

# **ELITE IAS**

## **Current Affairs March 2019**



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## Editorial

### Coalition of the concerned

In the wake of the Pulwama attack on February 14, 2019, the government has iterated once again its plan for the “diplomatic isolation” of **Pakistan**. The idea, which was first articulated after the 2016 Uri attacks, is a non-starter, as was underlined by the visit of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman to both countries earlier this month, just a few days after Pulwama. In Pakistan, the Prince called himself “Pakistan’s Ambassador” in his country, and issued a joint statement praising Pakistan for its fight against terrorism. Clearly, a more considered diplomatic strategy, less full of rhetoric, must be chalked out by the government in response to cross-border terrorism.

### Beyond isolation

To begin with, the government would do better to repackage its idea of “isolating Pakistan” into one of building a more inclusive ‘coalition against terrorism emanating from Pakistan’. In the past couple of weeks alone, Iran and Afghanistan have faced terror attacks on their security forces along the border with Pakistan — and several other countries, which have also faced such attacks or see the presence of Pakistan-based groups on their soil, would be willing to join ranks on this. The truth is, in today’s interconnected world, it is vainglorious to expect countries to join a unilateral plan for isolation.

Despite the U.S.’s considerable might, it has been unable to get most countries, including India, to sever ties with Iran and North Korea, for example. The impact of such a campaign is also doubtful: after years of trying to isolate North Korea, the U.S. is pursuing talks with its leader. While isolation might work as a campaign slogan for domestic audiences, it is quickly rebuffed each time a country engages with the nation one is trying to isolate. An inclusive coalition is more likely to move nations at the global stage as well. The success of the efforts led by the U.S. and other countries to ‘grey list’ Pakistan at the Financial Action Task Force or of French efforts for a United Nations Security Council statement on Pulwama points to that.

Second, India must focus on the case against Masood Azhar, which pre-dates the case against 26/11 mastermind Hafiz Saeed. In a first, the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) claimed responsibility for the Pulwama attack in a suicide bomber video that has not thus far been disputed by its leader Masood Azhar. Azhar has been on the U.S.’s radar since 1992, when he was a leader of the banned terror group Harkat ul-Ansar, and worked with jihadi groups in Sudan and Bangladesh. His release after years in Indian prisons in exchange for hostages on board the IC-814 flight should on its own merit his banning and prosecution — not just in Pakistan, but in all the countries whose nationals were on board that Indian Airlines flight, as well as the stops that flight made: in Nepal, the United Arab Emirates and Afghanistan.

Third, India must prepare for a pushback from Pakistan, most likely in terms of internationalising the Kashmir issue, and linking it to progress in Afghanistan. This is what Pakistan’s Ambassador to Afghanistan, Zahid Nasrullah, did when he said that any attack by India would “impact the momentum” of the peace talks in Afghanistan. His words were heard beyond Kabul, in Washington and Moscow. On February 18, members of the Taliban negotiating team were due to meet U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in Islamabad. The talks were called off after Afghanistan objected to the Taliban team’s travel to Pakistan, and rescheduled for February 25 in Doha. It remains to be seen how much countries trying to negotiate with the Taliban will need Pakistan’s leverage to make progress on those talks. U.S. President Donald Trump sees them as the precursor for plans to pull out most troops in combat in Afghanistan before his re-election bid for 2020.

### **The American angle**

Next, the government must prioritise action over words, when it comes to moves against Pakistan’s sponsorship and hosting of the JeM. The measures taken thus far — cancelling Most Favoured Nation status, maximising use of Indus waters, denying visas to Pakistani sportspersons, etc. — have little real impact on Pakistan and certainly none on the military establishment. Instead of priding itself on extracting statements of condemnation from various governments in the world, it is better for New Delhi to use India’s considerable diplomatic leverage to ensure action that would shut down the JeM and the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) permanently and bring their leaders to justice. In this regard, mere statements and bans have not worked for more than two decades, and the government must consider other options, especially with the countries that carry the most leverage and access in Pakistan: China, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia.

It is puzzling that the U.S. has been able to carry out drone strikes on a whole host of terror group leaders on Pakistan’s western front, but never once targeted camps and infrastructure belonging to the JeM and the LeT, despite their well-established links to al-Qaeda. India must also press the U.S. to place travel sanctions on specific entities in the Pakistani military establishment unless visible action is taken against the JeM, whose leaders hold public rallies and issue videos threatening India.

Contrary to popular perception, the Trump administration’s moves to cancel funds to Pakistan last year is not the toughest action the U.S. has contemplated: in May 1992, then U.S. President George H.W. Bush had directed his Secretary of State James Baker to send a stern letter to then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif threatening to designate Pakistan as a “State sponsor of Terror” for its support to Kashmiri and Sikh militant groups.

A similar line of talks must be pursued by New Delhi with Riyadh — which once was a donor to Pakistan’s Islamist institutions, but now is wary of funding extremism — to withhold any funds that may trickle down to charitable wings run by the JeM and LeT. With China, it is surprising that the issue of a simple ban at the UN Security Council has not been made India’s chief demand from Beijing. It is hoped that this will be rectified soon when the next proposal to ban Azhar is brought to the UNSC, and during Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj’s visit to China for the trilateral Russia-India-China meeting. More than the ban, however, India must ask China for action against any entities dealing with the JeM in Pakistan, given that China is the partner with the most influence in Pakistan today, and one with the most to lose from terror groups in Punjab operating along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.



## Steady dialogue

Finally, India must look to its own actions on the diplomatic front with Pakistan. Calling off a formal dialogue process for more than a decade has clearly yielded no desired outcome. South Asia as a region, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) process too have suffered the consequences of this disengagement, without yielding any desired outcomes. A measured, steady and non-political level of dialogue is a more effective way of impressing India's determination to root out terrorism than the present on-again, off-again policy. As the nation prepares for a possible military response to the Pulwama attack, it is important that New Delhi consider its diplomatic response carefully, particularly taking into account both the historical and regional context of its moves.



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

### **Govt to take immediate steps to protect Maithili language**

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

- ☞ The Ministry of Human Resource Development has decided to take immediate steps to implement the recommendations of a committee, which it had constituted in 2018 to make a report for the promotion and protection of Maithili language and its scripts.
- ☞ The committee has submitted its report to the Ministry. In the report, it has made several recommendations for the promotion and protection of the Maithili language. The report was examined in the Ministry and it has been decided to take immediate action on some of the recommendations of the committee.

#### **Following are some of the recommendations by the committee:**

- ◆ To establish a script and manuscript centre at Darbhanga in any one of the Universities namely Kameshwar Singh Sanskrit University or Lalit Narayan Mithila University.
- ◆ To ensure early completion of the work pertaining to unicode scripts of Mithilakshar by Technology Development of Indian Languages (TDIL).
- ◆ To prepare audio-visual teaching materials for teaching the Mithilakshar scripts.

#### **Background**

- ◆ Mithilakshar or Tirhuta is the script of broader cultural Mithila. The scripts of Mithilaksar, Bangla, Assamese, Nebari, Odia and Tibetan are part of the family.
- ◆ It is an extremely ancient script and it is one of the scripts of the broader North Eastern India.
- ◆ Mithilakshar had come to its current shape by 10th Century AD. The oldest form of Mithilakshar is found in the Sahodara stone inscriptions of 950 AD.
- ◆ In the subsequent years, the scripts were found to have been used throughout Mithila from Champaran to Deoghar.
- ◆ However, the use of the script saw a decline in the last 100 years, raising fears of culture getting decimated.
- ◆ As the script is not being used, the Maithili language is being developed in a composite manner despite having been accorded a constitutional status in the constitution.
- ◆ To safeguard the same, the Human Resources Ministry had constituted the committee in 2018 for making a report for the promotion and protection of Maithili Language and its scripts.

***Source: PIB***

## National Youth Parliament Festival Awards

### Why in news?

- ☞ In order to encourage the youth in the age group of 18-25 years to engage with public issues and understand the common man's point of view Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports has launched the National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 on the National Youth Day .

### About the Youth Parliament Festival:

- ◆ National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 has been jointly organised by National Service Scheme (NSS) and Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) under the aegis of Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports.
- ◆ The theme is: "Be the Voice of New India" and "Find solutions and contribute to policy".
- ◆ Youth in the age bracket of 18-25 years were invited to participate in the District, State and National level Youth Parliaments.
- ◆ The participants were selected through two screening processes from District Youth Parliament to State Youth Parliament and finally to the speakers in the National Youth Parliament (NYP).
- ◆ The best three speakers at the National Youth Parliament will be awarded Rs. 2 Lakhs, Rs. 1.50 Lakhs and Rs. 1 Lakh respectively in order of merit along with a certificate by the Prime Minister.

### Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan:

- ◆ Nehru Yuva Kendras were established in the year 1972.
- ◆ In the year 1987-88, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan(NYKS) was set up as an autonomous organization under the Government of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.
- ◆ The aim of the Sangathan is to oversee working of the Nehru Yuva Kendras all over country.
- ◆ NYKS is the largest grassroots level youth organization; one of its kind in the world.
- ◆ The objective is to provide rural youth avenues to take part in the process of nation building as well providing opportunities for the development of their personality and skills.
- ◆ Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan has been working in various fronts of youth development with a variety of youth programmes and schemes of the Ministry of Youth Affairs.

### National Youth Day:

- ◆ Government of India had decided in 1984 to celebrate the birthday of Swami Vivekananda i.e. 12 January is celebrated as National Youth Day every year.
- ◆ Since then from 1985, it is started celebrating as the National Youth Day all over the country.
- ◆ The main objective is to propagate the philosophy and the ideals of Swami Vivekananda.
- ◆ It became a mainstream celebration in India from 1985 onwards and observed on January 12 ever since.

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### **About National Service Scheme (NSS):**

- ◆ National Service Scheme (NSS) was launched during 1969, the birth centenary year of Mahatma Gandhi, in 37 universities involving 40000 students.
- ◆ NSS is an extension dimension to the higher education system to orient the student youth to community service while they are studying in educational institutions.
- ◆ It is being implemented by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India.

### **Aims and objectives of NSS:**

- ◆ To understand the community in which they work;
- ◆ To understand themselves in relation to their community;
- ◆ To identify the needs and problems of the community and involve them in problem solving process.
- ◆ To develop among themselves a sense of social and civic responsibility;
- ◆ To utilise their knowledge in finding practical solution to individual and community problems;
- ◆ To develop competence required for group-living and sharing of responsibilities:
- ◆ To gain skills in mobilising community participation;
- ◆ To acquire leadership qualities and democratic attitude;
- ◆ To develop capacity to meet emergencies and natural disasters; and
- ◆ To practice national integration and social harmony

### **Motto of NSS:**

- ◆ The motto or watchword of the National Service Scheme is “NOT ME BUT YOU”.

### **Implementation:**

- ◆ NSS is being implemented in Senior Secondary Schools, Colleges and Universities.

### **Programme Structure**

- ◆ The design of the NSS envisages that each educational institution covered under the Scheme has at least one NSS unit comprising of normally 100 student volunteers, led by a teacher designated as Programme Officer (PO).
- ◆ Each NSS unit adopts a village or slum for taking up its activities.

### **Nature of Activities under NSS:**

- ◆ Briefly, the NSS volunteers work on issues of social relevance, which keep evolving in response to the needs of the community, through regular and special camping activities. Such issues include
- ◆ literacy and education,
- ◆ health, family welfare and nutrition,
- ◆ environment conservation,
- ◆ social service programmes,
- ◆ programmes for empowerment of women,
- ◆ programmes connected with economic development activities,
- ◆ rescue and relief during calamities, etc.

*Source: PIB*

## **Union HRD Ministry launches Scheme to provide apprenticeship opportunities to graduates**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The Union Minister for Human Resources Development, Prakash Javadekar on February 27, 2019 launched the ‘Scheme for Higher Education Youth in Apprenticeship and Skills’ (SHREYAS) for providing industry apprenticeship or training opportunities to fresh graduates of 2019.

### **Key Facts**

- ◆ Launched primarily to skill non-technical students of BA, BSc. BCom courses, the SHREYAS programme intends to introduce BA, BSc, and BCom (Professional) courses in the higher educational institutions.
- ◆ These courses will be available to the students from Academic year April-May 2019.
- ◆ The scheme aims to boost the employment skills of Indian youth by providing them with ‘on the job work exposure’ through the National Apprenticeship Promotional Scheme (NAPS) and the National Career Service (NCS).
- ◆ The SHREYAS Scheme is a programme basket comprising the initiatives of three central ministries, including the Ministry of Human Resources Development, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and the Ministry of Labour and Employment.



## Functioning of the Scheme

- ◆ The scheme will be operated in conjunction with National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) which provides for placing of apprentices or trainees up to 10 percent of the total work force in every industry.
- ◆ The scheme will be implemented by the Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) initially in the Banking Finance Insurance Services (BFSI), Retail, Health care, Telecom, Logistics, Media, Management services, ITeS and Apparel. More sectors would be added over time with emerging apprenticeship demand.
- ◆ The scheme would be operationalised by coordination of Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and the Ministry of Labour.
- ◆ The Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) have identified more than 100 areas where they would be able to find apprenticeship opportunities where the apprenticeships would be provided.
- ◆ Higher Educational Institutions can log-in to the SHREYAS portal and express their interest in the skill areas along with the expected number of students.
- ◆ This demand would be scrutinised by the SSC concerned, who would confirm the positions available on portal.
- ◆ Based on this confirmation, the Higher Educational Institutions would upload the names of the students on the SHREYAS portal.
- ◆ The NAPS would thereupon generate the Contract between the industry and the student.
- ◆ After this, the monthly stipend would be paid by the industry and 25 percent of this would be reimbursed by NAPS portal subject to a maximum of Rs 1,500 per month.
- ◆ The SSC would monitor the progress and would conduct the examination at the end of the apprenticeship period and would give certificate to the successful candidates.
- ◆ These certificates will be valid throughout India for seeking employment.
- ◆ More than 40 higher educational institutions have already been tied up for taking up embedded apprenticeship courses.

## Objectives

- ◆ To improve employability of students by introducing employment relevance
- ◆ To forge a close functional link between education and industry
- ◆ To provide skills to the students in a dynamic manner
- ◆ To establish an 'earn while you learn' system into higher education
- ◆ To help industry in securing good quality manpower
- ◆ To link student community with employment facilitating efforts of the Government
- ◆ The scheme aims to cover 50 lakh students by 2022.
- ◆ The State Governments are expected to play a major role in securing apprenticeship opportunities, apart from the Sector Skill Councils, so that general degree students passing out in April 2019 gain the option of industry & service sector apprenticeship.

**Source: PIB**

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## Government launches ‘2nd Edition of ISL Dictionary’ for hearing impaired persons

### Why in news?

- ☞ Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Thaawarchand Gehlot on February 27, 2019 launched the ‘2nd Edition of Indian Sign Language (ISL) Dictionary’.
- ☞ The dictionary has been prepared by the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) under Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- ☞ The second edition of dictionary includes total 6000 words. The first edition of the dictionary was launched on March 23, 2018 with 3000 words.

### 2nd Edition of ISL Dictionary

- ◆ The Dictionary includes total 6000 words under the categories of academic, legal, medical, technical and everyday terms.
- ◆ The dictionary videos contain the sign, the English term for the sign and pictures where relevant.
- ◆ A word list is also given with the English and Hindi equivalents of the signs.
- ◆ It has been made with the involvement of the hearing impaired community, by giving due consideration to their suggestions and understanding.
- ◆ The ISL Dictionary is also available on ISLRTC’s YouTube channel. Around 1000 videos have been uploaded already and the rest are in the process of being uploaded on YouTube.

### Significance

- ◆ According to Census 2011, there are 50.71 lakh hearing impaired persons in India. Most of the deaf people use Indian Sign Language to communicate.
- ◆ The ISL Dictionary aims to offer these people the maximum number of words, which will not only expand their learning but also help them express their feelings and ideas in a better way.
- ◆ The dictionary will serve as a resource for ISL teachers, ISL learners, teachers of the deaf people, interpreters, parents of hearing impaired children, researchers, etc.
- ◆ Hearing impaired persons will benefit from this dictionary since they can look up information about a particular sign and its English/Hindi equivalents.

*Source: PIB, Business Standard*

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## Government launches three women safety initiatives

### Why in news?

☞ Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh along with Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi jointly launched three significant initiatives to promote the safety of women in their living spaces, working spaces and the public spaces on February 18, 2019 at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi.

### Key Facts

- ◆ The initiatives include Emergency Response Support System, Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences (ITSSO) and Safe City Implementation Monitoring Portal.
- ◆ The Ministry launched Emergency Response Support System in 16 states and union territories including Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, UP, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Puducherry, Lakshadweep, Andaman, Dadar Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu and Jammu and Kashmir.
- ◆ The Union Government has enacted the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018 to provide effective deterrence against the offence of rape.
- ◆ For the effective implementation of the Act, to strengthen investigation and prosecution machinery and to instill a sense of security amongst women, the government is launching the following initiatives:

### Emergency Response Support System (ERSS)

- ◆ The Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) is a pan-India single number (112) based response system for persons in distress.

### Citizens can access emergency services by using the following methods:

- ◆ **Dial 112:** A person in distress can dial a pan-India number: 112.
- ◆ **Press power button:** A citizen can press the power button on a smartphone thrice quickly to activate a panic call to ERC.
- ◆ **Long press 5, 9 keys:** In case of a feature phone, a citizen can long press on number 5 or 9 on the phone keypad to activate the panic call.
- ◆ The other ways to access the emergency service is by logging onto the ERSS website for the state and lodge the emergency or send SOS alert to State ERC or use 112 India Mobile App, which is available free on Google Play store and Apple store.

## **Key Highlights**

- ◆ Under this system, all the states have to set up a dedicated Emergency Response Centre (ERC).
- ◆ The centres will have a team of trained call-takers and dispatchers to handle emergency requests relating to assistance from police, fire & rescue, health and other emergency services.
- ◆ The police can view all events after an emergency call is made at the ERC. The ERCs are connected to District Command Centres (DCC) and the Emergency Response Vehicles and assistance and response to victims are facilitated through them.
- ◆ The centre is designed to be a common protocol managed by each state and union territory.
- ◆ For Women and children, 112 India App provides a special SHOUT feature which alerts registered volunteers in the vicinity of the victim for immediate assistance.
- ◆ The Central Government is funding Rs 321.69 crore to the states and union territories for the emergency system as a part of Nirbhaya scheme project. The service has already been launched in Himachal Pradesh and Nagaland.

## **Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences (ITSSO)**

- ◆ The Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences (ITSSO) is an online module available to law enforcement agencies at all levels- national, state, district and police station that allows states to undertake real-time monitoring and management for completion of investigation in rape cases in two months.
- ◆ The system leverages the existing CCTNS database, which covers nearly 15000 police stations in the country.
- ◆ It would greatly strengthen the states' ability for analytics and prognosis for timely investigation and prosecution in rape cases.

## **Significance**

- ◆ The Criminal Law Amendment in April 2018 prescribes stringent penal provisions including the death penalty for rape of a girl below the age of 12 years.
- ◆ For swift administration of justice in such cases, the Act also inter-alia mandates completion of investigation and trials within two months.
- ◆ To enhance women safety in the country, the government has formulated a multi-pronged action plan and initiated a series of measures. ITSSO is one of such measures developed by the Home Ministry towards smart policing.

## **Safe City Implementation Monitoring (SCIM) portal**

- ◆ The Government has identified eight cities for implementation of Safe City projects in the first phase at a cost of Rs 2,919 crore, in order to instil a sense of security in women in metro cities.
- ◆ The cities include Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow and Mumbai.
- ◆ The projects are funded under the Nirbhaya Fund scheme. They have been prepared jointly by Municipal bodies and City Police and reflect integrated action for the safety of women.
- ◆ The safe city projects involve the creation of on-ground assets, resources and behaviour change programs for the safety of women.
- ◆ The projects will supplement existing assets and meet citizen demands for safe eco-system for women in these cities.

## **Key features of projects:**

- ◆ Identification of crime hot-spots in each city.
- ◆ Saturating such Hot-spots with increased CCTV surveillance.
- ◆ Automated Number Plate Reading (ANPR) and drone-based surveillance also being deployed in few cities as per requirement.
- ◆ Setting up women police out-posts for facilitating ease of access by any aggrieved woman to report incidence or seek assistance.
- ◆ Patrols by women police in vulnerable areas.
- ◆ Setting up women help desks in police stations with facility for trained counsellors
- ◆ Augmentation of existing women support centers like Asha Jyoti Kendra or Bharosa centers
- ◆ Implementing safety measures in buses, including cameras.
- ◆ Improving street lighting in identified hot spot areas.
- ◆ Setting up toilets for women.
- ◆ Undertaking social awareness programmes on women safety and gender sensitivity.

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## Way Ahead

- ◆ All the measures would be coordinated through an Integrated Smart Control Room in the city.
- ◆ In order to facilitate states to monitor and manage the safe city projects and avoid duplication on the ground, an online Safe City Implementation Monitoring (SCIM) portal has been developed by the Home Ministry.
- ◆ The portal will facilitate online tracking of deployment of assets and infrastructure created under the Safe City projects.
- ◆ It will facilitate an evidence-based online monitoring system. The details on assets and infrastructure are captured along with latitude and longitude using GPS for greater transparency.
- ◆ The portal also creates a digital repository of assets, infrastructure and social outreach programs, as well as best practices achieved in each city.

*Source: PIB*

## Government launches ‘Operation Digital Board’ to boost quality education

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Minister of Human Resource Development, Prakash Javadekar on February 20, 2019 launched the ‘Operation Digital Board’ to boost quality education in the country.

### Key Facts

- ◆ The Operation Digital Board is a revolutionary step which will make the learning as well as the teaching process interactive and will popularise flipped learning as a pedagogical approach.
- ◆ Flipped learning is an instructional strategy that reverses the traditional learning environment by delivering instructional content often online, outside of the classroom.
- ◆ An expert committee has worked out optimum configuration of the Digital Class Rooms under the Operation Digital Board.

### Highlights

- ◆ Under the Operation Digital Board, 7 lakh classrooms of 9th, 10th and 11th standards and 2 lakh classrooms of colleges and Universities will be equipped with digital boards in the next three years.
- ◆ The digital board will be introduced all over the country in government and government aided schools from class 9th onwards as well as in higher education institutions.
- ◆ The operation aims to convert a class room into a digital class room and make available the e-resources at any time and at any place to students.
- ◆ It will also help in providing personalised adaptive learning as well as Intelligent Tutoring by exploiting emerging technologies like Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence & Data Analytics.
- ◆ The implementation will begin from the coming session of 2019 itself.

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## **Implementation of ODB in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**

- ◆ The Operation Digital Board (ODB) will be implemented in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by the University Grants Commission (UGC)
- ◆ UGC recently passed a resolution for extending digital education to every classroom in the country by 2022.
- ◆ It is estimated that there are around 5 lakh classrooms in the institutions which are aided by Centre or State Governments. Out of this, UGC proposed to take up 300 universities and about 10,000 colleges in the first phase, covering 2 lakh classrooms.
- ◆ For the 2 lakh classrooms, the cost is estimated at Rs. 2000 crores. The scheme can be implemented as a Central scheme as a loan from Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA).
- ◆ For this purpose, UGC will put in place a Portal for all the public funded HEIs to log-in and opt for the scheme giving details of this facility.

## **Implementation of ODB in Schools**

- ◆ Digital or SMART board will be provided in all Government and Government – aided schools having Secondary and Sr. Secondary classes.
- ◆ Nearly 1.5 lakh Secondary and Sr. Secondary schools will be covered under the scheme in collaboration with the State and UTs.

## **Background**

- ◆ Taking into account that the biggest challenge facing education sector in the country is maintaining acceptable quality standards, the Government is continuously making efforts to spread educational technology and connectivity to resolve this issue and bring fairness in educational standards.
- ◆ Various initiatives such as e-Pathshala, DIKSHA, NROER, NPTEL, e-pathshala SWAYAM and SWAYAM-Prabha DTH Channels etc. have provided adequate content of high quality which can be taken to every classroom, and thereby facilitating blended learning and flip class learning.
- ◆ These educational interventions can adequately raise the standards of teaching, irrespective of the location of the Schools and Colleges/Institutes.

**Source: PIB**

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## **PM presents Swachh Shakti-2019 Awards; inaugurates development projects in Haryana**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 12, 2019 participated in Swachh Shakti 2019 event and distributed the Swachh Shakti 2019 Awards during his visit to Kurukshetra, Haryana.
- ☞ On the same occasion, he also inaugurated and laid foundation stone of several development projects in Haryana.

### **Swachh Shakti 2019**

- ◆ The Prime Minister Modi gave away the Swachh Shakti awards to woman sarpanches from across the country in Swachh Shakti 2019 programme. He also visited the Swachh Sundar Shauchalay exhibition at Kurukshetra.
- ◆ The Swachh Shakti 2019 was attended by women panches and sarpanches from across the country. Over 15,000 women took part in Swachh Shakti event that was aimed at empowering women. This was the third edition of the Swachh Shakti programme.

### **Swachh Shakti Programme**

- ◆ The Swachh Shakti Programme is a national event which aims to bring in to focus the leadership role played by rural women in Swachh Bharat Mission.
- ◆ Launched in 2017, the Programme is a part of ongoing activities under the aegis of the Swachh Bharat Mission, launched on October 2, 2014 by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to achieve a clean and Open Defecation Free (ODF) India by October 2, 2019.
- ◆ The programme is attended by women panchs and sarpanchs from across the country.
- ◆ The first edition of Swachh Shakti programme was launched from Gandhinagar, Gujarat by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on International Women's Day 2017. The second edition was launched from Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

## Inauguration of National Cancer Institute: India's premier institute of cancer

- ◆ The Prime Minister dedicated the India's premier institute of cancer, the 'National Cancer Institute' of Bhadsa, Jhajjar to the nation.
- ◆ The National Cancer Institute is built at the AIIMS Jhajjar campus.
- ◆ The 700 bed hospital has different facilities like surgical oncology, radiation oncology, medical oncology, anaesthesia, palliative care and nuclear medicine, besides hostel rooms for doctors and attendants of cancer patients.
- ◆ The NCI will be the nodal institution for all activities related to cancer in the country and will have linkages with regional cancer centers and other cancer institutes within the country.
- ◆ It will identify priority areas for Research & Development and will carry out basic and applied research in molecular biology, genomics, proteomics, cancer epidemiology, radiation biology and cancer vaccines.

## Other development projects launched by PM Modi in Haryana

- ◆ The Prime Minister inaugurated the **ESIC Medical College & Hospital of Faridabad**, the first ESIC Medical College and Hospital in North India.
- ◆ He laid the foundation stone of the **National Institute of Ayurveda, Panchkula** being set up at Shri Mata Mansa Devi Temple Complex in Panchkula. It will be a national level institute for Ayurveda treatment, education and research.
- ◆ He laid the foundation stone of '**Sri Krishna Ayush University**', the first University related to Indian system of medicine in Haryana as well as the first University of this kind in India.
- ◆ He laid the foundation stone of '**Battles of Panipat Museum**'. Located at Panipat, the museum will honour the heroes of the various battles of Panipat. The Museum is in line with the Union Government's initiative to honour the unsung heroes of India.
- ◆ The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of **Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay University of Health Sciences**, Karnal.

*Source: The Hindu*

## PM laid foundation stone for Sela Tunnel

### Why in news?

- ☞ Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently laid the foundation stone for the Sela Tunnel Project in Arunachal Pradesh during his visit to Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Tripura.

### Key Facts

- ◆ The tunnel will be constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) at a cost of Rs. 687 crore.
- ◆ The Tunnel would be completed in the next three years. It covers a total distance of 12.04 kms which consist of two tunnels of 1790 meters and 475 meters.

## Significance

- ◆ Once completed, the tunnel would provide:
- ◆ All weather connectivity to Tawang and forward areas; a move that would be a game changer for the local population apart from the much required strategic edge for the security forces
- ◆ Reduction in more than one hour of travelling time from Tezpur to Tawang
- ◆ Travellers would be able to avoid the dangerous snow covered Sela top at a height of 13,700 feet

## **Foundation stone for 7 Extra High Voltage Sub-stations and 24 Low Tension Sub stations laid**

- ◆ The Prime Minister also laid the foundation stone for 7 Extra High Voltage (EHV) Sub-stations and 24 Low Tension (LT) Sub-stations in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh. This project is aimed at meeting the objectives of affordable 24X7 power to all, especially in the remote locations.
- ◆ The project will be implemented by Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), a 'Navratna' Company under Union Ministry of Power.
- ◆ The project will be carried out under the 'Comprehensive Scheme for Strengthening of Transmission & Distribution (T&D) Systems in Arunachal Pradesh' that was sanctioned in October 2014 under Central Sector Plan Scheme of Ministry of Power at an estimated cost of Rs 3,199.45 crores.

## Impact

- ◆ The project will enhance the consumers' access to affordable grid connected power supply.
- ◆ It will lead to reduction in operation of Diesel Generating Plants in Arunachal Pradesh, thus bringing socio-economic and environmental benefits to the people of the state.
- ◆ It will also facilitate in development of small scale industries, cottage industries and tourism sector in the region.
- ◆ It will give impetus to integration of upcoming Hydro Power Generating Plants in Arunachal Pradesh with the National Grid.
- ◆ It will facilitate laying of optical fiber to extend communication facility to the small villages.
- ◆ It will boost local economy of the entire state with infusion of about Rs. 6501 crore.

***Source: The Hindu***

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## **Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog for cows**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on February 6, 2019 approved the proposal for establishment of Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog for conservation, protection and development of cows and their progeny.
- ☞ The setting up of the Aayog was announced in the Union Interim Budget 2019-20.

### **Terms of Reference**

- ☞ The Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog will work in collaboration with Veterinary, Animal Sciences or Agriculture University, departments or organisations of the Central and State Governments engaged in the task of research in breeding and rearing of cow, organic manure, biogas, etc.

### **Impact**

- ◆ The setting up of Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog will lead to conservation, protection and development of cattle population in the country including development and conservation of indigenous breeds.
- ◆ It will result in increased growth of livestock sector which is more inclusive, benefitting women, and small and marginal farmers.
- ◆ It will provide the policy framework and direction to the cow conservation and development programmes in the country.
- ◆ It will ensure proper implementation of laws with respect to the welfare of cows.

### **Plight of cows in India: Issue of Cattle Slaughter**

- ◆ Cow, considered as a sacred animal in India, owns a tremendous value for its nutritious milk and variety of dairy products. In India, there are thousands of stray cows that walk the jammed streets freely owing to the law and belief of the people that they shouldn't be harmed physically.
- ◆ However, despite such sacred sentiments and animal protection laws, cattle slaughter has become a controversial topic in India in recent times, with one group of Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists treating cattle such as cows, bulls and calves as an endeared and respected living being, while the other religions of Islam and Christianity considering it as a source of meat.
- ◆ In such intense scenario, Union Government's new Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Market) Rules also steamed up the winds. These Rules prohibit the sale of cows and buffaloes for slaughter at animal markets.
- ◆ Though the Supreme Court tried to normalise the situation by putting a stay on the ban on cattle slaughter in July 2017, the issue of cattle slaughter still looms over.

***Source: PIB, The Hindu***

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## **Government launches Shehri Samridhi Utsav to extend outreach of DAY-NULM**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The Union Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) in February 2019 launched the Shehri Samridhi Utsav, an initiative that aims to extend the outreach of Deendayal Antyodaya Mission – National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) to the most vulnerable.

The event will facilitate access of Self-Help Group (SHG) members to the other government schemes.

### **Highlights of the Shehri Samridhi Utsav**

- ◆ The Day one of Shehri Samridhi Utsav began with a series of rallies led by women's' SHGs across the country. These rallies spread awareness about DAY-NULM in urban poor communities.
- ◆ Job melas and fairs were organised by many states to market the products made by women micro-entrepreneurs.
- ◆ Through Shehri Samridhi Utsav, the SHG members across cities are being linked to government schemes such as Swachhh Bharat Mission (Urban), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), Ujjwala Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Yojana and National Nutrition Mission.
- ◆ A major highlight of Shehri Samridhi Utsav is the National Exhibition cum sale of SHG products and National Street Food Festival that will be organised in New Delhi.
- ◆ Over 100 stalls are being set up in Central Delhi with various handlooms, handicrafts, snacks and other local products made by 200 Self Help Groups representing 23 states.

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

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

*Source; PIB*



## Polity & Governance, Social Justice, Social Development

### Central Information Commission rules EVMs are ‘information’ under RTI Act

#### Why in news?

- ☞ The Central Information Commission has ruled that an Electronic Voting Machine is “information” under the Right to Information Act and can be demanded by an applicant on a payment of Rs 10.

#### What’s the issue?

- ◆ The Central Information Commission (CIC) was hearing an RTI which had asked the Election Commission for an EVM but was denied.
- ◆ As per Section 2(f) and 2(i) of the RTI Act, the definition of ‘information’ and ‘record’ includes ‘any model or any sample’ held by a public authority.
- ◆ Hence Calling the rejection of grating EVM to public as wrong.

#### Counter Argument of ECI:

- ☞ Election Commission of India argued that the information was exempted from disclosure under Section 8(1)(d) of the RTI Act as the software installed in the machines is an intellectual property of a third party, the disclosure of which would harm the competitive position of the third party concerned.

#### Central Information Commission:

- ◆ Under the provision of Section-12 of RTI Act 2005 the Central Government constituted a body to be known as the Central Information Commission in 2005.
- ◆ The present Chief Information Commissioner of India is Sudhir Bhargava.
- ◆ There are two women who became CIC till now: Ms Deepak Sandhu (4<sup>th</sup> CIC) and Ms Sushma Singh (5<sup>th</sup> CIC).

#### Eligibility:

- ◆ Section 12(5) of the RTI Act 2005 provides that the Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners shall be persons of eminence in public life with wide knowledge and experience in law, science and technology, social service, management, journalism, mass media or administration and governance.
- ◆ Section 12(6) of the RTI Act 2005 provides that Chief Information Commissioner or an Information Commissioner shall not be a Member of Parliament or Member of the Legislature of any State or Union Territory as the case may be, or hold any other office of profit or connected with any political party or carrying on any business or pursuing any profession.

### **Term of office and other service conditions of CIC:**

- ◆ Section 13 of the RTI Act 2005 provides that the Chief Information Commissioner shall hold office for a term of five years from the date on which he enters upon his office and shall not be eligible for reappointment.
- ◆ Section 13(5)(a) of the RTI Act 2005 provides that the salaries and allowances payable to and other terms and conditions of service of the Chief Information Commissioner shall be the same as that of the Chief Election Commissioner.

### **Power of CIC as per RTI Act, 2005:**

- ◆ Adjudication in second appeal for giving information
- ◆ Direction for record keeping
- ◆ Suo motu disclosures receiving and enquiring into a complaint on inability to file RTI
- ◆ Imposition of penalties and Monitoring and Reporting including preparation of an Annual Report.

### **Composition of CIC:**

- ◆ This Commission consists of the Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners not exceeding 10.
- ◆ CIC and members are appointed by the President of India on the recommendation of a committee consisting of:
  - ◆ The Prime Minister, who shall be the Chairperson of the committee
  - ◆ The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha
  - ◆ A Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister.

### **What is Right to Information?**

- ◆ Right to information refers to the right of information accessible under the Act which is held by or under the control of any public authority and includes the right to:
  - ◆ Inspection of work, documents, records
  - ◆ Taking notes, extracts, or certified copies of documents or records
  - ◆ Taking certified samples of material
  - ◆ Obtaining information in the form of diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode or through printouts where such information is stored in a computer or in any other device.

## **Right to Information (RTI) act**

- ◆ Right to Information (RTI) is act of the Parliament of India to provide for setting out the practical regime of the right to information for citizens and replaces the erstwhile Freedom of information Act, 2002.
- ◆ Under the provisions of the Act, any citizen of India may request information from a public authority which is required to reply expeditiously or within thirty days.

*Source: The Hindu*

## **President promulgates four Ordinances including Ordinance banning Triple Talaq**

### **Why in news?**

- ◆ President Ram Nath Kovind on February 21, 2019 promulgated the four ordinances, namely:
- ◆ The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Second Ordinance, 2019
- ◆ The Indian Medical Council (Amendment) Second Ordinance, 2019
- ◆ The Companies (Amendment) Second Ordinance, 2019
- ◆ The Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Ordinance, 2019
- ◆ The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Second Ordinance and Indian Medical Council (Amendment) Second Ordinance have been promulgated to give continued effect to the provisions brought in by the earlier ordinance.
- ◆ The Companies (Amendment) Second Ordinance has been promulgated to empower the Central Government to allow certain companies to have a different financial year instead of the year determined by the Tribunal.
- ◆ The Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Ordinance has been promulgated to have central legislation to tackle the menace of illicit deposit schemes in the country.

## **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Second Ordinance, 2019**

- ◆ The Ordinance declares the practice of triple talaq to be void and illegal, 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 makes declaration of talaq a cognisable and non-bailable offence. A husband declaring talaq can be imprisoned for up to three years along with a fine. However, the magistrate can decide on releasing the husband on bail only after hearing the woman against whom talaq has been pronounced.
- ◆ The Ordinance will protect the rights of married Muslim women and deter the practice of divorce by declaring triple talaq (talaq –e –biddat).

## **Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Ordinance, 2019**

- ◆ The Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Ordinance, 2019 aims to immediately tackle the menace of illicit deposit taking activities in the country which at present are exploiting regulatory gaps and duping poor and gullible people of their hard-earned savings.
- ◆ The Ordinance contains a banning clause which bans Deposit Takers from promoting, operating, issuing advertisements or accepting deposits in any Unregulated Deposit Scheme.
- ◆ This Ordinance seeks to put in place a mechanism by which the depositors can be repaid without delay by attaching the assets of the defaulting establishments.

## **Indian Medical Council (Amendment) Second Ordinance, 2019**

- ◆ The Indian Medical Council (Amendment) Second Ordinance, 2019 enables the Board of Governors appointed in supersession of the Medical Council of India (MCI) to continue to exercise the powers of MCI for a period of two years or till the Council is reconstituted, whichever is earlier.
- ◆ It will ensure transparency, accountability and quality in the governance of medical education in the country.
- ◆ It will also ensure that the work already done by the Board of Governors as per provisions of earlier Ordinance is validated and may continue.

## **Companies (Amendment) Second Ordinance, 2019**

- ◆ In pursuance of the Government's objective of providing Ease of Doing Business while simultaneously strengthening the corporate governance and compliance framework enshrined in the Companies Act, 2013, the Companies (Amendment) Second Ordinance, 2019 has been promulgated.
- ◆ This Ordinance addresses the need to impose civil liability for technical and procedural defaults of a minor nature and to plug the corporate governance and enforcement frame work through:
  - ◆ Re-categorisation of 16 minor offences as civil defaults which will de-clog special courts
  - ◆ Transfer of certain routine functions such as permitting conversion of a public company into a private company to the central government
  - ◆ Breach of ceiling on directorships being made a ground for disqualification
  - ◆ Enhancing the pecuniary jurisdiction of regional director's for compounding offences

***Source: PIB***



## **Jammu & Kashmir Government grants Divisional Status to Ladakh Region**

- ◆ The Jammu and Kashmir Governor granted the Divisional Status to Ladakh Region, while exercising its powers under Section 5 of Land Revenue Act, 1996.

### **Key Facts**

- ◆ The Ladakh division will comprise Leh and Kargil districts with its headquarters at Leh. Till now, the Ladakh region formed a part of the Kashmir Division of Jammu & Kashmir.
- ◆ The State Government also approved creation of the posts of Divisional Commissioner (Ladakh), Leh and Inspector General of Police (Ladakh), Leh.
- ◆ The notification came just after the visit of PM Narendra Modi to Leh on February 3, 2019.

### **Ladakh becomes the third Division of J&K**

- ◆ With this, Ladakh became the third Division in the state with the other two being Jammu, and Kashmir.
- ◆ The Ladakh division is now the biggest division in the state with 86,909 sq. km of area, followed by Jammu division of 26,293 sq km at second and Kashmir Division of 15,948 sq km at third.

### **Significance of Divisional Status to Ladakh**

- ◆ The Divisional status would facilitate the Ladakh Region in a great way to progress.
- ◆ Ladakh has two Hill Councils for its administration, one in Leh and the other in Kargil. With the Divisional Status, both Leh and Kargil districts will get equal benefits.
- ◆ Offices and the opportunities will be distributed to both the districts.
- ◆ With this, the routine administrative clearances for Leh and Kargil can now be obtained at Divisional headquarters in Leh.
- ◆ It also brings opportunities of employment of different levels in various departments for the locals.

### **Background**

- ◆ For almost last three decades, Ladakh region has been demanding for Union Territory status with a proper legislation. The Divisional Status is considered as a step towards its dream of Union Territory.
- ◆ Recently, the state government has also empowered the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDC) of Leh and Kargil with financial and administrative powers through an amendment in the Act.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Parliament passes Personal Laws (Amendment) Bill 2019

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Parliament on February 13, 2019 passed the Personal Laws (Amendment Bill), 2018 that seeks to remove leprosy as a ground for divorce.

### Key Facts

- ◆ The bill was passed after upper house of the Parliament Rajya Sabha approved it without discussion.
- ◆ The lower house of the Parliament, Lok Sabha had passed the bill on January 7, 2019. Leprosy is being removed as a ground for divorce as it is now a curable disease as against the earlier notion of it being incurable.

### Objective

- ◆ The Bill seeks to uphold the rights of people with leprosy as the disease is curable.
- ◆ It seeks to amend five personal laws- the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act 1939, Divorce Act (for Christians) 1869, Special Marriage Act 1954 and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act 1956- to remove leprosy as a ground for divorce.

### Highlights

- ◆ Leprosy as a ground for divorce is a “discriminatory” provision. The first attempt towards eliminating the bias against people suffering from the disease was made in 2008 when the National Human Rights Commission had underlined the need to make amendments in certain personal laws and other legislations.
- ◆ In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a Resolution on the ‘Elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members’, which was signed and ratified by India.
- ◆ Subsequently, the 20th Law Commission of India in its 256th Report titled “Eliminating Discrimination Against Persons Affected by Leprosy” had recommended repeal of laws and provisions that were discriminatory against leprosy-affected people.
- ◆ In 2014, the Supreme Court had also asked the Centre and the state governments to take the necessary steps for rehabilitation and integration of leprosy-affected people into the mainstream including the steps to repeal the provisions where leprosy has been treated as a stigmatic disability.
- ◆ Hence, taking in regard the recommendations, Government decided to omit such discriminatory provisions from the Personal Laws.

### Significance

- ◆ The bill aims to end discrimination against people suffering from leprosy. When it will get Presidential assent and become an Act, it will go a long way in detaching the social stigma associated with the disease.

*Source: PIB*

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## Cabinet approves amendment to the Cinematograph Act, 1952

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for introducing the Cinematograph Amendment Bill, 2019 to amend to the Cinematograph Act, 1952.
- ☞ The bill aims to tackle piracy in films by including the penal provisions for unauthorised camcording and duplication of films.

### Highlights

- ◆ The bill proposes two major amendments- insertion of new Section 6AA in the Act for prohibition of unauthorised recording and amendment in Section 7 to introduce penal provisions for violating provisions of section 6AA.
- ◆ Under the proposed amendments, no person shall without the written authorisation of the author be permitted to use any audio visual recording device to knowingly make or transmit or attempt to make or transmit or abet the making or transmission of a copy of a film or a part thereof.
- ◆ The expression author shall have the same meaning as assigned to it in the clause (d) of section 2 of the Copyright act of 1957.
- ◆ Further, in case of violations of the provisions of section 6AA, the violators shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 3 years or with fine which may extend to 10 lakh rupees or with both.

### Significance

- ◆ The proposed amendments are expected to increase Industry revenues, boost job creation, fulfill important objectives of India's National IP policy and will give relief against piracy and infringing content online.

### Background

- ◆ The film industry has been since long demanding that the Government should consider amendments to the law preventing camcording and piracy.
- ◆ PM Narendra Modi addressed the issue while speaking during the inaugural function of the National Museum of Indian Cinema at Mumbai on January 19, 2019. The matter was then brought to the consideration of the Union Cabinet.
- ◆ The medium of cinema, the tools and the technology associated with it and even its audience has undergone radical changes over a period of time.
- ◆ There have also been many changes in the field of media and entertainment with the proliferation of TV channels and cable network throughout the country, the advent of new digital technology, apprehension of piracy, particularly release of the pirated version of films on internet, causing huge losses to the film industry and government exchequer.

*Source; PIB*

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## **Union Cabinet approves Introduction of Registration of Marriage of NRI Bill, 2019**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 13, 2019 approved the introduction of Registration of Marriage of Non-Resident Indian (NRI) Bill, 2019 to create more accountability to Indian citizens living abroad.
- ☞ The bill mainly seeks to offer more protection against the exploitation of Indian citizens, mostly Indian women by their NRI partners.

### **Highlights**

- ◆ The Bill provides for amendment of the legal framework to act as a deterrent to the erring NRI spouses and creating more accountability and offer protection against exploitation of Indian Citizens, specially women married to NRIs.
- ◆ Under the new bill, a marriage between an NRI and an Indian citizen will have to be registered in India or Indian missions and posts abroad within 30 days from the date of marriage.
- ◆ After the bill's passing, the necessary changes would be carried out in the Passports Act, 1967 and Code of Criminal Procedure 1973 by insertion of Section 86A.
- ◆ According to the proposed amendments, if the marriage isn't registered within 30 days, the passport of the NRI will be revoked, summons and warrant be issued.
- Despite all this, if the NRI fails to appear in court, his properties will be attached and he will be declared 'Proclaimed Offender'.

### **Impact**

- ◆ The Bill would offer great protection to Indian citizens married to NRIs and serve as a deterrent to NRIs against harassment of their spouses.
- ◆ It is expected to benefit Indian women married to NRIs across the world.
- ◆ The bill would amend the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, solving a major problem of serving judicial summons for court proceedings in India.

### **Background**

- ◆ The bill has been introduced with the hope of restricting NRI husbands from using marriage as a tool of exploitation and making money and providing better enforcement of rights for the deserted woman under the family laws.
- ◆ The introduction of the Bill was necessitated due to numerous complaints received from Indian nationals mostly women, who were deserted or harassed by their Non-Resident Indian Spouses.
- ◆ Since marriage takes place outside India, there are no records or legal documents for further procedures to be initiated against the offender.
- ◆ Hence, once the Bill is passed, such practices will be curbed and it will provide much needed relief to all Indian women married to NRIs worldwide.

***Source: PIB***

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## MHA announces to conduct ‘All India Citizens Survey of Police Services

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on February 21, 2019 announced to conduct a pan-India survey called ‘All India Citizens Survey of Police Services’ to gauge public perception of police.

### Key Facts

- ◆ The survey will be conducted by the Bureau of Police Research and Development with the help of the National Council of Applied Economic Research in a period of nine months.
- ◆ The Ministry approved to conduct the survey with an aim to strengthen the model of good governance by acting as a link between the people and the government, considering that a globally accepted way to assess the impact of government initiatives is through public perception surveys.

### All India Citizens Survey of Police Services

- ◆ The survey will commence in mid March 2019 and will cover a representative sample of 1.2 lakh households spread over 173 districts across the country, based on the National Sample Survey framework.
- ◆ All States and Union Territories would be suitably represented in this survey.
- ◆ States/UTs have been requested to extend full cooperation to the conduct of the survey, and prepare their Police for undertaking such surveys on their own.
- ◆ The survey aims to understand public perceptions and their attitudes about Police.
- ◆ It aims to know the level of number of crimes or incidents in which matter is not reported to Police, and also about crime reporting and recording.
- ◆ It will assess citizens’ perception and experience about women and children safety.

### Significance

- ◆ The outcome of the survey is expected to bring out useful suggestions for government in formulating appropriate policy responses for crime prevention programmes, for transformation in community policing, improvement in the access to the justice and increased resource allocation for police.

*Source: Indian Express*

## PRC ‘status’ to 6 communities in Arunachal Pradesh stokes violence

### Why in news?

- ☞ Protest has been reported in Arunachal Pradesh since the state government announced it was considering issuing PRC to six non-Arunachal Scheduled Tribes communities.
- ☞ The government is considering issuing the certificate to the six non-APSTs communities living in Namsai and Changlang districts and to the Gorkhas living in Vijaynagar.

## **Background:**

- ◆ Deoris, Sonowal Kacharis, Morans, Adivasis and Mishings were demanding Permanent Residence Certificate. Most of these communities are recognised as Scheduled Tribes in neighbouring Assam.
- ◆ According to reports, the demand by these communities for PRC, recognising them as residents of the state, is long-standing, but is opposed by powerful groups.

## **What is permanent resident certificate?**

- ◆ Permanent resident certificate is a legal document issued to Indian citizens that serves as evidence of residence and is required to be submitted as residential proof for official purpose.
- ◆ The State Government of Arunachal Pradesh issues the domicile certificate otherwise called as Permanent Residence Certificate (PRC) to the residents of the state who stayed therein over a period. Those citizens who are not currently residing in the state but are sure of permanently staying therein can also apply for it.

## **Purpose of the Certificate:**

- ◆ Permanent Residence Certificate should be produced in many situations such as admission in educational organisations, job reservation under specific quotas especially for government jobs, etc. to get local preferences.
- ◆ To apply for ration card permanent residence certificate is a vital and mandate document.
- ◆ To avail the provisions of various schemes of the state or to claim scholarships of the State, permanent residence certificate is essential.

## **What is the status of PRC in Arunachal Pradesh?**

- ◆ The Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Tribes (APST) are the holders of PRC in Arunachal Pradesh.
- ◆ Many non-APST communities who are living in the state are demanding for PRC as they often fail to prove their permanent domicile status during various checks – educational and otherwise.

## **Why are people in Arunachal protesting against PRC?**

- ◆ The tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh are concerned that giving PRCs to the non-tribal communities will lead to the dilution of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) Act of 1873 which leads to the Inner Line Permit (ILP) rule in the state.
- ◆ The rule makes it mandatory for all non-permanent residents and visitors to obtain Inner Line Permits before entering Arunachal Pradesh.



- ◆ The APSTs believe that giving PRC will lead to easy flow of non-tribals into the tribal land and will affect their culture in the long run.
- ◆ All Arunachal Students' Union (AAPSU) said that having a PRC should not mean that non-APST communities need not take ILP for entering/living in the state/tribal land.
- ◆ The main bone of contention lies in the fact that although these are living in Arunachal Pradesh since many years, they don't have the official land rights either.
- ◆ While they are regarded as non-tribal in Arunachal Pradesh and not offered PRC, their counterparts in Assam enjoy PRC and land rights.

*Source: Indian Express*

## Assam launches PRANAM commission to protect parents of state government employees

### Why in news?

- ☞ Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal recently launched the **PRANAM Commission**, which is a panel set up to look after the issues concerning a Bill brought in for the protection of parents of state government employees.
- ☞ The Parents Responsibility and Norms for Accountability and Monitoring (**PRANAM**) Bill, stated to be the first-of-its-kind bill in the country, aims to protect elderly parents of government employees in their times of need.

### Objective

- ◆ The bill aims to ensure that no state government employee ignores their elderly parents and unmarried differently-abled siblings.
- ◆ It is an effort from the state government to protect the parents and give them financial security.
- ◆ **Composition of PRANAM Commission**
- ◆ **Chief Commissioner: V B Pyarelal**
- ◆ **Commissioners: Dr. Alaka Desai Sarma and Jugabala Buragohain**

### Key Features

- ◆ The **PRANAM Bill** makes it mandatory for the state government employees to look after their parents and unmarried differently-abled siblings who do not have their own sources of income.
- ◆ Under the bill's provisions, if the PRANAM Commission gets a complaint that parents of a state government employee are being ignored, then 10 or 15 per cent of the employee's salary will be deducted by the government and paid to the parents or differently-abled siblings.
- ◆ The bill would benefit 8 lakh parents of 4 lakh state government employees.

- The employees of private companies and the central government working in the state would also be covered by the bill at a later stage.
- The PRANAM Bill was approved by the state cabinet in 2018. According to the state's Chief Minister, it would be better if the bill did not require to be implemented.

*Source: Times of India*

## **Cabinet approves Promulgation of Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Ordinance, 2019**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on February 19, 2019 approved the Promulgation of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Ordinance, 2019.

### **Key Facts**

- ◆ The proposed Ordinance will immediately tackle the menace of illicit deposit taking activities in the country which at present are exploiting regulatory gaps and duping poor and gullible people of their hard-earned savings.
- ◆ Earlier, the Lok Sabha on February 13, 2019 passed the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2018.
- ◆ The Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2018 was introduced in Parliament on July 18, 2018 and was referred to the Standing Committee on Finance (SCF), which submitted its Seventieth Report on the Bill to Parliament on January 3, 2019.

### **Significance**

- ☞ The official amendments will strengthen the Bill to effectively tackle the menace of illicit deposit taking activities in the country, and prevent schemes such as Saradha Chit Fund Scheme from duping poor people of their hard earned savings.

### **Provisions of the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2018**

- ◆ The Bill contains a banning clause which bans Deposit Takers from promoting, operating, issuing advertisements or accepting deposits in any Unregulated Deposit Scheme. The Bill bans unregulated deposit taking activities altogether, by making them an offence.
- ◆ It three different types of offences, namely, running of Unregulated Deposit Schemes, fraudulent default in Regulated Deposit Schemes, and wrongful inducement in relation to Unregulated Deposit Schemes.
- ◆ It provides for severe punishment and heavy fines to act as deterrent.
- ◆ It has adequate provisions for repayment of deposits in cases where such schemes manage to raise deposits illegally.

- ◆ It provides for attachment of properties or assets by the Competent Authority and subsequent realisation of assets for repayment to depositors.
- ◆ It provides clear-cut time lines for attachment of property and restitution to depositors.
- ◆ It enables creation of an online database for collection and sharing of information on deposit-taking activities in the country.
- ◆ It adopts best practices from State laws while entrusting the primary responsibility of implementing the provisions of the legislation to the State Governments.
- ◆ It defines “Deposit Takers” as all possible entities (including individuals) receiving or soliciting deposits, except specific entities such as those incorporated by legislation.
- ◆ It defines “Deposit” in such a manner that deposit-takers are restricted from concealing public deposits as receipts, and not to hinder acceptance of money by an establishment in the ordinary course of its business.

### **What led to the amendments in the Bill?**

- ◆ As per information provided by the RBI, during July 2014 and May 2018, 978 cases of unauthorized schemes were discussed in State Level Coordination Committee (SLCC) meetings in various States. A large number of such instances were reported from the eastern part of the country.
- ◆ Subsequently, the Finance Minister in the Budget Speech 2017-18 had announced that the draft bill to curtail the menace of illicit deposit schemes had been placed in the public domain and would be introduced shortly after its finalisation.
- ◆ The Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2018 provides a comprehensive legislation to deal with the menace of illicit deposit schemes in the country.

### **Saradha chit fund scam**

- ◆ In the early 2000s, businessman Sudipto Sen led Saradha Group launched a collective investment scheme. The Group used a consortium of companies to tap small investors promising them very high returns and raised over Rs 2000 crore.
- ◆ The scheme expanded to states like Odisha, Assam, and Tripura and the number of investors rose to over 15 lakh.
- ◆ By 2009, the Group diversified with the help of continued investments from ordinary people and opened 239 companies. Some invested through the schemes launched by the Group itself and some invested through chit funds under the Chit Fund Act, 1982.
- ◆ In 2012, the market regulator SEBI asked the Group to stop accepting money from investors until it got the regulator’s permission. In 2013, the Group’s scheme failed and investors lodged hundreds of complaints. The company collapsed in April 2013.

*Source: PIB, The Hindu*

## **SC directs NCM to decide on redefining ‘Minority’**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The Supreme Court recently directed the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) to take a decision within three months on a representation seeking guidelines to redefine the term ‘Minority’.
- ☞ A bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi asked petitioner Ashwini Upadhyay to re-file his representation to the Minority Commission and directed the Commission to take a decision in this regard within three months in the context of state-wise population of a community.

### **What is the issue?**

- ◆ BJP leader and lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay had filed a writ petition in the court to declare the Notification dated 23.10.1993 as arbitrary unreasonable and ultra-vires the Constitution.
- ◆ The apex court had declined his petition in 2017 and had asked him to approach the National Commission for Minorities, following which, he submitted a Representation to the National Commission for Minorities on November 17, 2017
- ◆ However, as per Upadhyay, the NCM has done nothing since November 2017.
- ◆ Hence, he filed a fresh writ petition to declare Section 2(c) of the NCM Act, 1992, and the Notification dated 23.10.1993 as void and unconstitutional for being arbitrary, unreasonable and offending Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Indian Constitution.
- ◆ He contended that those who are not entitled to minority protection are enjoying the benefits of the same under the Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution, exemptions under Articles 15(5) and (6) of the Constitution, provisions of the Right to Education Act and welfare programmes of the Government.
- ◆ The enjoyment of minority benefits by majority breaches various fundamental rights such as right to equality, right to freedom of speech and discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or birth.
- ◆ He further illustrated that Hindus, who are otherwise a majority community, are minority in several north-eastern states such as in Jammu and Kashmir. However, Hindus are deprived of benefits available to the minority communities in these states.

*Source: The Hindu*



## International Relations, India & the World and International Affairs

### Chagos Islands dispute: UK obliged to end control – UN

#### Why in news?

- ☞ The UK should end its control of the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean “as rapidly as possible”, the UN’s highest court has said.
- ☞ The International Court of Justice said the islands were not lawfully separated from the former colony of Mauritius.
- ☞ However, the UK Foreign Office added it would “carefully” examine the details of the court’s opinion, which is not legally binding.

#### Implications of the judgement:

- ◆ While ICJ advisory opinions are not binding, the ramifications of the opinion will be highly significant; an opinion in favour of Mauritius may strengthen their position in any future negotiations, as well as putting significant international pressure on the UK over the status of the territory.
- ◆ But what could be particularly critical is the decision’s impact on far broader issues of post-colonial sovereignty, and the legitimacy of colonial era independence arrangements.

#### Where are the Chagos Islands located?

- ◆ The Chagos Islands are located more than 2,000 miles off the east coast of Africa and around 310 miles south of the Maldives Archipelago.
- ◆ The Chagos group are made up of a combination of different coralline rock structures, which top a submarine ridge that runs southwards across the centre of the Indian Ocean.

#### What’s the issue?

- ◆ Britain detached the Chagos Islands from Mauritius in 1965, three years before Mauritian independence.
- ◆ From 1967 to 1973, some 1,500 Chagos islanders were gradually forced to leave their homes so that the largest island, Diego Garcia, could be leased to the US for a strategic airbase. Today, Diego Garcia hosts a major US military base.
- ◆ In 2016, after several judicial challenges, Britain extended Diego Garcia’s lease until 2036 and declared that the expelled islanders would not be allowed to go back.
- ◆ In 2017, Mauritius successfully petitioned the United Nations to seek an ICJ advisory opinion on the legality of the separation.
- ◆ Mauritius claims it was forced to give up the islands – now a British overseas territory – in 1965 in exchange for independence, which it gained in 1968.

### Dispute:

- ◆ British overseas territory of Chagos island in 1965 in exchange for independence, which it gained in 1968.
- ◆ The dispute over the Chagos Islands is home to the US military base on Diego Garcia which is being portrayed by some as an indication of Britain’s waning influence on the world stage following the Brexit vote.

### Arguments put forth by Mauritius:

- ◆ The crux of the Mauritian claim is the right of self-determination. Mauritius argues it was illegal for Britain to break up its territory. It claims sovereignty over the archipelago and demands the right to resettle former residents.
- ◆ In its submission to the court, the Mauritian government claimed that the separation of the islands from Mauritius was in clear breach of UN resolution 1514, also known as the Colonial Declaration.
- ◆ Passed in 1960, it enshrined the right of self-determination for colonial peoples and specifically banned the breakup of colonies prior to independence. This was intended to keep borders stable, and to prevent colonial powers from simply absorbing colonial territory into their overseas territory so as to retain their sovereignty.

*Source: The Hindu*

## India climbs 8 Spots in 2019 International Intellectual Property Index

### Why in news?

- ☞ India climbed eight places in the 2019 International Intellectual Property (IP) Index, ranking at 36th position among 50 countries. India’s overall score has increased from 30.07 percent in 2018 to 36.04 percent in 2019.

### **Key Facts**

- ◆ In 2018 International Intellectual Property Index, India was ranked 44th out of 50 countries.
- ◆ The seventh edition of the International Intellectual Property Index, “Inspiring Tomorrow” was released by the Global Innovation Policy Center (GIPC) of U.S. Chamber of Commerce on February 7, 2019.
- ◆ The Index was topped by the United States with 42.66 points out of 45, followed by the United Kingdom (42.22) at 2nd, Sweden (41.03) at 3rd and Germany (41.00) at 4th.



### About International Intellectual Property Index

- ◆ The International Intellectual Property Index ranks 50 economies based on 45 unique indicators across eight separate categories that are critical to an innovation-led economy supported by robust patent, trademark, copyright, and trade secrets protection.
- ◆ The Global Intellectual Property Centre of the USCC works around the world to examine the Intellectual Property (IP) rights and their role in creating jobs, saving lives, advancing global economic growth, etc.
- ◆ It provides both an IP report card for the world and a blueprint for policymakers in various countries.
- ◆ The Index covers 50 economies, representing 90 percent of global GDP.

### U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s take on India’s improvement

- ◆ As per the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, *“The improvement reflects important reforms implemented by Indian policymakers toward building and sustaining an innovation ecosystem for domestic entrepreneurs and foreign investors alike”*.
- ◆ For the second year in a row, India’s score represents the largest gain of any country measured on the Index.
- ◆ The improvement is an outcome of specific reforms such as accession to the WIPO Internet Treaties, the agreement to initiate a Patent Prosecution Highway (PPH) with international offices, and a dedicated set of IP incentives for small business.
- ◆ The development was also attributed to few pro-IP policies of the Government such as ‘Accelerating Growth for New India Innovations’, ‘Startup India’ and ‘Digital India’.

*Source: The Hindu*

### Trump-Kim Vietnam Summit

#### Why in news?

- ☞ United States President Donald Trump held the second summit with the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Un in Vietnam on February 27-28, 2019 as part of his administration’s ongoing endeavours to **denuclearise North Korea**.
- ☞ Vietnam’s Hanoi hosted the second summit. Vietnam has diplomatic ties with both Washington and Pyongyang.

#### Significance

- ◆ The 2nd Trump-Kim Summit was in continuation of Trump’s efforts to persuade Kim to roll back his nuclear program.
- ◆ The Summit comes less than a year after the two leaders held a historic meeting in Singapore in June 2018. Since their meeting, Trump has claimed that North Korea is no longer a nuclear threat; however, the observers have witnessed some movement at their nuclear site.

## What were the expectations?

- ☞ At the second Trump-Kim summit, experts expected that North Korea will likely be exchanging the destruction of its main Yongbyon nuclear complex with a formal declaration of the end of 1950-53 Korean War by the US.
- ☞ They also expected that North Korea might also resume some lucrative economic projects with South Korea.

## First Trump-Kim Summit

- ◆ The first Trump-Kim Summit was held in Singapore on June 12, 2018. During the first historic delegation level talks, Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un signed a historic agreement.
- ◆ Though the Summit opened a path to peace, there is still not a concrete plan for denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.
- ◆ That was the first time that a sitting US president met a North Korean leader in the last 60 years. The meeting followed decades of hostility, which worsened following North Korea's nuclear missile tests that brought America within striking range.

## Inter-Korean Summit: Improving relations of North and South Koreas

- ◆ South Korean President, Moon Jae-in was the one who had helped set up the first Trump-Kim meeting.
- ◆ Moon himself held three summits with Kim in 2018 itself. During the Inter-Korean Summit in April 2018, both the leaders signed a landmark peace agreement 'Panmunjeom Declaration' for the complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. The two leaders pledged a 'new era of peace' through the joint declaration.
- ◆ It was the first time that a North Korean leader crossed over the southern side of the Demilitarised Zone to enter South Korea, since the end of the Korean War in 1953.

## Denuclearisation of North Korea

- ◆ The Denuclearisation of North Korea has recently become crucial for the world leaders after they witnessed the back-to-back nuclear missile tests by the North Korea.
- ◆ These nuclear weapon tests came as a shock for the US when America was brought within the striking range of North Korea.
- ◆ Since 2011, the country has fired over 80 missiles and conducted four nuclear weapons tests. In 2017, North Korea launched its first-ever intercontinental ballistic missile and threatened to send more missiles into the waters near Guam, a US island territory in the Western Pacific.
- ◆ The country has repeatedly demanded that the United States should reciprocate with measures such as sanctions relief.

## Impact after Trump-Kim Summit

- ◆ Following the Summit, North Korea released American detainees and announced the suspension of the nuclear and long-range missile tests and dismantling of a nuclear test site and parts of a rocket launch facility. All this was done in the absence of outside experts.
- ◆ However, the satellite videos taken since the June 2018 summit indicated that North Korea is continuing to produce nuclear materials at its weapons factories.
- ◆ Even the monitors of the United Nations (UN) in the first week of February 2019 observed that North Korea is still working to protect its ballistic missiles against American military strikes. They also observed that the country was illegally evading sanctions against it.

*Source: The Hindu*

## India strikes back: IAF jets destroy Jaish terror camps across LoC

### Why in news?

- ☞ In retaliation to the deadly Pulwama terror attack, the Indian Air Force fighter jets crossed the line of control in the early hours of February 26, 2019 and attacked Jaish-e-Mohammed terror camps in Pakistan occupied Kashmir.

### Key Facts

- ◆ The same was confirmed by the Indian Foreign Secretary, Vijay Gokhale during a press conference in New Delhi on the same day. The Foreign Secretary revealed that India has struck the biggest training camp of JeM in Balakot.
- ◆ According to Pakistan's Director General of Inter Services Public Relations Pakistan, Asif Ghafoor, "Indian aircrafts intruded from Muzaffarabad sector. Facing timely and effective response from Pakistan Air Force released payload in haste while escaping which fell near Balakot. No casualties or damage."

### Highlights

- ◆ According to sources, the Indian Air Force used Mirage-2000 jets to drop 1000 kg of laser-guided bombs causing an estimated casualty of 200-300.
- ◆ In the intelligence led operation, India struck the biggest training camp of Jaish-e-Mohammed in Balakot, Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa.
- ◆ In the operation, a very large number of JeM terrorists, trainers, senior commanders and groups of jihadis who were being trained for fidayeen action were reportedly eliminated.
- ◆ The attacked facility at Balakot was headed by Maulana Yousuf Azhar (also known as Ustad Ghouri), the brother-in-law of Masood Azhar, chief of Jaish-e-Mohammed.
- ◆ In total, it has been reported that more than two camps of the Jaish E Mohammed were destroyed and after the arrival of the Pakistan airforce, the Indian jets returned. However, the Indian foreign secretary has confirmed the attack on only one JeM camp.
- ◆ Accordingly to preliminary information, it has been said that more than 200 terrorists might have been killed.

## Significance

- ◆ According to the Indian Foreign Secretary, the surgical strike 2.0 was a non-military preemptive action, which specifically targeted the JeM camp.
- ◆ The selection of the target was also conditioned by India's desire to avoid civilian casualties. The chosen facility was located in thick forest on a hilltop far away from any civilian presence.
- ◆ This is the first time that the Indian Air Force has crossed into Pakistan since 1971.

## Background

- ◆ The strike comes almost two weeks after a suicide terror attack on an Indian army convoy on February 14, 2019 that killed over 40 CRPF personnel in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district.
- ◆ The responsibility of the attack was claimed by a Pakistan-based militant group, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), which is led by Masood Azhar.
- ◆ Following this, the Indian military carried out several encounters, in which the mastermind behind the attack - Ghazi Rasheed was shot dead. There were also casualties on the Indian side.
- ◆ The current attack is similar to the surgical strike carried out by the Indian Army on September 29, 2016, when they attacked seven terrorist launch pads across the Line of Control (LoC) in retaliation to an attack on its base in Jammu and Kashmir's Uri.

*Source: The Hindu*

## India raises customs duty on all goods imported from Pakistan

### Why in news?

- ☞ India on February 16, 2019 increased customs duty on all goods originating from or imported from Pakistan to 200 per cent with immediate effect. It is not very clear whether this will affect the third-country trade which is going on between the two countries through places such as Dubai in the UAE and Singapore.

### Key facts

- ◆ The move comes after India withdrew the 'Most-Favoured Nation' status accorded to Pakistan on February 15 following the Pulwama terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir that led to the killing of at least 40 CRPF personnel and injuring of many others.
- ◆ The decision was taken during a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security, which was presided over by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss the security scenario in Jammu and Kashmir in the wake of the terror attack.

## What is MFN status?

- ◆ The most favoured nation (MFN) status was accorded in 1996 under WTO's General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).
- ◆ The special status is accorded by one state to another in international trade. The term means that the country which is the recipient of this treatment must nominally receive equal trade advantages as the "most favoured nation" by the country granting such treatment.
- ◆ As per the obligation under the WTO, the member countries of WTO were required to extend MFN status to each other automatically, unless otherwise specified in the agreement or schedule notified to the WTO by the member country.
- ◆ Both India and Pakistan are signatories to this which means they have to treat each other and rest of WTO member countries as favoured trading partners.
- ◆ India extended MFN status to all SAARC nations including Pakistan and except for Pakistan, all the SAARC countries extended the special status to India as well.
- ◆ MFN status leads to equal treatment amongst countries and ensures a more stable, predictable, reliable and competitive international trade.
- ◆ The trade advantages mainly include low tariffs and high import quotas. A country that has been accorded MFN status may not be treated less advantageously than any other country with MFN status by the promising country.

## Following are some of the key benefits of MFN status:

- ◆ **Free trade:** The status increases trade creation and decreases trade diversion. A country that grants MFN on imports will have its imports provided by the most efficient supplier if the most efficient supplier is within the group of MFN.
- ◆ **Equal Opportunities:** The status allows smaller countries, in particular, to participate in the advantages that larger countries often grant to each other. The smaller countries would often not be powerful enough to negotiate such advantages by themselves.
- ◆ **More Transparency:** Having one set of tariffs for all countries simplifies the rules and makes them more transparent.
- ◆ **No Discrimination:** Each WTO member is required to treat all the other members equally as "most-favoured" trading partners. If a country improves the benefits that it gives to one trading partner, it has to give the same "best" treatment to all the other WTO members so that they all remain "most-favoured". The nation also has to ensure that there is no discrimination between its own and foreign products, services or nationals.
- ◆ **Fair competition:** It also discourages unfair practices such as export subsidies and dumping products at below cost to gain market share.

## **MFN status to Pakistan**

- ◆ India granted the MFN status to Pakistan in the year 1996. Though the two nations have no formal bilateral trade agreement, a composite dialogue began between them in 1998.
- ◆ As per the WTO rules, India could roll back the MFN status from Pakistan at any point. The decision to review the MFN status accorded to Pakistan was first thought off in the wake of Uri attack.
- ◆ India's main exports to Pakistan include sugar, cotton, man-made filaments, chemicals, carpets, furniture fresh fruits and vegetables while its imports comprise mineral fuels, precious stones and wooden handicrafts among others.

## **Impact of withdrawal**

- ◆ Pakistan exported just \$500 million of goods in 2017-18 to India, representing 1.5 per cent of its exports. However, it is believed to have exported goods worth about 3-4 times as much through third countries.
- ◆ While the official trade between the two neighbours in 2017-18 stood at \$2.4 billion, the third-country trade between the two is estimated to have been \$5-10 billion.
- ◆ The main items imported by India from Pakistan include fresh fruits, cement, petroleum products, bulk minerals and ores and finished leather.
- ◆ The major items that India exports to Pakistan include raw cotton, cotton yarn, chemicals, plastics, manmade yarn and dyes.
- ◆ According to analysts, the 200 per cent hike in the excise duty could hit cement and bituminous oil export by Pakistan as these are bulk commodities which are difficult to ship through third countries without impacting the costing hugely.

*Source: The Hindu, Indian Express*

## **Afghanistan begins export to India through Chabahar port**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ Afghanistan on February 24, 2019 began exports to India through the Chabahar port in Iran. This is the first time Afghanistan has exported goods to India bypassing the Pakistan route.
- ☞ The first consignment of exports to India was flagged off by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. While inaugurating the new route, the President said that the Chabahar port is the result of healthy cooperation between India, Iran and Afghanistan and it will ensure economic growth.



## Key Facts

- ◆ According to reports, twenty-three trucks carrying 570 tonnes of dried fruits, textiles, carpets and mineral products were dispatched from the western Afghan city of Zaranj to Chabahar in Iran.
- ◆ The consignment will then be shipped from Chabahar to the Indian port city of Mumbai.
- ◆ Afghanistan's exports are expected to increase from \$1 billion to \$2 billion after the opening of the new trade route.
- ◆ The Chabahar port is expected to help Afghanistan transform from an importer country into an exporter country.

## Significance

- ◆ The move marks the first time that Afghanistan has shipped goods to India through a newly developed Iranian seaport in a bid to improve exports and reduce reliance on routes through its uneasy neighbor, Pakistan.
- ◆ For decades, the landlocked nation was forced to rely on Pakistan's land and seaports for international trade.
- ◆ However, mutual tensions in recent years significantly reduced Afghan trade and transit activities through Pakistan.

## Background

- ◆ India has played a huge role in the financing and development of Iran's Chabahar Port in order to enable Kabul to get direct and easy sea trade access.
- ◆ India took operational control of a portion of the Iranian port late last year for 18 months and plans to send cargo ships from its ports of Mumbai, Kandla and Mundra every two weeks.
- ◆ The United States also last year waived off certain anti-Iran sanctions to allow the development of Chabahar to support efforts aimed at stabilising Afghanistan.
- ◆ The waiver has enabled India, Iran and Afghanistan to continue their work to establish a new transit and transport corridor linking the three countries to help improve Afghan economy and allow the war-ravaged country to import food and medicines, bypassing Pakistan.
- ◆ India successfully shipped 1.1 million tons of wheat to Afghanistan through Chabahar Port in 2017. In the same year, India also launched an air corridor with Kabul for bilateral trade.

***Source: The Hindu***

## Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman's India visit

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of Saudi Arabia, visited India on February 19-20, 2019.

### Key Facts

- ◆ This first ever visit by his Royal Highness followed the official visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in April 2016 at the invitation of King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud; the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques (Head of State & Government).
- ◆ Prime Minister Modi and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) held delegation level talks at Hyderabad House on February 20, 2019 and released the India-Saudi Arabia Joint Statement.
- ◆ Both the sides also signed five agreements and Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) including deals on an investment fund and tourism.

### List of MoUs/Agreements signed

- ◆ MoU on investing in the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund
- ◆ MoU on Cooperation in the field of Tourism between the Union Ministry of Tourism, and the Saudi Commission for tourism and national heritage of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- ◆ MoU for Cooperation in the field of housing
- ◆ Framework Cooperation Program between Invest India and Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA) on enhancing bilateral investment relations
- ◆ MoU for Cooperation on Broadcasting between Prasar Bharati and Saudi Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) for exchange of audio visual programme
- ◆ MoU for Cooperation on Broadcasting between Prasar Bharati and Saudi Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) for exchange of audio visual programme

### India-Saudi Arabia Joint Statement

- ◆ **Condemnation of Pulwama terrorist attack and cooperation against terrorism:** The Prime Minister and His Royal Highness condemned in the recent Pulwama terror attack on Indian security forces on February 14, 2019.
- ◆ Both sides called on all states to reject the use of terrorism against other countries. They stressed for early adoption of the 'UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism' and underlined the importance of comprehensive sanctioning of terrorists and their organisations by the United Nations.
- ◆ **Comprehensive Security Dialogue:** To enhance cooperation in the Counter-terrorism, the two sides agreed to constitute a 'Comprehensive Security Dialogue' at the level of National Security Advisors and set up a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.
- ◆ **Increase in the Hajj quota:** Saudi Arabia enhanced the quota for Hajj pilgrims from India to 200000 to reflect the latest census.

- ◆ **Release of 850 Indian prisoners:** Prime Minister expressed his thanks to the Saudi Crown Prince for ordering the release of 850 Indian prisoners from Saudi jails.
- ◆ **Strategic partnership under Riyadh Declaration:** The two sides re-affirmed deep commitment to strengthen the strategic partnership envisaged in the ‘Riyadh Declaration’ of February 2010.
- ◆ **Strategic Partnership Council:** The two sides agreed to reinforce the existing partnership with high level monitoring mechanism by the creation of the Strategic Partnership Council led by Prime Minister Modi and His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, and supported by ministerial representation.
- ◆ **Workshop between NITI Aayog and SCISP:** Both the sides welcomed the outcomes of the Workshop between NITI Aayog and Saudi Centre for International Strategic Partnership (SCISP) organised recently in Riyadh. The Workshop identified over 40 opportunities of joint collaboration and investments.
- ◆ **Deepening trade and investment cooperation:** They agreed to deepen trade and investment cooperation by aligning the Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 and 13 Vision Realisation Programs with India’s flagship initiatives “Make in India”, “Start Up India”, “Smart Cities”, “Clean India”, and “Digital India”.
- ◆ Saudi Crown Prince announced to invest over USD 100 billion in India in areas of energy, refining, petrochemicals, infrastructure, agriculture, minerals and mining, manufacturing, education and health.
- ◆ **First joint venture West Coast Refinery and Petrochemical Project:** Both sides agreed to expedite the implementation of the first Joint Venture West Coast Refinery and Petrochemical Project estimated to cost USD 44 billion. In addition, investments of USD 10 billion through the Public Investment Fund and other investments opportunities worth USD 26 billion are expected.
- ◆ **Saudi Arabia’s investment in NIIF:** The Prime Minister welcomed the investment from Saudi Arabia in the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) and other key sectors in India.
- ◆ **Energy security:** The two sides expressed to grow bilateral trade in the energy sector, acknowledging Saudi Arabia as the world’s most reliable supplier of oil & gas and the key supplier to India. They stressed on continuation of the India-Saudi Arabia Energy consultations.
- ◆ **Joint Working Group on Skill Development:** The two sides agreed to set up a Joint Working Group on Skill Development to identify areas of cooperation in important fields such as manufacturing, information technology, communications, and programming.
- ◆ **Co-operation in the defence sector:** They welcomed the recent developments in India-Saudi co-operation in the defence sector, especially after signing of MoU on Defence Cooperation during the visit of His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud to India in February 2014.
- ◆ **Security situation in West Asia and Middle East:** Both sides emphasised Security Council Resolution (2254) with regard to the solution in Syria, and Security Council Resolution (2216), the GCC initiative, and the outcomes of the Yemeni National Dialogue with regard to the solution in Yemen.
- ◆ **Cooperation in payment systems:** Both sides agreed to explore opportunities for cooperation in the area of payment systems including RuPAY for the benefit of Indian community in general and particularly the Hajj or Umrah pilgrims. The Prime Minister thanked the Crown Prince for sorting the issue of “Iqamah” for the Indian Labour who were stranded in Saudi Arabia.

*Source: PIB, The Hindu*

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## **Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan: Present status of development in India**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ Union Minister of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation, Nitin Gadkari on February 21, 2019 announced the Government's decision to stop the flow of river water to Pakistan and divert water from Eastern Rivers to Jammu & Kashmir and Punjab.
- ☞ The decision came as a response to the devastating terror attack in Pulwama, Jammu & Kashmir that killed over 44 Indian paramilitary police officers.

### **Indus Basin System**

- ◆ The Indus System comprises of rivers - Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej. The river basin is mainly shared by India and Pakistan with a small share for China and Afghanistan.
- ◆ Under the Indus Waters Treaty signed between India and Pakistan in 1960, all the waters of three rivers, namely Ravi, Sutlej and Beas (Eastern Rivers) were allocated to India for exclusive use. The waters of Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab (Western Rivers) were allocated to Pakistan.
- ◆ However, India was given the right to use waters of Western Rivers only for specified domestic, non-consumptive and agricultural use.
- ◆ India also has the right to generate hydroelectricity through Run of the River (RoR) projects on the Western Rivers, subject to specific criteria for design and operation.

### **Ongoing projects under the Indus Waters Treaty**

- ◆ India constructed Bhakra Dam on Satluj, Pong and Pandoh Dam on Beas and Thein (Ranjitsagar) on Ravi to utilise the waters of the Eastern Rivers which have been allocated to India for exclusive use.
- ◆ These dams along with other works like Beas-Sutlej Link, Madhopur-Beas Link and Indira Gandhi Nahar Project has helped India utilise nearly 95 percent of waters of Eastern Rivers. However, about 2 million acre feet (MAF) of water annually from Ravi is reported to be still flowing unutilised to Pakistan.
- ◆ To stop the flow of these waters, following projects are being undertaken:

### **Resumption of Construction of Shahpurkandi project**

- ◆ The Shahpurkandi Project will help in utilising the waters coming out from powerhouse of Thein dam to irrigate 37000 hectares of land in Jammu & Kashmir and Punjab and generate 206 MW of power.
- ◆ The project was scheduled to be completed by September 2016; however, following a dispute between J&K and Punjab, the work on the project had been suspended since 2014.
- ◆ The project was resumed after agreement between the states on September 8, 2018.
- ◆ The cost of the project is Rs 2715.70 Crore. The Central Government will provide assistance of Rs 485.38 crore towards balance cost of works of irrigated component of the project.

## **Construction of Ujh multipurpose project**

- ◆ The Ujh multipurpose project will create storage of about 781 million cubic meter of water on river Ujh, a tributary of Ravi.
- ◆ It will be utilised for irrigation and power generation in India and will provide a total irrigation benefits of 31,380 ha in Kathua, Hiranagar and Samba district of J&K.
- ◆ The project will be completed at a total cost of Rs 5850 crore as per the estimates of July 2017.
- ◆ This project is a National Project and the Central Assistance of Rs. 4892.47 crore on works portion of irrigation component as well as the special grant is under consideration.
- ◆ The project will be implemented in 6 years.

## **2nd Ravi Beas link below Ujh**

- ◆ This project will tap excess water flowing down to Pakistan through river Ravi, even after construction of Thein Dam.
- ◆ It involves construction of a barrage across river Ravi for diverting water through a tunnel link to Beas basin.
- ◆ The project is expected to utilise about 0.58 Million acre-foot (MAF) of surplus waters below Ujh dam by diverting it to Beas basin for benefits of other co-basin states.
- ◆ The all three projects are declared as the National projects and will help India to utilise its entire share of waters given under the Indus Waters Treaty 1960.

## **Indus Waters Treaty**

- ◆ Indus Waters Treaty was signed in 1960 after over 9 years of negotiations between India and Pakistan with the help of the World Bank, which is also a signatory.
- ◆ The treaty was signed in Karachi on 19 September 1960 by then Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru and President of Pakistan Ayub Khan.
- ◆ The Treaty describes the methods for cooperation and information exchange between the two countries regarding use of the rivers.
- ◆ It also puts up different procedures to handle issues such as- “questions” to be handled by the Commission; “differences” to be resolved by a Neutral Expert and “disputes” to be referred to seven-member tribunal “Court of Arbitration.”
- ◆ Permanent Indus Commission, which is responsible for cooperation and information exchange between both the countries, has a commissioner from each country.

*Source: Indian Express, The Hindu*

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## Trump declares national emergency to build US-Mexico border wall

### Why in news?

- ☞ US President Donald Trump on February 15, 2019 signed an executive order declaring national emergency in the nation. The move would unblock billions of dollars of federal money to construct a wall along the US-Mexico border.

### Key Facts

- ◆ Trump explained the move by saying that it was essential to prevent the country from “invasion” of illegal immigrants, drug dealers and criminal cartels.
- ◆ The move followed a rare show of cooperation between opposition parties when the US legislators reached a tentative deal on funding for border security to avoid another government shutdown that was due to start on February 16.
- ◆ However, the budget for a wall along the Mexico border is far less than what President Donald Trump had demanded.

### Border Issue

- ◆ Building a border wall on the US-Mexico border was one of the key promises made by Donald Trump during his 2016 election campaign.
- ◆ Since then, the President has been faced with much opposition from the opposition parties over the funding of the wall.
- ◆ The disagreement over funding the wall on the border ended up in the longest government shutdown in the United States during December-January.
- ◆ The shutdown left more than 800,000 government workers without pay. It only ended when Trump signed a deal on January 25 to give the Congress 21 days to come up with an agreement or face further blocking of funds.

### New Agreement: Key Details

- ◆ While, the details of the new agreement have not been officially released, according to reports, the US legislators agreed to settle for a figure of \$1.4 billion to build border barriers, far below Trump’s demand of \$5.7 billion.
- ◆ The agreed amount is expected to finance just a quarter of more than 322 kms of the wall that Trump planned to build in 2019.

### How will declaration of emergency help border wall funding?

- ◆ Trump backed his decision of declaring a national emergency by saying that he has taken this path to speed up the process of building the wall. “I could do the wall over a long period of time. I didn’t need to do this, but I would rather do it much faster,” he said.
- ◆ According to the White House, Trump administration has so far identified up to \$8.1 billion that will be available to build the border wall once the national emergency is declared and additional funds have been reprogrammed.
- ◆ This includes about \$601 million from the Treasury Forfeiture Fund, up to \$2.5 billion under the Department of Defence funds transferred for support for counter-drug activities and up to \$3.6 billion reallocated from Department of Defence military construction projects.
- ◆ The expected funds would be used to repair or build barriers along at least 376 kms of the border.



## Criticism

- ◆ In a joint statement, US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer declared Trump’s declaration of emergency as unlawful. They claimed that he has declared a national emergency over a crisis that does not exist and it does great violence to the Constitution.
- ◆ The opposition leaders stated that the move was plainly a power grab by a disappointed President, who has gone outside the bounds of the law to try to get what he failed to achieve in the constitutional legislative process.
- ◆ According to Steven Choi, executive director of the New York Immigration Coalition, the decision not only jeopardises the safety of thousands of asylum seekers at the US southern border but also the integrity of US democracy.
- ◆ Trump’s opponents have already announced their intention to legally challenge it. The declaration is challenged in court by states and others who stand to lose federal money or claim that Trump is abusing his authority.

## Background

- ◆ This is not the first time that a US President has ordered a national emergency for an issue that is conventionally considered as less important.
- ◆ Trump’s predecessors have used this provision of presidential powers multiple times in the past, even for issues that are less important than this.
- ◆ Under the National Emergencies Act, since 1976, US presidents have declared nearly 60 national emergencies, as per a White House factsheet. As many as 31 of them are reportedly still in effect.
- Former Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, who became former president Barack Obama’s Homeland Security Secretary, declared a state of emergency along the border in 2005.
- Former New Mexico governor Bill Richardson also declared a state of emergency at the border in 2005.
- Former presidents George W Bush and Barack Obama also directed the use of the military to assist Homeland Security in securing and managing the southern border.
- George W Bush declared a national emergency in 2001, which invoked reprogramming authority granted by Title 10 United States Code, section 2808, and both he and Obama used that authority a total of 18 times to fund projects between 2001 and 2014.
- In total, according to past records, Bill Clinton is set to have declared 17 national emergencies, George W Bush 13 and Barack Obama 12, but nearly all were for crises that emerged overseas.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Abu Dhabi adds Hindi as third official court language

### Why in news?

☞ The Abu Dhabi Judicial Department (ADJD) has added Hindi as the third official language to be used in the city's courts, alongside Arabic and English.

The move is aimed at helping foreigners to learn about litigation procedures, their rights and duties without a language barrier, in addition to facilitating registration procedures through unified forms available through the judicial department's website.

### Highlights

- ◆ The Abu Dhabi Judicial Department has extended the adoption of interactive forms of statement of claims filed before courts by including the Hindi language alongside Arabic and English in labour cases.
- ◆ The adoption of multilingual interactive forms for claim sheets, grievances and requests, aims to promote judicial services and increase the transparency of litigation procedures. The move is designed to improve access to justice.
- ◆ It is in addition to facilitating registration procedures to the public through simplified and easy forms and raising litigants' legal awareness through interactive forms of the statements of claims, to ensure access to the legal materials related to the subject of the dispute.
- ◆ The adoption of new languages comes as part of the bilingual litigation system, the first phase of which was launched in November 2018, through the adoption of procedures requiring the plaintiffs to translate case documents in civil and commercial lawsuits into English, if the defendant is a foreigner.
- ◆ The foreign investor receives the case files translated, thus contributing to the provision of a global judicial service that meets the requirements of residents in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

### Background

- ◆ The extension of the adoption of interactive forms in several languages comes under the directives of Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Presidential Affairs and ADJD Chairman.
- ◆ According to official figures, the UAE population is estimated to be around nine million, of which 88.5 per cent are expatriate workers from foreign countries.
- ◆ The Indian community in the UAE, numbering 2.6 million, constitutes 30 per cent of the total population and is the largest expatriate community in the country.

*Source: The Hindu*

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## US pulls out of Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia

### Why in news?

- ☞ US President Donald Trump announced on February 1, 2019 that the United States will pull out of the three-decade-old Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, which it had signed with Russia during the Cold War.

### Key Facts

- ◆ Trump announced that the US will suspend its obligations under the pact and begin the process of withdrawing from it on February 2, 2019.
- ◆ He stated that the US will exit the treaty in six months unless Russia comes back into compliance by destroying all of its violating missiles, launchers, and associated equipment.
- ◆ Explaining the decision, he said that for arms control to effectively contribute to national security, all parties must faithfully implement their obligations.
- ◆ Trump alleged that Russia has violated the agreement and that they have been violating it for many years.
- ◆ He said that the US would not let Russia violate a nuclear agreement and go out and develop the weapons while the US is not allowed to. “We’ll have to develop those weapons,” he added.

### Russia’s reaction

- ◆ In response to US suspension of the treaty, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced on February 2, 2019 that Russia would also abandon its obligations under the cold-war era nuclear arms control treaty.
- ◆ Putin stated that Russia would build weapons previously banned under the treaty and would no longer initiate talks with the United States on any matters related to nuclear arms control.
- ◆ However, Putin said that Russia will only deploy short and intermediate-range nuclear missiles if US does so as well.

### Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty

#### What is the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty?

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

#### Significance of the treaty

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

## What led US to withdraw from the agreement?

- ◆ The Trump Administration has repeatedly alleged that Russia has violated the treaty. The US insists the Russians have, in breach of the deal, developed a new medium-range missile called the ‘**Novator 9M729**’ - known to NATO as the **SSC-8**. The missile would enable Russia to launch a nuclear strike at NATO countries at very short notice.
- ◆ In 2014, President Barack Obama had accused Russia of breaching the INF after it allegedly tested a ground-launched cruise missile. He, however, reportedly chose not to withdraw from the treaty under pressure from the European leaders, who said such a move could restart an arms race.
- ◆ Recently, NATO officially confirmed Russia’s activity constituted a likely violation. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said earlier this month that the military alliance remained concerned about Russia’s lack of respect for its international commitments, including the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.
- ◆ Stoltenberg stated that after years of denials, Russia recently acknowledged the existence of its new missile system ‘**9M729**’. However, Russia did not provide any credible answers on its new missile.
- ◆ Russia’s failure to adhere to the agreement was also addressed in the most recent Nuclear Posture Review published by the Defense Department in February, which said Russia “continues to violate a series of arms control treaties and commitments.”
- ◆ The INF treaty was a bilateral treaty between the US and the USSR. Hence, other nations such as China were free to develop and deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles without restraint.
- ◆ This led many in the Trump administration to feel that the INF treaty placed them at a growing disadvantage in their developing strategic rivalry with China.

## Impact

- ◆ The withdrawal of the United States from the treaty could provoke an arms race, not only with Russia, but also with China, which was never a signatory to the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, similar to the one that was occurring when the agreement was initially signed in the 1980s.
- ◆ The decision comes as the United States has begun building its first long-range nuclear weapons since 1991, a move that other nations are citing to justify their own nuclear modernisation efforts.
- ◆ The move signals an end to the more than a half-century of traditional nuclear arms control, in which the key agreements were negotiated in US and Russia.

*Source: The Hindu*



## Indian Economy and Economic Development

### Interim Budget 2019

#### Why in news?

☞ Interim Finance Minister Piyush Goyal presented the Interim Budget on 1st February 2019.

#### What are the key announcements?

##### State of the Economy

- ◆ India is the fastest growing major economy in the world.
- ◆ India is now the 6<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world (11th in 2013-14)
- ◆ Inflation - 4.6%
- ◆ Fiscal deficit - 3.4% of GDP
- ◆ Current Account Deficit (CAD) - 2.5% of GDP
- ◆ FDI \$239 billion during the last 5 years.
- ◆ The number of returns filed has also almost doubled showing 80% growth in tax base.
- ◆ The State revenues are improving with guaranteed 14% annual revenue increase for the first five years from GST.

##### Vision for the next Decade

- ◆ Becoming a \$5 Trillion Economy in the next 5 years
- ◆ \$10 Trillion Dollar Economy in the next 8 years thereafter
- ◆ 10 Dimensions to concentrate are-
  1. Physical as well as social infrastructure for a \$10 Trillion Dollar Economy and to provide ease of living
  2. Creating a Digital India reaching every sector of the economy,
  3. Making India pollution free
  4. Expanding rural industrialisation
  5. Clean Rivers, with safe drinking water
  6. Development powered by coastline and ocean waters
  7. Outer skies
  8. Self-sufficiency in food
  9. A healthy India
  10. Minimum Government Maximum Governance nation

## Poor and backward classes

- ◆ Rs.60,000 crores are being allocated for MGNREGA in BE 2019-20.

## Farmers

- ◆ **Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)** is announced to provide an direct income support at the rate of Rs.6,000 per year to vulnerable landholding farmer families, having cultivable land upto 2 hectares.
- ◆ **Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog** will be setup to upscale sustainable genetic up-gradation of cow resources and to enhance production and productivity of cows.
- ◆ India is the second largest fish producing nation in the world accounting for 6.3% of global production and an annual growth > 7%.
- ◆ **Department of Fisheries** will be created to provide focused attention.
- ◆ 2% interest subvention to the farmers pursuing the activities of animal husbandry and fisheries, who avail loan through **Kisan Credit Card**.
- ◆ In case of timely repayment of loan, they will also get an additional 3% interest subvention.
- ◆ **Natural calamities** - Generally the crop loans are rescheduled for farmers affected by severe natural calamities.
- ◆ Now, these farmers affected by natural calamities, where assistance is provided from NDRF, will be provided with 2% interest subvention and prompt repayment incentive of 3% for the entire period of reschedulement of their loans. (at present it is 2% only for the first year)

## Labour and Workers Dignity

- ◆ 42 crore workers in the unorganised sector
  - ◆ **Pradhan Mantri Shram-Yogi Maandhan** to provide a monthly pension of Rs.3,000 from the age of 60 years on a contribution of a small affordable amount by the worker during their working age for the unorganised sector workers with monthly income upto Rs.15,000.
1. Rs.100/month for a worker joining at the age of 29 years
  2. Rs. 55/month for a worker joining at the age of 18 years
  3. The Government will deposit equal matching share
- ◆ A **Committee under NITI Aayog** will be set up to complete the task of identifying De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic communities not yet formally classified.
  - ◆ A **Welfare Development Board** will also set up under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment specifically for the purpose of implementing welfare and development programmes for these communities.



### Empowering Youth

- ◆ **National Programme on ‘Artificial Intelligence’** will be implemented by establishing a National Centre on Artificial Intelligence as a hub along with Centres of Excellence
- ◆ A National Artificial Intelligence portal will also be developed.

### Empowering MSMEs and Traders

- ◆ **Government e-Marketplace (GeM)** is now being extended to all CPSEs.
- ◆ Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, which will now be renamed as the **Department for Promotion of Industries and Internal Trade** as it was recently assigned the subject of “promotion of internal trade including retail trading and welfare of traders, and their employees”.

### National Security

- ◆ Defence Budget will be crossing Rs.3,00,000 crore for the first time in 2019-20.

### Infrastructure

- ◆ **Vande Bharat Express** will be the first indigenously developed and manufactured semi high-speed train that will give the Indian passengers world class experience with speed, service and safety.
- ◆ Total Railway Budget is of Rs.1,58,658 crore.
- ◆ Specific recommendations of a high level **Inter-Ministerial Committee** to transform the system of bidding for exploration and to change from revenue sharing to exploration programme for Category II and III basins will be implemented.

### Digital India

- ◆ **Digital Villages initiative** will connect as many as 1 lakh villages with the digital services offered by the Government, within the next 5 years with the assistance of Common Service Centres (CSCs).

### Entertainment

- ◆ Single window clearance for ease of shooting films will be available to Indian filmmakers. (Earlier it was available only to foreigners).
- ◆ Anti-camcording provisions in the Cinematograph Act will be introduced.

### Customs and Trading Across Border Reforms

- ◆ **Abolition of Customs duties on 36 capital goods** along with introduction of single point of approval are introduced under section 65 of the Customs Act.
- ◆ Full digitalization of export/import transactions and leveraging RFID technology to improve export logistics are being introduced.

## Tax

- ◆ **Rebate** - Individual taxpayers having taxable annual income up to Rs.5 lakhs will get full tax rebate and therefore will not be required to pay any income tax.
- ◆ Besides, under section 80C, a deduction of Rs.1,50,000 can be claimed from total income, for investments made in LIC, PPF, Mediciclaim, incurred towards tuition fees, etc.
- ◆ So effectively persons having gross income up to Rs.6.50 lakhs may not be required to pay any income tax if they make such investments.
- ◆ **Deductions** - Additional deductions such as interest on home loan up to Rs.2 lakh, interest on education loans, NPS contributions, medical insurance, medical expenditure on senior citizens etc, are announced.
- ◆ **Standard Deduction** - For salaried persons, a Standard Deduction is raised to Rs.50,000 from Rs.40,000 i.e Rs.50,000 can be exempted from Taxation.
- ◆ **TDS threshold** - TDS threshold on interest earned on bank/post office deposits is being raised from Rs.10,000 to Rs.40,000.
- ◆ **Housing & Real Estate** –
  1. Income tax on notional rent on a **second self-occupied house** is also now exempted.
  2. TDS threshold for deduction of tax on rent is to be increased from Rs.1,80,000 to Rs.2,40,000.
  3. **Rollover of capital gains** under section 54 of the Income Tax Act will be increased from investment in one residential house to two residential houses for a tax payer having capital gains up to Rs.2 crore. This benefit can be availed once in a life time.
  4. **Section 80-IBA** - Tax on notional rent, on unsold inventories, has been exempted from one year to two years, from the end of the year in which the project is completed (applicable to project approved till 31st March, 2020).

## Analysis of Interim Budget 2019

### What are the positives?

- ◆ **Small taxpayers** - Various proposals announced in the interim Budget are aimed to ease tax burden on salaried class, small taxpayers as well as passive income earners such as senior citizens.
- ◆ In the absence of a social security net or unemployment benefits for unorganised sector workforce, the new pension scheme will be of significant advantage.
- ◆ **Tax net** - The limit of Income-tax Rebate has now been increased to Rs.12,500 from Rs.2,500 for taxpayers having income up to Rs.5 lakh.
- ◆ But people will have to file returns to earn a rebate, thus enlarging the tax base.
- ◆ **Reduced red tape** - The complicated filing forms, elaborate disclosures, demand notices and scrutiny assessments have been concerns for individual taxpayers.

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- ◆ The 2019 Budget has now promised to process tax returns within 24 hours with quick refunds and move scrutiny assessments wholly to the electronic mode.
- ◆ **Real Estate** - Tax policies of governments in recent years have controlled the Indian investors' obsession for real estate, and have directed them towards financial investments.
- ◆ But signalling a change of stance, the 2019 Budget has proposals that would work as significant incentives for home buyers.

## What are the criticisms?

- ◆ There has been a general perception that this elaborate interim Budget is aimed at seeking votes.
- ◆ e.g PM-KISAN will benefit over 120 million farmer families, among which a third of these families live in UP and Bihar. The electoral benefit of such a scheme is very evident.
- ◆ Schemes towards benefitting middle class is also seen as identifying and targeting the sections of population that are in distress and unhappy with the Centre.
- ◆ No Interim Budget in the past announced a new programme with as huge an annual expenditure outlay as the Rs.75,000 crore, thus breaking precedence of minimum spending during election years.
- ◆ No Interim Budget in the past also announced as big an income-tax concession.
- ◆ So it is not right for a government that will be in power for few months to constitute a financial burden for the coming years as well.

*Source: The Hindu, Economic Times*

## Nine new items added to MSP for minor forest produce scheme

### Why in news?

- ◆ The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) has added nine minor forest produce (MFP) items to its minimum support price (MSP) for MFP scheme.
- ◆ The total number of MFPs covered under the list is reached to 49.
- ◆ The decision was taken by MoTA based on the recommendations of the pricing cell, constituted by the TRIFED.

### MSP for MFP scheme:

- ◆ Minimum Support Price Scheme (MSP) for Minor Forest Produce (MFP) is a centrally-sponsored scheme launched at the end of 2013-14 (during the 12th five-year plan) to assure fair and remunerative price to MFP gatherers.
- ◆ Known as 'Mechanism for marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and development of value chain for MFP'.
- ◆ FAQ (Fair Average Quality) parameters are norms of quality that the state agency has to ensure while procuring MFP.
- ◆ The scheme envisages fixation of Minimum Support Price for the selected MFPs based on the suggestions/ input received from TRIFED and declaration of MSP for selected MFPs by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs

## Objectives:

- ◆ To provide fair price to the MFP gatherers for the produce collected by them and enhance their income level.
- ◆ To ensure sustainable harvesting of MFPs.
- ◆ The Scheme will have a huge social dividend for MFP gatherers, majority of whom are tribals.

## States Covered:

- ◆ The scheme is implemented in all the States & union territories having Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

## Implementation:

- ◆ Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt of India. of India shall be the Nodal Ministry for implementation and monitoring of the scheme.
- ◆ Ministry of Tribal Affairs shall announce Minimum Support Price (MSP) for the selected MFPs with the technical support from TRIFED.
- ◆ TRIFED shall be Central Nodal Agency for implementation of the scheme through State level implementing agencies.
- ◆ State designated agencies will undertake procurement of notified MFPs directly from MFP gatherers (individual or collectives) at haats notified procurement centers at grass root level at prefixed Minimum Support Price and ensure full & timely on the spot payment to MFP gatherers.

*Source: Vikaspedia, PIB*

## **Anoop Satpathy-led Expert Committee submits report; recommends National Minimum Wage at Rs 375 per day**

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Expert Committee led by Anoop Satpathy, Fellow of V. V. Giri National Labour Institute (VVGNI), on February 14, 2019 submitted its report on “Determining the Methodology for Fixation of the National Minimum Wage” to the Government.

### Key Facts

- ◆ The Committee was constituted by the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment January 17, 2017 to review and recommend methodology for fixation of National Minimum Wage (NMW) and determine the base level National minimum wage/wages through an evidence-based approach.
- ◆ The Report has been placed on the Ministry’s website for facilitating the process of consultation and dialogue among social partners and stakeholders for necessary approval of methodology.

## Recommendations of the Anoop Satpathy-led Expert Committee

- ◆ The report recommended a balanced diet approach which is culturally edible for fixation of national minimum wage. It proposed a particular amount of food items per day per person to constitute a national level balanced food basket: More or less than 10 percent of 2400 calories + proteins greater than or equal to 50 gm + fats greater than or equal to 30 gm per day per person
- ◆ It proposes minimum wage should include reasonable expenditure on essential non-food items such as clothing, fuel, light, house rent, education, medical expenses, footwear and transport which must be equal to the median class.
- ◆ It proposes that expenditure on any other non-food items be equivalent to 25-30 percent of the household expenditure distribution as per the survey data of 2011-12 by National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).
- ◆ It recommended the fixation of need based National Minimum Wage for India at Rs 375 per day or Rs 9,750 per month irrespective of sectors, skills, occupations and rural-urban locations for a family comprising of 3.6 consumption units.
- ◆ It recommended to introduce an additional house rent allowance or city compensatory allowance of Rs 55 per day or Rs 1,430 per month for urban workers, over and above the National Minimum Wage.
- ◆ It recommended reviewing the food consumption basket once in every five years, subject to the availability of NSSO-CES data.
- ◆ It also recommended revising and updating the basic minimum wage at least in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) every six months to reflect changes in the cost of living.

## Different national minimum wages for different geographical regions

- ◆ The Committee recommended different national minimum wages for different geographical regions of the country to suit the local realities.
- ◆ For the purpose of estimating national minimum wages at regional levels, it grouped the states into five regions and recommended region specific national minimum wages. Have a look:

Region	States	National Minimum Wage
<b>Region I</b>	Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal	Rs 342 per day (Rs 8,892 per month)
<b>Region II</b>	Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand	Rs 380 per day (Rs 9,880 per month)
<b>Region III</b>	Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu	Rs 414 per day (Rs 10,764 per month)
<b>Region IV</b>	Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Punjab	Rs 447 per day (Rs 11,622 per month)
<b>Region V</b>	Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim, Mizoram and Tripura	

- ◆ The report undertook a rigorous analysis and verified the changes in the demographic structure, consumption pattern, nutritional intakes, composition of food baskets and the relative importance of non-food consumption items to address the realities in the Indian context.

*Source: PIB, Business Standard*

## Government to conduct survey of all agricultural households in India

### Why in news?

- ☞ The government has decided to conduct a survey of all agricultural households in the country to assess the plight of farmers for the current crop year (July-June).

### Objective

- ◆ The survey aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of the situation of agricultural households in the country, including their income, expenditure and indebtedness.

### Key Highlights

- ◆ The survey called the ‘Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural Households’ will be conducted during the 77th round of the National Sample Survey in the current calendar year.
- ◆ It would mainly focus on assessing the income, expenditure and indebtedness of the agricultural households among other issues for the current crop year.
- ◆ The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) has been chosen as the nodal agency.
- ◆ The last such survey was conducted for crop year 2012-13. Post it, the National Sample Survey Office has not conducted any such survey.
- ◆ The comparable estimates for rise in income of agricultural households during 2014-2018 are also not available.

### The periodicity of such a survey

- ◆ The periodicity of such a survey is decided on the basis of requirements of the concerned ministry, adequacy of the current data, availability of resources and manpower, emerging areas of concern and development priorities of the government.
- ◆ Given the vastness of the country’s size and resources involved, the NSSO conducts other surveys on household consumer expenditure and employment-unemployment after every five years.
- ◆ The inter-ministerial committee formed on doubling farmers’ income by 2022 has considered the estimates of agriculture households’ income obtained from the 70th round of NSS survey data as the base level income.

*Source: Economic Times*



## e-wallets: RBI extends KYC compliance norms by six months

### Why in news?

- ☞ In a relief to e-wallet companies, the Reserve Bank of India extended by six months the deadline for compliance with Know Your Customer (KYC) norms, for prepaid payment instrument (PPI) issuers.

### Background:

- ◆ The earlier deadline was February 28.
- ◆ E-wallet companies were caught in a bind over looming deadline as companies were apprehensive that they will not be able to meet the central bank's deadline to complete KYC of all customers by February-end.
- ◆ Based on requests received from various stakeholders to increase the above timeline on account of difficulties in undertaking Aadhaar e-KYC and time necessary to put in place alternative systems for completing the KYC process, it has been decided to allow PPI issuers additional time of six months for completion of the KYC process.

### Prepaid payment instrument (PPI):

- ◆ PPIs are instruments that facilitate purchase of goods and services, including financial services and remittance facilities, against the value stored on such instruments.
- ◆ The value stored on such instruments represents the value paid for by the holders by cash, by debit to a bank account, or by credit card.
- ◆ The pre-paid instruments can be issued as smart cards, magnetic stripe cards, internet accounts, internet wallets, mobile accounts, mobile wallets, paper vouchers and any such instrument which can be used to access the pre-paid amount.
- ◆ The Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 provides for the regulation and supervision of PPIs in India.
- ◆ These payment instruments are licensed and regulated by the Reserve Bank of India.

### Three types of PPIs:

1. Closed system PPIs
  2. Semi-closed system PPIs
  3. Open system PPIs.
- ◆ The most common example of a closed system PPI is a brand-specific gift card. Such cards, physical or otherwise, can be used only at specific locations, and cannot be used to transfer funds from one account to another.

### Who can issue prepaid payment instruments in India?

- ☞ Only those companies incorporated in India and have a minimum paid-up capital of Rs. 5 crore and minimum positive net worth of Rs. 1 crore at all the times are permitted to issue PPIs in India.

*Source: Indian Express*

## **KUSUM Yojana: CCEA approves ‘Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan’ Scheme for farmers’ welfare**

### **Why in news?**

☞ The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on February 19, 2019 approved the launch of ‘Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan’ (KUSUM Yojana) with the objective of providing financial and water security to farmers.

The Central Government will provide a total financial support of Rs 34,422 crore for the scheme.

### **Components of KUSUM Yojana**

- ◆ The Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan scheme consists of three components:
- ◆ **Component-A:** 10,000 MW of Decentralised Ground Mounted Grid Connected Renewable Power Plants.
- ◆ **Component-B:** Installation of 17.50 lakh standalone Solar Powered Agriculture Pumps.
- ◆ **Component-C:** Solarisation of 10 Lakh Grid-connected Solar Powered Agriculture Pumps.
- ◆ With all these three components combined, the scheme aims to add a solar capacity of 25,750 MW by 2022.
- ◆ The Component-A and Component-C will be implemented on pilot mode. The Component-A aims for 1000 MW capacity, while, Component-C aims for the one lakh grid connected agriculture pumps. On the other hand, the Component-B will be implemented in full-fledged manner.

### **Component-A**

- ◆ Under Component A, Renewable power plants of capacity 500 KW to 2 MW will be setup by individual farmers, cooperatives, panchayats or farmer producer organisations (FPO) on their lands.
- ◆ The power generated will be purchased by the DISCOMs in tariffs determined by respective State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERC). The scheme will open a continuous source of income to the rural land owners.
- ◆ The DISCOMs will be provided with the Performance Based Incentives of Rs. 0.40 per unit for five years.

### **Component-B**

- ◆ Under Component B, individual farmers will be supported to install standalone solar pumps of capacity up to 7.5 HP. Under the scheme, the Solar PV capacity in kW equal to the pump capacity in Horsepower (HP) is allowed.

### **Component C**

- ◆ Under Component C, individual farmers will be supported to solarise pumps of capacity up to 7.5 HP. Solar PV capacity up to two times of pump capacity in kW is allowed under the scheme.
- ◆ The farmer will be able to use the generated energy to meet the irrigation needs and the excess available energy will be sold to DISCOM. This will help to create an avenue for extra income to the farmers.

## Funding of Component-B and Component-C

- ◆ For both Component-B and Component-C, central financial assistance (CFA) of 30 percent of the benchmark cost or the tender cost, whichever is lower, will be provided.
- ◆ The State Government will give a subsidy of 30 percent; and the remaining 40 percent will be provided by the farmer. Bank finance may be made available for meeting 30 percent of the cost. The remaining 10 percent will be provided by the farmer.
- ◆ Higher CFA of 50 percent will be provided for North Eastern States, Sikkim, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

## Impact

- ◆ The Scheme will have substantial environmental impact in terms of savings of **CO2 emissions**. All three components of the Scheme will save about 27 million tonnes of CO2 emission per annum.
- ◆ The Component-B of the Scheme on standalone solar pumps may result in **saving of 1.2 billion liters of diesel** per annum and associated savings in the foreign exchange due to reduction of import of crude oil.
- ◆ The scheme will have **direct employment potential**. Besides increasing self-employment, it will generate employment opportunity equivalent to 6.31 lakh job years for skilled and unskilled workers.

*Source: The Hindu ,PIB*

## Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Yojana

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Ministry of Labour and Employment on February 15, 2019 launched the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan Yojana (PM-SYM), a mega pension scheme for unorganised sector. The scheme was announced in the Interim Budget 2019.
- ☞ Implemented from February 15 itself, the PM-SYM is a voluntary and contributory pension scheme that will engage as many as 42 crore workers in the unorganised sector.

### Eligibility

- ◆ The unorganised sector workers, with income of less than Rs 15,000 per month and who belong to the entry age group of 18-40 years, will be eligible for the scheme.
- ◆ Those workers should not be covered under New Pension Scheme (NPS), Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme or Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).
- ◆ He or she should not be an income tax payer.

### Who are the workers of unorganised sector?

- ◆ The workers of unorganised sector can be home based workers, street vendors, mid-day meal workers, head loaders, brick kiln workers, cobblers, rag pickers, domestic workers, washer men, rickshaw pullers, landless labourers, own account workers, agricultural workers, construction workers, beedi workers, handloom workers, leather workers, audio- visual workers and similar other occupations.

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## **Benefits under Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan Yojana**

- ♦ **Minimum Assured Pension:** Each subscriber under the scheme will receive minimum assured pension of Rs 3000 per month after attaining the age of 60 years.
- ♦ **In case of death during receipt of pension:** If the subscriber dies during the receipt of pension, his or her spouse will be entitled to receive 50 percent of the pension as family pension. This family pension is applicable only to spouse.
- ♦ **In case of death before the age of 60 years:** If a beneficiary has given regular contribution and dies before attaining the age of 60 years, his or her spouse will be entitled to continue the scheme subsequently by payment of regular contribution or may even exit the scheme.

## **Contribution to the scheme**

- ♦ **Contribution by the Subscriber:** The subscriber is required to contribute the prescribed contribution amount from the age of joining the scheme till the age of 60 years.
- ♦ **Medium of contribution:** The subscriber can contribute to the PM-SYM through 'auto-debit' facility from his or her savings bank account or from his or her Jan- Dhan account.
- ♦ **Equal contribution by the Central Government:** Under the PM-SYM, the prescribed age-specific contribution by the beneficiary and the matching contribution by the Central Government will be made on a '50:50 basis'.
- ♦ For example, if a person enters the scheme at an age of 29 years, he or she is required to contribute Rs 100 per month till the age of 60 years and the equal amount of Rs 100 will be contributed by the Central Government.
- ♦ **Enrollment agency:** The enrolment will be carried out by all the Community Service Centers (CSCs).

## **Exit and Withdrawal**

- ♦ Considering the unpredictable nature of employability of these workers, the exit provisions of scheme have been kept flexible. These provisions are:
- ♦ In case subscriber exits the scheme within a period of less than 10 years, the beneficiary's share of contribution only will be returned to him with savings bank interest rate.
- ♦ If subscriber exits after a period of 10 years or more but before 60 years of age, the beneficiary's share of contribution along with accumulated interest will be returned.
- ♦ If a beneficiary has given regular contributions and died due to any cause, his/ her spouse will be entitled to continue the scheme subsequently by payment of regular contribution or exit by receiving the beneficiary's contribution along with accumulated interest.
- ♦ If a beneficiary has given regular contributions and become permanently disabled before 60 years of age and is unable to continue to contribute, his/ her spouse will be entitled to continue the scheme subsequently by payment of regular contribution or can exit the scheme by receiving the beneficiary's contribution with interest.
- ♦ After the death of subscriber as well as his or her spouse, the entire corpus will be credited back to the fund.

**Other Details**

- ◆ **Fund Management:** PM-SYM will be a Central Sector Scheme administered by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and implemented through Life Insurance Corporation of India and CSCs. LIC will be the Pension Fund Manager and responsible for Pension pay out.
- ◆ **Default of Contributions:** If a subscriber has not paid the contribution continuously, he or she will be allowed to regularise his contribution by paying entire outstanding dues along with penalty charges.
- ◆ **Pension Pay Out:** Once the beneficiary joins the scheme at the entry age of 18-40 years, the beneficiary has to contribute till 60 years of age. On attaining the age of 60 years, the subscriber will get the assured monthly pension of Rs 3000.
- ◆ **Doubt and Clarification:** In case of any doubt, clarification provided by the Directorate General Labour Welfare (DGLW) will be final.

*Source: The Hindu*

**President approves changes in Stamp Act, to help curb tax evasion**

**Why in news?**

- ☞ President Ram Nath Kovind gave his assent to changes in the Indian Stamp Act, 1899, which will rationalise and harmonise the system of levying stamp duty and help curb tax evasion.

**Background:**

- ☞ The Amendments to the Indian Stamp Act, 1899, were introduced as part of the Finance Act 2019, and was approved by Parliament.

**Proposed amendments:**

- ◆ Creation of the legal and institutional mechanism to enable states to collect stamp duty on securities market instruments at one place by one agency (through the Stock Exchanges or Clearing Corporations authorised by the stock exchange or by the Depositories).
- ◆ A Mechanism for appropriate sharing the stamp duty with relevant state governments based on the state of domicile of the buying client.
- ◆ Creation of a Coordination Council comprising representatives from Union and States under Article 263 of the Indian Constitution tasked with the responsibility of making recommendations regarding review/revision of stamp duty rates.

**What will be the stamp duty rates?**

- ◆ As regards the stamp duty rates, the duties levied by Maharashtra will be taken as a benchmark as it accounts for 70% of the total collection.
- ◆ The rates would be chosen in such a manner that it provides a revenue neutral position to the state governments while reducing the overall tax burden for investors.
- ◆ The stamp duty will have to be paid by either the buyer or seller of financial security, as against the current practice of levying the duty on both.

*Source: Live Mint*

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## Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) unveiled

### Why in news?

- ☞ To provide an assured income support to the small and marginal farmers, the Government has unveiled the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN).

### About the PM-KISAN:

- ☞ In the Interim budget of 2019-20, Government has announced the 'Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)' for providing an assured income support to the small and marginal farmers.

### Highlights

- ◆ Under this programme, vulnerable landholding farmer families, having cultivable land upto 2 hectares, will be provided direct income support at the rate of Rs. 6,000 per year.
- ◆ This income support will be transferred directly into the bank accounts of beneficiary farmers, in three equal instalments of Rs. 2,000 each.
- ◆ This programme will be funded by Government of India.
- ◆ This programme will entail an annual expenditure of Rs. 75,000 crores.

### Significance of Programme:

- ◆ Around 12 crore small and marginal farmer families are expected to benefit.
- ◆ PM-KISAN would not only provide assured supplemental income to the most vulnerable farmer families, but would also meet their emergent needs especially before the harvest season.
- ◆ PM-KISAN would pave the way for the farmers to earn and live a respectable living.

*Source: PIB, The Hindu*

## Dharmapada Samvaad-Skill Saathi Youth Conclave in Odisha

### Why in news?

- ☞ Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Minister inaugurated Nua Odisha, Dharmapada Samvaad-Skill Saathi Youth Conclave in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.
- ☞ The programme aims to create a mass movement around skill development in the state and inspire youth to make the most of various skill development opportunities in the country.

### Skill Saathi Scheme

- ◆ The Skills Career Counselling Scheme aims to counsel 1 crore candidates from the age group of 15–35 years focusing on School & College drop-outs, young adults from the community, college students, polytechnic students, ITI students, Diploma students, Graduates, Post-Graduates, NEET category (Not in Employment education or Training), etc. pan India from August 2018.
- ◆ Counselling will be conducted on a standardized module as defined by NSDC/MSDE.
- ◆ The Skill Saathi initiative has so far mobilised and counselled over 1 lakh candidate in Odisha and over 10 lakh youth across the country in the past three months.
- ◆ Skills on Wheels – Skills on Wheels will be a part of the Skill Saathi in order to create awareness about skill development among youth at their doorsteps.



## Objectives of the Scheme:

- ◆ Create Awareness about the Skill India Mission and inform the youth of India about vocational education and its opportunities.
- ◆ Sensitize prospective candidates about available Market Opportunities under the Skill India Mission.
- ◆ Facilitate Psychometric Testing and Face-To-Face Counseling Interventions to create an individual-level impact to guide aspirants to make the right choice of training and subsequent employment/ entrepreneurship.
- ◆ Facilitate Understanding of the concepts of New India, the prospects of India becoming the Skill Capital of the World and how the new generation of youth can become drivers of change.

*Source: Business Standard*

## Union Cabinet approves National Mineral Policy 2019

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 28, 2019 approved National Mineral Policy 2019.
- ☞ The New National Mineral Policy will ensure more effective regulation and will lead to sustainable mining sector development in future while addressing the issues of project affected persons especially those residing in tribal areas.

### Objective

- ☞ The main objective of the policy is to have a more effective, meaningful and implementable policy that will bring in transparency, better regulation and enforcement, balanced social and economic growth as well as sustainable mining practices.

### Key Facts

- ◆ The National Mineral Policy 2019 includes provisions which will give boost to mining sector such as:
- ◆ Introduction of Right of First Refusal for RP/PL holders
- ◆ Encouraging the private sector to take up exploration,
- ◆ Auctioning in virgin areas for composite RP cum PL cum ML on revenue share basis
- ◆ Encouragement of merger and acquisition of mining entities
- ◆ Transfer of mining leases and creation of dedicated mineral corridors to boost private sector mining areas.
- The 2019 policy proposes to grant status of industry to mining activity to boost financing of mining for private sector and for acquisitions of mineral assets in other countries by private sector.

- ◆ It also mentions that long term import export policy for minerals will help private sector in better planning and stability in business.
- ◆ The new policy also mentions rationalise reserved areas given to PSUs which have not been used and to put these areas to auction, which will give more opportunity to private sector for participation.
- ◆ It also mentions to make efforts to harmonise taxes, levies and royalty with world benchmarks to help private sector.

### **Other Details**

- ◆ The National Mineral Policy, 2019 will focus on make in India initiative and gender sensitivity in terms of the vision.
- ◆ As far as the regulation in Minerals is concerned, E-Governance, IT enabled systems, awareness and Information campaigns have been incorporated.
- ◆ Besides, regarding the role of state in mineral development online public portal with provision for generating triggers at higher level in the event of delay of clearances has been put in place.

### **Significance**

- ◆ The National Mineral Policy 2019 aims to attract private investment through incentives while the efforts would be made to maintain a database of mineral resources and tenements under mining tenement systems.
- ◆ The new policy would focus on the use of coastal waterways and inland shipping for evacuation and transportation of minerals and encourage dedicated mineral corridors to facilitate the transportation of minerals.
- ◆ It proposes a long term export import policy for the mineral sector to provide stability and as an incentive for investing in large scale commercial mining activity.
- ◆ It also introduces the concept of Inter-Generational Equity that deals with the well-being not only of the present generation but also of the generations to come and also proposes to constitute an inter-ministerial body to institutionalise the mechanism for ensuring sustainable development in mining.

### **Background**

- ◆ The National Mineral Policy 2019 replaces the extant National Mineral Policy 2008 which was announced in the year 2008.
- ◆ The impetus to review NMP 2008 came about by way of a direction from the Supreme Court through its judgment dated August 2, 2017 in Writ Petition (Civil) No. 114/2014 entitled common cause v/s union of India and others.
- ◆ In compliance of the directions of the apex Court, the Ministry of Mines had constituted a committee on August 14, 2017 under the chairmanship of Dr K Rajeswara Rao, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Mines to review NMP 2008.
- ◆ The Committee had members from central ministries and departments, state governments, industry associations and subordinate offices of the Ministry of Mines.

- ◆ The committee also invited concerned NGOs and institutional bodies to take part in the deliberation of the committee meetings. Based on the deliberations held at committee meetings and stakeholders' comments and suggestions, a committee report was prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Mines.
- ◆ The Ministry of Mines accepted the committee report and invited the comments and suggestions of the stakeholders as part of the PLCP process.
- ◆ Then, based on the received suggestions in PLCP process and the suggestions from the central ministries, the Ministry of Mines finalised the National Mineral Policy 2019.

*Source: PIB The Hindu*

## GST Council reduces GST Rate on Real Estate projects

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council met on February 24, 2019 for its 33rd meeting and slashed GST rate on under-construction residential properties and the affordable housing projects.

### The revised GST rates:

- ◆ In case of non-affordable houses, the GST rate for under-construction flats and houses has been brought to 5 percent without Input Tax Credit (ITC), down from the present 12 percent.
- ◆ In case of affordable houses, the GST rate has been reduced to 1 percent without ITC from 8 percent.
- ◆ Input Tax Credit means that at the time of paying tax on output, you can reduce the tax you have already paid on inputs and pay the balance amount

### Definition of affordable housing

- ◆ An affordable house is a house or flat of carpet area of up to 90 sq m in non-metropolitan cities/towns and 60 sq m in metropolitan cities having value up to Rs 45 lakh (both for metropolitan and non-metropolitan cities).
- ◆ Metropolitan Cities are Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi NCR (limited to Delhi, Noida, Greater Noida, Ghaziabad, Gurgaon, and Faridabad), Hyderabad, Kolkata and Mumbai (whole of MMR).

### What led the GST Council to undertake such decisions?

- ◆ The GST Council undertook such decisions after considering that the Real Estate sector is one of the largest contributors to the national GDP and provides employment opportunity to large numbers of people.
- ◆ However, lately there have been reports of slowdown in the sector and low off-take of under-construction houses. To boost the residential segment of the real estate sector, the GST Council decided to slash the rates on housing.
- ◆ Such decision was being demanded by the sector especially to boost the government's vision of 'Housing for all by 2022'.

### Benefits of these changes:

- ◆ The buyer of house will get a fair price.
- ◆ Interest of the buyer and consumer will get protected.
- ◆ Cash flow problem for the sector will be addressed by exemption of GST on development rights, long term lease (premium), FSI (Floor Space Index), etc.
- ◆ Unutilised ITC, which used to become cost at the end of the project, will get removed and will lead to better pricing.
- ◆ Tax structure and tax compliance will become simpler for builders.

*Source: The Hindu, Business Standard*

### Government cleared proposals to encourage investments in Start-Ups

#### Why in news?

- ☞ The Government recently cleared proposals to encourage investments in Start-Ups, aiming at simplifying the process of exemptions for Start-ups from the 'Angel Tax' under Section 56 (2) (viib) of Income Tax Act, 1961.
- ☞ As per the new norms, registered startups will be exempted from tax on funding of up to Rs 25 crore compared with the existing limit of Rs 10 crore.

#### Significance

- ◆ The new norms aim to catalyse entrepreneurship by enabling angel investments by innovators across all sections of society and all sectors of economy.
- ◆ Till date, the startups were availing of the tax concession only on the condition that their total investment, including funding from angel investors, does not exceed Rs 10 crore.

#### Definition of 'Start-ups' expanded

- ◆ The norms expand the definition of a 'Start-Up'. Now an entity will be considered as a Start-up up to 10 years from its date of incorporation and registration instead of the previous period of 7 years.
- ◆ Similarly, an entity will continue to be recognised as a Start-up, if its turnover for any of the financial years since incorporation and registration has not exceeded Rs 100 crore instead of Rs. 25 crore limit earlier.

#### Cases of Exemption of Start-Ups from Angel Tax

Start-ups will be exempted from the Angel Tax in following cases:

- ◆ Investments of up to Rs 25 crore received by eligible Start-ups for shares issued or proposed to be issued.
- ◆ Investments made by a listed company having a net worth of at least Rs 100 crore or a turnover of at least Rs 250 crore.

- ◆ The aggregate limit of Rs. 25 crore will exclude consideration received by eligible Start-ups for the following classes of persons:
- ◆ Investments made by non-residents will also be exempted.
- ◆ Start-ups will need to file a duly signed declaration with DPIIT for availing of the exemption. The declaration will be transmitted by DPIIT to the CBDT.

### **Eligibility for exemption from the Angel Tax**

- ◆ A Start-up will be eligible for exemption under Section 56 (2) (viib) of Income Tax Act, if it is a private limited company recognised by Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) and is not investing in:
  - ◆ Building or land or both, unless it is for its business or used by it for purposes of renting or held by it as stock-in-trade.
  - ◆ Loans and advances, other than loans extended in the ordinary course of business by the Start-ups
  - ◆ Capital contribution made to any other entity
  - ◆ Shares and securities
  - ◆ a motor vehicle, aircraft, yacht or any other mode of transport, the actual cost of which exceeds Rs 10 lakh, other than that held by the Start-ups for the purpose of plying, hiring, leasing or as stock-in-trade
  - ◆ Jewelry other than that held by the Start-ups as stock-in-trade

*Source: PIB, Economic Times*

### **India's first Aqua Mega Food Park commissioned in Andhra Pradesh**

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

- ☞ Union Minister of Food Processing Industries Harsimrat Kaur Badal on February 12, 2019 commissioned Godavari Mega Aqua Food Park at Tundurru Village in Bhimavaram Mandal, West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh through video conferencing.
- ☞ The park is promoted by Godavari Mega Aqua Food Park Pvt. Ltd. It will be the first Mega Aqua Food Park operationalised exclusively for fish and marine products processing in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

#### **Highlights**

- ◆ The Godavari Mega Aqua Food Park Pvt. Ltd has been set up in 57.81 acre of land at a cost of Rs. 122.60 crores.
- ◆ The facilities created by the developer at Central Processing Centre (CPC) of this mega food park include pre-processing line for fish of 1.5 TPH, pre-processing line for shrimp of 1.5 TPH, freezing of fish of 1.5 TPH, freezing of shrimp of 1.5 TPH, cold storage for fish of 2000MT, cold storage for shrimp of 1000MT, ice plant, food testing laboratory besides state of art enabling infrastructure.

- ◆ The park also has a common administrative building for office and other uses by the entrepreneurs and 2 PPCs at Amalapuram EG-District and Karlapalem, Guntur District having facilities for primary processing and storage near the farms in the catchment area to benefit farmers.
- ◆ This mega food park will benefit the people of West Godavari-District as well as nearby Districts of East Godavari, Krishna of Andhra Pradesh and nearby districts of Telangana.

### **Significance**

- ☞ The modern infrastructure for food processing created at park will benefit the farmers, growers, processors and consumers of Andhra Pradesh and adjoining areas immensely and prove to be a big boost to the growth of the food processing sector in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

### **Rationale behind the move**

- ◆ The Union Ministry of Food Processing Industries is implementing Mega Food Park Scheme in the country to give a major boost to the food processing sector by adding value and reducing food wastage at each stage of the supply chain with particular focus on perishables.
- ◆ The mega food parks create modern infrastructure facilities for food processing along the value chain from farm to market with strong forward and backward linkages through a cluster based approach.
- ◆ Further, common facilities and enabling infrastructure is created at central processing centre and facilities for primary processing and storage is created near the farm in the form of Primary Processing Centers (PPCs) and Collection Centers (CCs).
- ◆ Under the Scheme, Government of India provides financial assistance upto Rs 50.00 crore per mega food park project.
- ◆ Besides this aqua food park, the Ministry had sanctioned another mega food park in Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh. It was inaugurated on July 9, 2012.
- ◆ Currently, the third Mega Food Park sanctioned by the Ministry is under implementation at Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh.

***Source: PIB***





## Environment and Ecology

### Third Indo-German Environment Forum held in New Delhi

#### Why in news?

- ☞ The third Indo-German Environment Forum with the theme “Cleaner Air, Greener Economy” was held in New Delhi on February 13, 2019.
- ☞ While inaugurating the forum, Union Environment Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan said that India and Germany have had a rich cooperation engagement for the last 60 years which extends to sectors such as natural resource management, urban environment protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation and innovative green technologies.

#### Highlights

- ◆ The one-day event involved panel discussions and parallel sessions focused on challenges, solutions and necessary framework conditions of air pollution control, waste management and circular economy as well as the implementation of NDCs and SDGs based on Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030 of UN respectively.
- ◆ It saw participation from around 250 representatives of ministries, business and science as well as non-governmental organisations.
- ◆ The forum provided an ideal platform for the bilateral exchange of high-level policy-makers and other key players on international environmental and climate policy and cooperation between the two countries.
- ◆ It was organised by the two environment ministries in cooperation with the Asia-Pacific Committee of German Business and the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- ◆ Besides this, two Joint Declarations of Intent (JDI) were exchanged during the forum between CPCB Chairman SP Singh Parihar and German Environment Agency President Maria Krautzberger.

#### The declarations were signed to increase cooperation in the following areas:

- (i) Clean air and combating air pollution
- (ii) Preparation of reference and COINDS documents for textile sector.

#### Significance

- ◆ Indo-German bilateral relations are founded on common democratic principles. Currently, Germany is amongst India’s most important partners both bilaterally and in the global context.
- ◆ According to German Federal Environment Minister Svenja Schulze, the progress and implementation of 2030 agenda is slow and window of opportunity for low carbon economy is dwindling and so the government, industry and society should do more.
- ◆ She further stated that Indo-German Environment Forum needs to build on experience exchange and cooperation will be strengthened in the areas of marine litter, waste to energy, biodiversity, waste and water.

## **Background**

- ◆ Four working groups had met this year in the run-up to the forum, to discuss the progress made and to bring in new topics of mutual benefits.
- ◆ Few of the outcomes have been cooperation in the field of marine litter, air pollution control, waste management, water pollution, circular economy, NDC implementation, SDG monitoring and climate change with focus on forestry and adaptation.

*Source: The Hindu*

## **Cheetahs from Namibia to be kept at Nauradehi sanctuary, NTCA tells SC**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ African cheetahs, to be translocated in India from Namibia, will be kept at Nauradehi wildlife sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh, said the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

### **Supreme court and NTCA:**

- ◆ NTCA told the apex court that the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) had given a ‘no objection’ for the translocation.
- ◆ However, one of the counsels appearing in the matter told the supreme court as to why the NTCA were not re-introducing Indian cheetahs in India. NTCA want to re-introduce African cheetahs. Indian cheetahs are available in Iran. Why they are not re-introducing Indian cheetahs?
- ◆ The matter is postponed for next hearing.

### **India’s Cheetah reintroduction programme:**

- ◆ The Wildlife Institute of India at Dehradun had prepared a ₹ 260-crore cheetah re-introduction project six years ago.
- ◆ It was estimated that an amount of ₹ 25 crore to ₹ 30 crore would be needed to build an enclosure in an area of 150 sq km for the cheetahs in Nauradehi.
- ◆ The proposal was to put the felines in the enclosure with huge boundary walls before being released in the wild.
- ◆ Nauradehi was found to be the most suitable area for the cheetahs as its forests are not very dense to restrict the fast movement of the spotted cat. Besides, the prey base for cheetahs is also in abundance at the sanctuary.
- ◆ According to the earlier action plan, around 20 cheetahs were to be translocated to Nauradehi from Namibia in Africa.
- ◆ The Namibia Cheetah Conservation Fund had then showed its willingness to donate the felines to India. However, the State was not ready to finance the plan contending that it was the Centre’s project.

### Significance of reintroduction:

- ◆ The reintroduction of cheetahs will help restore India's open forests and grassland ecosystems, which have been suffering. Having cheetahs will result in greater biodiversity, and biodiversity is the hallmark of healthy ecosystems.
- ◆ India is also home to the world's largest free-roaming populations of livestock. Bringing back the cheetah will focus attention on pastoralism, and in doing so, help restore India's natural heritage.

### About cheetah:

- ◆ The cheetah, *Acinonyx jubatus*, is one of the oldest of the big cat species, with ancestors that can be traced back more than five million years to the Miocene era.
- ◆ The cheetah is also the world's fastest land mammal, an icon of nature.
- ◆ The species is IUCN Red Listed as vulnerable.
- ◆ With great speed and dexterity, the cheetah is known for being an excellent hunter, its kills feeding many other animals in its ecosystem—ensuring that multiple species survive.
- ◆ The country's last spotted feline died in Chhattisgarh in 1947. Later, the cheetah — which is the fastest land animal — was declared extinct in India in 1952.

### Threats:

- ◆ The reasons for extinction can all be traced to man's interference. Problems like human-wildlife conflict, loss of habitat and loss of prey, and illegal trafficking, have decimated their numbers.
- ◆ The advent of climate change and growing human populations have only made these problems worse.
- ◆ With less available land for wildlife, species that require vast home range like the cheetah are placed in competition with other animals and humans, all fighting over less space.

### About NTCA:

- ◆ In 2005, The National Tiger Conservation Authority was established in following a recommendation of the Tiger Task Force, constituted by the Prime Minister of India for reorganized management of Project Tiger and the Tiger Reserves of India.
- ◆ For this purpose, The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 was amended (Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006) to provide for constituting of the National Tiger Conservation Authority responsible for implementation of the Project Tiger Plan to protect endangered tigers.

### Nauradehi wildlife sanctuary:

- ◆ It is largest wildlife sanctuary of Madhya Pradesh in India.
- ◆ It is located at the tri junction of Sagar, Damoh and Narsingpur districts.
- ◆ It is selected for **Cheetah re-introduction Project in India**.
- ◆ It is a unique protected area where in two major river basins of India are encompassed, namely the **Narmada & Ganges**.

- ◆ Three-fourth of the wildlife sanctuary falls in the Yamuna and one fourth falls in the Narmada basin. Thus Nauradehi is such a unique biodiversity area.
- ◆ Nauradehi sanctuary management has selected **Indian Wolf** (*Canis lupus pallipes*) as **mono of Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary** due to its super predatory nature.
- ◆ The wildlife refuge is divided into six ranges:
  1. Mohli Range
  2. Singpur Range
  3. Jhapan Range
  4. Sarra Range
  5. D’Gaon Range
  6. Nauradehi Range

### Wildlife attractions:

- ◆ Leopard, Wild dog (Dholes), Nilgai (Blue bull), Sambhar, Indian Wolf, Chital, Chinkara, Sloth Bear, Wild Boar, Hyena, Crocodile etc.
- ◆ Bird watching is great as presence of large water bodies allures migratory and resident avian species. Principal flora of this jungle is Teak, Saja, Dhawda, Bhirra etc.

*Source: The Hindu*

## **Government releases publication on actions undertaken to tackle climate change**

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change recently released a publication titled “India – Spearheading Climate Solutions” on climate actions in India.
- ☞ The publication mentions the key initiatives undertaken by India under various sectors towards combating and adapting to climate change. It not only highlights the achievements towards climate action but also showcases Government’s preparedness for future.

### Highlights

- ◆ During the last four years, the Government introduced a number of policies and initiatives like e-mobility, green transportation, renewable energy, waste management, afforestation, water, etc. to minimise the impact of climate change.
- ◆ Moreover, many clean and green development initiatives have been undertaken at both the state and national level.

- ◆ Some of the key initiatives include the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), National Adaptation Fund on Climate Change (NAFCC), Climate Change Action Programme (CCAP) and State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC).
- ◆ The Government also undertook few measures to minimise the impact of climate change such as generating 175 GW of renewable energy by 2022, smart cities, electric vehicles, leapfrogging from Bharat Stage -IV to Bharat Stage-VI emission norms by April 2020, etc.

### **Major initiatives of the Government towards combating climate change**

- ◆ **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):** The Action plan covers eight major missions on Solar, Enhanced Energy Efficiency, Sustainable Habitat, Water, Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, Green India, Sustainable Agriculture and Strategic Knowledge on Climate Change.
- ◆ **International Solar Alliance (ISA):** ISA was jointly launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the then President of France, Francois Hollande on November 30, 2015 in Paris on the side-lines of CoP 21. The vision and mission of the alliance is to provide a dedicated platform for cooperation among solar resource rich countries that lie completely or partial between the Tropics of Capricorn & Cancer.
- ◆ **State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC):** State governments have drafted climate strategies aligned with the eight National Missions under the NAPCC. The strategies focus on issues ranging from climate mitigation, energy efficiency, and resource conservation to climate adaptation.
- ◆ **FAME Scheme for E-mobility:** Union Government in April 2015 launched Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric vehicles (FAME) – India Scheme with an aim to boost sales of eco-friendly vehicles in the country. It is a part of the National Mission for Electric Mobility.
- ◆ **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation & Urban Transformation (AMRUT) for Smart Cities:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 25 June 2015 launched three urban development schemes- AMRUT, Smart Cities Mission and Housing for All (Urban) with an aim to develop infrastructure.
- ◆ **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:** The scheme provides LPG connections to five crore below-poverty-line beneficiaries. The connections are given in the name of women beneficiaries to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels and conventional fuel like cow dung for cooking food, thus reducing air pollution.
- ◆ **UJALA scheme:** The scheme was launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2015 with a target of replacing 77 crore incandescent lamps with LED bulbs. The usage of LED bulbs will not only result in reducing electricity bills but also help in environment protection.
- ◆ **Swachh Bharat Mission:** Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Movement) is a campaign that was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 2, 2014. The campaign seeks to clean the streets, roads and infrastructure of the country’s 4041 statutory cities and towns.

*Source: Vikaspedia, Down to Earth*

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## NDMA to conduct national workshop on heat wave risk reduction

### Why in news?

- ☞ The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) would be conducting a two-day national workshop on heat wave risk reduction in Nagpur from February 27-28, 2019. The workshop has been organised in collaboration with the Maharashtra Government.
- ☞ The workshop will be attended by experts on heat wave as well as other stakeholders such as early warning and forecasting agencies, state governments and research institutions apart from Members and senior officials from NDMA.

### Objective

- ◆ The workshop aims to sensitize the states to the need of preparing and implementing specific heat action plans.

### Key Highlights

- ◆ During the workshop, some of the most vulnerable states, which have done a commendable job in mitigating the impact of heat waves, will share their experiences and best practices to help other stakeholders draw lessons.
- ◆ The workshop will also provide an opportunity for community capacity building and awareness generation among vulnerable populations.
- ◆ It will also discuss the integration of long-term heat risk reduction measures into developmental plans as well as climate change adaptation.

### Significance

- ◆ Heat wave has emerged as one of the major severe weather events around the globe in recent years.
- ◆ Climate change is driving temperatures higher as well as increasing the frequency and severity of heat waves. India too is experiencing increased instances of heat waves every year.
- ◆ Hence, the NDMA has been closely working with the vulnerable states to reduce the adverse impacts of the heat wave.

### Background

- ◆ Sustained efforts including timely release and effective implementation of the national guidelines on heat wave, preparation of heat action plans by 13 vulnerable States, regular follow-up and monitoring by NDMA, extensive awareness generation campaigns through print, electronic and social media, preparedness workshops in 2017 and 2018, have significantly brought down the number of heat-related deaths in the past few years.

*Source: PIB*



## India, Norway launch ‘India-Norway Marine Pollution Initiative’ to combat Marine Pollution

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change recently signed a Letter of Intent (LoI) with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to launch the ‘India-Norway Marine Pollution Initiative’.

### Key Facts

- ◆ The launch of the initiative came after the Indian and Norwegian governments signed an MoU to establish the ‘**India-Norway Ocean Dialogue**’ during the Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg’s visit to India in January 2019.
- ◆ A **Joint Task Force on Blue Economy** was also established under the aegis of the MoU to promote multi-sectoral cooperation in various aspects of Blue Economy.
- ◆ The task force comprises of government officials, researchers and experts. It was tasked to develop sustainable solutions within strategic areas of the blue economy, such as maritime and marine sector in addition to energy sector.
- ◆ Blue Economy is defined as ‘sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and better ocean ecosystem health’. The Blue Economy comprises various activities such as fisheries, marine transport, waste management, tourism, climate change, etc.

### India-Norway Marine Pollution Initiative

- ◆ The India-Norway Marine Pollution Initiative will combat marine pollution, which is one of the fastest growing environmental concerns.
- ◆ Norway and India will share experiences, competence and collaborate on efforts to develop clean and healthy oceans.
- ◆ Both the sides will jointly collaborate for sustainable use of ocean resources and growth in the blue economy.
- ◆ Through a range of implementing partners, this initiative will seek to support local governments in implementing sustainable waste management practices, develop systems for collecting and analysing information about sources and scope of marine pollution.
- ◆ They will also work towards beach clean-up efforts, awareness raising campaigns and pilot project using plastic waste as fuel substitution for coal in cement production.

*Source: PIB*



## Science and Technology, Defense, Health

### India's communication satellite GSAT-31 launched from French Guiana

#### Why in news?

- ☞ Indian Space Research Organisation's latest communication satellite, GSAT-31 was successfully launched by Arianespace aboard its launch vehicle Ariane 5 from the spaceport in French Guiana on February 5, 2019.
- ☞ The launch vehicle Ariane 5 VA-247 lifted off from Kourou Launch Base in Guiana Space Center (CSG) at 2:31 am (IST) carrying two telecommunications satellites. This is Arianespace's first launch of the year and the 103rd Ariane 5 mission.

#### Ariane 5 carried two communication satellites:

1. Saudi Geostationary Satellite 1/Hellas Sat 4 and Hellas Sat
2. ISRO's GSAT-31

#### GSAT-31

- ◆ GSAT-31 is a telecommunications satellite designed and manufactured by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). It is India's 40th communication satellite and derives its heritage from ISRO's earlier INSAT/GSAT satellite series.
- ◆ After separation from Ariane-5 upper stage, the two solar arrays of GSAT-31 were automatically deployed in quick succession and ISRO's Master Control Facility at Hassan in Karnataka took over the command and control of GSAT-31 and found its health parameters normal.
- ◆ In the coming days, ISRO scientists will undertake phase-wise orbit-raising manoeuvres to place the satellite in Geostationary Orbit (36,000 km above the equator) using its onboard propulsion system.
- ◆ During the final stages of its orbit raising operations, the antenna reflector of GSAT-31 will be deployed. Following this, the satellite will be put in its final orbital configuration. The satellite will be operational after the successful completion of all in-orbit tests.

#### Key Features

- ◆ With a lift-off mass of 2536 kg, the telecommunications satellite will augment the Ku-band transponder capacity in Geostationary Orbit for at least 15 years.
- ◆ It will further provide continuity to operational services on some of the in-orbit satellites. It will also help bridge the digital divide in the Indian subcontinent as part of an ambitious Indian space program, whose objectives are to develop India while pursuing scientific research and planetary exploration.

- ◆ It has a unique configuration of providing flexible frequency segments and flexible coverage. Hence, it will provide communication services to Indian mainland and islands.
- ◆ It will also provide DTH Television Services, connectivity to VSATs for ATM, Stock-exchange, Digital Satellite News Gathering (DSNG) and e-governance applications. The satellite will also be used for bulk data transfer for a host of emerging telecommunication applications.

### **Saudi Geostationary Satellite 1/Hellas Sat 4**

- ◆ The Saudi Geostationary Satellite 1/Hellas Sat 4 (also called HS-4/SGS-1) satellite comprises two payloads, with coverage zones encompassing three continents- Europe, the Middle East and South Africa:
  1. The **Saudi Geostationary Satellite 1** communications payload will provide advanced Ka-band spot beam communications services for Saudi Arabia’s KACST (King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology), as well as secure communications for countries belonging to the Gulf Cooperative Council region.
  2. The **Hellas Sat 4** communications payload, on the other hand, will offer advanced Ku-band regional beam communications services for Arabsat’s subsidiary Hellas Sat, a Greek-Cypriot satellite operator which provides services to leading Direct-to-Home (DTH) operators by delivering contents to more than three million households.
- ◆ The HS-4/SGS-1 satellite was designed, assembled and integrated by the US manufacturer Lockheed Martin Space.

### **Arianespace**

- ◆ Arianespace provides launch services for all types of satellites into all orbits. It has orbited more than 590 satellites since 1980, using its three launchers, Ariane, Soyuz and Vega, from launch sites in French Guiana (South America) and Baikonur, Kazakhstan.
- ◆ It is headquartered in Evry, near Paris and has a technical facility at the Guiana Space Center, Europe’s Spaceport in French Guiana.
- ◆ It is a subsidiary of ArianeGroup, which holds 74 per cent of its share capital, with the balance held by 15 other shareholders from the European launcher industry.

*Source: The Hindu*

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## India's fighter jet 'LCA Tejas' now fully combat-ready; gets Final Operational Clearance

### Why in news?

- ☞ Landmark day for India's defence sector, India's first self-made fighter jet, Light Combat Aircraft Tejas MK I (LCA Tejas) on February 20, 2019 received the Final Operational Clearance for induction into the Indian Air Force (IAF) as a fully-weaponised fighter jet.

### Key Facts

- ◆ The formal declaration of Final Operational Clearance (FOC) of the aircraft was made by Dr G Satheesh Reddy, Chairman of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Secretary of Defence (R&D).
- ◆ The military aviation regulator CEMILAC handed over the FOC Certificate and other release-to-service documents to Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa during the ongoing 'Aero India 2019' event.
- ◆ Prior to this, the LCA Tejas was an Initial Operational Clearance (IOC) aircraft.

### Difference between FOC and IOC Aircraft

- ◆ The Final Operational Clearance (FOC) aircraft has several additional capabilities compared to the Initial Operational Clearance (IOC) aircraft.
- ◆ The primary difference is that a FOC aircraft has more advanced missile capability with a significantly enhanced range.
- ◆ Some of the more advanced capabilities of the FOC aircraft LCA Tejas are: Beyond Visual Range Missile capabilities, Air-to-Air Refuelling, Air-to-Ground FOC earmarked advanced weapons and delivery system, and general flight envelope expansion.
- ◆ The Initial Operational Clearance (IOC) was accorded to the LCA Tejas aircraft in the year 2013 and was inducted into the Indian Air Force 45 Squadron in July 2016 to prepare for combat readiness. The 45 Squadron has since flown over 1500 sorties during the trials.

### Organisations behind the LCA Tejas aircraft

- ◆ The design, development and production of the LCA Tejas aircraft were carried out by Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA), the autonomous society of DRDO as the design agency. The Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) is the manufacturer of the aircraft.
- ◆ Many other DRDO laboratories like ADE, GTRE, LRDE, Centre for Military Airworthiness & Certification (CEMILAC), etc., as well as other agencies such as BEL, CSIR, DG-AQA, and Private sector agencies have contributed in the journey of LCA.

## Light Combat Aircraft Tejas

- ◆ The Light Combat Aircraft Tejas is a supersonic, single-seat, single-engine multirole light fighter aircraft that uses fourth generation technologies.
- ◆ It was co-developed by the Aeronautical Development Agency in cooperation with the Bengaluru-based Hindustan Aeronautics Limited.
- ◆ It is built from CFC materials and has unstable aerodynamics.
- ◆ It is equipped with a quadruplex digital fly-by-wire flight control system to ease handling by the pilot.
- ◆ It incorporates an advanced glass cockpit that comprises all the round dialed electro-mechanical instruments.
- ◆ It is fitted with the coherent pulse-Doppler Multi Mode Radar that is designed to operate equally effectively in the Air to Air and Air to Surface domains.
- ◆ It is fitted with Open Architecture Computer (OAC).

*Source: The Hindu*

## 4th Global Digital Health Partnership Summit

### Why in news?

- ☞ The global intergovernmental meeting on digital health was hosted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in collaboration with World Health Organization (WHO) and the Global Digital Health Partnership (GDHP).

### Key Fact:

- ☞ The GDHP was initiated by the Australian Digital Health Agency, who will provide the first 18 months of secretariat services for the GDHP and was the host country for the inaugural summit in 2018.

### Efforts made by government towards digital healthcare:

- ◆ India took the world stage at the 71st World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland by successfully introducing and unanimous adoption of Resolution on Digital Health.
- ◆ Health Ministry is in the process of establishing an Integrated Health Information Platform for interoperability amongst various health IT systems and a pan-India exchange of Electronic Health Records of citizens ensuring privacy, security, and confidentiality of data.
- ◆ The same is to be supplemented by a pan-Indian network of disease surveillance, tele-medicine and tele-radiology and tele-education.
- ◆ National Resource Centre for EHR (Electronic Health Record) Standards has also been set up in order to augment facilitation for adoption of the notified EHR Standards.
- ◆ Ayushman Bharat is primarily dependent on maximising the use of digital tools for effective implementation and monitoring.
- ◆ The Ayushman Bharat scheme is completely digital wherein all the processes from beneficiary identification to hospital empanelment and settlement of claims are done electronically and benefits of the scheme are delivered in a mode that is cashless, paperless & completely transparent for all stake holders.

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## **Global Digital Health Partnership (GDHP):**

- ◆ Established in February 2018, the Global Digital Health Partnership (GDHP) is an international collaboration of governments, government agencies and multinational organisations dedicated to improving the health and well-being of their citizens through the best use of evidence-based digital technologies.
- ◆ The GDHP facilitates global collaboration and co-operation in the implementation of digital health services.
- ◆ There are currently 23 countries, territories and the World Health Organization participating in the GDHP.
- ◆ The GDHP is currently focused on the five work streams below.
  1. Cyber security
  2. Interoperability
  3. Evidence and Evaluation
  4. Policy Environments
  5. Clinical and Consumer Engagement

## **GDHP Member Countries:**

- ◆ Currently, 23 countries are the member of this group which include Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Estonia, Hong Kong SAR, India, Japan Republic of Indonesia, Italy, New Zealand, Netherlands Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland, Sweden, Portugal, the United Kingdom, the United States, Ukraine, Uruguay and the World Health Organization.

## **Why is the GDHP important for populations globally?**

- ◆ As countries around the world face the challenges of designing systems and delivering services that result in good health and well-being for their citizens, digital technologies can provide potential solutions.
- ◆ They can improve the safety, quality and effectiveness of healthcare, support earlier diagnosis of disease and the development of new medicines and treatments.
- ◆ They can empower patients, citizens and the care professionals who serve them.
- ◆ Governments are making significant investments to harness the power of technology and foster innovation and public-private partnerships that support high quality, sustainable health and care for all. The GDHP facilitates global collaboration and co-operation in the implementation of digital health services.
- ◆ There is currently no similar international forum to share best practice and enable co-working in digital health.

*Source: PIB, The Hindu*

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## Inland Waterways Authority of India launches new portal ‘LADIS’

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) recently launched a new portal called ‘LADIS’ – Least Available Depth Information System in New Delhi to ensure optimum use of national water ways.
- ☞ The portal will ensure that the real-time data on least available depths (LADs) is disseminated for ship and barge and cargo owners so that they can undertake transportation on the national waterways in a more planned way.

### Highlights

- ◆ The LADIS portal is hosted at on IWAI’s website and has been built in house by the IWAI.
- ◆ Initially the information of LADs will be available for national waterway 1, national waterway 2, Indo-Bangladesh Protocol route and national waterway 3, along with the date of survey. The facility will soon be expanded to other national waterways as well.
- ◆ The details of the LAD will be fed into the portal by respective surveyors and regional in-charge deputed with Inland Waterways Authority of India survey vessels, which constantly move on national waterways.
- ◆ The Inland Waterways Authority of India has designed the portal to facilitate the day to day operations of inland vessels plying on National Waterways and to avoid any hindrance in service and operation.
- ◆ It will enhance credibility and efficiency of information sharing to achieve seamless operations on National Waterways, besides pre-empting problems that may occur during movement of vessels.
- ◆ The vessel operators and cargo owners will prepare their sailing plans strictly as per applicable waterways related information (Hydrographic survey reports, River Notices) available on IWAI’s website.

### Significance

- ◆ For seamless movement of vessels, an assured depth of waterway is required.
- ◆ If real time information is made available regarding least available depths in stretches of various national waterways, it will help transporters by guiding them on the suitability of time of movement.

*Source: The Hindu*

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## Vande Bharat Express: India's first semi-high speed train

### Why in news?

- ☞ Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 15, 2019 flagged off India's first Semi High Speed Train, 'Vande Bharat Express' on New Delhi-Kanpur-Allahabad-Varanasi route from the New Delhi Railway Station.

### Key Facts

- ◆ With maximum speed of 160 kmph, Vande Bharat Express or Train-18 offers travel classes like Shatabdi Train but with better facilities with a totally new travel experience to passengers.
- ◆ Vande Bharat Express is regarded as a successor to the 30-year-old Shatabdi Express. Shatabdi was introduced in 1988 and is presently running on over 20 routes connecting metros with other important cities.

### Vande Bharat Express developed by Integral Coach Factory

- ◆ Integral Coach Factory (ICF), Chennai, a Railways Production unit, has been the force behind the complete in-house design and manufacture, computer modelling and working of the Vande Bharat Express with the help of large number of suppliers for system integration in just 18 months, in keeping with the vision of Prime Minister's vision of "Make in India".
- ◆ The major systems of the train have been designed and built in India. It offers matching global standards of performance, safety and passenger comfort and yet costing less than half of global prices.

### Features

- ◆ Touted as the Next Generation Shatabdi Express, **Vande Bharat Express** is the first long-distance train without separate locomotive (engine) and is driven by a self-propulsion module.
- ◆ It is capable of running at a speed of up to 160 kmph. It will cut travel time by 15 percent compared to the Shatabdi Express.
- ◆ The train has been developed by the Chennai-based Integral Coach Factory (ICF) at an investment of nearly Rs 100 crore.
- ◆ It is fully air-conditioned train and is equipped with CCTV cameras.
- ◆ It has 16 coaches with Chair Car type configuration with 2 Executive Class Chair Cars and 14 Chair Cars.
- ◆ It has two executive compartments in the middle with 52 seats each and the trailer coaches would have 78 seats each.
- ◆ It has soft lighting, automatic doors, footsteps and GPS-based audio-visual Passenger Information System.
- ◆ It has intelligent braking system with power regeneration for better energy efficiency thereby making it cost, energy and environment efficient.
- ◆ The footstep in a coach's doorway slides outward when the train stops at a station enabling passengers to board or deboard safely with comfort.

- ◆ The train offers some features to enhance passenger comfort which include inter-connected fully sealed gangways, automatic doors with retractable footsteps, onboard Wi-Fi and infotainment, and modular toilets with bio-vacuum systems.
- ◆ It also has provision of Divyang-friendly facilities.
- ◆ It also features rotational seats which can be aligned in the direction of travel (executive class), roller blinds and diffused LED lighting, and disabled-friendly toilets.
- ◆ All toilets are bio-vacuum type.
- ◆ The lighting is dual mode - diffused for general illumination and personal for every seat.
- ◆ Every coach has a pantry with facility to serve hot meals, hot and cold beverages.
- ◆ The insulation is meant to keep heat and noise to very low levels for additional passenger comfort.
- ◆ Adding up the green footprints, the train has regenerative braking system in the coaches which can save up to 30 percent of electrical energy.
- ◆ Speed, Safety and Service are the hallmarks of this train.

*Source: The Hindu*

## **Chinook Helicopters: First batch of 4 Boeing heavy-lift helicopters arrive in India from US**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The first batch of four Boeing heavy-lift Chinook Helicopters, CH-47F (I), arrived at the Mundra airport in Gujarat on February 10, 2019.

### **Key Facts**

- ◆ Procured from the United States, the Chinook Helicopters are expected to provide impetus to the heavy-lift capabilities of Indian Air Force (IAF) and strengthen the defence ties with the United States.
- ◆ Manufactured by Boeing, the CH-47F (I) will be stationed at Chandigarh air base of the Indian Air Force. The Chandigarh air base takes care of providing necessary items to Siachen and Eastern Ladakh sectors.
- ◆ The Indian Air Force is currently using Mi-17 and Mi-26 helicopters, which were manufactured by Russia.

### **Chinook Helicopters**

- ◆ The CH-47F (I) Chinook is an advanced multi-mission helicopter that will provide unmatched strategic airlift capability to the Indian armed forces across the full spectrum of combat missions.
- ◆ With capability of carrying around 10 tonnes of load, these helicopters are majorly used for artillery, battlefield resupply and transportation of troops.

- ◆ These are also used for humanitarian and disaster relief operations such as transportation of relief supplies and mass evacuation of refugees.
- ◆ Chinooks have a unique twin engine and tandem rotor design, one of the most visibly recognised symbols of the American armed forces.
- ◆ The Chinook helicopter is used by 18 other defence forces around the world.

### India's procurement of Chinook Helicopters from US

- ◆ Indian government has already spent USD 3 billion to buy 15 Chinook and 22 Apache attack helicopters. India also has the option to buy six more Apaches, already approved by the United States.
- ◆ India signed a **USD 3 billion deal with the US in September 2015** for the purchase of 15 Chinook heavy lift and 22 AH-64E Apache attack helicopters.
- ◆ In October 2018, **4 pilots and 4 flight engineers of IAF were trained** by Boeing for operating Chinook helicopters. The pilots and flight engineers were trained in Delaware USA.
- ◆ On February 2, 2019, India was officially handed over first of the **Chinook helicopters during 'India-Chinook Transfer Ceremony' at Boeing's facility** in Philadelphia.

*Source: The Hindu*

### Over 12 lakh people treated for free under Ayushman Bharat

#### Why in news?

- ☞ Indu Bhushan, the CEO of Ayushman Bharat, on February 22, 2019 announced that over 12 lakh people received free treatment under the Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), while around two crore beneficiary e-cards have been issued since the launch of mission in September 2018.

#### Status of Health and Wellness Centres (HWC) under Ayushman Bharat

- ◆ So far, 15,000 hospitals have been empanelled under the scheme, of which, 15 percent are private hospitals.
- ◆ The first Health and Wellness Centre (HWC) under Ayushman Bharat was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Jangla in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh on April 14, 2018. Since then, 10,252 HWCs have been operationalised.
- ◆ The states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala have the highest number of HWCs under the Ayushman Bharat.
- ◆ Andhra Pradesh operationalised 1361 HWCs, Tamil Nadu has 1318, UP has 912, Karnataka has 700 and Kerala has 678 HWCs.
- ◆ A total of 1,33,84,332 women and men of age 30 years and above have been screened for common Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) at these HWCs.

## **Functioning of Health & Wellness Centres**

- ◆ Under Ayushman Bharat its first component, 1,50,000 existing Sub- Health Centres (SHCs) and Primary Health Centres (PHCs) to be transformed to Health & Wellness Centres (HWCs) to deliver Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC), which is universal and free to users.
- ◆ The wide range of services provided at these Health and Wellness Centres encompass maternal and child health services, communicable and non-communicable diseases, services for the elderly and palliative care including free essential drugs and diagnostic services.
- ◆ States have the flexibility to expand the service package to address problems of local importance as defined by disease prevalence and community feedback.
- ◆ In the urban context, the Urban Primary Health Centres or Urban Health Posts would be strengthened to deliver comprehensive primary health care.
- ◆ The norm of ‘One Multipurpose Worker’ MPW-(F) per 10,000 population supported by four-five ASHAs, will enable outreach of services, preventive and promotive care.
- ◆ HWC at the sub centre level are being staffed by trained Mid- Level Health Provider (MLHP), also called as Community Health Officers (CHO).

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

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

## **What are the objectives?**

- ◆ Launched with an aim to help the poor and the economically deprived, the scheme will be available for 10.74 crore beneficiary families and about 50 crore Indian citizens.
- ◆ This scheme will strengthen the healthcare services in India. Around 13000 hospitals in the country have been coordinated for the implementation of the scheme.
- ◆ The scheme aims to target poor and vulnerable population of the country, based on the Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011 (SECC) database. There will be no cap on family size and age in the scheme.

- ◆ The scheme allows the beneficiary to take cashless benefits from any public or private empanelled hospitals across the country.
- ◆ The scheme will work in partnership with NITI Aayog to operationalise a robust, modular and interoperable IT platform which will involve a paperless and cashless transaction.
- ◆ The National Health Agency (NHA), the apex body implementing the scheme, has launched a website (mera.pmjaya.gov.in).

*Source: PIB*

## Aero India 2019 culminates

### Why in news?

- ☞ The 12th biennial edition of International Aerospace and Defence Exhibition, Aero India 2019 culminated on February 24, 2019 at Air Force Station Yelahanka in Bengaluru.
- ☞ For the first time, the 2019 edition of Aero India combined the defence and civil aviation segments into a holistic event with the co-involvement of the defence and civil aviation ministries. The 12th edition of Aero India intended to be a “Runway to a billion opportunities” and put India on the Global map.

### Theme

- ◆ The theme of 2019 Aero India exhibition is ‘**The Runway to a Billion Opportunities**’ that aims to bolster business in the international aviation sector and provide a platform to showcase India’s aeronautical advancements.

### Highlights

- ◆ More than 600 Indian Companies and 200 Foreign Companies participated and witnessed the largest Air show of Asia.
- ◆ The total area of the show grew from 27,678 sq m to 28,398 sq m this year.
- ◆ A total of 61 aircraft participated in the event, of which, 31 flew.
- ◆ Several seminars were conducted by a host of agencies including Ministry of Civil Aviation, Skill Development Ministry, State Governments and Industrial Associations.
- ◆ The air show saw a lot of activity from business point of view and witnessed several round table meets.
- ◆ The Aero India 2019 had many firsts to its credit such as the ‘Drone Olympics’.
- ◆ There was a specific theme for each day of the show.
- ◆ Start-ups, technology and women were featured on each of the business days of Aero India 2019.
- ◆ As many as 500 B2B meetings were held and 50 MoUs were signed.



## **Drone Olympics Competition held at Aero India 2019**

- ◆ The Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) made a spectacular entry at the Aero-India 2019 with the first ever ‘Drone Olympics’ competition for UAV’s held on February 21, 2019 at Air Force Station, Yelahanka, Bengaluru.
- ◆ The ‘Drone Olympics’ aims to encourage the UAV industry to connect with potential buyers and business partners in the country and also provide an opportunity to the Armed Forces to assess the capabilities of UAVs.
- ◆ An overwhelming response was received for participation in the competition, both from companies and individuals. More than 120 applications were received, out of which 57 applicants were invited to participate.
- ◆ The winners of competition were honoured with medals and cash prizes.
- ◆ The winners of the competition will be invited to demonstrate the best of human machine interaction during Lockheed Martin’s Alpha Pilot Race in United States later in 2019.

## **ATL Drone Module – Get Set Fly!**

- ◆ During the award ceremony of the Drone Olympics Competition, the Atal Tinkering Lab (ATL) of Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), NITI Aayog launched the ‘ATL Drone Module – Get Set Fly!’.
- ◆ Created in collaboration with the blooming drone industry in India, the ATL Drone Module aims to introduce the young minds of India to the technology and help them to identify and solve community issues using drones as a tool.

## **‘Make in India’ initiative**

- ◆ The Make in India initiative of the Government has provided the impetus for increased self-reliance in Defence and the potential for “Nose to tail production”.
- ◆ The initiative has stressed on the need for instituting provisions for creating the ecosystem for utilisation and consolidation of design and manufacturing facilities to create a ‘robust supply chain system’.
- ◆ It is under Make in India that Indian PSUs are manufacturing more than 4000 aircraft including LCA, LCH, ALH, C295 etc.
- ◆ Over 10,000 MSMEs have made 80 percent of components, aggregates and assemblies of complex weapon systems and aircrafts.
- ◆ Over 424 companies had obtained the licence for Defence production which was almost double the number in last four years.

## Major initiatives and developments in Defence Sector: At a Glance

- ◆ During the last four years, **150 contracts worth Rs 1,27,500 crore** have been signed with Indian vendors for procurement of defence equipment for the Armed forces.
- ◆ The Government had accorded **Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) to 164 proposals** worth Rs 2,79,950 Cr under ‘Buy and Make’ categories only to the Indian vendors.
- ◆ In respect of **Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) and Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs)**, 40 percent of the production had been outsourced to the Private Sector and Government issued Reference for Proposals for the manufacture of seven identified types of ammunition in private sector.
- ◆ The ‘**Defence Investor cell**’ was set up in January 2018 to enhance the ‘Ease of doing Business’ and over 350 industries had been facilitated till date.
- ◆ **34 projects relating to Army, Navy and Air Force** had already been accorded ‘Approval in Principle’ under the ‘Make-II’ category.
- ◆ The **FDI policy** had been revised and now foreign investments upto 49 percent are allowed through the automatic route and above 49 percent are allowed under Government route.
- ◆ In last four years, six companies in Defence and Aerospace sectors had obtained government approval for FDI of Rs 237 crore while FDI of over Rs 200 crore had been received through the automatic route.
- ◆ The **iDEX scheme** was launched on April 12, 2018 to create a network of Defence Innovation hubs throughout the country and to resolve Defence and Aerospace related issues.
- ◆ The **Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti** was launched by the Ministry of Defence to create greater capacity development and encourage greater filing of patents in defence and aerospace sectors.

*Source: The Hindu*

## ISRO to launch electronic intelligence satellite ‘Emisat’

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) would be launching an electronic intelligence satellite Emisat for Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in March 2019.
- ☞ In the special mission, ISRO would also be launching 28 third-party satellites and demonstrate its new technologies like three different orbits with a new variant of Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) rocket.
- ☞ The exact date of the mission has not been specified yet.

## Key Highlights

- ◆ ISRO would be using a PSLV rocket with four strap-on motors. For the first time, it will be trying to orbit the rocket at three different altitudes.
- ◆ The main passenger of the PSLV rocket will be DRDO's electronic intelligence satellite 'Emisat'. The satellite alone weighs about 420 kg.
- ◆ The remaining 28 satellites would cumulatively weigh about 250 kg.
- ◆ After launching Emisat at an altitude of 763 km, the PSLV rocket will be brought down to put the 28 satellites into orbit at an altitude of 504 km.
- ◆ Following that the rocket will be brought down further to 485 km where the fourth stage will turn into a payload platform carrying three experimental payloads.
- ◆ The experimental payloads include one developed by the students of Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology, ISRO's own technology demonstrator and a Hamsat.

## Key Facts

- ◆ The PSLV is a four-stage engine expendable rocket with alternating solid and liquid fuel.
- ◆ In its normal configuration, the rocket will have six strap-on motors hugging the rocket's first stage.
- ◆ The space agency selects the kind of rocket to be used based on the weight of the satellites it carries.

## Background

- ◆ In January, the space agency launched a defence imaging satellite Microsat R for the DRDO.
- ◆ On January 24, the ISRO flew a PSLV with two strap-on motors while in March it will have four strap-on motors.
- ◆ The space agency has two more PSLV variants -Core Alone, which does not have any strap-on motors and PSLV-XL, which is a larger rocket.
- ◆ Further, ISRO will be launching two more defence satellites in July or August 2019 with its new rocket Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV).

*Source: The Hindu*

## New NASA mission could find more than 1,000 planets

### Why in news?

- ☞ With 300-megapixel Wide Field Instrument, the telescope will be able to map the Milky Way and other galaxies 100 times faster than the famous Hubble Space Telescope, which was launched in 1990.
- ☞ The telescope will scan a small piece of the universe – about two square degrees – at a resolution higher than any similar mission in the past.
- ☞ Nasa's new telescope could find as many as 1,400 new planets outside our solar system, enabling humans to find the largest, deepest and clearest picture of the universe as well as the existence of extraterrestrial life.

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### About the WFIRST:

- ◆ The Wide Field Infrared Survey Telescope (WFIRST) is a NASA infrared space observatory currently under development.
- ◆ WFIRST was recommended in 2010 by United States National Research Council Decadal Survey committee as the top priority for the next decade of astronomy. It was approved for development and launch in February 2016.
- ◆ Wide Field Infrared Survey Telescope (WFIRST) mission is scheduled for launch in the mid-2020s.
- ◆ It was designed by NASA and astronomers throughout the country to find new planets and research dark energy, the mysterious force that pervades otherwise empty space and that could hold the keys to understanding how the universe expands.

### Features of the telescope:

- ◆ WFIRST has unique combination – both a wide field of view and a high resolution – that make it so powerful for microlensing planet searches,
- ◆ To find new planets, WFIRST will use gravitational microlensing, a technique that relies on the gravity of stars and planets to bend and magnify the light coming from stars that pass behind them from the telescope’s viewpoint.
- ◆ This microlensing effect allows a telescope to find planets orbiting stars thousands of light-years away from the Earth – much farther than other planet-detecting techniques.

### Significance of WFIRST:

- ◆ With the 2.4 meter telescope, single WFIRST images will uncover millions of galaxies. For example, where Hubble has found only a few galaxies within 500 million years of the Big Bang, WFIRST will find hundreds of these rare objects. In addition, the WFIRST coronagraph instrument will directly image ice and gas giant exoplanets.

*Source: The Hindu*

## New Horizons spacecraft sends sharpest view of Ultima Thule

### Why in news?

- ☞ NASA has recently captured the sharpest-ever image of Ultima Thule.
- ☞ The new image shows circular pieces of terrain, deep pits and other details that were previously elusive.

### About Ultima Thule:

- ◆ Ultima Thule is located in the Kuiper belt in the outermost regions of the Solar System, beyond the orbit of Neptune.
- ◆ It measures approximately 30 km in diameter, and is irregularly shaped.
- ◆ Ultima Thule has a reddish color, probably caused by exposure of hydrocarbons to sunlight over billions of years.
- ◆ Ultima Thule belongs to a class of Kuiper belt objects called the “cold classicals”, which have nearly circular orbits with low inclinations to the solar plane.

### **About New Horizons Mission:**

- ◆ New Horizons is an interplanetary space probe that was launched as a part of NASA's New Frontiers program.
- ◆ Launched in 2006, it has been travelling through space for the past nine years.
- ◆ The primary mission is to perform a flyby study of the Pluto system. The secondary mission to fly by and study one or more other Kuiper belt objects (KBOs).
- ◆ It is the first spacecraft which successfully fly by the dwarf planet Pluto, for its exploration in the Kuiper Belt along with its moon Charon and other dwarf planets in the belt.
- ◆ Images sent by this mission would not only provide geological phenomena of the Pluto (mineral, oil and natural gas exploration) but also help in understanding the various new phenomenon that occurs over the Pluto and the Belt.

### **New Horizons' top discoveries about Pluto:**

- ◆ Sputnik Planitia, the western lobe of Pluto's heart, might hold a giant, frozen ocean of nitrogen. This type of structure doesn't exist anywhere else in the solar system.
- ◆ Pluto has a vibrant, blue atmospheric haze that hovers at least 300 miles above the surface. Methane in that haze might react with sunlight, making way for complex organic molecules.
- ◆ Pluto's moon Charon has a large tectonic belt around its equator, which scientists think is the result of an underground ocean ripped open.
- ◆ Scientists believe methane escaping from Pluto has sprayed Charon's red polar cap. No one has ever seen the sharing of molecules this way in the solar system, but it does resemble binary star systems exchanging materials.

### **About Kuiper belt:**

- ◆ Kuiper belt is a region of the solar system beyond the planets, extending from the orbit of Neptune.
- ◆ It consists mainly small bodies or remnants from the solar system's formation.
- ◆ It is similar to the asteroid belt, although it is far larger — 20 times as wide and 200 times as massive.
- ◆ The Kuiper belt objects (KBO) are composed largely of frozen volatiles (termed 'ices'), such as methane, ammonia and water.
- ◆ Kuiper belt is home to at least three dwarf planets — Pluto, Haumea and Makemake. Pluto, discovered in 1930, is considered its largest member.

*Source: The Hindu*

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## Draft e-commerce policy: Keeping our data safe and secure

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Department of Industry and Internal Trade released the draft National Ecommerce Policy that sends a clear message that India and its citizens have a sovereign right to their data.

### Key issues Addressed in The Draft:

- ◆ Data
- ◆ Infrastructure development
- ◆ Ecommerce marketplaces
- ◆ Regulatory issues
- ◆ Stimulating domestic digital economy
- ◆ Export promotion

### Key features of the draft:

#### **Indian Control over Data**

- ◆ Government to be given access to source code, algorithms of AI systems and Impose custom duties on electronic transmissions to reduce revenue loss.
- ◆ Bar sharing of sensitive data of Indian users with third party entities, even with consent.
- ◆ A ‘data authority ‘to look at community data.

#### **Local Presence for Apps & Websites:**

- ◆ All ecommerce websites and apps available for downloading in India to have a registered business entity here.
- ◆ Non-compliant ecommerce app/website to be denied access here.

#### **Incentives for Data Localisation:**

- ◆ Location of the computing facilities like data centres, server farms within India.
- ◆ Firms to get 3 years to comply with local data storage requirements.
- ◆ Data storage facilities to get ‘infrastructure status’.

#### **FDI in E-commerce:**

- ◆ FDI only in marketplace model.
- ◆ No FDI in inventory model.

#### **E-commerce Trade:**

- ◆ Curbs on Chinese ecommerce exports.
- ◆ Gifting route, often used by Chinese apps and websites will be banned for all parcels except life-saving drugs.



- ◆ Integrating Customs, RBI and India Post to improve tracking of imports through ecommerce.
- ◆ Incentives & e-commerce export promotions.
- ◆ Ecommerce start-ups may get ‘infant industry’ status raising limit for courier shipments from 25,000 INR to boost ecommerce export.

### **Regulation:**

- ◆ There will be no separate regulator for ecommerce sector.
- ◆ E-consumer courts to be developed.

*Source: Economic Times*

## **Exercise Sampriti 2019: India-Bangladesh joint military exercise begins**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ Indo-Bangladesh joint military exercise, ‘Exercise Sampriti 2019’ began on March 2, 2019 at Tangail, Bangladesh. This will be the eighth edition of the exercise which is hosted alternately by both countries.

### **Key Facts**

- ◆ The exercise will conclude on March 15, 2019. As part of the ongoing India-Bangladesh defence cooperation, Exercise Sampriti is an important bilateral endeavor between India and Bangladesh.
- ◆ The exercise is aimed to strengthen and broaden the aspects of interoperability and cooperation between the Indian and Bangladesh Armies.

### **Key highlights**

- ◆ The exercise began with the ceremonial salute of the participating contingents to the national flags of both the countries to the strains of “Jana Gana Mana” and the “Amar Shonar Bangla”.
- ◆ The Bangladesh contingent was represented by 36 East Bengal Battalion, while Indian side was represented by 9th Battalion the Rajputana Rifles.
- ◆ A company group from Bangladesh Army and an equal number from Indian Army are taking part in the two-week long exercise.
- ◆ The experts from both the sides will also hold discussions to share each other’s experiences in varied topics for mutual benefits.
- ◆ The exercise will involve tactical level operations in a counter insurgency and counter terrorism environment under the mandate of the United Nations.
- ◆ Both sides will jointly train, plan and execute a series of well-developed tactical drills for neutralisation of likely threats that may be encountered during simulated UN peace keeping operations.

## About Exercise Sampriti

- ◆ The Exercise Sampriti is a Joint Training Exercise between India-Bangladesh held alternately in India and Bangladesh every year.
- ◆ The aim of this exercise is to build, strengthen and promote positive relations between the Armies of India and Bangladesh.
- ◆ In addition to understanding each other in tactical level operations, the exercise lays emphasis on greater cultural understanding to strengthen military trust and cooperation between the two nations.
- ◆ The joint exercise was first held in Assam in 2011.

*Source: The Hindu*

## Union Cabinet approves National Policy on Software Products 2019

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the National Policy on Software Products 2019 to develop India as a Software Product Nation.
- ☞ The software product ecosystem is characterised by innovations, Intellectual Property (IP) creation and large value addition increase in productivity, which has the potential to significantly boost revenues and exports in the sector, create substantive employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in emerging technologies and leverage opportunities available under the digital India programme, thus, leading to a boost in inclusive and sustainable growth.

### Objective

- ◆ The National Policy on Software Products 2019 aims to develop India as the global software product hub, driven by innovation, improved commercialization, sustainable Intellectual Property (IP), promoting technology start-ups and specialized skill sets.
- ◆ It also aims to align with other government initiatives such as start-up India, make in India and Digital India, Skill India, in order to create Indian software products Industry of USD 70-80 billion with direct and indirect employment of 3.5 million by 2025.

### Key Facts

- ◆ Initially, an outlay of Rs 1500 crore is involved to implement the programmes and schemes envisaged under this policy over a period of 7 years.
- ◆ The amount will be divided into Software Product Development Fund (SPDF) and Research & Innovation fund.
- ◆ The policy will lead to the formulation of several schemes, initiatives, projects and measures for the development of software products sector in the country as per the envisaged roadmap.
- ◆ To achieve its vision, the new policy has earmarked the following five missions:

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- ◆ Promoting the creation of a sustainable Indian software product industry, driven by intellectual property (IP), leading to a ten-fold increase in India share of the Global Software product market by 2025.
- ◆ Nurturing 10,000 technology startups in software product industry, including 1000 such technology startups in Tier-II and Tier-III towns and cities and generating direct and indirect employment for 3.5 million people by 2025.
- ◆ Creating a talent pool for the software product industry through:
  - (i) Up-skilling of 1,000,000 IT professionals
  - (ii) Motivating 100,000 school and college students
  - (iii) Generating 10,000 specialized professionals that can provide leadership
  - (iv) Building a cluster-based innovation-driven ecosystem by developing 20 sectoral and strategically located software product development clusters having integrated ICT infrastructure, marketing, incubation, research and development testbeds and mentoring support.
  - (v) In order to evolve and monitor scheme and programmes for the implementation of this policy, National Software Products Mission will be set up with participation from government, academia and industry.

### **Way Ahead**

- ◆ The Indian IT Industry has predominantly been a service Industry. However, a need has been felt to move up the value chain through technology-oriented products and services.
- ◆ Hence, to create a robust software product ecosystem the Government has approved the National Policy on Software Products – 2019.

*Source: PIB*

## **NASA to launch new mission to study space weather from ISS**

### **Why in news?**

- ☞ The National Aeronautics and Space Administration has selected a new mission that will help scientists understand and ultimately, forecast the vast space weather system around the Earth.
- ☞ The mission titled as the Atmospheric Waves Experiment (AWE) is expected to cost around USD 42 million and it will be launched in August 2022, attached to the exterior of the Earth-orbiting International Space Station.

### **Mission Objectives**

- ◆ The experiment will focus on colourful bands of light in Earth's atmosphere, called airglow, to determine what combination of forces drive space weather in the upper atmosphere.
- ◆ It was earlier thought that only the Sun's constant outflow of ultraviolet light and particles, the solar wind, could affect the region.

- ◆ However, researchers now have learned that solar variability is not enough to drive the changes observed and Earth's weather also must be having an effect.
- ◆ Hence to understand this deeper, the mission will investigate how waves in the lower atmosphere, caused by variations in the densities of different packets of air, impact the upper atmosphere.

### **Significance**

- ◆ Studying space weather is significance as it can have profound impacts, affecting technology and astronauts in space, disrupting radio communications and at its most severe, overwhelming power grids.
- ◆ The new experiment will, for the first time, obtain global observations of an important driver of space weather in a dynamic region of Earth's upper atmosphere that can cause interference with radio and GPS communications.

### **Sun RISE Experiment**

- ◆ NASA has selected another experiment, called the Sun Radio Interferometer Space Experiment (Sun RISE) for a seven-month extended formulation study. The experiment is expected to be undertaken at an estimated cost of \$100,000.
- ◆ The experience would involve an array of six CubeSats operating like one large radio telescope.
- ◆ The proposed mission would investigate how giant space weather storms from the Sun, called solar particle storms, are accelerated and released into planetary space.

### **Background**

- ◆ The Atmospheric Waves Experiment is a Mission of Opportunity under NASA's Heliophysics Explorers Program, which conducts focused scientific research and develops instrumentation to fill the scientific gaps between the agency's larger missions.
- ◆ Since the 1958 launch of NASA's first satellite Explorer 1, which discovered Earth's radiation belts, the Explorers Program has supported over 90 missions. The Uhuru and Cosmic Background Explorer (COBE) missions resulted in the conferral of Nobel prizes to their investigators.
- ◆ The Explorers Program seeks innovative ideas for small and cost-constrained missions that can help unravel the mysteries of the universe.
- ◆ The AWE was selected for development based on its potential science value and the feasibility of its development plans.

*Source: The Hindu*

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## Government brings 42 non-scheduled cancer drugs under price control

### Why in news?

- ☞ The Union Government announced on February 27, 2019 that it has brought 42 non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs under price control, capping trade margin at 30 per cent, which would reduce their retail prices by up to 85 per cent.

### Key facts

- ◆ This was made possible after the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) invoked extraordinary powers in public interest, under Para 19 of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 to bring 42 non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs under price control through trade margin rationalisation.
- ◆ The Department of Pharmaceuticals (DOP) stated in a notification that invoking paragraph 19 of DPCO, 2013 places a cap on trade margin of 30 per cent and directs the manufacturers to fix their retail price based on the price at first point of sale of the product of the non-scheduled formulations containing any of the 42 drugs.

### Highlights

- ◆ According to NPPA's available data, the MRP for 105 brands will be reduced up to 85 per cent resulting in a minimum saving of Rs 105 crore for the consumers.
- ◆ Currently, 57 anti-cancer drugs are under price control as scheduled formulations.
- ◆ Now 42 non-scheduled anti-cancer medicines have been selected for price regulation by restricting trade margin on the selling price up to 30 per cent.
- ◆ The medicines would cover 72 formulations and 355 brands, as per the data available with NPPA.
- ◆ More data is being collected from hospitals and manufacturers to finalise the list.
- ◆ The drug manufacturers have been given seven days to recalculate the prices and inform the NPPA, state drug controllers, stockists and retailers.
- ◆ The revised prices shall come into effect from March 8, 2019.

### Background

- ◆ The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority currently fixes prices of drugs placed in the National List of Essential Medicines under Schedule-I of the DPCO.
- ◆ So far, around 1000 drugs have been brought under price control under the initiative.
- ◆ Non-scheduled drugs are allowed an increase of up to 10 per cent in prices every year, which is monitored by the NPPA.

*Source: The Hindu*

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## **Cabinet approves National Policy on Electronics 2019**

### **Why in news?**

☞ The Union Cabinet on February 19, 2019 approved the National Policy on Electronics 2019 (NPE 2019), proposed by the Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

The 2019 Policy on Electronics proposes to propel the growth of Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) industry in the country. It replaces the National Policy of Electronics 2012 (NPE 2012).

### **Objective of NPE 2019**

☞ The Policy aims to position India as a global hub for Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) by encouraging and driving capabilities for developing core components and creating an enabling environment for the industry to compete globally.

### **Features of National Policy on Electronics 2019**

- ◆ Create eco-system for globally competitive ESDM sector by promoting domestic manufacturing and export in the entire value-chain of ESDM
- ◆ Provide incentives and support for manufacturing of core electronic components
- ◆ Provide special package of incentives for mega projects which are extremely high-tech and entail huge investments, such as semiconductor facilities display fabrication, etc.
- ◆ Formulate suitable schemes and incentive mechanisms to encourage new units and expansion of existing units
- ◆ Promote Industry-led R&D and innovation in all sub-sectors of electronics such as 5G, IoT/ Sensors, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning, Virtual Reality (VR), Drones, Robotics, Additive Manufacturing, Photonics, Nano-based devices, etc.
- ◆ Provide incentives and support for significantly enhancing availability of skilled manpower
- ◆ Special thrust on Fabless Chip Design Industry, Medical Electronic Devices Industry, Automotive Electronics Industry and Power Electronics for Mobility and Strategic Electronics Industry
- ◆ Create Sovereign Patent Fund (SPF) to promote the development and acquisition of IPs in ESDM sector
- ◆ Promote trusted electronics value chain initiatives to improve national cyber security profile

### **Significance**

- ◆ The Policy will lead to the formulation of several schemes, initiatives, projects and measures for the development of ESDM sector in the country.
- ◆ The scheme targets to promote domestic manufacturing and export in the entire value-chain of ESDM for economic development to achieve a turnover of USD 400 billion by 2025.
- ◆ This will include targeted production of 1.0 billion (100 crore) mobile handsets by 2025 valued at USD 190 billion, including 600 million (60 crore) mobile handsets valued at USD 110 billion for export.

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## **Impact**

- ◆ The NPE 2019 will lead to formulation of several schemes, initiatives, and projects in consultation with the concerned Ministries and Departments for the development of ESDM sector in the country.
- ◆ It will enable flow of investment and technology, leading to higher value addition in the domestically manufactured electronic products, increased electronics hardware manufacturing in the country and their export.

*Source: Indian Express*



## More News

### **Swachh Bharat Mission launches ‘Darwaza Band - Part 2’ campaign; Amitabh Bachchan stars in campaign films**

- ◆ The Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) on February 6, 2019 launched the ‘Darwaza Band -Part 2’ campaign for sustainability of the Open Defecation Free (ODF) status of villages across the country.
- ◆ As per Amitabh Bachchan, “The campaign talks about how a toilet must be used by all, always and under all circumstances (har koi, har roz, hamesha).” The actor dedicated a re-adaptation of a poem of his father Late Harivansh Rai Bachchan to the Swachh Bharat Mission - “Swachh Tann, Swachh Mann, Swachh Bharat, Mera Parichay”.

### **World Cancer Day 2019 observed across the world**

- ◆ The World Cancer Day 2019 was observed across the world on February 4, 2019 with an aim to unite the world’s population in the fight against cancer.
- ◆ The day is observed every year with an aim to save millions of preventable deaths by raising awareness and education about the disease, pressing governments and individuals across the world to take action. Cancer is one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide, with approximately 14 million new cases in 2012.
- ◆ World Cancer Day was proclaimed by the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), a leading international non-governmental organisation.

### **Indian historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam wins Israel’s Dan David Prize 2019**

- ◆ Indian historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam on February 10, 2019 won the prestigious Dan David Prize 2019 for his work on inter-cultural encounters between Asians, Europeans and people of North and South America during the early modern era.
- ◆ He won the Israel’s prestigious USD 1 million dollar award in the category of ”**Past Time Dimension**” for his work in macro history. He shared the award in the Past category with Professor Kenneth Pomeranz of University of Chicago.
- ◆ Once presented with the award money, Subrahmanyam will donate 10 percent of the prize money towards scholarships for graduate or post-graduate researchers.
- ◆ The Dan David Prize laureates are required to donate 10 percent of their prize money towards scholarships for graduate or post-graduate researchers in their respective fields to encourage and foster new generations of scholars.

## **Bihar Government announces universal old age pension scheme-**

### **Mukhyamantri Vridhajan Pension Yojna**

- ◆ The state government of Bihar has announced a universal old age pension scheme called Mukhyamantri Vridhajan Pension Yojna (MVPY) for all people above 60 years of age.
- ◆ The scheme will come into force from April 1, 2019. Except those senior citizens who have retired from government service, all will be eligible for 400 rupees monthly pension irrespective of caste, religion or community.
- ◆ The currently old age pension scheme is applicable to only the BPL category.
- ◆ Besides this, the state's Chief Minister Nitish Kumar announced a pension of Rs 6,000 for journalists above 60 years of age.
- ◆ Those who have been in regular service in the field of media and not getting any other pension will be eligible for Bihar Patrakar Samman Yojana (BPSY). The scheme will also be implemented from the April 1.

### **Prajnesh Gunneswaran breaks into men's singles top 100**

- ◆ India's Prajnesh Gunneswaran has made it to the top-100 of Men's Singles Tennis rankings with a jump of six places that took him to 97.
- ◆ With the feat, Gunneswaran has become the third Indian player to break into the top-100 barrier in the past decade after Somdev Devvarman and Yuki Bhambri.
- ◆ He reached the semifinals of the ATP Chennai Challenger last week to ensure his entry into the coveted bracket. If he is able to maintain his rank inside top-100, it will secure him entry into Grand Slam singles main draws.
- ◆ In the doubles, Rohan Bopanna stayed put at 37 and was followed by his partner Divij Sharan at 39.
- ◆ In the Women's Tennis Association charts, Ankita Raina continues to be country's top singles player at number 165 after climbing three places and was followed by Karman Kaur Thandi, who dropped a place to 211.

### **PM Narendra Modi receives Seoul Peace Prize for 2018**

- ◆ Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 22, 2019 received the prestigious Seoul Peace Prize 2018 for his contribution to international cooperation and fostering global economic growth. The committee credited him for his efforts in promoting global peace and harmony through inclusive economic growth and improving quality of life.
- ◆ The award was presented to him by Kwon E-hyock, the Chairman of the Seoul Peace Prize Cultural Foundation at a grand ceremony in Seoul, South Korea. A short film on the life and achievements of Prime Minister Modi was also screened at the event.

## **National Science Day 2019 observed; Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize to be conferred**

- ◆ The National Science Day 2019 was observed across India on February 28, 2019 to mark the discovery of the Raman Effect by Indian physicist Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman (CV Raman).
- ◆ This year celebrations of the Day were organised by the Department of Science & Technology (DST). On the occasion of National Science Day 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will confer the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize for Science and Technology for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018 to the awardees.
- ◆ The Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize is named after the founder Director of the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), Dr. Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar.

## **Sushil Chandra appointed as new Election Commissioner**

- ◆ Sushil Chandra on February 15, 2019 assumed charge as the new Election Commissioner (EC) of India. He would be working along with Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora and Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa in the Election Commission.
- ◆ The Election Commissioners are usually retired IAS or IRS officers. Until 1989, the Election Commission was a single member body, but later two additional Election Commissioners were added. Thus, the Election Commission currently consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners.
- ◆ The decisions of the commission are taken by a majority vote. The term of an Election Commissioner in 6 years.

## **President confers Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony**

- ◆ Indian President Ram Nath Kovind presented the Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony to Rajkumar Singhajit Singh, Bangladesh cultural organisation Chhayanaut and Ram Sutar Vanji for the years 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively on February 18, 2019 at a function held in Pravasi Bhartiya Kendra, New Delhi.

The award was instituted by the Union Government in 2012 to recognise the contributions made by Rabindranath Tagore to humanity at large with his works and ideas, as part of the commemoration of his 150th Birth Anniversary, for promoting values of cultural harmony.

## **Sanath Jayasuriya banned from cricket for two years**

- ◆ Former Sri Lankan Cricket captain Sanath Jayasuriya has been banned from cricket for a period of two years. The information was shared by the International Cricket Council through a statement on February 26, 2019.

## **Key Highlights**

- ◆ The 49-year-old former cricketer admitted failing to co-operate with an investigation and concealing, tampering with or destroying evidence.
- ◆ The cricketer was charged in October 2018. The charge came after a year-long investigation in Sri Lanka, where the ACU said corruption had become an inherent part of the system.

- ◆ Jayasuriya was charged after he failed to provide a phone and SIM card for the investigation after being requested by ACU.
- ◆ The statement from the ICC read that the conviction is the latest part of a much broader ICC investigation into corruption in cricket in Sri Lanka.
- ◆ It demonstrates the importance of participants in cricket, cooperating with investigations.
- ◆ The ICC had recently held an amnesty in relation to Sri Lankan Cricket resulting in eleven players and other participants coming forward with new information.
- ◆ This information has reportedly assisted in a number of ACU's ongoing investigations and has resulted in some new investigations getting underway.

### **President Ram Nath Kovind confers Gandhi Peace Prize for 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018**

- ◆ President Ram Nath Kovind on February 26, 2019 conferred the Gandhi Peace Prize for the years 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 at a function in Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi. The award ceremony saw the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- ◆ The awardees were selected by the jury under the Chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The 2018 Gandhi Peace Prize was conferred on Yohei Sasakawa, who is at the forefront of many philanthropic initiatives. His compassionate nature can be seen in the manner in which he has worked to eliminate leprosy in India.

### **PM Modi dedicates National War Memorial to the nation**

- ◆ Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 25, 2019 dedicated the National War Memorial to the nation in a solemn ceremonial function in New Delhi.
- ◆ The National War Memorial, located near the India Gate in New Delhi, is a fitting tribute to the soldiers who laid down their lives defending the nation, post-independence.
- ◆ The Memorial commemorates the soldiers who participated and made the supreme sacrifice in Peace Keeping Missions, and Counter Insurgency Operations.

### **Chris Gayle announces retirement from One-day Internationals**

- ◆ Veteran West Indies batsman Chris Gayle has announced that he will retire from One-day Internationals after this year's World Cup in England and Wales. The announcement was made by West Indies Cricket on February 17, 2019.
- ◆ The 39-year old left-hander has scored 9,727 ODI runs, second only to the legendary Brian Lara among West Indians in 284 matches. He needs 677 more runs to surpass Lara as the West Indies' all-time record ODI run scorer, a feat he will be hoping to achieve during his fifth World Cup.

### **Oscars 2019: ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ wins most Oscars**

- ◆ The 91st Academy Awards, popularly known as Oscar Awards, were conferred on February 24, 2019 (February 25 as per Indian time). ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, nominated for five Oscars, won the most Oscars at the award show.
- ◆ The ‘Period. End Of Sentence’, a film on menstruation set in rural India, won the Oscar in the Documentary - Short Subject category at the 91st Academy Awards. The film has been directed by Rayka Zehtabchi and produced by Indian producer Guneet Monga’s Sikhya Entertainment.

### **Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi elected as new chair of African Union**

- ◆ Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on February 10, 2019 took over as the chair of the African Union (AU) following a meeting by heads of state from the continent in Ethiopia’s capital city, Addis Ababa.
- ◆ The post of AU’s chair rotates annually between the five regions of the continent. The Incoming AU chairman President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is expected to focus on the fight against armed groups on the continent and rebuilding efforts of countries recovering from conflict.
- ◆ It is the first time since the AU was founded in 2002 that Egypt assumes the top seat of the body

