMs and post offices have been mapped on the application and approximately 1.35 lakh bank mitras would be brought on board by December 1, 2018.

**The following are the salient features of the app:**

- ★ Find nearby Financial touch points, based on the current location
- ★ Search by place name
- ★ Search by place name also available with Voice Interface
- ★ Phone number of bank branches available in the app, with the facility of call button for integrated dialling
- ★ Users' feedback will go directly to the concerned bank for carrying out the necessary updation in data on financial touch points.

*Source: The Hindu, Business Standard, PIB*

**Weakening Emerging Market Currencies****Why in news?**

- ❑ Many of the emerging market economies' currencies including that of India are weakening against the U.S. dollar.

**What is the issue?**

- ★ The Indian rupee weakened past the 71 mark for the first time recently.
- ★ It has registered a loss of about 10% of its value against the dollar since the year's beginning.
- ★ This makes the rupee the worst-performing currency in Asia.
- ★ Other emerging market currencies too have suffered much larger losses.
- ★ They, notably, include the Turkish lira, the Argentine peso and the South African rand.
- ★ The Argentine peso has lost more than half of its value in 2018.
- ★ It witnessed a sharp loss of more than 10% on a single day.
- ★ This happened despite a 15 percentage point increase in interest rates by Argentina's central bank.
- ★ It was an effort to stem the outflow of capital and shore up the value of the currency.

**What are the related external and domestic causes?**

- ★ A common factor is the increasing demand for the dollar across the globe. The U.S. Federal Reserve raised the interest rates earlier this year (2018).
- ★ The resultant tightening of liquidity in the West has played a major role in strengthening of the dollar. Emerging market countries earlier benefited from the West's easing of monetary conditions.
- ★ These are now facing the impact of a return to the West's tight monetary policy. Investors who earlier put their money in emerging markets have recently preferred American assets.
- ★ As, this has become more attractive now yielding higher returns. Emerging market economies cannot simply blame external economic factors.

- ★ The management of these economies has generally been far from ideal. This is particularly true when it comes to hard-hit economies like Turkey and Argentina.
- ★ A key trouble of emerging market economies is the higher domestic inflation in relation to the economies in the West. So it is natural that their currencies slide in value over time against the dollar and other major Western currencies.

### The way forward

- ★ Shift of capital across the globe due to interest rates variations is normal. There is need for a drastic change in emerging markets' monetary policy as against that of the West.
- ★ The role of emerging markets' central banks in the current scenario is crucial.
- ★ Their mandate should be to let their currencies find their true value in a smooth manner.

*Source: The Hindu*

### Web portal for MSME banking credit space launched

#### Why in news?

- The Union Government has recently launched [www.psbloansin59minutes.com](http://www.psbloansin59minutes.com) web portal, a transformative initiative in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) credit space.

#### Key facts

- ★ The web portal will enable in principle approval for MSME loans up to Rs 1 crore within 59 minutes from Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) and 5 Public Sector Banks (PSBs).
- ★ It is a strategic initiative of SIDBI led PSB consortium built up under the aegis of Department of Financial Services (DFS), Union Ministry of Finance.
- ★ A first in MSME banking credit space, [www.psbloansin59minutes.com](http://www.psbloansin59minutes.com) is one of its kind platforms in MSME segment which integrates advanced fintech to ensure seamless loan approval and management.
- ★ The loans are undertaken without human intervention till sanction and or disbursement stage.
- ★ The Portal sets a new benchmark in loan processing and reduces the turnaround time from 20-25 days to 59 minutes.
- ★ Subsequent to the principle approval, the loan will be disbursed in 7-8 working days.
- ★ A MSME borrower is not required to submit any physical document for in-principle approval.
- ★ The solution uses sophisticated algorithms to read and analyse data points from various sources such as IT returns, GST data, and bank statements in less than an hour while capturing the applicants basic details using Smart analytics from available documents.
- ★ The system simplifies the decision making process for a loan officer as the final output provides a summary of credit, valuation and verification on a user-friendly dashboard in real time.

### Key features of the portal

- ★ The MSME financing will be carried out by SIDBI and big 5 PSBs- SBI, Bank of Baroda, PNB, Vijaya and Indian Bank.
- ★ It is the first-of-its-kind portal for MSME borrowers that let MSMEs to connect with multiple banks without visiting the branch.
- ★ It is an advanced digital platform for MSME Financing with services driven architecture and highest level of information security.
- ★ It is the only platform in the market with a Banker Interface which covers the Branch Level integrations (with maker-checker-approver) in tune with current systems of PSBs.
- ★ It is also the only platform that enables bankers to create Loan Products in line with the Scoring models and assessment methods within their approved credit policy.
- ★ It has an integrated GST, ITR, Bank Statement Analyser, Fraud Check and Bureau Check as well as host of other features which at present is not available with any other player in the market.
- ★ It has been integrated with (Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises) CGTMSE for checking the eligibility of Borrowers. MSME borrower gets loan up to Rs 2 crore without any collateral, which is major relief for MSME borrower.

*Source: Business Standard*

### Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna to benefit over 3 crore Insured Persons

#### Why in news?

- The newly launched Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna is expected to benefit around 3.2 crore Insured Persons (IPs). The scheme, covered under the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948, was approved by the Employee's State Insurance (ESI) Corporation during its 175th meeting in September.

#### Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna

- ★ This scheme is a relief payable in cash directly to the bank account of insured persons in case of unemployment and while they search for a new engagement.
- ★ The cash benefit given to the unemployed persons searching for new employment will be 25 percent of his average earning of 90 days.
- ★ The detailed instructions of the scheme including the eligibility conditions and application format will be issued separately.

#### Key Highlights

- ★ The ESI approved the proposal for reimbursement of Rs 10 per person to the employers to encourage the seeding of Aadhar (UID) in ESIC database of their workers and their family members. The move will curtail the multiple registrations of same Insured Persons and thus enable them to avail the benefits requiring longer contributory conditions.
- ★ The ESI Corporation also approved the proposal for relaxing the eligibility conditions for availing Super Specialty treatment from the earlier insurable employment of 2 years to 6 months with contribution requirement of only 78 days.

- ★ The eligibility for availing Super Specialty treatment for dependents of Insured Person was also relaxed to the insurable employment of one year with 156 days of contributions. The move will help the Insured Persons and their beneficiaries to avail the Super Specialty treatment free of cost as per the revised eligibility.
- ★ Further, the ESI approved the proposal for increasing the funeral expenses from existing Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000 being paid on the death of Insured Person.

### **What is the significance of the move?**

- ★ There are around six crore workers in the organised sector who are getting benefits from EPFO, ESIC and social security schemes.
- ★ The Union Government has taken many steps to enhance their working conditions and safety and social security in order to improve their standard of living.
- ★ The Government is also continuously making efforts to improve the life conditions of around 40 crore workers in the unorganised sector.
- ★ In the last two years, nearly one crore workers have been linked with ESIC benefits and more than one crore have been brought in the fold of EPFO.

*Source: PIB*

## **SEBI eases KYC norms for Foreign Portfolio Investors**

### **Why in news?**

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on September 21, 2018 relaxed the Know Your Client (KYC) requirements norms for the Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs).

### **Key facts**

- ★ The market regulator also stressed that the beneficial ownership criteria in Prevention of Money Laundering (Maintenance of Records) Rules, 2005 (PMLA Rules) should be made applicable for purpose of KYC and not for determining eligibility of FPIs.
- ★ As per the PMLA Rules, the clubbing of investment limit for FPIs should not be done on the basis of beneficial owner (BO). Accordingly, there will be a separate set of norms for determining conditions where NRIs, overseas citizens of India (OCIs) and resident Indians (RIs) are constituents.
- ★ The KYC review, including changes in BOs and their holdings, is done based on risk categorisation of FPIs, according to SEBI norms.

### **KYC requirements norms for the Foreign Portfolio Investors**

- ★ The norms state that in case of category II and category III FPIs from high-risk jurisdictions, the KYC review should be done on a yearly basis.
- ★ Category II and III existing FPIs should provide the list of BOs and applicable KYC documentation within six months from the date of this circular that is September 21.
- ★ If an existing FPI fails to comply with the applicable KYC requirements by the given deadline, the concerned custodian shall not allow such FPIs to make fresh purchases till the time KYC requirements are complied with.

- ★ However, such FPIs will be allowed to sell the securities already purchased by it.
- ★ Such FPI will be allowed to disinvest its holdings within a period of 180 days from the expiry of the timeline.
- ★ In case the FPI remains non-compliant with the requirements even after 180 days from the said deadline, its FPI registration will no longer be valid and it would need to disinvest its holdings immediately.
- ★ The NRIs, OCIs, and RIs will be allowed to be constituents of FPIs as long as a single NRI, OCI or RI holds less than 25 percent and the aggregate holdings by such entities is less than 50 percent of the assets under management of the FPI.
- ★ The NRI, OCI or RI should not be in control of the FPI. However, investment managers of the NRIs, OCIs and RIs will be able to be in control of the FPI, if they are appropriately regulated in the home jurisdiction and registered with SEBI as non-investing FPI.
- ★ A non-investing FPI may be directly or indirectly fully owned and controlled by an NRI, OCI, or RI.
- ★ The restriction that NRI, OCI, or RI shall not be in control of FPI does not apply to FPIs that are offshore funds for which no-objection certificate has been provided by the board in terms of SEBI (Mutual Funds) Regulations, 1996.
- ★ The restrictions on eligibility conditions are not applicable to FPIs investing solely in mutual funds in India.
- ★ Existing FPIs that are not compliant with these norms will be given two years to meet the eligibility criteria. In case, the FPI temporarily breach the criteria, 90 days will be given to meet the conditions.
- ★ In case of FPIs from high risk jurisdictions, the intermediaries can ensure KYC documentation as applicable for category III FPIs.
- ★ There is no need for identification and verification of beneficial owner of entity eligible as category I FPI, in case the intermediate shareholder or owner entity is eligible for registration as category I FPI.
- ★ In case of companies or trusts represented by service providers like lawyers or accountants, FPIs should provide information of the real owners of those companies or trusts.
- ★ If a beneficial owner exercises controls through means like voting rights, agreements, arrangement among others that should also be specified. However, a beneficial owner should not be a nominee of another person.
- ★ The new rules would apply equally to those investors using the Offshore Derivative Instruments, popularly known as P-Notes or Participatory Notes.
- ★ With regard to KYC documentation for Category III FPIs, audited annual financial statement or a net worth certificate from auditor should be obtained. The exempted documents should be provided during investigations or an enquiry.

*Source: Economic Times*

## ○ **World Bank approves framework to support India's transition to high-middle income country**

### Why in news?

- The World Bank board has approved an ambitious five-year **Country Partnership Framework (CPF)** for India that is in line with India's objectives of high, sustainable and inclusive growth.
- The framework sets the strategic focus for the World Bank's engagement with India for the period FY18-22, to support its transition to a high-middle income economy.

### Significance

- ★ Through the CPF, the World Bank aims to support India's transition to a higher middle-income country by addressing some of its key development priorities such as resource efficient and inclusive growth, job creation and building its human capital.
- ★ The framework is expected to bring financial support worth Rs 25-30 billion US Dollars from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA).

### The three elements CPF will be based on include:

- ★ Government of India's development priorities
- ★ World Bank's *Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD)* for India, which presents the Group's analysis of the key challenges facing India
- ★ World Bank's comparative advantage and value proposition to support India
- ★ The CPF also incorporates lessons learned from the last five years of implementation of the Country Partnership Strategy FY13-17.

### □ **Three challenges faced by India in its aspiration to become a middle-class country include:**

- ★ Scarcity and inefficiency of resources: land, water and air
- ★ Disparities and divergence in the creation of jobs and inclusion across locations
- ★ Uneven state capability
- ★ To fulfill its objective of bringing about economic transformation in India, the World Bank's framework will address key themes including addressing climate change in support of India's national determined contributions on climate change, addressing gender gap focusing on women's economic empowerment and addressing the impacts of technology change.

## Background

- ★ India has posted incredible growth and development over the last several decades.
  - ★ It has gone from a low-income country status to a low-middle income and now, it is entering the economic transformation from low-middle income to high-middle income country.
- Hence, India is well-positioned to become a high middle-income country by 2030.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Union Cabinet approves benefit package for ASHAs, ASHA facilitators

### Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on September 19, 2018 approved ASHA Benefit Package with effect from October, 2018, which will be paid in November 2018.

### Key components

- ★ The eligible ASHAs and ASHA facilitators will be enrolled in the Union Government's social security schemes including the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana.
- ★ The amount of routine and recurring incentives under the National Health Mission (NHM) for ASHAs will also be increased from Rs1000 per month to Rs 2000 per month.

### Expenditure

- The Union Government will be providing funds worth Rs 1224.97 crore for two years 2018-19 and 2019-20 for the implementation of the benefit package.

### Beneficiaries

- ★ According to estimates, around 1,06,36,701 ASHAs and ASHA facilitators are expected to be covered under Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana.
- ★ Further, around 9,57,303 ASHAs and ASHA facilitators will be covered under Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana.
- ★ Finally, about 10,22,265 ASHAs will get at least a minimum of Rs 2000 per month in comparison to the current Rs 1000 for routine activities.

### Eligibility Criteria

#### Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana

- ★ The eligibility criteria for ASHAs and ASHA Facilitators to be covered under Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (Life Insurance) include those who are aged between 18-70 years.
- ★ The insurance cover would be for a one-year period stretching from June 1 to May 31 and the benefits include:
  - ★ Rs 2 Lakh in case of death due to an accident
  - ★ Rs 2 Lakh in case of total and irrecoverable loss of both eyes or loss of use of both hands or feet or loss of sight of one eye and loss of use of one hand or one foot.
  - ★ Rs 1 Lakh in case of total and irrecoverable loss of sight of one eye or loss of use of one hand or one foot.
- ★ The annual premium of Rs 12 per beneficiary will be paid by the Union Government.

## Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana

- ★ The eligibility criteria for ASHAs and ASHA Facilitators to be covered under Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (Accident Insurance) include those who are aged between 18-50 years.
- ★ The insurance cover would be for a one-year period stretching from June 1 to May 31.
- ★ The benefit includes Rs 2 Lakh in case of death due to any cause.
- ★ The annual premium of Rs 330 (average) will be paid by the Central Government.

## Who are ASHAs?

- ★ The Accredited social health activists (ASHAs) are community health workers instituted by the Union Government's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) as a part of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM).
- ★ The main aim of the ASHA scheme is to provide every village in the country with a trained female community health activist ASHA.
- ★ The ASHAs, who are selected from the village itself, are trained to work as an interface between the community and the public health system.

*Source: PIB, Business Standard*

## Operational guidelines for Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana modified

### Why in news?

- The Union Government on September 18, 2018 released the new operational guidelines for implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).
- The new modified provisions include the provision of penalties for states and insurance companies for the delay in settlement of insurance claims under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. The new operational guidelines address the current challenges faced while implementing the scheme by putting forth effective solutions.

## New operational guidelines for Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

- ★ The **farmers will be paid 12 percent interest by insurance companies** for the delay in settlement claims beyond two months of prescribed cut-off date.
- ★ The **State Governments will have to pay 12 percent interest** for the delay in release of State share of subsidy beyond three months of prescribed cut-off date submission by insurance companies.
- ★ The guidelines detail a **Standard Operating Procedure for evaluation of insurance companies** and removes them from the scheme, if found ineffective in providing services.
- ★ It includes **Perennial horticultural crops** on pilot basis under the ambit of PMFBY.
- ★ It includes cloud burst and natural fire in **localised calamities** in addition to unseasonal and cyclonic rainfalls, hailstorm, landslide, and inundation in post harvest losses.
- ★ It provides **add on coverage for crop loss** due to attack of wild animals on pilot basis with the additional financial liabilities to be borne by concerned state government.

- ★ It incorporates **definition of major crops**, unseasonal rainfall and inundation for clarity and proper coverage.
- ★ **Aadhaar number** will be mandatorily captured to avoid duplication of beneficiaries.
- ★ To ensure that more non-loanee farmers are insured under the scheme, apart from various awareness activities being scheduled, the insurance companies are given a target of **enrolling 10 percent more non-loanee farmers** than the previous corresponding season.
- ★ The insurance companies will have to **mandatorily spend 0.5 percent of gross premium** per company per season for publicity and awareness of the scheme.
- ★ **Release of upfront premium subsidy** will be made at the beginning of the season based on 50 percent of 80 percent total share of subsidy of corresponding season of previous year as subsidy.
- ★ Balance premium will be paid as a second installment based on the specific approved business statistics on the portal for settlement of claims.
- ★ Final installment will be paid after reconciliation of entire coverage data on portal based on final business statistics. This will reduce the delay in settling the claims of farmers.
- ★ It specifies **separate budget allocation for Administrative expenses** and district wise crop wise crop calendar to decide cutoff date for enrolment.
- ★ It gives **72 hours time to insured farmer** to intimate individual claims through any stakeholders and directly on portal.
- ★ It mentions **Detailed SOP** for dispute redressal regarding crop loss, claims estimation, failed sowing, post harvest loss, area correction factor and multi picking crops.

*Source: PIB, The Hindu*



**Environment and Ecology****○ Ocean Cleanup foundation deploys 2000 ft long device to clean Great Pacific Garbage Patch****Why in news?**

- ❑ The Ocean Cleanup foundation, an organisation founded by **24-year-old Dutch innovator Boyan Slat**, on September 9, 2018 launched the world's first ocean cleanup array from San Francisco, marking the start of the cleanup of **Great Pacific Garbage Patch**, a collection of marine debris in the North Pacific Ocean.
- ❑ The cleanup system, "**System 001**", headed to a location 240 nautical miles offshore for a two-week trial before moving towards the Great Pacific Garbage Patch which is 1200 nautical miles off shore, to start the cleanup.
- ❑ System 001 is being towed from the San Francisco Bay by the vessel Maersk Launcher.

**System 001: a 2000-foot-long plastic cleaning array**

- ★ The cleanup array comprises floater, skirt and stabilizers.
- ★ System 001, named as '**Wilson**', will be able to **collect 50 tons of plastic** in its first year.
- ★ The hard-walled pipe enables the **floating component** of the array.
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- ★ System 001, named as '**Wilson**', will be able to **collect 50 tons of plastic** in its first year.
- ★ The hard-walled pipe enables the **floating component** of the array.
- ★ It consists of a 2000 ft long U-shaped floating barrier with a three-meter (10 ft) skirt attached below.
- ★ This dense 10-foot skirt below the floating part of the device is supposed to help **gather floating debris**.
- ★ The system is designed to be **propelled by wind and waves**, allowing it to passively catch and concentrate plastic debris in front of it.
- ★ The floating array is **equipped with lanterns, radar reflectors, navigational signals**, GPS, and anti-collision beacons.
- ★ The system is fitted with **sensors and cameras** to help the team in monitoring its performance and make improvements for future deployments.
- ★ The system receives the power through the **solar panels**.

## Great Pacific Garbage Patch

- ★ The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is a collection of marine debris in the North Pacific Ocean, containing up to 16 times more waste than previously thought.
- ★ The Patch occupies an area three times the size of France in the Pacific Ocean between California and Hawaii with 79000 tons of plastic debris in the form of 1.8 trillion pieces.
- ★ The Patch is also known as the Pacific trash vortex and spans from the West Coast of North America to Japan.
- ★ The patch is comprised of the Western Garbage Patch located near Japan and the Eastern Garbage Patch located between the US States of Hawaii and California.
- ★ Plastics accumulated in the patch do not wear down; they simply break into tinier pieces, forming Microplastics.
- ★ The patch was discovered in 1997 by Charles Moore, who had sailed through a mishmash of floating plastic bottles and other debris on his way home to Los Angeles.
- ★ The patch is now being targeted by the Ocean Cleanup Foundation for the cleanup. The Foundation was set up by 24-year-old Dutch teenager Boyan Slat with an aim to clean the patch through USD 32 million ‘Ocean Cleanup’ campaign.

## The Ocean Cleanup

- ★ Dutch inventor Boyan Slat founded ‘The Ocean Cleanup’ in 2013 at the age of 18 in Delft, the Netherlands.
- ★ Headquartered at Rotterdam, the Netherlands, the Ocean Cleanup is a non-profit organization, developing advanced technologies to free the world’s oceans of plastic.
- ★ The organisation targets to clean up half the Great Pacific Garbage Patch in 5 years’ time.
- ★ As per the plans of the organisation, the concentrated plastic will be brought back to shore for recycling and will be sold to companies. The revenue gained will help fund the cleanup expansion.
- ★ The Ocean Cleanup’s team consists of more than 70 engineers, researchers, scientists and computational modelers working daily to rid the world’s oceans of plastic.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Global Climate Action Summit 2018

### Why in news?

- ❑ The Global Climate Action Summit 2018 was held during September 12-14, 2018 at San Francisco, California, United States.

### Key facts

- ★ At the 2018 Global Climate Action Summit, mayors and government functionaries of Indian cities announced to scale up their actions to combat climate change and to protect people from hazardous climate impacts.
- ★ The co-chairs of the Summit, Governor of California Edmund G. Brown Jr. and UN’s Special Envoy for Climate Action Michael R. Bloomberg, unveiled a new report demonstrating how cities, states, and businesses can help the US in achieving its 2025 emissions reduction target.

## Launch of the Global Green Bond Partnership

- ★ At the Global Climate Action Summit (GCAS), the Global Green Bond Partnership (GGBP) was launched. This new partnership will support efforts of cities, states, regions, corporations, private companies, and financial institutions to accelerate the issuance of green bonds.
- ★ The founding members of the Global Green Bond Partnership GGBP include - World Bank, IFC – a member of the World Bank Group, Amundi of European Investment Bank, Climate Bonds Initiative of Ceres, and ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability of GCoM and the Low Emissions Development Strategies Global Partnership (LEDS GP).
- ★ The members of the Global Green Bond Partnership (GGBP) will work together to scale green bond issuance primarily by sub-national entities and corporations.
- ★ The Partnership will coordinate with efforts such as IFC's Green Cornerstone Bond Fund Support Program to compliment the Amundi Planet Emerging Green One Fund and other targeted efforts.

## Heat Action Plans

- ★ In 2018, based on guidance provided by the central government, 13 states and over 30 cities adopted or are developing Heat Action Plans. These 13 states are Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh.
- ★ Soon all 17 Indian States, prone to extreme heat, will have plans in place to protect communities from deadly temperatures.

## Key elements of effective Heat Action Plans

- ★ Community outreach to build public awareness
- ★ Early warning systems and inter-agency coordination
- ★ Capacity building among healthcare professionals
- ★ Addressing vulnerability of the population
- ★ Implementing adaptive measures

*Source: The Hindu*

## 1st General Assembly of International Solar Alliance to be held on 2 October

### Why in news?

- The first General Assembly of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) will be inaugurated on October 2, 2018 in Delhi.

### Key Facts

- ★ The ISA is a major initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in contributing to the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement through the rapid and massive deployment of solar energy.
- ★ The Founding Conference of the ISA was jointly hosted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron in New Delhi on March 11, 2018.

## About International Solar Alliance (ISA)

- ★ The International Solar Alliance (ISA) on 6 December 2017 became a treaty-based international inter-governmental organisation following the ratification by Guinea on 6 November 2017.
- ★ The International Solar Alliance was launched jointly by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Francois Hollande on the first day of the COP-21 summit at Paris in 2015.
- ★ The International Solar Alliance aims to undertake joint efforts required to reduce the cost of finance and technology and mobilise more than USD 1000 billion of investments needed by 2030 for massive deployment of solar energy.
- ★ It is India's first international and inter-governmental organisation of 121 Countries and has headquarters in India with United Nations as Strategic Partner.
- ★ It aims to create a collaborative platform for increased deployment of solar energy technologies to enhance energy security and sustainable development.
- ★ It will work with partner countries to formulate projects and programmes to accelerate development of clean solar energy technologies.
- ★ Its governing structure 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.
- ★ The ISA framework agreement entered into force on December 6, 2017, the thirtieth day after the ratification by Guinea, the 15th country to ratify the agreement.
- ★ Till date, 47 countries have signed and 19 countries have ratified the Framework Agreement of International Solar Alliance.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Nepal to become world's first country to double its tiger population

### Why in news?

- ★ Nepal is set to become the first country in the world to double its tiger population as part of the World Wildlife Foundation's (WWF) 'Tx2' programme which aims to double the number of tigers all over the world.
- ★ The government of Nepal announced on September 23, 2018, on the occasion of National Conservation Day, that there are now an estimated 235 wild tigers in the nation, nearly double the number from around 121 in 2009.

### Key Facts

- ★ Nepal had conducted a national tiger survey between November 2017 and April 2018 in the transboundary Terai Arc Landscape (TAL), a vast area of diverse ecosystems shared with India.
- ★ The survey revealed that Nepal's tiger population rose to 235 from 121 in 2009.
- ★ The earlier tiger survey in 2013 had estimated the tiger population in the nation to be around 198.
- ★ With four years remaining before the 2022 deadline, Nepal looks set to achieve its goal of doubling the tiger population.
- ★ However, this only underscores the continued need to ensure protection and improved and contiguous habitats for the long-term survival of the species.

### Significance

- ★ The success of Nepal in doubling tiger numbers has been largely attributed to the country's political commitment and the adoption of innovative tools and approaches towards tiger conservation.
- ★ Nepal was the first country to achieve global standards in managing tiger conservation areas, an accreditation scheme governed by the Conservation Assured Tiger Standards (CA|TS).

### Background

- ★ According to the World Wildlife Foundation, there could have been over 100,000 tigers roaming the world a century ago.
- ★ However, a number of factors including poaching and habitat loss led to the decline in their numbers. By 2010, only 3,200 were left in the entire world, as per WWF data.
- ★ Among the 13 countries with tiger ranges, India recorded the highest tiger population with 2226 tigers in 2016, followed by Russia that had 433 and then Indonesia, which had 371. China had less than five and Vietnam less than seven in 2016.

*Source: The Hindu*

## ○ **India, United Nations sign Sustainable Development Framework for 2018-2022**

### Why in news?

- India and the United Nations on September 28, 2018 signed the Government of India-United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF) for 2018-2022.
- The framework was signed by Amitabh Kant, CEO NITI Aayog and United Nations Resident Coordinator in India, Yuri Afanasiev.

## ○ **Government of India-United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF) 2018-2022**

- ★ The Framework outlines the work of UN agencies in India to support the achievement of key development outcomes that have been identified in consultation with the government and are aligned to the national priorities.
- ★ The NITI Aayog is the national counterpart for the UN in India for the operationalisation of the UNSDF.
- ★ Nineteen UN agencies have signed on the UNSDF 2018-2022.

### **Seven priority areas of UNSDF 2018-22**

- ★ The UNSDF 2018-22 comprises of seven priority areas that outline the work that UN agencies will undertake jointly or individually fully aligned with the priorities of the Union Government.
- ★ The seven priority areas outlined in the UNSDF are:
  1. Poverty and Urbanization
  2. Health, Water, and Sanitation
  3. Education and Employability
  4. Nutrition and Food Security
  5. Climate Change, Clean Energy, and Disaster Resilience
  6. Skilling, Entrepreneurship, and Job Creation
  7. Gender Equality and Youth Development.

### **United Nations in India**

- ★ The United Nations system in India includes 26 organisations that have the privilege to serve in India.
- ★ The Resident Coordinator, the designated representative of the UN Secretary-General to the Government, leads the UN Country Team to advocate the mandate of the United Nations.
- ★ Yuri Afanasiev is the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in India. He assumed his duties in July 2015.

*Source: PIB, Business Standard*

## **Delhi, Seoul sign MoU to tackle air pollution, improve infrastructure**

### **Why in news?**

- The Delhi government on September 14, 2018 signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Seoul Metropolitan Government to work closely in the fields of environment, tourism, waste water and solid waste management, infrastructure and public health.

### **‘Friendship and Cooperation Agreement’**

- ★ The agreement has listed 11 areas for exchange of expertise and cooperation including environment, culture, tourism, smart city, transportation, education, land use planning and management, science and technology, MICE industry, waste water and solid waste management, infrastructure and public health.
- ★ It requires the two capital cities- New Delhi and Seoul- to set up and operationalise a ‘Twinning Cell’ and a committee to support the cell for easy communication and knowledge sharing.

- ★ The cell will support activity related workshops, conduct community participation activities and help maintain documentation.
- ★ The annual reports of the cell would be sent to the Ministry concerned of the two cities. In case of Delhi, the reports would be sent to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and the Ministry of External Affairs.
- ★ The Delhi government will seek the support of its Urban Development Department and other departments for implementing all the relevant aspects of the agreement.
- ★ Besides this, the agreement calls for regular meetings between the two cities to communicate over the programmes, projects and activities to be undertaken under it. The cities will develop an annual joint action plan and ensure financial resources to support the exchanges and activities.

### Duration

- The 'Twinning Agreement' will remain in force till three years from September 14, 2018, and it could be amended by written agreement between the two parties.

### What are the Challenges faced by Delhi ?

- ★ **Air pollution:** Air pollution is a major issue faced by Delhi almost throughout the year and especially during winter. Since the past two years, Delhi has witnessed very severe smog during winter.
- ★ **Landfill Management:** Delhi with four towering landfills is still struggling when it comes to dealing with it.
- ★ **Water Crisis:** The only river passing through Delhi- Yamuna- is facing serious water pollution problems. Hence, Delhi faces an acute water crisis every summer as it is dependent on neighbouring states for the supply.
- ★ **Public Transport:** Though Delhi's public transport system has seen vast improvement with the advent of the new metro lines and low floor buses, the state government is still trying to improve the experience, as the use of public transport will be key to fighting pollution and reducing congestion.

*Source: PIB*



## Science and Technology, Defense and Health

### ○ MoU to modernise Emergency Response and Disaster Management System

#### Why in news?

- The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) on September 20, 2018 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for setting up the state-of-the-art Integrated Control Room for Emergency Response (ICR-ER) in Ministry of Home Affairs.

#### Highlights of the agreement

- ★ Under the MoU, the ISRO will render its technical expertise for setting up of proposed ICR-ER.
- ★ The project will be executed under overall supervision of the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- ★ The proposed Control Room is expected to be established in next one-and-a-half year.
- ★ The ICR-ER will cater to the requirement of Disaster Management as well as Internal Security.
- ★ ICR-ER will address the requirement of receipt of information on near real-time basis.
- ★ It will also address strategic level monitoring, situation awareness, command and control, preparedness and response in the diverse internal security situation and disaster related emergencies.
- ★ Hence, it will aim to increase the operational effectiveness and will be helpful in rendering timely response during various emergency situations.

#### Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)

- ★ The Indian Space Research Organization was set up at Ahmadabad in 1969 by Prof Vikram Sarabhai as its Chairman.
- ★ It is the apex body to provide guidelines, formulate policies and monitor implementation of the national space policy.
- ★ ISRO is managed by the Department of Space (DoS) of the Government of India. DoS itself falls under the authority of the Prime Minister.
- ★ The organisation is directed towards self reliant use of space technology for national development with the main thrust on mass communication and education via satellite; management of natural resources through remote sensing technology; and development of indigenous satellites and launch vehicles.

*Source: PIB*

## India's first 'smart fence' pilot project inaugurated

### Why in news?

- ❑ India's first 'smart fence' pilot project was inaugurated by Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh along the India-Pakistan International Border in Ploura, Jammu and Kashmir on.
- ❑ The initiative has been taken up by the Border Security Force (BSF), as part of their comprehensive integrated border management system.

### Highlights

- ★ The pilot project involves deploying of laser-activated fences and technology-enabled barriers to plug vulnerable gaps along the frontiers.
- ★ The smart fencing uses a number of devices for surveillance, communication and data storage.
- ★ The innovative system provides for round-the-clock surveillance on the border, even in different weather conditions be it dust storm, fog or rain.
- ★ It also reportedly comprises automated surveillance technology and alarm detection systems.
- ★ The BSF has not disclosed its complete features due to security reasons.

### Significance

- ★ The smart fence pilot project is expected to be a massive boon for monitoring security situations in border areas.
- ★ It is a technological solution devised to make the security system at the borders more strong and effective.
- ★ The system will virtually make it impossible for terrorists to infiltrate into the Indian side of the border.
- ★ According to Home Minister Rajnath Singh, the shortcomings of the pilot project will be addressed to make the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management system fool proof before it is extended to other areas.

*Source: The Hindu*

## India, Sri Lanka conduct joint naval exercise 'SLINEX 2018'

### Why in news?

- ❑ The sixth edition of '**SLINEX 2018**', a joint naval exercise between the naval forces of India and Sri Lanka is currently underway in Trincomalee, a major port city of Sri Lanka. The bilateral exercise is being held from September 7-13, 2018.
- ❑ The bilateral exercise, which was previously held once in two years, will be held as an annual event from this year onwards. Three Navy ships from each side along with around 1,000 naval personnel from both countries are participating in the joint drill.

### Key Highlights

- ★ The three Indian warships participating in the exercise include INS Kirch, Sumitra and Cora Divh.
- ★ In addition to the three ships, one ship-borne integral helicopter and two maritime patrol aircraft Dornier are participating from the Indian side, while the Sri Lankan Navy is represented by SLN Ships Sayurala, Samudra and Suranimala.
- ★ The exercise is being conducted in two phases. It commenced with the Harbour Phase, during which, the participants engaged in professional, cultural and social interactions.
- ★ It was followed by the Sea Phase, from September 11- 13, in the Bay of Bengal off Trincomalee. The phase includes gun firings, communication procedures, seamanship as well as navigation evolutions and helicopter operations.

### About SLINEX

- ★ The exercise aims to reinforce strong neighbourly ties between both countries underscored by extensive maritime interaction and improved understanding and contribute towards maritime security in the region.
- ★ The exercise primarily focuses on fleet work, seamanship, communication, replenishment at sea, joint training, helicopter and maritime patrol aircraft operations, search and rescue and maneuvers at sea.
- ★ It also involves sports fixtures and cultural events, which would provide an opportunity for personnel from both navies to learn from each other.
- ★ SLINEX series of bilateral maritime exercises was initiated in 2005 and since then five successful engagements have been conducted.
- ★ SLINEX aims to promote mutual understanding and provide exposure to both the Navies to each others' operating procedures, communication procedures and best practices.
- ★ This allows the two navies to develop a greater confidence to operate together during complex maritime missions.

*Source: The Hindu*

### ○ **India's combat aircraft Tejas successfully completes first-ever mid-air refuelling trial**

#### Why in news?

- ★ In a first, *Tejas*, the advanced version of India's indigenously produced *Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)* was successfully refuelled mid-air by a Russian-origin Ilyushin-78 tanker on September 10, 2018.
- ★ The mid-air refuelling was a part of a 'wet contact' trial for LCA Tejas MK-1. The Russian-origin tanker refuelled the fighter plane, piloted by Wing Commander Siddarth Singh, with 1,900 litres of fuel at an altitude of 20,000 ft. The move demonstrates a key capability sought by the Indian Air Force.

## Highlights

- ★ The actual engagement followed two dry tests, which were conducted last week when the refuelling systems (probe and drogue) were tested without actually transferring fuel.
- ★ On the day of the actual test, the LCA's internal and drop tanks were refuelled while the jet was flying at 270 knots.
- ★ The IAF provided all required support to DRDO including the tanker aircraft for the successful test flight.
- ★ The IAF has ordered 123 LCA variants at a cost of Rs 70, 000 crores and plans to order 201 more upgraded models to arrest a sharp decline in its combat capabilities.
- ★ Among the 123 planes on order, 20 each are in the initial operational clearance (IOC) and the more advanced final operational clearance (FOC) configurations, while the remaining 83 are in the Mk-1A configuration that comes with additional improvements.

## What is the Significance?

- ★ The successful test is being seen as a significant achievement and a major step towards the final operational clearance of the Light Combat Aircraft.
- ★ The air-to-air refuelling capability for LCA is a 'force multiplier' for the IAF, giving the aircraft the potential to stay airborne for a much longer period of time.
- ★ The enhanced range and endurance in air is expected to provide IAF a host of options in exploiting the operational potential of the LCA as well as to participate in international exercises without having to stage through several locations en route.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Chiller Star Labelling Program to improve energy efficiency

- The Union Ministry of Power on September 14, 2018 launched the Chiller Star Labelling Program, an ambitious program to encourage the deployment of energy efficient chiller systems in the country. and will be valid up to December 31, 2020.

## Chiller Star Labelling Program

- ★ The Chiller Star Labelling Program envisages providing star rating in terms of its energy performance.
- ★ The program has been formulated by Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE).
- ★ BEE has developed an online registration platform for easy and expeditious approval under this initiative.
- ★ The chillers manufacturers will be able to register online for availing appropriate star rating of chiller equipment.

- ★ The star label (1 to 5) will be awarded, with 5 star being the most efficient chillers, based on the test certificate from designated agencies and after due verification from BEE.
- ★ Through the chiller star labelling Program, it is estimated that more than 500 million units of electricity would be saved in 2019 along with Green House Gases (GHG) reduction of 0.5 million-ton equivalent of CO<sub>2</sub>.
- ★ It will also save more than 4 billion units of electricity by the year 2030 with CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction of 3.5 million ton.

### What is the significance?

- ★ The program will promote advancement technology for central HVAC (Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) systems and will also facilitate energy efficient solutions for the large commercial and industrial applications.
- ★ Chillers are used extensively for space conditioning of buildings and for industrial process cooling applications. Chillers, being energy intensive system, contribute more than 40 percent of the total energy consumption in commercial buildings.
- ★ Therefore, it is important to optimize energy performance of chillers and create awareness amongst the end users to adopt transition towards energy efficient chillers.

*Source: PIB, Times of India*

## ISRO launches two UK satellites aboard PSLV-C42

### Why in news?

- ❑ The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) recently launched its polar satellite launch vehicle (PSLV) C42 carrying two earth observation satellites for the United Kingdom.
- ❑ launch vehicle- PSLV-C42 lifted off at 10.08 PM from the first launch pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.

### Key facts

- ★ The 44.4 metres launch vehicle weighing 230.4 tons carried two earth observing satellites - NovaSAR and S1-4 of Surrey Satellite Technology Limited, UK. There was no Indian satellite on the flight.
- ★ The satellites were put into sun synchronous orbit, 583 km from the Earth, just over 17 minutes after the lift off from the first launch pad. The 33-hour countdown for the launch began at 1.08 PM on September 15, 2018.
- ★ The mission was a commercial arrangement between the British company and Antrix Corporation Limited, which is the commercial wing of ISRO.
- ★ The entire flight up to the release of the satellites was designed to take place within 17.5 minutes.
- ★ With the successful launch of the two British satellites, the total number of foreign satellites launched by India goes up to 239.
- ★ *NovaSAR is an S-Band synthetic aperture radar satellite, which will map forest, land use and monitor ice cover, flood and disaster.*
- ★ *S1-4 is a high-resolution optical Earth observation satellite that will be used for surveying resources, urban management and monitoring of the environment and disasters.*

## Significance

- ★ The launch marks PSLV-C42's first fully commercial trip of the year, breaking a five-month-long lull, for the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). This was the 44th PSLV and the 12th time it flew as core-alone.
- ★ India has been sending foreign satellites belonging to international customers from 29 countries through PSLV.
- ★ More commercial ventures are expected for nano satellites are expected in the future. Presently there is an order of 980 crore Rupees for this fiscal and next fiscal.
- ★ Antrix has so far contracted over 280 foreign customer satellites for a fee, among which, most are small experimental or earth observation spacecraft.
- ★ ISRO did not make any launch post April 12, after it put replacement navigation satellite IRNSS-II to space on PSLV-C41.
- ★ The space organization, in fact, recalled its GSAT-11 from the South American launch port of Kourou, weeks before it was due for launch.

*Source: The Hindu*

## HIV Estimations 2017 Report: NACO

### Why in news?

- ❑ The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) on September 14, 2018 released the HIV Estimations 2017 report.
- ❑ The HIV Estimations 2017 report is 14th in the series of HIV Estimations launched earlier under the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP). The first round of HIV estimation was done in 1998, while the latest round was done in 2015.
- ❑ NACO undertakes HIV estimations in every two years in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) - National Institute of Medical Statistics (NIMS).

### Highlights of HIV Estimations 2017

- ★ The report highlights the significant achievement of **nation's response on AIDS prevention** as well as on treatment front.
- ★ It indicates that there is no place for gratification as the country aims to achieve the ambitious goal of attaining the '**End of AIDS**' by 2030.
- ★ As per the report, India had **around 21.40 lakh people living with HIV (PLHIV)** with adult prevalence of 0.22 percent in 2017.
- ★ Around **87.58 thousand new HIV infections** and **69.11 thousand AIDS related deaths** happened in 2017.
- ★ Over **22000 mothers needed Antiretroviral Therapy (ART)** for prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV.

- ★ HIV Estimations 2017 confirmed the previous findings in terms of characteristic of the HIV epidemic, that is, the **national prevalence and incidence remain low**, but the epidemic is high in some geographical regions and population group.
- ★ The report noted that the **rate of decline in annual new HIV infections** has been relatively slower in recent years.
- ★ Overall, the impact of the programme has been significant with **more than 80 percent decline in estimated new infection** incidences from peak of epidemic in 1995.
- ★ Estimated **AIDS related death declined by 71 percent** since its peak in 2005.
- ★ As per UNAIDS 2018 report, the global average for decline in new infections and AIDS related deaths from peak has been 47 percent and 51 percent respectively.

## Objective

- ★ The objective of HIV Estimations is to provide updated information on the status of HIV epidemic in India at national and State/UT level.
- ★ Estimations of adult HIV prevalence, annual new infections (HIV incidence), AIDS-related mortality and prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) needs are outcomes of HIV estimations.
- ★ These modelled estimates are needed because there is no direct reliable way of measuring these core indicators which are used to track the AIDS epidemic and monitor and evaluate the response.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Indo-US joint military exercise 'Yudh Abhyas 2018' begins in Uttarakhand

### Why in news?

- ❑ Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2018, a joint military exercise of Indian and US armies, commenced on September 16, 2018 at Chaubattia,

### Key Facts

- ★ Indian and US soldiers gave a ceremonial salute to the two senior most officers of the US and Indian side reviewing the ceremony. The exercise concluded on September 29, 2018.
- ★ Exercise Yudh Abhyas is a series of one of the longest running joint military training and a major ongoing bilateral defence cooperation endeavour between India and the US.
- ★ This is the 14th edition of the joint military exercise hosted alternately by both countries. The two-week exercise will witness participation of about 350 personnel of the US Army and similar strength of Garud Division of the Indian Army.

### Highlights of the Exercise

- ★ Exercise Yudh Abhyas will provide an opportunity to the armed forces of both countries to train in an integrated manner at Battalion level with joint planning at Brigade level.
- ★ Multiple scenarios will be rehearsed during the joint exercise with a view to understand each-other's organisational structure and battle procedures.
- ★ The exercise is an ideal platform to learn from each-other's experiences of planning and execution of operations.

- ★ Both the sides will test the modern equipment for surveillance and tracking, specialist weapons for close quarter battle with terrorists, explosive and improvised explosive device detectors, as well as the latest communication equipment.
- ★ Both the armies will jointly train, plan and execute a series of well-developed operations for neutralisation of threats of varied nature.
- ★ The combined exercise will simulate a scenario where both nations are working together in counter insurgency and counter terrorism environment in mountainous terrain under UN charter.
- ★ Experts from both sides will hold expert academic and military discussions to share each other's experiences on varied topics for mutual benefit.

*Source: The Hindu*

## ○ **DRDO conducts first successful test of man portable-anti-tank guided missile**

### Why in news?

- India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on September 15, 2018 conducted the first successful flight test of its new indigenously designed and developed low weight man-portable anti-tank guided missile (MP-ATGM) at Ahmednagar test range in Maharashtra.
- The first successful test firing was followed by another test launch on September 16, which also took place at the same test range. The two successful missions were conducted to test different ranges of the missile, including its maximum range capability. According to DRDO, the two launches met all the test objectives.

### What is MP-ATGM?

- ★ The man-portable anti-tank guided missile (MP-ATGM) is a third-generation anti-tank guided missile, which has been under development with the DRDO in partnership with Indian defense contractor VEM Technologies Ltd. since 2015.
- ★ The missile, fitted with a high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT) warhead, reportedly boasts of a top attack capability and has a maximum engagement range of about 2.5 kilometers.
- ★ The missile would help the Indian army destroy enemy tanks during a war in the future. The Indian army needs close to 75,000 such missiles for future battles.

### Background

- ★ The Indian Defence Research and Development Organisation had promised the Indian Army to hand over the first MPATGM prototype by the end of 2018 for user trials.
- ★ The mass production of the missile is expected to begin in 2021. The Indian government scrapped a \$500 million deal with Rafael for 321 Spike ATGM systems and 8,356 missiles in favor of the MPATGM system in December 2017.
- ★ The Union Defence Ministry selected the Spike ATGM over the US-made FGM-148 Javelin ATGM system in October 2014.
- ★ The Indian Army intends to equip all of its infantry and mechanised units with a third-generation ATGM by the early 2020s. The third-generation ATGMs are expected to have a strike range of over 2.5 km.
- ★ The requirements of the Indian Army are so huge that they will have to be met with missile systems supplied from other nations along with the ones being developed indigenously by the DRDO.

*Source: The Hindu*

## PM inaugurates Parakram Parv in Jodhpur

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on September 28, 2018 inaugurated the Parakram Parv at the Combined Commanders' Conference in Jodhpur to mark the second anniversary of the surgical strikes carried out by the Indian army on September 29, 2016.

### Key Facts

- ★ The Parakram Parv, an exhibition, is being organised by the Konark Corps at the Jodhpur Military station. Parakram Parv is being celebrated to highlight the valour and accomplishments of the Indian Army.
- ★ A three-day main event from September 28-30, 2018 will be organised at the India Gate lawns in New Delhi besides similar events at 53 locations in 51 cities across the country.
- ★ The Day will also be marked to remember the sacrifice of soldiers during the 'Uri incident'.

### What is Surgical Strike?

- ★ A surgical strike is a military attack which results in only damage to the intended legitimate military target, and no or minimal collateral damage to surrounding structures, vehicles, buildings, or the general public infrastructure and utilities.
- ★ A swift and targeted attack with the aim of minimum collateral damage to the nearby areas and civilians is a surgical strike.
- ★ Surgical strikes require not just detailed and exhaustive planning but also needs precision in execution undertaken by forces across the world.

### Why Indian Army carried out Surgical strike?

- ★ Eleven days after the Uri attack that claimed 18 soldiers, Indian Army carried out a four hour Surgical Strike on the night of September 28-29, 2016 in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, inflicting heavy casualties on terrorists along with 'those protecting them', sending across a message of change of stand on the rules of engagement on the disputed Line of Control.
- ★ As per army, the strike was conducted to prevent terrorists who were prepping to infiltrate and attack the Kashmir region and metros. As per reports, first-of-its-kind strike across the Pakistani border was based on specific intelligence reports.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana launched

### Why in news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on September 23, 2018 launched the flagship scheme 'Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana' (PMJAY), also known as Ayushman Bharat or the National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM).

### Key Facts

- ★ This is the world's largest health scheme which will serve a population that equals 27-28 European. *The beneficiaries are almost equal to the population of Canada, Mexico and US put together.*
- ★ The scheme will become operational from September 25, 2018, the birth anniversary of Deendayal Upadhyay.

**□ 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.
- ★ 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 Ayushman Bharat programme will be funded with 60 percent contribution from the Centre and the remaining from the states.
- ★ 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 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 scheme allows the beneficiary to take cashless benefits from any public or private empanelled hospitals across the country.
- ★ 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.
- ★ 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).

**Hospital empanelment**

- ★ The beneficiaries can avail of the benefits in both public and empanelled private facilities. All public hospitals in the States implementing the scheme will be considered empanelled for the Scheme.
- ★ Hospitals belonging to Employee State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) will also be empanelled based on the bed occupancy ratio parameter.
- ★ While, the private hospitals will be empanelled online, based on defined criteria.
- ★ Each empanelled hospital will have an ‘Ayushman Mitra help desk’ where a prospective beneficiary can check documents to verify the eligibility and enrolment to the scheme.
- ★ So far, 15686 applications for hospital empanelment have been received and over 8735 hospitals, both public and private, have been empanelled for the scheme.

## Remaining States

- ★ As many as 30 states and Union Territories have signed MoUs with the Union Government to implement the programme over the next two to three months. However, Telangana, Odisha, Delhi, Kerala and Punjab have still not signed the MoUs, so the scheme will not be implemented in these states till they come on board.
- ★ States will be required to form a State Health Agency (SHA) to implement the scheme and at the district level also, a structure for implementation of the scheme will be set up. To ensure that the funds reach SHA on time, the transfer of funds from Central Government to State Health Agencies may be done through an escrow account directly.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Centre of Excellence for Data Analytics inaugurated in Delhi

### Why in news?

- The Centre of Excellence for Data Analytics (CEDA) was inaugurated by Union IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad in New Delhi on September 28, 2018.

### Key Facts

- ★ The centre has been set up by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) in a joint initiative with National Informatics Centre Services Incorporated (NICSI).
- ★ Unveiling the potential that data analytics has in transforming the way the government schemes are run, the Minister also released a white paper on ‘Data Analytics in Government’ that brings to the front the need for a data-driven decision making and policy formulation in government across the entire spectrum of its activities.

### About CEDA

- ★ The Centre of Excellence for Data Analytics (CEDA) has been created to support government departments to unlock the hidden potential of the data that they are generating as a part of the governance processes and use it to improve the overall governance.
- ★ The centre will help in fast-tracking the adoption of advanced world-class data analytics services in government.
- ★ It aims to strengthen citizen service delivery through data-driven governance.
- ★ It proposes to establish strong partnerships with academia and industry to ensure that the cutting edge technologies and quality expertise are brought in to help the government take advantage of the booming analytic wave.

### CEDA: Key Objectives

- ★ To be a focal point and centre of expertise in data analytics for government and public sector.
- ★ To help ministries in assessing the impact from the analytics solutions and help in understanding changes to organisational roles and responsibilities.
- ★ To facilitate faster and cost-effective technology adoption.
- ★ To promote capacity building and enable the departments to self-service analytics with minimum technical support.
- ★ To implement a knowledge repository to collect learnings from across projects and share best practices across initiatives to ensure the adoption of best practices.

**The CEDA will provide the following services to the Government:**

- ★ The centre will provide data profiling tools and techniques and the necessary expertise to analyse the data for quality issues. While data cleaning shall be done for making the data ready for analytical use, recommendations shall also be given in order to help the department take necessary actions to further improve their data collection process.
- ★ The centre will build analytic solutions that are specific to a particular problem which may relate to a single or a combination of departments.
- ★ The CEDA will build Data Analytic solutions that address a generic data analytics problem that is prevalent across departments or states. Such a solution will then be made available to other departments/states as a pre-built analytic solution that can be operationalized for the new states at a cost-effective and a much faster rate.
- ★ The centre will implement knowledge repository to collect learnings from across projects and share best practices across initiatives and will ensure usage of best practices in across the government.
- ★ Besides creating the analytics solutions for the government departments, the centre's focus would also be to train and enable the departments to do self-service analytics by simplifying the data in a manner in which an administrator can use it with minimum technical support.
- ★ The centre will help ministries in assessing the impact from the analytics solutions and help in understanding changes to organizational roles and responsibilities

**Background**

- ★ The shift towards the digital age, propelled by Digital India Program, has led to tremendous growth in data related to various aspects of Government functions and services.
- ★ As the next logical step, government departments are now looking to exploit this mount of a gold mine by investing in analytical solutions that can turn this data into insights.
- ★ Besides CEDA, DigiVaarta App, which aims to spread awareness on DigiDhan, was launched in Delhi. The app also aims to spread the popularity of BHIM's barcode-based merchant payment mode with merchants and traders at large.
- ★ The initiative aims to enable citizen government dialogue and engage citizens in educational and outreach programmes. The app can perform many more functions beyond chat and offers audio-video tutorials.

*Source: Economic Times, PIB*

**SATAT initiative to be launched to promote compressed biogas as alternative fuel****Why in news?**

- ❑ The Union Petroleum Minister, Dharmendra Pradhan is set to launch the Sustainable Alternative towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) initiative in October 2018.

**Objective**

- ❑ The SATAT initiative is aimed at providing a sustainable alternative towards affordable transportation as a developmental effort that would benefit vehicle-users as well as farmers and entrepreneurs.

### **Key Benefits of the SATAT Initiative**

- ★ The move is expected to boost the availability of more affordable transport fuels and enable better use of agricultural residue, cattle dung and municipal solid waste.
- ★ It is expected to pave the way for efficient municipal solid waste management and help in tackling the problem of polluted urban air due to farm stubble-burning and carbon emissions.
- ★ It will boost entrepreneurship, rural economy and employment and provide an additional source of revenue to farmers.
- ★ It will also help achieve the nation's climate change goals and bring down the dependency on natural gas and crude oil imports and act as a buffer against crude oil and gas price fluctuations.
- ★ The Compressed Bio-Gas networks can be integrated with city gas distribution (CGD) networks to boost supplies to domestic and retail users in existing and upcoming markets.
- ★ Besides retailing from OMC fuel stations, Compressed Bio-Gas can at a later date be injected into CGD pipelines too for efficient distribution and optimised access of a cleaner and more affordable fuel.

### **How is Compressed Biogas produced?**

- ★ The Bio-gas is produced naturally through a process of anaerobic decomposition from waste and biomass sources like agriculture residue, cattle dung, sugarcane press mud, municipal solid waste and sewage treatment plant waste.
- ★ After purification, it is compressed and called CBG, which has pure methane content of over 95 per cent.
- ★ The other waste streams including rotten potatoes from cold storages, rotten vegetables, dairy plants, chicken and poultry litter, food waste, horticulture waste, forestry residues and treated organic waste from industrial effluent treatment plants (ETPs) can also be used to generate biogas.

### **Compressed Biogas plants**

- ★ The plants are proposed to be set up mainly through independent entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs would be able to separately market the other by-products from these plants, including bio-manure and carbon-dioxide to enhance returns on investment.
- ★ The CBG produced at these plants will be transported through cylinders to the fuel station networks of OMCs for marketing as a green transport fuel alternative.
- ★ It is planned to roll out 5,000 Compressed Bio-Gas plants across India in a phased manner, with 250 plants by the year 2020, 1000 plants by 2022 and 5000 plants by 2025.
- ★ These plants are expected to produce 15 million tonnes of CBG per annum, which is about 40 per cent of current CNG consumption of 44 million tonnes per annum in the country.
- ★ At an investment of approx. Rs 1.7 lakh crore, this initiative is expected to generate direct employment for 75,000 people and produce 50 million tonnes of bio-manure for crops.

### **Background**

- ★ The Compressed Bio-Gas is exactly similar to the commercially available natural gas (CNG) in its composition and energy potential. Hence, it can be used as an alternative, renewable automotive fuel.
- ★ The potential for Compressed Bio-Gas production from various sources in India is estimated at about 62 million tonnes per annum.
- ★ The 1,500-strong CNG stations network in the country currently serve about 32 lakh gas-based vehicles.

- ★ The Working Group on Biofuels, set up under the National Policy on Biofuels 2018, is in the process of finalising a pan-India pricing model for Compressed Bio-Gas.
- ★ The National Policy on Biofuels 2018 emphasises on active promotion of advanced biofuels, including CBG.
- ★ The Union Government had launched the GOBAR-DHAN (Galvanising Organic Bio-Agro Resources) scheme earlier this year to convert cattle dung and solid waste in farms to CBG and compost. The scheme proposes to cover 700 projects across the country in 2018-19

*Source: PIB*

### National Digital Communications Policy 2018

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on September 26, 2018 approved the National Digital Communications Policy 2018 (NDCP-2018), the new telecom policy of the country.
- The cabinet also accorded approval to the re-designation of the Telecom Commission as the “Digital Communications Commission”.

### National Digital Communications Policy 2018 (NDCP-2018)

- ★ The NDCP-2018 envisions supporting India’s transition to a digitally empowered economy and society by fulfilling the information and communications needs of citizens and enterprises by establishing a resilient and affordable digital communications infrastructure and services.
- ★ This customer focused and application driven policy will lead to new ideas and innovations after the launch of advanced technology such as 5G, IOT, and M2M which will govern the telecom sector.

### Objectives of the policy

- ★ Provide universal broadband connectivity at 50 Mbps to every citizen
- ★ Provide 1 Gbps connectivity to all Gram Panchayats by 2020 and 10 Gbps by 2022
- ★ Ensure connectivity to all uncovered areas
- ★ Attract investments of USD 100 billion in the Digital Communications Sector
- ★ Train 1 million manpower for building New Age Skill
- ★ Expand IoT ecosystem to 5 billion connected devices
- ★ Establish a comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals
- ★ Facilitate India’s effective participation in the global digital economy
- ★ Enforce accountability through appropriate institutional mechanisms
- ★ Secure digital communications infrastructure and services

## Strategy

- ★ Establishment of a National Digital Grid by creating a National Fibre Authority
- ★ Establishing Common Service Ducts and utility corridors in all new city and highway road projects
- ★ Creation of a collaborative institutional mechanism between Centre, States and Local Bodies for common rights of way, standardisation of costs and timelines
- ★ Removal of barriers to approvals
- ★ Facilitating development of Open Access Next Generation Networks

## What is the need of new telecom policy?

- ★ At present, the world is witnessing an era of modern technological advancements in the Telecom Sector such as 5G, Internet of Things (IoT), Machine to machine (M2M) communication, etc.
- ★ Considering this transformation, the government felt a need to introduce a policy for the Indian Telecom Sector which can form the main pillar of Digital India by addressing emerging opportunities.
- ★ Accordingly, the National Digital Communications Policy 2018 was formulated in place of the existing National Telecom Policy 2012.

*Source: The Hindu, PIB*

## ○ **Government inaugurates National Orientation workshop on National e-Vidhan Application**

### Why in news?

- Union Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs, Arjun Ram Meghwal on September 24, 2018 inaugurated the two-day National Orientation workshop on National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA).

### National Orientation workshop on NeVA

- ★ The Orientation Workshop would include technical sessions and group discussions over 2 days.
- ★ It would facilitate exposure for the delegates about the positive attributes of NeVA; deliberations on issues faced by different State Legislatures in implementation of e-Vidhan and finding solutions thereof.
- ★ The focus of the workshop would be to encourage all State Legislatures to move towards e-Vidhan platform and bring in transparency, accountability and responsiveness in their conduct of business.

### National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA)

- ★ NeVA is a member-centric, decentralised digital application that makes information available on digital platform about day to day functioning of Legislative Houses covering.
- ★ NeVA, a Rs 739 Crore project, aims to bring legislatures on digital platform, covering all Houses.
- ★ It is to be used by the Legislatures as well as all the Government Departments.
- ★ It will increase transparency, accountability; and decrease the scope of corruption in the functioning of House.
- ★ The application would host a secure page for each Member of the House for submitting Questions & other Notices.

## NeVA Mobile App

- ★ The mNeVA (NeVA mobile app) is a device neutral and user friendly app that has made information on conduct of business in Legislatures accessible anytime, anywhere to everyone.
- ★ It is a work-flow based app deployed in Cloud (Meghraj) which helps the Chair of the House to conduct the proceedings of the House smoothly.
- ★ It also helps the members to carry out their duties in the House efficiently.
- ★ The App is available for download from Play store and App store for Android and iOS mobiles respectively.
- ★ Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Puducherry, Manipur Assemblies have already started using the application.

## e-Vidhan

- ★ e-Vidhan is a Mission Mode Project to digitise and make the functioning of State Legislatures paperless.
- ★ This is part of Digital India programme of the Union Government.
- ★ The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs is the Nodal Ministry for this project.
- ★ The Ministry aims to roll out e-Vidhan as NeVA covering all 40 Houses including two Houses of Parliament and thereby putting all them on a single platform and proving the theory of ‘One Nation One Application’.

*Source: PIB*

## Successful test of Prithvi Defence Vehicle conducted

### Why in news?

- ❑ India recently conducted a successful test of its indigenously designed ballistic missile defense system off the coast of Odisha. With the test, India achieved a major milestone in developing a two-layer Ballistic Missile Defence system.
- ❑ The mission, named Prithvi Defence Vehicle (PDV) mission, aimed to engage targets in the exo-atmosphere region at an altitude above 50km of the earth's atmosphere. The test was conducted from Abdul Kalam Island, earlier known as Wheeler Island of the Integrated Test Range (ITR).

### Key Facts

- ★ The mission involved test-firing of an inceptor missile of the coast of Odisha to intercept an incoming ballistic missile off the Bay of Bengal.
- ★ The test was successful, as both the PDV interceptor and the target missile were engaged successfully.
- ★ In the automated operation, the radar-based detection and tracking system detected and tracked the enemy's ballistic missile.
- ★ The computer network with the help of data received from the radars predicted the trajectory of the incoming ballistic missile. The PDV that was kept fully ready took off once the computer system gave the command for lift-off.

- ★ The interceptor guided by high-accuracy Inertial Navigation System (INS) supported by a Redundant Micro Navigation System moved towards the estimated point of the interception.
- ★ Once the missile crossed the atmosphere, the heat shield ejected and the IR Seeker dome opened to look at the target location as designated by the mission computer.
- ★ With the help of Inertial Guidance and IR Seeker, the missile moved for an interception.
- ★ All events were monitored in real-time by the Telemetry/Range Stations, at various other locations.

### **Background**

- ★ The PDV was first tested in April 2014. The missile interceptor had a “near miss” at an altitude of 120 kilometers.
- ★ However, in February 2017, the Interceptor missile was successfully test fired from the Abdul Kalam Island.
- ★ The PDV is slated to replace the existing Prithvi Air Defense (PAD)/Pradyumna Ballistic Missile Interceptor, which has a maximum interception altitude of 80 kilometers.
- ★ The new two-stage solid-fueled PDV interceptor is fitted with an Imaging Infrared (IIR) seeker, developed by DRDO, to distinguish between incoming warheads and decoys.

*Source: The Hindu*

## **The latest Levels and Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2018 from UNICEF**

### **Why in news?**

- ❑ The death of children below the age of five years continues to steadily reduce in India, declining from nearly 22 per cent in 2012 to 18 per cent in 2017, which is now for the first time below the one million mark, as per a new UN report released on September 17, 2018.
- ❑ The latest Levels and Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2018 from UNICEF and partners in the UN Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME) shows the full scope of child and mortality rates across the world – from newborns to adolescents.

The report finds that globally, the under-five mortality rate has dropped by more than half (1990-2017), but inequities persist among and within countries.

### **The Report: Key Highlights**

- ★ The report reveals that over the last two decades, the world made substantial progress in reducing mortality among children and young adolescents.
- ★ Despite the progress, in 2017 alone, an estimated 6.3 million children and young adolescents died, mostly from preventable causes. The children under the age of 5 years accounted for 5.4 million of these deaths and newborns accounted for around half of the deaths.
- ★ Among children and young adolescents, the risk of dying was highest in the first month of life at an average rate of 18 deaths per 1,000 live births globally in 2017.
- ★ While the chances of survival have increased for all age groups since 2000, the progress has been uneven.

- ★ The largest improvements in survival for children under the age of 5 years occurred among children aged 1-4 years. The mortality in this age group declined by 60 per cent from 2000 to 2017.
- ★ Still, the report revealed that children face widespread regional and income disparities in their chances of survival.
- ★ According to the report, the Sub-Saharan Africa region had the highest under-five mortality rate in the world. In 2017, the region had an average under-five mortality rate of 76 deaths per 1,000 live births.
- ★ On current trends, 56 million children under 5 years of age are projected to die between 2018 and 2030, half of them newborns.
- ★ In 2017, 118 countries already had an under-five mortality rate below the SDG target of a mortality rate at least as low as 25 deaths per 1,000 live births.
- ★ Among the remaining countries, progress will need to be accelerated in about 50 countries to achieve the SDG target by 2030.

### **SDG-3**

- The SDG goal 3 calls for an end to preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age and specifies that all countries should aim to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 deaths per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality to at least as low as 25 deaths per 1,000 live births by 2030.

### **Child Survival Trend in India**

- ★ According to the UN report, the death of children below the age of five years continues to steadily reduce in India, declining from nearly 22 per cent in 2012 to 18 per cent in 2017, which is now for the first time below the one million mark.
- ★ The under-five mortality rate of India at 39 per 1000 live births now equals that of the world, highlighting the much faster decline by India in the last five years as compared to the global decline.
- ★ In fact, the gender gap in child survival has reduced almost four-fold in the last five years, with under-five mortality of girl child now being 2.5 per cent higher, compared to nearly 10 per cent in 2012.

### **What lies ahead?**

- ★ The report highlights that urgent measures are required in countries across the world to curb the child mortality rate and improve the survival chances of newborns, children and young adolescents.
- ★ The child deaths, particularly the ones that happen due to regional and socio-economic disparities, reflect the broader influence of sustainable social and economic development on a child's health.
- ★ Hence, the urgent measures can involve simple solutions like ensuring basic health services such as clean water, sanitation, adequate nutrition, medicines, electricity, timely vaccines and more health facilities and doctors to every child.
- ★ Ending preventable deaths of children worldwide also require targeted interventions to the age-specific causes of death among children and young adolescents.
- ★ Further, to achieve sustainable and equitable progress towards 2030 and beyond, disparities in child survival within countries must also be addressed.

*Source: The Hindu*

## India successfully test fires short-range Prahaar missile

### Why in news?

- ❑ India on September 20, 2018 successfully test-fired the indigenously developed surface-to-surface, short-range tactical ballistic missile ‘Prahaar’ from the Odisha coast.
- ❑ The missile has been developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). It was test-launched from launch pad-3 of the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur, near Balasore. It is capable of filling the gap between the multi-barrel rocket system ‘Pinaka’ and medium-range ballistic missile ‘Prithvi’.

### Key Facts

- ★ The test launch was successful, as the missile travelled a range of 200 km before zeroing in on the target, achieving all mission objectives.
- ★ The missile is equipped with state-of-the-art navigation, guidance and electromechanical actuation systems with an advanced onboard computer.
- ★ It is fitted with an inertial navigation system and is capable of engaging multiple targets in different directions.
- ★ Further, the missile is a quick-reaction, all-weather, all-terrain and highly accurate battlefield support tactical weapon system.
- ★ The DRDO used various tracking radars as well as electro-optic equipment to track and monitor the trajectory of the missile.
- ★ As a safety measure, 4,494 people residing in five villages adjacent to the missile launch site were temporarily shifted by the district administration before the launch to nearby two shelters with compensation.
- ★ The people returned to their houses after getting clearance from ITR authorities soon after the test was over.

### Significance

- ★ The indigenously developed Prahaar missile is expected to further strengthen the defence capabilities of the Indian Army.
- ★ It is an Indian solid-fuel road-mobile tactical ballistic missile developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- ★ The all-weather missile, which has a length of 7.3m, a diameter of 420 mm and weighs 1,280 kg, can carry a payload of 200 kg. It is capable of striking targets as far as 150km.
- ★ It is essentially a quick reaction battlefield tactical missile with advance maneuvering capability.
- ★ It has been developed to provide a cost-effective, quick reaction, all-weather, all-terrain, highly accurate battlefield support tactical weapon system to the Indian Army.
- ★ It can be launched from a road-mobile launch platform, which can carry six missiles at a time. It can be fired in all directions from the launcher. It could be used for striking both tactical and strategic targets.
- ★ The Prahaar missile was test-fired successfully for the very first time in July 2011 from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Global TB Report 2018

### Why in news?

- ❑ The World Health Organisation (WHO) on September 18, 2018 released the 2018 Global TB Report in New York. The report calls for an exceptional mobilisation of national and international commitments enough to end Tuberculosis (TB) by 2030.
- ❑ As per the report, although global efforts have prevented an estimated 54 million TB deaths since 2000, TB remains the world's deadliest infectious disease.
- ❑ The United Nations General Assembly High-level Meeting on the fight against tuberculosis is about to take place on September 26, 2018 to deliberate on the same issue.

### Tuberculosis: Status of the epidemic

- ★ Overall, TB deaths have decreased over the past year. In 2017, there were 1.6 million deaths including 300000 HIV-positive people. Since 2000, a 44 percent reduction in TB deaths has been witnessed among people infected with HIV.
- ★ An estimated 10 million people developed TB in 2017. The number of new cases is falling by 2 percent every year, although faster reductions have occurred in Europe and Africa between 2013 and 2017.
- ★ Few countries are moving faster than others as evidenced in countries such as Lesotho, Eswatini, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe which witnessed annual declines of 4-8 percent.
- ★ In the Russian Federation, high level political commitment and intensified TB efforts have led to more rapid 5 percent decline in cases and 13 percent decline in deaths.
- ★ Despite all these efforts, drug-resistant TB remains a global public health crisis. In 2017, 558000 people developed disease resistant to rifampicin, the most effective first-line TB drug.
- ★ The vast majority of people had multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB), the combined resistance to rifampicin and isoniazid medicines.

### TB Response: Challenges

- ★ Underreporting and under-diagnosis of TB cases remains a major challenge. Of the 10 million people who fell ill with TB in 2017, only 6.4 million were officially recorded, leaving 3.6 million people undiagnosed, or detected but not reported.
- ★ Ten countries accounted for 80 percent of the gap of underreporting and under-diagnosis, with India, Indonesia and Nigeria topping the list.
- ★ Treatment coverage lags behind at 64 percent and must increase to at least 90 percent by 2025 to meet the TB targets.
- ★ To improve detection, diagnosis and treatment rates, WHO along with the Stop TB Partnership and the Global Fund launched the new initiative 'Find. Treat. All. #EndTB' in 2018, providing quality care to 40 million people with TB from 2018 to 2022.

- ★ Only around half of the estimated 920000 people with HIV-associated TB were reported in 2017, of these, 84 percent were on antiretroviral therapy.
- ★ Only one in four people with MDR-TB were reported to have received treatment with a second-line regimen.
- ★ China and India alone were home to 40 percent of patients requiring treatment for MDR-TB, but not reported to be receiving it.
- ★ Globally, MDR-TB treatment success remains low at 55 percent, often due to drug toxicity making it impossible for patients to stay on treatment.
- ★ The report predicts that at least 30 million people should be able to access TB preventive treatment between 2018 and 2022, based on new WHO guidance.
- ★ One of the most urgent challenges is to scale up funding. In 2018, investments in TB prevention and care in low- and middle-income countries fell short of USD 3.5 billion. Without an increase in funding, the annual gap will widen to USD 5.4 billion in 2020.
- ★ A further USD 1.3 billion per year is required to accelerate the development of new vaccines, diagnostics and medicines.

### **The Way ahead**

- ★ To meet the global target of ending TB by 2030, countries urgently need to step up their response by increasing domestic and international funding to fight the disease.
- ★ WHO strongly recommends preventive treatment for people living with HIV, and children under 5 years living in households with TB.

*Source: The Hindu*



## More News

### Justice Ranjan Gogoi appointed as 46th Chief Justice of India

- ❑ The Union government on September 13, 2018 appointed Justice Ranjan Gogoi as the 46th Chief Justice of India (CJI). He will assume his post on October 3. He will be succeeding incumbent CJI Dipak Misra, who is set to retire a day before his swearing in, on October 2, 2018.
- ❑ Justice Gogoi's name was suggested for the esteemed post by Justice Misra himself. He is the senior-most judge of the Supreme Court after Chief Justice Misra. His appointment was confirmed after President Ramnath Kovind signed the warrant of his appointment.

### ○ PM Modi, Cochin International Airport honoured with UN Champions of the Earth Award 2018

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on September 26, 2018 awarded with the prestigious UN Champions of the Earth Award 2018, the highest environmental honour of the United Nations.
- ★ The UN Environment jointly awarded PM Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron in the Policy Leadership category for their efforts regarding the creation of the International Solar Alliance.
- ★ PM Modi was also acknowledged for his unprecedented pledge to eliminate all single use plastic in India by 2022. This year, the Champions of the Earth Award recognised six of the world's most outstanding environmental change makers for their combination of bold, innovative, and tireless efforts to tackle some of the most urgent environmental issues.

### International Literacy Day 2018

- ❑ The 52nd International Literacy Day was celebrated across the world on September 8, 2018 with an aim to highlight improvements in world literacy rates, and reflect on the existing literacy challenges.

### Theme 2018: Literacy and skills development

- ★ This year's theme explores integrated approaches that simultaneously support the development of literacy and skills, to ultimately improve people's lives and contribute to equitable and sustainable societies.
- ★ The day was commemorated by a two-day special event at UNESCO's headquarters, Paris. It also saw the hosting of the 2018 UNESCO International Literacy Prize awards ceremony.
- ★ The Literacy Prizes consists of five prizes. They are International Reading Association Literacy Award, Noma Literacy Prize, UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize, The Malcolm Adiseshiah International Literacy Prize and UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy.

### **National Nutrition Month observed across India to fight malnutrition**

- ★ The National Nutrition Month is being celebrated across the country in September to mark the fight against malnutrition. During this month, the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development will organise various programmes to spread broad awareness on issues related to malnutrition like stunting, under-nutrition, anaemia and low birth weight in children.
- ★ The month will focus on adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers to eliminate the deficiencies prevailing in the Health sector.
- ★ The WCD ministry is trying to reach about 11 crore women and children during this month through various grass-root activities with the convergence of different ministries.

### **Village Rockstars is India's official entry to Oscars 2019**

- ★ Village Rockstars, an Assamese language feature film by National Award-winning filmmaker Rima Das, was on September 22, 2018 selected as India's official entry for the Best Foreign Language Film category of the 2019 Academy (Oscar) Awards.
- ★ Village Rockstars tells the story of 10-year-old Dhunu, a young girl from a remote village in Assam, who dreams of owning a guitar and forming a rock band despite the awful financial situation at home. The movie had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) 2017.

### **International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons:**

- The International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons is observed every year on 26 September across the world.

### **Objective**

- ★ To provide an occasion for world community to reaffirm its commitment to global nuclear disarmament as high priority.
- ★ To provide opportunity to educate public and their leaders about real benefits of eliminating such weapons, and the social and economic costs of perpetuating them.

### **Background:**

- ★ The International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons was proclaimed by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in December 2013 as follow-up to its high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament which was held on 26 September 2013, in New York, US.
- ★ UNGA called for urgent commencement of negotiations in Conference on Disarmament of comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons to prohibit their possession, development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer and use or threat of use, and to provide for their destruction.

## ○ National Tourism Awards 2017: Ahmedabad, Mandu jointly win ‘Best Heritage City’ award

- ★ The National Tourism Awards 2016-17 were presented by Union Minister for Tourism (IC), K J Alphonso on September 27, 2018, on the occasion of the World Tourism Day, which is being celebrated globally with the theme ‘Tourism & Digital Transformation’.
- ★ The Tourism Minister also launched the ‘Incredible India Mobile App’ and the ‘Incredible India Tourist Facilitators Certification’ programme. Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said that tourism is the cornerstone of the Indian economy, as it is a major source of employment and foreign exchange, and in order to tap the full potential of this sector, the industry has to join hands.

## Ibrahim Mohamed Solih wins Maldives Presidential Election 2018

- ★ Opposition candidate, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, on September 24, 2018 won the Maldives Presidential Election 2018, defeating incumbent President Yameen Abdul Gayoom, who will stay on in the presidency until his term ends on November 17, 2018.
- ★ Ibrahim Mohammad Solih is a consensus candidate of the joint opposition, which includes the Maldivian Democratic Party, the Jumhooree Party, the Adhaalat Party and former president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom’s own faction of the Progressive Party.

## Instagram co-founders Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger resign

- ★ Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, the co-founders of the photo-sharing app Instagram, on September 24, 2018 announced to resign from their respective positions in the social media company.
- ★ Mike Krieger is the Chief Technical Officer, while Kevin Systrom is the Chief Executive Officer. They founded the photo-sharing app in 2010 and sold it to Facebook in 2012 for about USD 1 billion.
- ★ Though they did not mention the reason to leave the company, however, revealed their plan to take time off to explore their creativity again.

## ○ PM inaugurates Jharsuguda Airport; flags off UDAN flight between Jharsuguda-Raipur sector

- ★ PM Narendra Modi on September 22, 2018 inaugurated the airport at Jharsuguda, the powerhouse of Odisha, in the presence of Odisha Governor Ganeshi Lal, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, Union Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu, Union Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and Union Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram.
- ★ Jharsuguda is the second airport of Odisha after Bhubaneswar to become operational. It is the first airport to provide necessary connectivity to Bhubaneswar, Raipur and Ranchi under the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) UDAN. Jharsuguda Airport has been developed by the Airports Authority of India in collaboration with Odisha Government.

### **70th Primetime Emmy Awards: Game of Thrones wins Outstanding Drama**

- ★ The 70th Primetime Emmy Awards were announced on September 18, 2018 at the Microsoft Theater, Los Angeles, California, United States. The awards hosted by comedians Michael Che and Colin Jost.
- ★ For the first time in almost 20 years, HBO didn't dominate the Emmy Awards. The channel had to settle for a tie with Netflix with 23 awards each. After being ineligible for the 2017 Emmy awards, the popular drama series Game of Thrones was the most nominated programme in this year's edition with a total of 22 nominations.

### **Vietnam President Tran Dai Quang passes away at 61**

- ★ Vietnam's President Tran Dai Quang passed away on September 21, 2018 in a military hospital in Hanoi after a prolonged serious illness. He was 61.
- ★ According to reports, the Vietnamese leader had been suffering from a serious illness since the past few months and had travelled abroad several times for treatment. He was sworn in as the President of the communist country in 2016, following a stint as public security minister.
- ★ While the post of the President is one of the top four posts in Vietnam, the role is largely ceremonial. The other top posts include that of the Prime Minister, National Assembly chairman and communist party head.

### **National Sports Awards 2018 announced; Mirabai Chanu, Virat Kohli to get Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna**

- ★ The National Sports Awards 2018 were announced by the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports on September 20, 2018. Cricket captain Virat Kohli and world champion weightlifter Mirabai Chanu will jointly be conferred with Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award 2018, India's highest sporting honour.
- ★ This year, the Ministry received a large number of nominations for these awards. The nominations were considered by the Selection Committees consisting of a former Olympian, Arjuna Awardees, Dronacharya Awardees, Dhyan Chand Awardees, Sport Journalists, Experts and sports administrators.

### **International Day of Democracy 2018 observed globally**

- ★ The International Day of Democracy was observed across the world on September 15, 2018. The day provides an opportunity to review the state of democracy in the world.
- ★ **The theme of the 2018 International Day of Democracy was 'Democracy under Strain: Solutions for a Changing World'.**
- ★ This year's theme looks for ways to revive democracy and seek answers to the systemic challenges it faces such as tackling economic and political inequalities, making democracies more inclusive by bringing the young and marginalised into the political system and responsive to emerging challenges such as migration and climate change.

## ○ Day coincides with 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- ★ The International Day of Democracy 2018 coincides with this year's 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, highlighting the values of freedom and respect for human rights as essential elements of democracy.
- ★ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government" (Article 21.3). The declaration inspired constitution-making around the world and contributed to global acceptance of democratic values and principles.
- ★ Democracy, in turn, provides the natural environment for the protection and effective realisation of human rights.

### National Hindi Divas 2018 observed across India

- ★ National Hindi Divas (Hindi Day) was observed across India on September 14, 2018 to promote Hindi as Matra Bhasha (mother tongue) of India. The day was marked by literary festivals, Hindi poetry sessions, Hindi essay writing competitions, Hindi speech contests and other events.
- ★ The day marks the adaptation of Hindi language as the official language of India by the Constituent Assembly of India on September 14, 1949. The decision of using Hindi as official language was ratified by Indian Constitution via amendment 343 which stated that all government communications will be penned in Hindi (Devanagari Script). This amendment came into effect on January 26, 1950.

