

CURRENT AFFAIRS

**Month of
September-2018**



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CURRENT AFFAIRS SEPTEMBER-2018

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Current Affairs SEPTEMBER-2018

UNIFORM CIVIL CODE NEITHER NECESSARY NOR DESIRABLE AT THIS STAGE : LAW COMMISSION

Why in News: A uniform civil code "is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage" in the country, the Law Commission of India. In a 185-page consultation paper, the Commission said secularism cannot contradict the plurality prevalent in the country.

The Commission, led by former Supreme Court judge Justice B.S. Chauhan, said "cultural diversity cannot be compromised to the extent that our urge for uniformity itself becomes a reason for threat to the territorial integrity of the nation".

A unified nation did not necessarily need to have "uniformity". "Efforts have to be made to reconcile our diversity with universal and indisputable arguments on human rights,". Difference did not always imply discrimination in a robust democracy, the government's topmost law advisory body said.

Meaning of term "secularism"

The term 'secularism' has meaning only if it assures the expression of any form of difference.

This diversity, both religious and regional, should not get subsumed under the louder voice of the majority, the Commission said.

At the same time, it said, discriminatory practices within a religion should not hide behind the cloak of that faith to gain legitimacy.

It said the way forward may not be a uniform civil code, but the codification of all personal laws so that prejudices and stereotypes in every one of them would come to light and could be tested on the anvil of fundamental rights of the Constitution.

"By codification of different personal laws, one can arrive at certain universal principles that priorities equity rather than imposition of a uniform code, which would discourage many from using the law altogether, given that matters of marriage and divorce can also be settled extra-judicially," the Commission reasoned.

The Commission suggested certain measures in marriage and divorce that should be uniformly accepted in the personal laws of all religions.

These amendments in personal laws include fixing the marriageable age for boys and girls at 18 years so that they marry as equals, making adultery a ground for divorce for men and women and to simplify divorce procedure. The Commission said the filing of Section 498A IPC (dowry harassment) cases was actually done by women wanting a quick exit from a difficult marriage.

'Nikahnamas should make it clear that polygamy is a criminal offence'

Significantly, the Commission suggested that nikahnamas should make it clear that polygamy is a criminal offence and this should apply to "all communities".

"This is not recommended owing to merely a moral position on bigamy, or to glorify monogamy, but emanates from the fact that only a man is permitted multiple wives, which is unfair," the Commission explained.

About UCC:

There is intense discussion surrounding the Uniform Civil Code both among those in power as well as among civilians. However, there is a need to review why the Uniform Civil Code is the need of the hour. In contrast to popular opinion, the UCC is not an invention of the NDA government aimed at targeting minorities. The Uniform Civil Code was in fact proposed in the original constitution of India. According to Article 44 of Part IV of the Directive Principles of State Policy, "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India."

Law Commission of India (LCI):

The LCI is a non-statutory and non-constitutional body constituted by the Union Government from time to time. The first commission was constituted in 1955 and since then various commissions were re-constituted every three years. It is usually headed by a retired Supreme Court judge or former Chief Justice of a high court. The Secretary Department of Legal Affairs and Secretary, Legislature Department of Union Ministry of Law & Justice are ex-officio members of the Commission. So far, various Law Commissions have submitted 262 reports to make important contribution towards codification and progressive development of laws of the country.

INDIA'S LARGEST PAYMENTS BANK

Why in News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched India Post Payments Bank or IPPB the largest payments bank in the country by network size in Talkatora Stadium, New Delhi. A payments bank operates on a small scale; it carries out most banking operations, but cannot give loans or issue credit cards directly. The IPPB's full services will be made operational at 650 branches the moment PM Modi inaugurates the facility. The new bank will leverage the postal department's vast network across India and help people in previously unbanked rural locations to use banking services easily. The payments bank sector in India grew and expanded in lightning speed after the Reserve Bank of India approved several applicants in 2015.

Important Points:

12 big defaulters were given loans before 2014. The NPAs of these defaulters are to the tune of Rs. 2 lakh crore. We have initiated action against them, and the results are visible. Similarly, there are 27 massive loan accounts, which have NPAs of Rs. 1 lakh crore. Arrangement for the return of the money is being done.



- In the past four years, all loans more than Rs. 50 crore were analysed. We are ensuring that all the preconditions for loan approval are being fulfilled. We have changed the laws, have taken decisions as to mergers, we have promoted professional approach in the banking sector.

The Indian Postal Department has 1.5 lakh post offices and more than 3 lakh postmen.

The IPPB has got ammo from the government in the form of 80 per cent increase in funding to Rs. 1,435 crore earlier this week, which will help the state-run entity compete with big private players like Airtel Payments Bank and Paytm Payments Bank.

The products that IPPB will offer are: savings and current accounts, money transfer, direct benefit transfers, bill and utility payments, and enterprise and merchant payments, the new payments bank said in a statement.

People can use IPPB's products and services via multiple channels such as counter services, ATMs, mobile banking app, SMS and IVR (interactive voice response).

According to analysts, the India Post Payments Bank's strength is the fusion of its legacy workforce with modern technology. The department's 3 lakh postmen and other associates will reinforce digital service with physical delivery of services.

The IPPB started operations in January last year with two experimental branches, one at Raipur in Chhattisgarh and the other at Ranchi in Jharkhand.

- Deposits up to Rs. 1 lakh can be accepted by payments banks. Though they can't give loans, they may offer third-party products. IPPB will work as an agent of Punjab National Bank.

17 crore postal savings bank (PSB) accounts will be linked with India Post Payments Bank accounts, giving an edge over private players who have had to spend a lot to acquire customers.

ARUNACHAL ASSEMBLY PASSES BILL FOR CREATION OF THREE NEW DISTRICTS

Why in News: The Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly passed the Arunachal Pradesh Re-Organization of Districts (Amendment) Bill, 2018, paving the way for creation of three new districts in the State. The Arunachal Pradesh Re-Organization of Districts (Amendment) Bill 2018 for the creation of three new districts was introduced in the state Assembly.

Important Points:

The Pakke-Kessang district will be headquartered at Lemmi. The district will be carved out of East Kameng district with five administrative units, namely:

Pakke-Kessangn,
Seijosa,
Pijiriang,
Passa Valley
Dissingn Passo

The Lepa Rada district will have headquarters at Basar. This district will be created by bifurcating the Lower Siang district with five administrative units, including:

Tirbin
Basar
Daring
Sago

The Shi-Yomi district would be created by bifurcating the West Siang district with its headquarters at Tato. The district would have four administrative units, namely:

Mechuka
Tato
Pidi
Manigong

Arunachal Pradesh will have 25 districts after creation of the three new districts. Arunachal Pradesh at present has 22 districts.

Why were these new districts being created?

Participating in the discussion, Chief Minister Pema Khandu said that the three new districts were created for the welfare of the people. Khandu also said that locals have already agreed to donate land for infrastructure development of the district headquarters. He said these formalities were discussed threadbare with the local residents before initiating the move for the creation of the new districts.



- Regarding the expenditure involved in development of infrastructure for newly created districts, the Chief Minister said, there would be no immediate financial expenditure from the Consolidated Fund of the state. The existing government infrastructure shall be used as minimum required infrastructure for running the district administration in the newly created three districts.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, CENSUS 2021 TO COLLECT DATA ON OBCS

Why in News: Census 2021 will for the first time collect data on Other Backward Classes (OBC). The decennial exercise will involve 25 lakh trained enumerators and the use of "maps/geo referencing at the time of house listing is also under consideration,".

A senior Minister said the decision to count the OBCs in the next Census was to get a correct perspective on the social status in the country.

Important Points:

The 2011 caste data collected as part of Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) is yet to be released by the Centre. As per the National Commission for Backward Classes, there are 2,479 entries in the Central list of the OBCs. "We are committed to give the correct social perspective of the country.

The 2011 Census collected information in 29 categories that included a separate column for Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes. A senior Home Ministry official said the OBCs would also be an option in the column in 2021.

The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), a wing of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, had announced a sample survey report on the country's population in 2006 and suggested that the OBC population in the country is around 41 per cent of the total population.

The NSSO had enumerated 79,306 households in rural areas and 45,374 in urban regions.

- It was emphasised that improvements in design and technological interventions be made so as to ensure that the Census data is finalised within three years after conducting of Census. At present it takes 7 to 8 years to release the complete data.
- The enumerators will start "house listing" in 2020 and the headcount will begin from February 2021. "It was also informed that nearly 25 lakh enumerators are trained and engaged for the gigantic exercise and accurate collection of data will be ensured in Census 2021."

Home Minister also emphasised the need for improvement in Civil Registration System, especially on registration of birth and death in remote areas, and strengthening sample registration system for estimating the data namely, infant mortality rate, maternal mortality ratio and fertility rates,".

Ad-hoc basis:

The Census Organisation was set up on an ad-hoc basis for each Census till the 1951 Census when the Census Act was enacted in 1948 to provide for the scheme of conducting population census with duties and responsibilities of census officers.

As per the 2011 Census, the country's population stood at 1.21 billion, almost equal to the combined population of the U.S., Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Japan put together [1214.3 million]. Earlier, the Home Ministry issued notification that the data collected during 2021 Census would be stored electronically, also a first.

Presently, the "schedules" (a tabular form containing details of individuals), carried by enumerators to households was being stored in a physical form at government's storehouse in Delhi. It is based on these schedules that the relevant statistical information on population, language, occupation, etc, are sorted from and published.

WRONGFUL PROSECUTION (MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE): LEGAL REMEDIES

Why in News: The Law Commission of India has submitted its Report titled 'Wrongful Prosecution (Miscarriage of Justice): Legal Remedies' to the Government of India.

What is wrongful prosecution?

- Internationally, the issue of wrongful prosecution, incarceration, and conviction of innocent persons is identified as 'miscarriage of justice' that takes place after a person has been wrongfully convicted but is later found to be factually innocent basis a new fact / proof coming to light.
- As per the law commission, 'Wrongful prosecution' would include cases where the accused and not guilty of the offence, and the police and / or the prosecution engaged in some form of misconduct in investigating and / or prosecuting the person. It would include both the cases where the person spent time in prison as well as where he did not; and cases where the accused was found not guilty by the trial court or where the accused was convicted by one or more courts but was ultimately found to be not guilty by the Higher Court.

Highlights of the report:

Internationally, the issue of wrongful prosecution, incarceration, and conviction of innocent persons is identified as 'miscarriage of justice' that takes place after a person has been wrongfully convicted but is later found to be factually innocent basis a new fact / proof coming to light. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ('ICCPR', ratified by India) also creates an obligation on the State parties to enact a law to compensate the victims of such miscarriage of justice.

This report looks at the issue from the context of Indian Criminal Justice system and recommends 'wrongful prosecution' to be the standards of miscarriage of justice, as against 'wrongful conviction' and 'wrongful incarceration'.

'Wrongful prosecution' would include cases where the accused and not guilty of the offence, and the police and / or the prosecution engaged in some form of misconduct in investigating and / or prosecuting the person. It would include both the cases where the person spent time in prison as well as where he did not; and cases where the accused was found not guilty by the trial court or where the accused was convicted by one or more courts but was ultimately found to be not guilty by the Higher Court.

- The Report gives an overview of the remedies available under the existing laws and discusses their inadequacies (also noted by the High Court in the aforementioned Order). The Commission, accordingly, recommends enactment of a specific legal provision for redressal of cases of wrongful prosecution - to provide relief to the victims of wrongful prosecution in terms of monetary and non-monetary compensation (such as counselling, mental health services, vocational / employment skills development etc.) within a statutory framework.

The Report enumerates the core principles of the recommended framework- defining 'wrongful prosecution' i.e., cases in which claim for compensation can be filed, designation of a Special Court to decide these claims of compensation, nature of proceedings - timeline for deciding the claim, etc., financial and other factors to be considered while determining the compensation, provisions for interim compensation in certain cases, removal of disqualification on account of wrongful prosecution/ conviction etc.

A draft Bill, articulating the aforesaid, is annexed with the Report as the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 2018.

Background:

The High Court of Delhi in the case of Babloo Chauhan had expressed grave concern about the state of innocent persons being wrongfully prosecuted, incarcerated for crimes that they did not commit. The Court highlighted the urgent need for a legislative framework for provided relief and rehabilitation to victims of wrongful prosecution, incarceration and asked the Law Commission to undertake a comprehensive examination of the aforesaid issued and make a recommendation thereon to the Government of India.

INTERNATIONAL TOURISM ARRIVALS HIT RECORD HIGH IN 2017

Why in News: The number of people travelling abroad hit record levels in 2017 with a total of 1,323 million international tourist arrivals recorded in destinations around the world, with India leading the growth in the South Asian region, according to data from the UN's tourism organisation.

Important Points:

- The latest edition of its Tourism Highlights shows international arrivals reached 1,323 million last year. The figure represents an 84 million increase over 2016, and a new record, with the sector also recording "uninterrupted growth" in arrivals for eight consecutive years.
- Europe and Africa led the regions with increases in arrivals, with growth of eight per cent and nine per cent, respectively.

- The UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), a specialized agency of the United Nations, added that tourism is the world's third largest export category, earning USD 1.3 trillion in receipts in 2017: an increase of five per cent.

Meanwhile, total exports from international tourism stood at USD 1.6 trillion, or an average of USD 4 billion a day: that is, seven per cent of the world's exports.

These strong 2017 results were driven by sustained travel demand for destinations across all world regions, including a firm recovery by those that have suffered from security challenges in recent years.

The report said positive results in South Asia were largely driven by the strong performance of India, the "sub region's largest destination, which benefited from increasing demand from western source markets and simpler visa procedures."

In India, international tourists arrivals grew from 14.57 million in 2016 to 15.54 million in 2017. International tourism receipts for India grew from 22.42 billion dollars in 2016 to 27.36 billion dollars last year.

For South Asia as a whole, international tourists arrivals grew from 25.17 million in 2016 to 26.57 million in 2017. International tourism receipts for South Asia grew from 33.28 billion dollars in 2016 to 39.52 billion dollars last year.

International tourist arrivals grew 6.8% in 2017, the highest increase since the 2009 global economic crisis and well above UNWTO's long-term forecast of 3.8% per year for the period 2010 to 2020. Results were driven by sustained travel demand for destinations across all world regions, including a firm recovery of those suffering from security challenges in recent years.

- Growth was fuelled by the global economic upswing, resulting in strong outbound demand from virtually all source markets.
- The recovery of outbound demand from Brazil and the Russian Federation after a few years of decline and the ongoing rise of India, also contributed to inbound growth in many destinations.
- Seven of the 10 top tourism destinations are also leaders worldwide in both international tourist arrivals and international tourism receipts: China, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.
Strong outbound demand from virtually all source markets, including rebounds from major emerging economies Brazil and the Russian Federation, benefited both advanced and emerging destinations.

About world Tourism Organization (UNWTO):

The World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.

As the leading international organization in the field of tourism, UNWTO promotes tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability and offers leadership and support to the sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies worldwide.

UNWTO encourages the implementation of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, to maximize tourism's socio-economic contribution while minimizing its possible negative impacts, and is committed to promoting tourism as an instrument in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), geared towards reducing poverty and fostering sustainable development worldwide.

UNWTO generates market knowledge, promotes competitive and sustainable tourism policies and instruments, fosters tourism education and training, and works to make tourism an effective tool for development through technical assistance projects in over 100 countries around the world.

- UNWTO's membership includes 158 countries, 6 Associate Members and over 500 Affiliate Member representing the private sector, educational institutions, tourism associations and local tourism authorities.

LAW COMMISSION'S SUGGESTIONS IN ITS CONSULTATION PAPER ON 'REFORM OF FAMILY LAW'

Why in News: This consultation on family law reforms in India, discusses a range of provisions within all family laws, secular or personal, and suggests a number of changes to in the form of potential amendments and fresh enactments.

Important Points:

As general suggestions to reforming family law, the paper discusses the introduction of new grounds for 'no fault' divorce accompanied by corresponding changes to provisions on alimony and maintenance, rights of differently-abled individuals within marriage, the thirty-day period for registration of marriages under Special Marriage Act; uncertainty and inequality in age of consent for marriage, compulsory registration of marriage, bigamy upon conversion etc.

Under Hindu law the paper among other issues discusses problems with provisions like restitution of conjugal rights, and further suggests the inclusion of concepts such as 'community of property' of a married couple, abolition of coparcenary, rights of illegitimate children et al. There are further suggestions for addressing self-acquired property of a Hindu female.

Under Muslim law the paper discusses the reform in inheritance law through codification of Muslim law on inheritance, but ensuring that the codified law is gender just. The paper also discusses the rights of a widow, and the changes application to general laws such as introduction of community of (self-acquired) property after marriage, inclusion of irretrievable breakdown of marriage as a ground for divorce.

Under Parsi law there are suggestions relating to protecting married women's right to inherit property even if they marry outside their community.

The paper also suggests the expansion of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015, to make it into a robust secular law that can be accessed by individuals of all communities for adoption. There are suggestions for amending the guidelines for adoption and also a suggestion to alter the language of the Act to accommodate all gender identities.

- The paper discusses lacunae within custody and guardianship laws, statutory or customary, and suggests that the 'best interest of the child' has to remain the paramount consideration in deciding matters of custody regardless of any prevailing personal law in place.
- Although the sixth schedule provides exemptions and exemptions to states in the North East and tribal areas, we suggest that efforts of women's organisations in these areas be acknowledged and relied upon in this regard to suggest ways in which family law reform could be aided by the state even when direct intervention may not be possible.
Since a number of these issues such as polygamy, nikah halala, settlement of a Parsi wife's property for benefit of children, as well as the law on adultery among others is presently sub judice before the Supreme Court, they have been discussed in the paper but comprehensive changes on some of these issues have not been suggested at this stage.
According to the paper, the age of majority, 18 years, must be recognised uniformly as the legal age for marriage for men and women alike as per the 1875 Indian Majority Act. "The difference in age for husband and wife has no basis in law as spouses entering into a marriage are by all means equals and their partnership must also be of that between equals," the paper said.
The law panel was of the view that maintaining the difference of 18 years for women and 21 years for men "simply contributes to the stereotype that wives must be younger than their husbands".
The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013 - enacted after what is popularly called the 'Nirbhaya case' - now deems any intercourse under the age of 18 years as rape, it pointed out.
"The law in such cases needs to duly consider whether criminalising all intercourse, even between the ages of 16 to 18 after the 2013 amendment may also have the consequence of criminalising consensual intercourse. The end goal of any legislative endeavour for the empowerment of women or gender justice should priorities autonomy of women," the document said.
- Instead of a full-fledged report on a uniform civil code, the law panel preferred a consultation paper as it had little time at hand to bring out a comprehensive report.

What is Uniform Civil Code?

The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India proposes to replace the personal laws based on the scriptures and customs of each major religious community in the country with a common set governing every citizen.

Is there a provision in Indian constitution for Uniform Civil Code (UCC)?

The constitution has a provision for Uniform Civil Code in Article 44 as a Directive Principle of State Policy which states that "The State shall endeavor to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India."

About Law Commission of India (LCI):

The LCI is a non-statutory and non-constitutional body constituted by the Union Government from time to time. The first commission was constituted in 1955 and since then various commissions were re-constituted every three years. It is usually headed by a retired Supreme Court judge or former Chief Justice of a high court. The Secretary Department of Legal Affairs and Secretary, Legislature Department of Union Ministry of Law & Justice are ex-officio members of the Commission. So far, various Law Commissions have submitted 262 reports to make important contribution towards codification and progressive development of laws of the country.

INDIA, PAKISTAN AGREE FOR 'TREATY MANDATED TOURS' OF BOTH SIDES IN INDUS BASIN

Why in News: India and Pakistan have agreed to undertake the Indus Waters Treaty mandated tours by their Commissioners in the Indus basin on both sides to resolve issues on the various hydroelectric projects, including the Pakal Dul and Lower Kalnai in Jammu and Kashmir.

The recently concluded deliberations were held to further strengthen the role of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) for matters under the 1960 Treaty.

Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)

IWT is water-distribution treaty between India and Pakistan which was brokered by World Bank (then the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development). It deals with sharing of water of Indus water system having six rivers - Beas, Ravi, Sutlej, Indus, Chenab and Jhelum between the two countries.

- It was signed by then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and President of Pakistan Ayub Khan in Karachi on September 19, 1960. It is most successful water treaty in world as it has survived India-Pakistan wars of 1965, 1971 and the 1999 Kargil standoff besides Kashmir insurgency since 1990.
- As per treaty, control over three eastern rivers Ravi, Beas and Sutlej are with India. While control over three western rivers Indus, Jhelum and Chenab was given to Pakistan. It allows India to use only 20% of the water of Indus river, which flows through it first, for irrigation, power generation and transport.
The treaty also sets out mechanism for cooperation and information exchange between two countries regarding their use of the rivers. It sets up Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) as a bilateral commission to implement and manage the treaty. It also makes mandatory for both countries to appoint water commissioners, who are required to meet twice a year and arrange technical visits to projects' sites.
The commission solves disputes arising over water sharing. Besides, treaty also provides arbitration mechanism to solve disputes amicably. The World Bank's role in relation to "disputes" and "differences" with respect of IWT is limited to the designation of people to fulfill certain roles when requested by either or both of the parties.

Decisions taken during the meeting

During the meeting, technical discussions were held on implementation of various hydroelectric projects under the provisions of Indus Waters Treaty 1960 including Pakal Dul (1000 MW) and Lower Kalnai (48 MW) projects in Jammu and Kashmir.

Both the countries agreed to undertake the Treaty mandated tours of both the Indus Commissioners in Indus basin on both sides. They deliberated on further strengthening the role of the Permanent Indus Commission for matters under the Treaty.

It was agreed by both the sides to hold the next meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission in India on mutually convenient dates.

Objection raised by Pakistan

- India intends to construct two hydropower projects on the Chenab River, the 1000 MW Pakal Dul dam and 48 MW Lower Kalnai hydropower projects.

- However, Pakistan demanded reduction of the height of Pakal Dul's reservoir up to five metres, maintenance of 40-metre height above sea level while making spillways' gates of the Pakal Dul project.
- It also demanded clarification regarding the pattern and mechanism for the water storage and releases and some technical concerns over design of the Lower Kalnai hydropower project.

Background

Pakistan is demanding reduction of height of Pakal Dul's reservoir up to five metres, maintenance of 40-metre height above sea level and making spillways' gates of Pakal Dul project. Besides it is also asking for clarification of pattern and mechanism for water storage, releases and some technical concerns over design of Lower Kalnai hydropower project from India.

'KRISHNA KUTIR'

Why in News: Union Ministry of Women and Child Development recently inaugurated widows' home 'Krishna Kutir' at Vrindavan in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. The construction of the home was funded by Central Government and it will be managed by the Uttar Pradesh Government. Krishna Kutir is special home for 1000 widows set under Swadhar Greh scheme and is the largest ever facility of its kind created by government organization. It was constructed to mitigate the plight of widows living in pathetic condition in Vrindavan.

Krishna Kutir:

Its construction was funded by Central Government and will be managed by UP Government. It was constructed on 1.4 hectare of land allotted by UP Government through National Building Construction Corporation (NBCC). It has 100 rooms or dormitories with capacity of housing 1000 inmates at time. Its name was selected a month-long Vrindavan Ashram contest held on social media and entry of Sunita Katyal, Krishna Kutir, was adjudged as winning entry.

The design of this Home was prepared in consultation with Helpage India and is old age friendly. It consists of ground plus three floors with facilities of ramp, lifts, supply of adequate electricity, water and other amenities for meeting requirement of senior citizens and persons with special challenges. It is also equipped with large modern kitchen and skill cum training centre. It also has two dispensaries and physiotherapy facility to provide regular medical check-ups to inmates.

Swadhar Greh Scheme:

It is implemented by Union Ministry of Women and Child Development. It aims to ensure economic and social security to women in distress or victims of difficult circumstances who are in need of institutional support for rehabilitation so that they could lead their life with dignity. It envisages providing shelter, food, clothing and health as well as economic and social security for these women.

Implementation of the scheme:

The State Governments/UT Administration invite applications from eligible organizations and the proposals which fulfil the norms are placed before a Project Sanctioning Committee (PSC) chaired by Secretary(WCD) of the State/UT concerned.

As per guidelines of the Swadhar Greh Scheme, to seek financial assistance the agency should meet following requirements:

The agency should be either recognized by State/UT under existing law or should be well known with the experience or working in the field for at least 3 years and its work should be reported satisfactory by the State Govt./UT Administration concerned.

It should ordinarily have been engaged in the field of women's welfare/social welfare for a minimum period of two years.

Its financial position should be sound.

It should have facilities, resources, experience and personnel to undertake the management of such project.

It should run Swadhar Greh on a no-profit basis.

It should have facilities like computers, internet connection etc at Swadhar Greh.

RBI: INTERNAL OMBUDSMAN MANDATORY FOR BANKS WITH OVER 10 BRANCHES

Why in News: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) asked all scheduled commercial banks with over 10 branches to appoint an internal ombudsman (IO). The central bank has, however, excluded regional rural banks (RRBs) from appointing ombudsman.

However, the apex bank excluded Regional Rural Banks from its directive.

Who is an ombudsman?

An ombudsman is a person officially charged with investigating and addressing public complaints or violation of rights.

Important Points:

- The implementation of IO Scheme, 2018 will be monitored by the bank's internal audit mechanism apart from regulatory oversight by RBI.
- The Scheme covers appointment and tenure; roles and responsibilities; procedural guidelines and oversight mechanism for the Internal Ombudsman.

All Scheduled Commercial Banks in India having more than 10 banking outlets are required to appoint IO in their banks.

The IO will examine customer complaints referring to the deficiency in service on the part of the bank that are partly or wholly rejected by the bank.

The customers of banks need not approach the IO directly as the banks themselves will escalate all complaints internally, which are not fully redressed to their respective IOs before conveying the final decision to the complainant.

Why was there a need of revised directions regarding Internal Ombudsman?

In May 2015, the RBI had advised all public-sector and selected private and foreign banks to appoint Internal Ombudsman (IO) as an independent authority to review complaints rejected by them.

The IO mechanism was set up with a view to strengthen the internal grievance redressal system of banks and to ensure that the complaints of the customers are redressed at the level of the bank itself by an authority (Internal Ombudsman) placed at the highest level of bank's grievance redressal mechanism.

Now, to enhance the independence of the Internal Ombudsman while simultaneously strengthening the monitoring system over functioning of the IO mechanism, RBI issued revised directions under Section 35 A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 in the form of 'Internal Ombudsman Scheme, 2018'.

About RBI:

- The Reserve Bank of India is the central bank of the country. Central banks are a relatively recent innovation and most central banks, as we know them today, were established around the early twentieth century.

- The Reserve Bank of India was set up on the basis of the recommendations of the Hilton Young Commission. The Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 (II of 1934) provides the statutory basis of the functioning of the Bank, which commenced operations on April 1, 1935.

The Bank was constituted to

- Regulate the issue of banknotes
- Maintain reserves with a view to securing monetary stability and
To operate the credit and currency system of the country to its advantage.

The Bank began its operations by taking over from the Government the functions so far being performed by the Controller of Currency and from the Imperial Bank of India, the management of Government accounts and public debt. The existing currency offices at Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Rangoon, Karachi, Lahore and Cawnpore (Kanpur) became branches of the Issue Department. Offices of the Banking Department were established in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Delhi and Rangoon.

ASIAN GAMES 2018

Why in News: India ended the 2018 Asian Games with the most number of medals in the Asiad. The Indian athletes bagged four medals on the penultimate day of this year's Asian Games to end the campaign with 69 medals. India ended with 15 gold, 24 silver and 30 bronze medals.

With 69 medals, India will finish at eighth on the table. They have more medals than Taiwan (66) and Iran (59) but they are above India because they have more gold medals than India. While Taiwan has 17, Iran has 19.

Important Points:

- India set a new record for most medals won and equaled its previous record for maximum gold medals at the Asian Games. India also won 24 silver medals at the 18th Asian Games, which is more than any of the Games' previous editions.
- India also created new national records in several sports and registered many firsts, some of which are listed below:
- PV Sindhu became the first badminton player to win silver in Asian Games.



- Rahi Sarnobat became the first Indian woman to win a gold medal in shooting at the Asian Games.
Vinesh Phogat became the first Indian woman wrestler to win a gold medal at the Asian Games.
Swapna Barman gave India its first-ever Asiad gold in women's heptathlon event.
Neeraj Chopra became the first Indian javelin thrower to win an Asiad gold.
Fouaad Mirza became the first Indian to win an Asian Games individual equestrian medal since 1982.
India also won its first medal in sepaktakraw at the 18th Asian Games.

2018 Asian Games vs 2010 Asian Games

India's previous best performance at the Asian Games was in the 2010 edition, when it had amassed a total of 64 medals, including 14 gold, 17 silver and 34 bronze medals. The Games had witnessed the first ever medals in gymnastics and roller sports.

In the 2018 edition, India not only bettered its previous best medal haul but also equaled its previous best gold medal haul, which was achieved in the 1951 edition of the Games held in New Delhi, India.

India also won medals in sports like Sepaktakraw and Kurash for the first time in the 2018 Asian Games.

- However, it failed to grab a medal in cue sports, golf, chess, roller sports, swimming and gymnastics, as it had done in the 2010 edition.

Important Differences

Sport Name	2018 Asian Games	2010 Asian Games
Athletics	19 (7 gold, 10 silver and 2 bronze)	12 (5 gold, 2 silver and 5 bronze)
Shooting	9 (2 gold, 4 silver and 3 bronze)	8 (1 gold, 3 silver and 4 bronze)
Wrestling	3 (2 gold & 1 bronze)	3 (bronze)
Bridge	3 (1 gold & 2 bronze)	No Medal
Rowing	3 (1 gold & 2 bronze)	5 (1 gold, 3 silver & 1 bronze)
Tennis	3 (1 gold & 2 bronze)	5 (gold, 1 silver & 2 bronze)
Boxing	2 (1 gold & 1 bronze)	9 (2 gold, 3 silver & 4 bronze)
Archery	2 (silver)	3 (1 silver and 2 bronze)
Equestrian	2 (silver)	No Medal
Squash	5 (1 silver & 4 bronze)	3 (bronze)
Sailing	3 (1 silver & 2 bronze)	1 (silver)
Badminton	2 (1 silver & 1 bronze)	No Medal
Hockey	2 (1 silver & 1 bronze)	1 (bronze)
Kabbadi	2 (1 silver & 1 bronze)	2 (gold)
Kurash	2 (1 silver & 1 bronze)	Event was not Introduced
Wushu	4 (bronze)	No Medal
Table Tennis	2 (Bronze)	No Medal
Sepaktakraw	1 (bronze)	No Medal

Key Government initiatives to boost sports

Khelo India Programme:

The programme was introduced by the Union Government to revive the sports culture in India at the grass-root level.

The programme's main objective is to build a strong framework for all sports played in the country and establish India as a great sporting nation.

The programme helps scout young talent from schools in various disciplines and grooms them as future sports champions.

- The scholarship programme is designed to take care of the players' expenses including training, development, boarding and lodging and tournament exposure apart from offering them out of pocket expense allowance.

National Sports University at Manipur:

- The proposal for setting up of National Sports University in Manipur was formally announced in the Budget 2014-15.
 - The Government of Manipur has transferred 336.93 acres of land in Thoubal district of Manipur to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports for the proposed University.
 - The National Sports University Bill, 2015, which provides for the setting of the university is under finalisation with the Ministry of Law and Justice.
- The University is expected to give an opportunity to the youth of country in general and of North Eastern States in particular for pursuing courses in coaching, physiotherapy, fitness, sports management and sports journalism.
- It would also churn out sportspersons of abilities both at the grass-roots as well as international levels and also promote sports-industry-related products like sports goods and medicines.

National Sports Talent Search Scheme (NSTSS):

The National Sports Talent Search Scheme (NSTSS) was formulated to identify the sporting talent among students in the age group of 8-12 years, who possess inborn qualities such as anthropometric, physical and physiological capabilities without any anatomical infirmities.

The scheme also aimed to nurture the sporting potential and talent in district-level sports schools/ central sports schools and national sports academies etc, in order to make them excel at the National and international sports competitions.

Target Olympic Podium (TOP) Scheme:

The TOP (Target Olympic Podium) Scheme had been formulated within the overall ambit of National Sports Development Fund (NSDF) with the objective of identifying and supporting potential medal prospects for 2016 and 2020 Olympic Games.

The focused disciplines under the scheme include Athletics, Archery, Badminton, Boxing, Wrestling, Weightlifting and Shooting.

- The selected athletes are being provided financial assistance for their customised training at Institutes having world-class facilities and other necessary support.

- The benchmark for selection of athletes under the scheme is in relation to international standards.
- 106 athletes have been identified so far for funding under TOP scheme.

TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVES FOR COFFEE STAKEHOLDERS

Why in News: Union Minister for Commerce & Industry, Suresh Prabhu launched Coffee Connect mobile app and digital mobile extension services 'Coffee Krishi Tharanga' for coffee stakeholders.

About 'Coffee Connect' mobile app:

The 'Coffee Connect' mobile app has been developed to ease the work of field functionaries and to improve the work efficiency.

The application provides solution by harnessing the power of mobility comprising the latest technology in easing the whole process of the field activities like digitisation of Coffee Growers & Estates with Geo Tagging, collecting the Plantation details.

It will also help in boosting transparency in the activities of the extension officers and officials, transparency in subsidy disbursement and real time report generation.

About Coffee KrishiTharanga services:

The Coffee KrishiTharanga services are aimed at providing customised information and services to increase productivity, profitability, and environmental sustainability.

The "Coffee KrishiTharanga" was pilot tested in the Chikmagalur and Hassan districts of Karnataka, covering 30000 farmers during the first year and will now be extended to remaining growers in a phased manner. NABARD has partly funded the Pilot project.

These services will help to reach maximum growers in limited period; improve the efficiency through digitization; and leverage existing mobile reach for wider delivery of improved technology.

Pilot projects on data analytics, artificial intelligence, IOTS and block chain:

- Suresh Prabhu also launched pilot projects on data analytics, artificial intelligence, IOTS and blockchain.
- The Coffee Board identified technological solutions to address some of the perennial coffee production and coffee farming issues such as rainfall, pests and diseases.
- Coffee Board in collaboration with EKA Analytics, a global leader in the data analytics and artificial intelligence, developed the hyper local weather forecast, pest (white stem borer) identification and leaf rust disease forecast applications for pilot testing.

These initiatives are in line with PM

Narendra Modi's 'Digital India' programme:

All these abovementioned initiatives are in line with PM Narendra Modi's Digital India initiative. The Coffee Board undertook key digital initiatives for the overall technological advancement of the coffee sector and value chain. These initiatives are aimed at benefiting all stakeholders in the coffee value chain.

Considering that the farmers are the end users, these technologies have been built on certain critical principles like ease of use, wider participation, maximization of reach and benefit.

GOVT CLEARS OVER 36% HIKE IN ARTISAN WAGES

Why in News: The Union Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) approved a proposal by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) to increase the wages of artisans by over 36 percent. With this, the wages will be increased from Rs 5.50 per hank previously to Rs 7.50 per hank.

This proposal for increase in wages to Khadi spinners, along with payment of government subsidy Modified Market Development Assistance (MMDA), will be implemented with effect from August 15, 2018.

Important Points:

Under the MMDA programme, 30 percent of the prime cost is paid to the Khadi institutions as production subsidy.

Out of this 30 percent, 40 percent goes to artisans as wage incentives and the remaining 60 percent goes to the Khadi institutions.

- The wage incentives are paid by Khadi and Village Industries Commission directly to the accounts of the artisans through direct benefits transfer.

- The enhancement in wages is expected to draw youth towards taking up spinning as a profession.

Importance:

This increase will also attract new and younger artisans to Khadi, who were earlier doubtful about their income comparing it to the wages given to the daily wagers under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA).

Example

If an artisan makes 20 hanks in a day, he will get Rs 150 per day as wage at the rate of Rs 7.50 per hank, plus incentives like MMDA, which would be approximately 35 percent on Rs 150, that is Rs 52.

Hence, an artisan spinning minimum 20 hanks in a day will now start earning Rs 202 per day, including his wages and government incentive.

Most of the artisans spin more than 20 hanks per day presently.

About Micro- Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs):

The Micro- Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are small sized entities, defined in terms of their size of investment. They are contributing significantly to output, employment export etc. in the economy. They perform a critical role in the economy by providing employment to a large number of unskilled and semi-skilled people, contributing to exports, raising manufacturing sector production and extending support to bigger industries by supplying raw material, basic goods, finished parts and components, etc.

About Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC):

The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is a statutory body formed by the Government of India, under the Act of Parliament, 'Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act of 1956'. It is an apex organisation under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, with regard to Khadi and village industries within India, which seeks to - "plan, promote, facilitate, organise and assist in the establishment and development of khadi and village industries in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary." In April 1957, it took over the work of former All India Khadi and Village Industries Board. The First

Director of KVIC was Late Sardar KA Venkataramaia, a veteran freedom fighter from Karnataka. Its head office is based in Mumbai, with its six zonal offices in Delhi, Bhopal, Bangalore, Kolkata, Mumbai and Guwahati. Other than its zonal offices, it has offices in 29 states for the implementation of its various programmes

SECTION 377: SUPREME COURT DELIVERS HISTORIC VERDICT,

DECRIMINALISES CONTROVERSIAL LAW

Why in News: In a landmark verdict, the Supreme Court today scrapped the controversial Section 377 - a 158-year-old colonial law on consensual gay sex. The Supreme Court reversed its own decision and said Section 377 is irrational and arbitrary. The bench comprising Chief Justice Dipak Misra; Justices R F Nariman, A M Khanwilkar, D Y Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra ruled that Section 377, to the extent it criminalises sexual acts between consenting adults, whether homosexual or heterosexual, is unconstitutional.

However, bestiality will continue as an offence. Any kind of sexual activity with animals shall remain penal offence under Section 377 of the IPC.

The Judgement overrules the Suresh Kaushal Judgement pronounced in 2013 by the apex court. The judgement is based on the interpretation of Article 14 (Right to Equality); Article 15 (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth); Article 19 (Freedom of Speech and Expression); and Article 21 (Right to Life and Right to Privacy) of the Indian Constitution.

Judgments made by Chief Justice and Justices

CJI Dipak Misra: Section 377 is arbitrary. LGBT community possesses rights like others. Majoritarian views and popular morality cannot dictate constitutional rights.

CJI Misra & Justice Khanwilkar: Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is violation of freedom of speech and expression. Bodily autonomy is individualistic. Expression of intimacy is part of right to privacy.

- CJI Misra & Justice Khanwilkar: Section 377 to the extent it criminalises sexual acts between consenting adults, whether homosexual or heterosexual, is unconstitutional.



- **Justice R F Nariman:** Homosexuality cannot be regarded as mental disorder. Homosexuals have right to live with dignity.
- Justice Chandrachud:** Section 377 inflicts tragedy and anguish; it has to be remedied. Human sexuality cannot be confined to a binary.
- Justice Indu Malhotra:** History owes an apology to these people persecuted by Section 377 for the social ostracism caused by the section.

What is Section 377?

The section holds that whoever, voluntarily, has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, commits an unnatural offence.

A person found guilty, under Section 377, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to 10 years, and shall also be liable to pay a fine.

Section 377 existed ever since the Indian Penal Code came into existence in 1860.

July 2018 Judgment of Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of India on July 12, 2018 stated that if the criminality of consensual gay sex is done away, the social stigma and discrimination attached to the LGBTQ community would go.

A five-judge bench comprising Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices R F Nariman, A M Khanwilkar, D Y Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra ruled this while hearing petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the 158-year-old penal law.

- The bench said that the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) community faced discrimination and social stigma because of the criminality attached to the consensual same-sex relationship.

The bench said that it will try to see whether section 377 of the IPC can stand the test of fundamental rights enshrined under Articles 14 (right to equality), 19 (freedom of speech and association) and 21 (right to life and liberty) of the Constitution.

However, the court reserved its verdict on whether to decriminalise Section 377 or not.

Delhi high court's 2009 ruling

- In 2001, the Naz Foundation, an NGO working on HIV/AIDS and sexual health issues, challenged the constitutionality of the Section 377 before the Delhi High Court. In 2009, the Delhi high court had ruled that Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was unconstitutional. The court held that penalising such actions violated the Right to Privacy and personal liberty under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.

It was also in violation of Article 14- the Right to Equality, Article 15- no discrimination on the basis of gender.

Important Points:

2001: Naz Foundation challenged the constitutionality of the Section 377 before the Delhi High Court.

2009 : Delhi High Court decriminalises homosexuality and ruled that Section 377 is unconstitutional.

2009-12: Individuals and religious groups challenged Delhi High Court's decisions.

2013 : Supreme Court sets aside Delhi High Court's ruling and recriminalizes Section 377.

2016 : Supreme Court agrees to revisit all the petitions

2017 : Supreme Court upheld Right to Privacy

January 2018 : Supreme Court agrees to reconsider its 2013 ruling and sends it to a larger bench

July 2018 : Supreme Court stated that if the criminality of consensual gay sex is done away, the social stigma attached to the LGBTQ community would go.

September 2018 : Supreme Court delivered historic judgement; terms Section 377 of the IPC as unconstitutional.

About LGBTQ:

LGBTQ is an initialism that collectively refers to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and Queer communities. In use since the 1990s, the term is an adaptation of the initialism LGB, which itself started replacing the phrase gay community beginning in the mid-to-late 1980s.

Death penalty on homosexuality in these countries:

Sudan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen are given death sentences to build a homosexual relationship. In Somalia and Nigeria, there is also a provision for death penalty for this. However, there are 13 countries in the world where there is a provision for death penalty for gay sex. There is a provision for death sentence in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Qatar, but it is not implemented. Some countries, including Indonesia, are punished for flogging for gay sex. In other countries, it has also been kept in the category of crime and sentenced to jail.

Countries where gay marriage is legal

2000# - Netherlands
2003- Belgium
2005- Canada
2005-spain
2006- South Africa
2008-Norway
2009- Mexico*
2009-Sweden
2010- Iceland
2010-Portugal
2010-Argentina
2011-Denmark**
2013- Uruguay
2013 -New Zealand
2013- France
2013- Brazil
2013-14- United Kingdom***
2014 - Luxembourg
2015-Finland
2015- Ireland
2015- United States
2016- Colombia
2017- Germany
2017- Malta

*In some jurisdictions | **Greenland, an autonomous territory of Denmark, legalised it in 2015 | ***England and Wales did it in 2013, and Scotland in 2014

#Year in which gay marriage was legalised ?

PANEL URGES PLAN TO SAVE HIMALAYAN SPRINGS

Why in News: NITI Aayog constituted group of experts has submitted report titled 'Inventory and Revival of Springs in the Himalayas for Water Security.' It has mentioned that nearly 30% of springs crucial to water security of people are drying and 50% have reported reduced discharge.

Important Points:

- Challenges: Almost half of perennial springs in Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) have already dried up or have become seasonal. Tens of thousands of villages in this region are currently facing acute water shortage for drinking and other domestic purposes. Almost 60% of low-discharge springs that provided water to small habitations in Himalayan region have reported clear decline during the last couple of decades

Dedicated mission: It has urged government to set up dedicated mission to salvage and revive spring water systems in Himalayan States, given their vital importance as source of water for both drinking and irrigation for the region's inhabitants.

Key Message: It calls for spring mapping and revival, using 8 steps protocol should be taken up across Himalayan states in phased manner, applying carrying capacity concept to all major tourist destinations and implementing and monitoring tourism sector. It calls for setting up of Mission on Spring Water Management in Himalayas. 8-year programme: It also has mooted 8-year programme to overhaul spring water management. This includes preparing digital atlas of country's springsheds, training para-hydrogeologists who could lead grassroots conservation and introducing Spring Health Card.

Water sources distribution: Meghalaya with 3,810 villages with springs has highest number of these water sources in Eastern Himalayan States. Sikkim had greatest density with 94% of its villages having spring. In Western Himalayas, Jammu & Kashmir had both highest number of villages with springs at 3,313 and greatest density of 50.6%.

Shimla Crisis:

- Himalayan spring water systems are important as a

source of water for both drinking and irrigation for the region's inhabitants. Spanning States across the country's north and northeast and home to about 50 million people, the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) has been heavily reliant on these natural groundwater sources.

- Also, with almost 64% of the cultivable area in the Himalayas fed by natural springs, they are often the only source of irrigation in the region.

Concerns:

Almost half of the perennial springs have already dried up or have become seasonal and tens of thousands of villages are currently facing acute water shortage for drinking and other domestic purposes.

Almost 60% of low-discharge springs that provided water to small habitations in the Himalayan region have reported clear decline during the last couple of decades.

The extent of the crisis plaguing the mountainous region was recently evident when more than half a dozen districts of Himachal Pradesh and the State capital Shimla faced a severe drinking water crisis this May after major water sources either went fully or partially dry.

Threats:

These water sources today are under increasing threat from the urbanisation caused by a constant push for development and climate change.

There are also multiple sources of pollution in springs and these were due to both geogenic, or 'natural' causes and anthropogenic, or man-made, ones.

Microbial content, sulphates and nitrates were primarily because of anthropogenic reasons and contamination from fluoride, arsenic and iron was mainly derived from geogenic sources.

Distribution of springs:

Meghalaya with 3,810 villages with springs has the highest number of these water sources in the Eastern Himalayan States.

- Sikkim has the greatest density with 94% of its villages having a spring.
- In the Western Himalayas, Jammu & Kashmir had

both the highest number of villages with springs at 3,313 and the greatest density of 50.6%.

What needs to be done?

A multidisciplinary, collaborative approach of managing springs that will involve building upon the existing body of work on spring water management is needed. The programme could be designed on the concept of an action-research programme as part of a hydrogeology-based, community-support system on spring water management.

A long- term plan:

The task force moots an 8-year programme to overhaul spring water management. This includes: preparing a digital atlas of the country's springsheds, training 'para-hydrogeologists' who could lead grassroots conservation and introduction of a 'Spring Health Card.'

Background:

Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) spans across states across country's north and northeast and is home to about 50 million people who are heavily reliant on natural groundwater sources such as perennial springs. These water sources are under increasing threat from urbanisation caused by constant push for development and climate change. The extent of crisis plaguing Himalayan region was recently evident when more than half dozen districts of Himachal Pradesh and State capital Shimla had faced severe drinking water crisis in May 2018 after major water sources either went fully or partially dry.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS SUMMIT 2018

Why in News: The International Women Entrepreneurs Summit 2018 is being held in Kathmandu, Nepal. It is organised by the South Asian Women Development Forum. Theme: "Equality begins with Economic Empowerment".

Objective:

The main objective of the summit is to bring together achievers, women business leaders, professionals, international service providers, resource organisations, experts, government representatives and other stakeholders with a focus on innovative economic transformation through discussions and collaborations.

International Women Entrepreneurs Summit 2018:

The main objective of the summit was to bring together achievers, women business leaders, professionals, international service providers, resource organizations, experts, government representatives and other stakeholders with a focus on innovative economic transformation through discussions and collaborations. It had seen participation of delegates from SAARC, ASEAN, EU, Africa, Arab countries and China.

South Asian Women Development Forum (SAWDF):

SAWDF is an autonomous, nonprofit organization based in Kathmandu, Nepal.

It was granted the status of SAARC Recognized Body by 36th Session of SAARC Council Ministers at 18th SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu in 2014.

It is first SAARC Recognized Body organisation working on women entrepreneurs issues.

It represents national women entrepreneurs' associations or organizations, institutions working towards economic issues of women entrepreneurs in SAARC Region.

Its membership is based on organizations with extensive work around women's entrepreneurship.

IAF CARRIES OUT FIRST EVER MID-AIR REFUELLING OF TEJAS COMBAT JET

Why in News: Indian Air Force (IAF) has successfully carried out first ever midair refuelling of indigenously developed light combat aircraft (LCA) Tejas. The midair refuelling test conducted involved dry linkup, meaning no fuel was actually transferred between IAF IL-78 tanker and Tejas fighter jet through its air-to-air refuelling probe.

Important Points:

For this test, Russian-built IL-78 MKI tanker was launched from IAF's base in Agra while LCA Tejas fighter was launched from Gwalior. Nine more tests will be held which will also include wet tests where actual transfer of fuel takes place from IAF tanker to fighter jet. The success of these midair refuelling trials will be major leap for indigenous fighter which will help in enhancing its mission capability by increasing its range and payload. . The ability to carry out air-to-air refuelling is also one of critical requirements for LCA Tejas to achieve final operational clearance.

About LCA Tejas:

- LCA Tejas is lightweight single-seat multi-role jet fighter, powered by single engine. It has tailless and compound delta wing design made entirely of composite structures. It is pegged as world's smallest and lightest supersonic fighter aircraft in its class.
- It is first advanced fly-by-wire Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) designed, developed and manufactured indigenously by state owned Hindustan Aeronautical Limited (HAL) and Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) as part of LCA programme, started in 1980s to replace India's ageing MiG-21 fighters. It was named 'Tejas', which means 'radiance', by former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. It took total of 20 years from 1993 to 2013 for building this aircraft. Its maiden flight took place in 2001.

Advance Features: LCA Tejas is equipped with quadruplex digital fly-by-wire flight control system to ease handling by the pilot. It also has digital computer-based attack system and autopilot mode. It is also equipped with satellite-aided Inertial Navigation System.

Stealth Features: It has many features of stealth fighter aircraft. Its radar cross section is very less compared to other aircrafts like MiG-29, F-16 due to its small size and extensive usage of carbon composites. It incorporates glass cockpit in which pilot is feed with real time information. It also has open architecture software for avionics which can be easily updated as and when required.

Range: It has limited reach of little over 400-km and will be mainly used for close air-to-ground operations (unlike Russian-origin Sukhoi-30MKIs or Rafale which have deep strike capability into enemy territory due to their long range).

Weaponry: It can fire air-to-air missiles, carry bombs and precision guided ammunition. DRDO has successfully tested fired Tejas with different kinds of weaponry and missiles including R-73 air-to-air missile, bomb dropping (including laser guided bombs). In future, DRDO also plans test firing of indigenous Astra missile and guns from the Tejas.

Operations: LCA Tejas had commenced operations from Sullur Air Force Station in Tamil Nadu in July 2018, two years after it was formally inducted into IAF. The fighter jet is part of 'Flying Daggers' of 45 Squadron of IAF. Southern Air Command based in Kerala capital Thiruvananthapuram has been entrusted with responsibility of integrating fighter aircraft in IAF's concept of operations.

INDIA, BULGARIA SIGN MOUS TO BOOST BILATERAL TIES

Why in News: India and Bulgaria on September 5 sign Memorandums of Understandings (MoUs) in presence of President Ram Nath Kovind and his Bulgarian counterpart Rumen Radev in Sofia in an effort to boost bilateral ties.

Important Points:

India and Bulgaria have signed four MoUs in fields of Civil Nuclear cooperation, investment, Tourism and establishment of Hindi chair at Sofia University. Both countries also signed program of Cooperation on science and Technology.

These agreements were signed after President Ramnath Kovind and his Bulgarian counterpart Rumen Radev held talks in Sofia, capital of Bulgaria. President Ram Nath Kovind visited Bulgaria on the second leg of his three-nation visit (Cyprus, Bulgaria and Czech Republic) to Europe to continue India's high-level engagements with the European countries. President Kovind was fifth Indian President to visit Bulgaria and first in 15 years.

India called for collaboration with Bulgaria in fields of innovation and R&D as it can offer exciting eco system for it.

It was also held that India and Bulgaria can cooperate in devising technologies to clean rivers and to explore potential of blue economy. Both countries also have agreed to substantially upgrade their economic partnership in line with depth of robust political relations.

Bulgaria can become key partner for India in defence sector under Make In India programme and in technology intensive sectors such as IT, logistics and infrastructure under Digital India and Smart Cities programmes of the Government. Bulgaria supported India on issues like entry into Nuclear Suppliers Group and permanent membership of UN Security council.

PM JAN DHAN YOJANA TO BE MADE OPEN-ENDED SCHEME WITH MORE INCENTIVES

Why in News: The Union Government decided to make the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) an open-ended scheme and added more incentives to encourage people to open bank accounts.

The flagship financial inclusion scheme was launched in August 2014 for a period of four years. Banking on its successful implementation, the government has decided to make the scheme open-ended with more incentives.

Objective

The Government has decided to continue the flagship financial inclusion programme with the main focus on opening an account from every household to every adult.

Important Points:

Briefing reporters after Union Cabinet meeting in New Delhi last evening, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said, the overdraft facility has been doubled from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 10,000 under the Yojana.

The age limit for availing overdraft facility under it has also been revised to 18 to 65 years from the earlier 18 to 60 years.

Accidental insurance cover for new RuPay Cardholders has been raised from Rs. one lakh to Rs. two lakh.

The Minister termed Jan Dhan Yojana as the world's biggest financial inclusion scheme saying that 32.41 crore accounts have been opened under it with more than 81 thousand 200 crore rupees of deposit balance. More than 7.5 crore Jan Dhan accounts are receiving Direct Benefit Transfer.

The upper age limit for availing the facility has also been hiked to 65 from the earlier 60 years.

Besides this, the pipeline of Jandhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) will continue to provide the necessary backbone for coverage of these activities and thereby accelerating the pace of digitised financially included and insured society.

Background

The first phase of the PMJDY scheme, which was launched in August 2014, focused on opening basic bank accounts and RuPay debit card with inbuilt accident insurance cover of Rs 1 lakh.

It also provided basic banking accounts with an overdraft facility of Rs 5000 after six months.

- The phase II of the scheme, which began in August 2015, planned to provide micro-insurance to the people and pension schemes to unorganised sector workers through business correspondents. The phase ended last month.
- Currently, there are approximately 32.41 crore Jan Dhan accounts across the country, having a total deposit balance of Rs 81,200 crore. Among the account holders, 53 per cent are women, while 83 per cent of the total accounts are seeded with Aadhaar. Further, around 30 lakh people have so far availed the overdraft facility.

INDIA, FRANCE SIGN IMPLEMENTATION AGREEMENT ON 'MOBILISE YOUR CITY'

Why in News: India and France signed an implementation agreement on 'Mobilise Your City' (MYC) in New Delhi to support three Indian cities in their efforts to reduce Green House Gas (GHG) emissions. The MYC agreement was signed by Mukund Kumar Sinha, OSD & Ex-Officio Joint Secretary in the Urban Affairs Ministry and the Regional Director of Agence Française de Développement (AfD), Nicolas Fornage. It was signed in the presence of Minister of State (I/C), Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs Hardeep Singh Puri and Alexander Ziegler, Ambassador of France in India.

Objective

The MYC aims at supporting three Indian cities on a pilot basis - Nagpur, Kochi and Ahmedabad - in their efforts to reduce Green House Gas (GHG) emissions related to urban transport by implementing urban mobility plans at the local level and to help India at the national level to improve their sustainable transport policy.

The selected pilot cities will benefit from the technical assistance activities initiated under the programme.

The proposed assistance includes:

To support planning and implementation of sustainable urban transport projects.

- To support the strengthening of institutional capacity for regulating, steering and planning urban mobility
- To learn and exchange formats with other cities across India to enable exchange on best practices

What is Mobilise Your City?

- The initiative is a part of an international initiative, which is supported by the French and the German Governments and was launched at 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) meeting in December 2015.
- Based on a proposal made by AFD in 2015, the European Union has agreed to provide funds of Euro 3.5 million through the AFD to contribute to specific investments and technical assistance components within the Mobilise Your City (MYC) programme in India.

Other Details

The details of the project activities will be worked out by AFD in consultation with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and the three partner cities including institutions such as the respective Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) for Smart Cities, the Municipal Corporations and any transport authority or transport related SPV.

COMCASA WILL HELP INDIA TRACK

CHINA'S INDIAN OCEAN MOVES BETTER

Why in News: The foundational agreement Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) which India concluded with the U.S. at the 2+2 dialogue will enable Indian military to get a better picture of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) which is seeing increasing Chinese movements.

Why COMCASA is so important for India?

The Comcasa provides the legal framework for the US to part with its sensitive communication equipment and codes to enable transfer of realtime operational information. This equipment is largely used for ground-to-air communication, on installed US-origin military aircraft, to enable best battle situation awareness.

The US data link is considered the most secure communication platform, which will also allow India access to big data base of American intelligence, including real-time imagery.

- The Comcasa will allow both sides to operate on the same communication systems, enabling an "interoperable" environment for militaries.

What is COMCASA?

COMCASA stands for Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement and is one of the four foundational agreements that the U.S. signs with allies and close partners to facilitate interoperability between militaries and sale of high end technology.

COMCASA is an India-specific version of the Communication and Information on Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA). It comes into force immediately, and is valid for a period 10 years. COMCASA allows India to procure transfer specialised equipment for encrypted communications for US origin military platforms like the C-17, C-130 and P-8Is. Currently, these platforms use commercially available communication systems.

COMCASA is a "technology enabler" to help transfer high-tech avionics, encrypted communication and electronic systems to India as well as ensure secrecy of its C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) systems from leaking to other countries like Russia. This agreement would allow the interoperability of India and United States equipments.

Without this agreement, the US cannot part with highly coded communication equipment with the military platforms they sell to India. India has to depend on commercially available less secure systems on, otherwise, high-end platforms like C-130Js and the P8I maritime surveillance aircraft, among others. COMCASA will change that. Now the US government will be able to give the go-ahead to install the best communication equipment on relevant platforms such as aircraft being sold to India.

COMCASA will effectively mean India sharing the real-time American intelligence on military deployments by China and Pakistan.

COMCASA will also help India obtain the armed version of the Sea Guardian drones. The US could not part with the weapon systems on the drone without COMCASA which will now allow installation of data and communication systems.

India has already signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) with the US. With the signing of COMCASA, India has gone one more step ahead in strengthening India-US military ties. LEMOA, COMCASA and BECA, or Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation, are the three foundational defence pacts that a country needs to sign to obtain cutting-edge weapons and communications systems from the US. India hopes to move ahead on BECS too in near future.

BATTLE OF HAIFA

Why in News: The northern Israeli coastal city of Haifa, on September 6th, celebrated the centenary year of its liberation from Ottoman rule during World War I, honouring the brave Indian soldiers who laid down their lives in what is considered "the last great cavalry campaign in history".

Haifa day:

The Indian Army commemorates September 23 every year as Haifa Day to pay its respects to the three Indian Cavalry Regiments - Mysore, Hyderabad and Jodhpur Lancers, that helped liberate Haifa following a dashing cavalry action by the 15th Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade of the then British Indian Army at the Battle of Haifa in 1918.

History and significance of Haifa war and its Indian Cemetery:

Owing to its rail and harbour, Israeli port city of Haifa was a strategic supply base. In addition to Haifa, the Allied Forces also engineered a plan to annexe Nazareth and Damascus in present-day Israel and Syria.

- On September 23, 1918, the 15th (Imperial Service) Cavalry Brigade comprising lancers from the regiments of princely states of Jodhpur and Mysore inflicted heavy assault on positions held by Ottoman Turks in and around the city of Haifa. Eventually, the Indian cavalry brigades fighting under the leadership of British General Edmund Allenby helped liberate Haifa from the clutches of the Turkish-German forces.

The victory was even more special as the Indian soldiers were armed only with lances (a kind of spear) and swords while the Turks had in their possession advance artillery and machine guns. The Indian troops displayed exemplary cavalry skills and valour during what was considered to be the last major cavalry campaign in military history.

Teen Murti memorial:

The Teen Murti memorial was constructed in 1922 in the memory of the Indian soldiers from three princely states namely Jodhpur, Hyderabad and Mysore who served present day Gaza strip, Israel and Palestine during the World War I under British India Army.

HRD AGREES TO END PISA BOYCOTT, INDIA TO PARTICIPATE IN 2021

Why in News: Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) has officially decided to participate in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) after gap of nine years. It will send team of officers to Paris to negotiate India's terms of participation in PISA 2021.

Background:

India had taken part in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2009 and bagged the 72nd rank among 74 participating countries. Then UPA government had boycotted PISA, blaming "out of context" questions for India's dismal performance.

About the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA):

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years.

- First conducted in 2000, the major domain of study rotates between reading, mathematics, and science in each cycle.
- PISA also includes measures of general or cross-curricular competencies, such as collaborative problem solving.

By design, PISA emphasizes functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory schooling.

PISA is coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization of industrialized countries, and is conducted in the United States by NCES. Data collection for the most recent assessment was completed in Fall 2015.

In 2012 PISA test, schools of Shanghai in China topped reading, mathematics and science test, followed closely by Singapore. In 2015, Singapore, Japan and Estonia were ranked as top three countries, in that order.

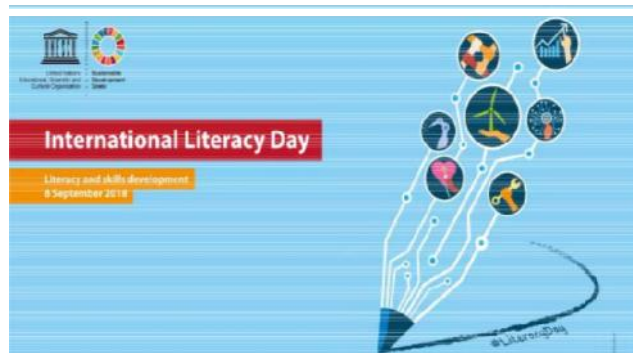
PISA 2021:

PISA 2021 test is likely to be administered in schools in Union Territory of Chandigarh. Apart from schools in Chandigarh, HRD Ministry also suggested that all Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) and Navodaya Vidyalayas (NVs), funded and run by Centre, shall take the test.

Why Chandigarh? Chandigarh was selected for its compact area, students are taught in Hindi and English (Government wants to keep number of languages in which test has to be administered to minimum). Chandigarh has record of performing well in learning assessments.

INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY 2018

Why in News: On September 8, 2018, 52nd International Literacy Day (ILD) will be celebrated around the world with the theme "Literacy and skills development". Despite progress made, literacy challenges persist, and at the same time the demands for skills required for work is evolving.



This year, ILD explores and highlights integrated approaches that can simultaneously support the development of literacy and skills, to ultimately improve people's life and work and contribute to equitable and sustainable societies.

The day was commemorated by a two-day special event at UNESCO's headquarters, Paris. It also saw the hosting of the 2018 UNESCO International Literacy Prize awards ceremony. The Literacy Prizes consists of five prizes. They are International Reading Association Literacy Award, Noma Literacy Prize, UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize, The Malcolm Adiseshiah International Literacy Prize and UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy.

Literacy, a part of UN's Sustainable Development Goals

The issue of literacy is a key component of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As per Sustainable Development Goal 4, the aim is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The target is that by 2030 all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

How International Literacy Day 2018 was celebrated in India?

The Union Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD) organised a panel discussion on the occasion of International Literacy Day. The panel was headed by chief guest HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar and the guest of honour, Upendra Kushwaha.

- In India, the day was celebrated at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi with the same theme.

When was the Day proclaimed and Why?

- On this day, in 1965, the World Congress of Ministers of Education met in Tehran, capital of Iran, for the first time to discuss the programme of education at the international level.
- The day was given its status by UNESCO in its 14th session in November 1966
- Ever since then, the day is celebrated annually on 8 September by most of the member countries.
- The main objective behind the day's observance was to mobilise public opinion in favour of struggle against illiteracy.

Every year, a theme is chosen to highlight the importance of literacy associated issues.

The day is a forum to disseminate information on literacy and raise public awareness and the significance of literacy for individual and national development.

Connecting literacy and skills:

Integrated approaches that connect literacy learning and skills development have a long history. For these approaches, functional literacy has been an influential concept since the late 1950s, viewed as a set of context-dependent skills that can engage a person with those activities in which literacy is required for an effective functioning of his or her group and community.

Beyond project managed by the education sector, numerous integrated programmes have been managed by other sectors in field such as agriculture, labour and health. These programmes have played an important role in combining literacy, technical and vocational skills, and employability and entrepreneurial skills, as exemplified by extension services and 'farmers school' models.

Parts of integrated programmes have targeted specific populations, such as out-of-school youth, women, rural people, low-skilled workers, and indigenous peoples. There are multiple factors that contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of these programmes.

A review of African experiences, for instance, highlighted two enabling factors.

- 1) competent, reliable and well-supported teachers or instructors; and
- 2) the consideration of participants' interest and conditions in programme design (Oxenham et al., 2002). Its findings also indicated, among others, the need to offer concrete and immediate benefits (e.g. income generation) to motivate learners.

OCEAN CLEANUP

Why in News: Amid a flotilla of boats, drones and helicopters, the Ocean Cleanup machine, a system of lengthy drifting trash traps, was slowly towed through San Francisco Bay beneath the Golden Gate Bridge and out to the open ocean. The 2,000-foot long system was pulled by a large ship, bobbing in a bay full of sailboats, ferries and a few kayakers.

The hope is that the vessel, the first of a planned fleet of 60 or more, can strain out the millions of pounds of plastic trash that collects in slow-moving ocean whirlpools called gyres, which can be hundreds of miles across. The ungainly watercraft starts out as a long line of linked floating booms - 2,000 feet of them - towed out from the dockyard where it's been built in Alameda, across the bay from San Francisco. It motors under the Golden Gate Bridge and out to a testing area about 275 miles off the coast of California. This odd vessel looks like a cross between an oil rig and a floating swimming pool and may help clean up the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

Important Points:

The Ocean Cleanup System 001 floating in the lagoon in front of the assembly yard in Alameda, Calif. Once in place, the Ocean Cleanup, dubbed System 001, is deployed. The passive system's floating series of connected booms naturally form into a broad U-shape. Below the booms, a 9-foot skirt gently corrals the plastic trash that contaminates our seas.

Currents and waves push trash into the machine's center to collect it. Floating particles are captured by the net while the push of water against the net propels fish and other marine life under and beyond.

THE MONSTER

Ocean Cleanup's maiden cleaning venture is directed at the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a zone lying between Hawaii and California, where plastic waste has accumulated. This zone covers an estimated surface area of 1.6 million sq km, an area twice the size of Texas or three times the size of France

- The approximate mass of plastic in the Patch is 80k tonnes, equivalent to the weight of 500 jumbo jets 1.8 trillion - That is the total number of plastic pieces estimated to be floating in the Patch, that is equivalent to 250 pieces of debris for every human in the world
- The GPGP is the largest of five such gyres across the world's oceans where ocean currents concentrate plastic waste. A gyre is a circular pattern of currents in an ocean basin
- Slat and Co. say that a full-scale rollout could clean 50% of the Patch in just five years.

The Ocean Cleanup claims it'll be able to remove 90% of ocean plastic by 2040 after fleets of systems are deployed into every ocean gyre combined with checking.

THE METHOD

Slat and team have devised a means of using ocean currents to their advantage. Their 'passive drifting system' (the first one is called System 001) consists of a 600-metre-long floater at the surface of the water with a tapered 3-metre-deep skirt attached below. The floater prevents plastic from flowing over it, while the skirt stops debris from escaping underneath. As the system moves through the water, the plastic continues to collect within the boundaries of the system as it takes a U-shape. Once the drifting system has rounded up the garbage, a ship can be used to gather it and take it away for processing.

A multi-year project

The project is due to the efforts of Boyan Slat, who as a teenager was so disgusted by the plastic waste he encountered diving off Greece that he has devoted his life to cleaning up the mess.

The non-profit he helped found has garnered support from the Dutch government, individuals and many in the tech world, including Marc Benioff of Salesforce. Last year, it received \$5.9 million in donations and reported reserves from donations in previous years of \$17 million.

The system is being built in San Francisco so it can tackle the largest of the world's five trash gyres, the infamous Great Pacific Garbage Patch. These patches consist of huge concentrations of garbage, mostly made up of buoyant plastics.

- Due to the gyres (which act like slow-moving whirlpools), the floating trash gathers in areas hundreds of miles across.

- On Saturday, the Maersk Launcher ship took a cleanup machine out to sea, accompanied by seven staff from the Ocean Cleanup, 18 crewmembers from the Danish shipping company Maersk and five independent marine observers.
- A press boat followed full of a polyglot collection of reporters and television crews whose presence signals the intense interest the public has shown globally to this audacious plan to clean plastic pollution from the world's oceans. It will take about five days for the system to reach the testing area, where it will be deployed for about two weeks.

HOME MINISTRY SANCTIONS RS 3,000 CR FOR SPECIAL WOMEN SAFETY PROGRAMME

Why in News: Public panic buttons and all-women police patrol teams will soon be launched in eight major cities, including Delhi, under a special women safety programme for which the home ministry has approved nearly Rs 3,000 crore.

Important Points:

Transit dormitories for women and children, smart LED streetlights, one-stop crisis centres, and forensic and cyber crime cells will be part of the Women Safe City Project. It will implemented in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Lucknow from 2018-19 to 2020-21.

Safe city proposals amounting to Rs 2,919.55 crore were approved under the 'Nirbhaya Fund' recently, the official said.

The 'Nirbhaya Fund' was set up in 2013 for implementation of initiatives aimed at enhancing safety and security for women in the country.

The non-lapsable corpus fund was instituted following the gangrape of a girl in Delhi in 2012 which triggered nationwide outrage and protests.

Rs 663.67 crore has been earmarked for Delhi, Rs 252 crore for Mumbai, Rs 425.06 crore for Chennai, Rs 253 crore for Ahmedabad, Rs 181.32 crore for Kolkata, Rs 667 crore for Bengaluru, Rs 282.50 crore for Hyderabad and Rs 195 crore for Lucknow, the official said.

- The project takes a comprehensive view of women safety, with the states adopting a mix of solutions based on their requirements. It envisages deployment of all-women patrol teams such as SHE-teams and well-equipped emergency response vehicles called 'Abhayam' vans to ensure quick and effective response system.
- The proposed infrastructure includes development of safe zone clusters in hot crime zones, smart LED street lighting, CCTV cameras connected to modern command and control centres, security enablers in public transport, installation of public panic buttons, provision of toilets for women within safe eco-systems and transit dormitories for women and children. Police stations are planned to be equipped with women help desks and other services such as counsellors. This will make police stations more accessible to women for lodging complaints and getting other assistance.

The cost of the project would be shared between the central government (from Nirbhaya fund) and respective states in the ratio of 60:40. In case of Delhi, the home ministry will allocate an additional amount of Rs 240.11 crore.

Incidents of crime against women rose from 3,29,243 in 2015 to 3,38,954 in 2016.

In 2015, as many as 34,651 cases of rape were registered in the country. The figure increased to 38,947 in 2016, according to the data of the National Crime Records Bureau. The data for 2017 is yet to be published.

STATUE OF UNITY

Why in News: The 182-meter figurine of freedom fighter Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, called the 'Statue of Unity', is almost complete with construction workers reaching waist height of what is going to be the world's tallest statue. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate Statue of Unity - a monument statue of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in Gujarat on his birth anniversary on October 31.

The project set into motion five years ago, when Narendra Modi, then the chief minister of Gujarat, had laid the foundation stone in the month of October in 2013. The massive icon is slated to be inaugurated on October 31 on the occasion of the 143rd birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.



Important Points:

Located in Gujarat, the 182-metre long statue will occupy over 20,000 square meters, and will be surrounded by a 12 square km artificial lake.

The total project cost is estimated to be Rs. 2,989 crore and the material used to make the statue has been collected from across the country.

The statue is built at the Sadhu-Bet Island, approximately 3.5 kms south of Sardar Sarovar Dam at Kevadia in the Narmada district of Gujarat.

In an apparent reference to the issue of Naxalism following the arrest of some activists for allegedly collaborating with Left ultras.

Tribute to the 'Iron Man of India'

The Rs 2,980 crore-project is meant to be a tribute to the man who was instrumental in the making of a united India by canvassing across the country and negotiating with princely states and others to become a part of Independent India.

Statue of Unity to stand tall in Gujarat

Once finished, Patel's icon would stand tall some 200 kilometers away from the state capital Ahmedabad and it will be surrounded by the Narmada river. The statue is coming up at Sadhu Bet at Kevadiya Colony near the Sardar Sarovar Dam in Narmada district.

Malaysian hand for steel frame

A mixture of concrete and steel will act as a skeleton for the massive statue and bronze panels will be used on the exterior. According to an Indian Express report, the contract for the steel framework has been handed over to the Malaysia-based Eversendai, which has constructed Burj Al Arab and Burj Khalifa - Dubai's famous highrises.

For the bronze work, the TQ Art Foundry has designed about 5,000 bronze panels under the supervision of artist Ram Sutar that have been assembled at a workshop on the site before being clad to complete the facade in stages.

About Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel:

A revered name in Indian politics -- Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was a lawyer and a political activist. He worked very closely with Mahatma Gandhi and was deeply influenced by Gandhi's ideology and principles.

He played a leading role during the Indian independence movement. After independence, he was crucial in the integration of over 500 princely states into the Indian Union.

He was the first Home Minister of Independent India and his uncompromising efforts towards consolidation of the country earned him the title 'Iron Man of India'.

Born on October 31, 1875, in Nadiad village of modern day Gujarat, Sardar Patel started his academic career in a Gujarati medium school and later shifted to an English medium school.

He went to pursue a degree in law and travelled to England in 1910. He completed his law degree in 1913 from Inns of Court and came back to India to start his law practice in Godhra, Gujarat.

For his legal proficiency, Vallabhbhai was offered many lucrative posts by the British Government but he rejected all.

RAIL SAHYOG WEB PORTAL

Why in News: Railways Minister Piyush Goyal on September 11, 2018 launched the 'Rail Sahyog' web portal to provide a platform for the Corporates and Public Sector Units (PSUs) to contribute to creation of amenities at or near Railway Stations through Corporate Social Responsibility funds.

The app launch was in line with PM Narendra Modi's vision for a New India by 2022. It was a part of various initiatives undertaken recently by Indian Railways for upgrading its infrastructure, technology, hygiene among host of other things for an enhanced passenger experience.

Rail Sahyog Portal:

- This portal will allow companies to register their requests for contributing to create amenities at railway stations through their CSR funds.
- These requests will be processed by Railway officials and based on principle of first come first serve, requests will be shortlisted.
- Selected applicants will be intimated to deposit the funds with Railways or its nominated agencies like RITES or RAILTEL etc.

The nominated agency will get the work executed thereafter.

The portal will provide simplicity and transparency for companies to fund creation of amenities at Railway stations through CSR funds.

It will provide opportunity for industry, companies, associations to collaborate with Indian Railways.

Fund utilized for creation of amenities will be beneficial for passengers and for neighbourhood of railway vicinity.

The activities identified to be funded through CSR are :

Construction of toilets in circulating areas of all stations with provision of low cost sanitary pad vending machine & incinerator in female toilets and condom vending machine in male toilets and initial one year maintenance. Approximate Cost per station: Rs. 22-30 Lakh.

Providing free Wi-Fi at stations through setting up Hotspots. Approximate cost per station: Rs. 10.30 lakhs to Rs 12.30 lakhs

Provision of Benches at station Platforms as facility for senior citizens/disabled. Approximate cost per set: Rs. 17500 to Rs. 47500.

Bottle crushing machines at 2175 major stations for ensuring environmental sustainability. The empty plastic water/cold drink bottles generated from the Railway passengers will be crushed in these machines to manage plastic pollution. Approximate cost per machine: Rs. 3.5 lakhs to Rs. 4.5 Lakhs.

- Dustbins at all stations for Swachh Bharat will help in preventing littering around. Separate dustbins for wet/dry waste need to be provided at circulating area of Station and Platforms. Approximate cost per set (two dustbins) : Rs. 4500

About Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a self-regulating business model that helps a company be socially accountable - to itself, its stakeholders, and the public. By practicing corporate social responsibility, also called corporate citizenship, companies can be conscious of the kind of impact they are having on all aspects of society including economic, social, and environmental. To engage in CSR means that, in the normal course of business, a company is operating in ways that enhance society and the environment, instead of contributing negatively to it.

INDIA, BANGLADESH JOINTLY INAUGURATE 3 PROJECTS

Why in News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina, and Chief Ministers of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee and Tripura Biplab Kumar Deb jointly inaugurated three projects in Bangladesh via video conferencing. These include:

1. 500 MW additional power supply from India to Bangladesh,
2. Akhaura - Agartala Rail Link, and
3. Rehabilitation of the Kulaura-Shahbazpur section of Bangladesh Railways.

These three projects are

Rehabilitation of Kulaura-Shahbazpur section of Bangladesh Railways: Under this project, bridge and bridge building was constructed, station with platform and shed along with reformation of level crossing and railway line were also built. Mainline of 44.77 km and loop line of 7.77 km was also renovated.

500 MW additional power supply from India to Bangladesh: It will be transferred through existing Bheramara (Bangladesh)-Baharampur (India) interconnection. With completion of this project, India will be supplying around 1.16 Gigawatts of power to Bangladesh. This project announced during his PM Modi's visit to Bangladesh in 2015.

Akhaura-Agartala Rail Link: The railway project was conceptualized in 2010. Later, both the countries had signed MoU on this railway project in 2013. It is expected that railway line will become operational in 2019. The railway project consists of constructing 15.054 km long railway line.

- It will provide another link in the cross-border connectivity between two countries by connecting Akhaura in Bangladesh with capital city of Tripura, Agartala through Nischintapur in Indo-Bangla border. It will help to develop socio-economic as well as cultural bond between two neighbouring countries.

US TO CLOSE PALESTINIAN MISSION IN WASHINGTON

Why in News: The United States announced the closure of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's (PLO) mission in Washington DC. Explaining the move, the US state department said that the PLO leaders had failed to engage with US efforts to bring about peace with Israel and attempted to prompt an investigation of Israel by the International Criminal Court.

The move is the latest in a series of measures by the Trump administration against the Palestinian leadership. The PLO, the internationally-recognised representative of the Palestinian people, opened the mission in 1994.

Important Points:

The US State Department said that the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) office failed to take steps to advance the start of direct and meaningful negotiations with Israel.

A statement from the department read, "we have permitted the PLO office to conduct operations that support the objective of achieving a lasting, comprehensive peace between Israelis and the Palestinians since the expiration of a previous waiver in November 2017."

It added that the PLO leadership has condemned a US peace plan they have not yet seen and refused to engage with the US government with respect to peace efforts and otherwise. The department further blamed the Palestinians for being unwilling to negotiate.

What is PLO?

The PLO is an umbrella group that was created in 1964 to represent various Palestinian factions seeking self-determination.

- The organisation is recognised as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people by over 100 states with which it holds diplomatic relations and has enjoyed observer status at the United Nations since 1974.

- The PLO also runs the Palestinian Authority, the semi-autonomous, interim government that manages certain areas of the Palestinian territories.

BARC RECOMMISSIONS UPGRADED COUNTRY'S OLDEST RESEARCH

REACTOR 'APSARA'

Why in News: Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Trombay has recommissioned India's oldest nuclear research reactor named 'Apsara', which was shut down permanently in 2009 for repair. The refurbished version of this reactor has been named as 'Apsara-upgraded' (Apsara-

U) and also has double capacity compared to its earlier version. It is located within India's nuclear weapons facility at BARC's Trombay campus (Maharashtra).

About Apsara:

Apsara was the first nuclear research reactor in Asia. It had become operational in BARC's Trombay campus in August 1956. It was first nuclear research reactor indigenously developed in India. The design was conceptualised in 1955 by Dr Homi Bhabha, the father of Indian Nuclear programme. Its name Apsara was coined by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Apsara was a light water moderated (swimming pool-type) reactor with maximum power output of 1 megawatt thermal (MWt). It burned enriched uranium in form of aluminum alloyed curved plates. It was utilised for various experiments including neutron activation analysis, radiation damage studies, forensic research, neutron radiography, and shielding experiments. It was shut down in 2009, after more than five decades of service.

Apsara-upgraded

The upgraded version, like its ancestor, is indigenously made. It uses plate type dispersion fuel elements made of Low Enriched Uranium (LEU). It will help to increase indigenous production of radio-isotopes for medical application by about 50% mainly due to higher neutron flux. It will also be extensively used for research in nuclear physics, material science and radiation shielding. The radioisotopes produced by it will be also used in the field food preservation, agriculture, and other industries apart from medicine for diagnosis and therapy.

About Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC): Changing weather bad for farming

BARC is India's premier nuclear research facility based in Mumbai, Maharashtra. It is multi-disciplinary research center with extensive infrastructure for advanced research and development. Its R&D covers entire spectrum of nuclear science, engineering and related areas. BARC's core mandate is to sustain peaceful applications of nuclear energy, primarily for power generation.

WORLD HUNGER LEVELS RISE FOR THIRD YEAR RUNNING - U.N.

Why in News: Climate change is having a negative effect on global agriculture and is driving up the number of hungry people around the world, according to the United Nations' 2018 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report.

Important Points:

It found that 821 million people -- one in every nine - were malnourished in 2017, up from 815 million in 2016, putting at risk the UN's goal of eradicating hunger in the world by 2030.

Meanwhile, 672 million adults - more than one in eight - are now obese, up from 600 million in 2014.

Many nations struggling with prolonged conflicts, including Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and Afghanistan, also suffered from one or more climate shocks, such as drought and floods.

There was also limited progress in 2017 in addressing multiple forms of malnutrition, such as child stunting (in which children don't grow properly due to undernourishment) and adult obesity, putting the health of hundreds of millions of people at risk.

"Hunger has been on the rise over the past three years, returning to levels from a decade ago," the UN agencies responsible for hunger and health said in a statement. "This reversal in progress sends a clear warning that more must be done and urgently if the Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger is to be achieved by 2030."

The UN said the situation is worsening in South America and most regions of Africa, while the trend in undernourishment in Asia seems to be slowing significantly.

The number of undernourished people in sub-Saharan Africa rose from 181 million in 2010 to almost 222 million in 2016, an increase of 22.6% in six years, and based on current projections, it may have grown to more than 236 million in 2017, the report found.

- The effects of climate variability on rainfall patterns and agricultural seasons, and climate extremes such as droughts and floods, are among the key drivers of the rise in hunger, together with conflict and economic slowdowns.
 - Changes in climate are undermining production of major crops such as wheat, rice and corn in tropical and temperate regions, a trend that is expected to worsen as temperatures become more extreme.
- The number of undernourished people tends to be higher in countries highly exposed to climate extremes, the report said.
- Rising temperatures, the late or early start of rainy seasons and the unequal distribution of rainfall within a season are affecting food production. Other effects include food price hikes and losses in poor farmers' incomes.

Hungry children

The report also found limited progress in reducing child stunting.

Nearly 151 million children younger than 5 were too short for their age due to malnutrition in 2017, compared with 165 million in 2012. Globally, Africa and Asia accounted for 39% and 55% of all stunted children, respectively.

Africa has seen an upward trend in the number of stunted children, while Asia has experienced the largest relative decrease in stunting prevalence. The confidence limits around the estimates for Oceania are too large to make clear conclusions.

In 2017, 50.5 million children under five were affected by wasting, which means they are underweight for their age, with 9.0% in West Africa according to UNICEF and 6.3% in Southern Africa and a very high 15.9% in South Asia.

The UN hunger report makes a number of recommendations, including calls for a shift toward agriculture that is sensitive to nutrition needs and food systems that can provide safe, high-quality food. The report also calls for a stepping-up of efforts to build climate resilience through policies that promote climate change adaptation and mitigation, and disaster risk reduction.

GOVERNMENT BANS 328 FIXED-DOSE COMBINATION DRUGS

Why in News: The Union Health Ministry has banned the sale and distribution of 328 fixed dose combination of drugs. The bans came into effect immediately. Six other drugs have been restricted.

Important Points:

This marks an end of the legal battle between the ministry and the manufacturers of these drugs. The ministry has been working since 2016 to ban these "irrational" and "unsafe" drugs.

Among the roughly 6,000 brands estimated to be affected by the ban are popular drugs like the painkiller Saridon, the skin cream Panderm, combination diabetes drug Gluconorm, antibiotic Lupidicl, x and antibacterial Taxim AZ.

The government had banned 344 FDCs on March 10, 2016, and later added five more to this list. However, manufacturers of these drugs contested the ban in various high courts and the Supreme Court. The SC on December 15, 2017, asked for the matter to be examined by the Drugs Technical Advisory Board. DTAB concluded in its report that there was no therapeutic justification for the ingredients in 328 FDCs and that these could be a risk to people. The board recommended banning them.

In the case of six other FDCs, the board recommended restricted manufacture and sale subject to certain conditions based on their therapeutic justification. The SC ruled that the government could not use the DTAB report to prohibit 15 of the 344 drugs in the original list as these have been manufactured in India since before 1988. This exception covered several popular cough syrups, painkillers and cold medication with sales amounting to over Rs 740 crore annually. However, the court told the ministry that it could still look into the safety of these 15 drugs by initiating a fresh investigation if it wanted to ban them.

The All India Drug Action Network, a civil society group working on safety and access to medicines which was one of the petitioners in the Supreme Court case, welcomed the ban and sought action from the government on the 15 excluded FDCs. "The banned FDCs account for about Rs 2,500 crore and represent only the tip of the iceberg.



- The market for unsafe, problematic FDCs in India is at least one-fourth of the total pharma market which is valued at Rs 1.3 trillion. Meanwhile, many large drug companies have claimed that over the last couple of years they have either phased out such drugs or changed the combination. The FDCs in question is less than 2%, they claim.

Drugs that have been banned

Saridon

Panderm

Gluconorm PG

Taxim AZ

Drugs that escaped the ban:

Phensedyl Cough Linctus

D-Cold Total

Corex

Fixed dose drug combinations (FDCs):

Combination products, also known as fixed dose drug combinations (FDCs), are combinations of two or more active drugs in a single dosage form. The Food and Drug Administration, USA defines a combination product as 'a product composed of any combination of a drug and a device or a biological product and a device or a drug and a biological product or a drug, device, and a biological product'. It is widely accepted that most drugs should be formulated as single compounds. Fixed ratio combination products are acceptable only when the dosage of each ingredient meets the requirement of a defined population group and when the combination has a proven advantage over single compounds administered separately in therapeutic effect, safety or compliance. FDCs are highly popular in the Indian pharmaceutical market and have been particularly flourishing in the last few years.

The rationality of FDCs should be based on certain aspects such as:

- The drugs in the combination should act by different mechanisms.
- The pharmacokinetics must not be widely different.
- The combination should not have supra-additive toxicity of the ingredients.

Most FDCs have the following demerits:

Dosage alteration of one drug is not possible without alteration of the other drug.

Differing pharmacokinetics of constituent drugs pose the problem of frequency of administration of the formulation.

By simple logic there are increased chances of adverse drug effects and drug interactions compared with both drugs given individually.

"PRADHAN MANTRI ANNADATA AAY

SANRAKSHAN ABHIYAN" (PM-AASHA)

Why in News: Giving a major boost to the pro-farmer initiatives of the Government and in keeping with its commitment and dedication for the Annadata, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved a new Umbrella Scheme "Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanrakshHan Abhiyan' (PM-AASHA). The Scheme is aimed at ensuring remunerative prices to the farmers for their produce as announced in the Union Budget for 2018.

This is an unprecedented step taken by Govt. of India to protect the farmers' income which is expected to go a long way towards the welfare of farmers. Government has already increased the MSP of kharif crops by following the principle of 1.5 times the cost of production. It is expected that the increase in MSP will be translated to farmer's income by way of robust procurement mechanism in coordination with the State Governments.

Components of PM-AASHA:

The new Umbrella Scheme includes the mechanism of ensuring remunerative prices to the farmers and is comprised of

1. Price Support Scheme (PSS),
2. Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS)
3. Pilot of Private Procurement & Stockist Scheme (PPPS).

- The other existing schemes of Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD) for procurement of paddy, wheat and nutri-cereals/coarse grains and of Ministry of Textile for cotton and jute will be continued for providing MSP to farmers for these crops.
- Cabinet has also decided that participation of private sector in procurement operation needs to be piloted so that on the basis of learnings the ambit of private participation in procurement operations may be increased. Therefore in addition to PDPS.
- It has been decided that for oilseeds, states have the option to roll out Private Procurement Stockist Scheme (PPSS) on pilot basis in selected district/ APMC(s) of district involving the participation of private stockiest. The pilot district/selected APMC(s) of district will cover one or more crop of oilseeds for which MSP is notified. Since this is akin to PSS, in that it involves physical procurement of the notified commodity, it shall substitute PSS/PDPS in the pilot districts.

The selected private agency shall procure the commodity at MSP in the notified markets during the notified period from the registered farmers in consonance with the PPSS Guidelines, whenever the prices in the market fall below the notified MSP and whenever authorized by the state/UT government to enter the market and maximum service charges up to 15% of the notified MSP will be payable.

Expenditure:

The Cabinet has decided to give additional government guarantee of Rs.16,550 crore making it Rs. 45,550 crore in total.

In addition to this, budget provision for procurement operations has also been increased and Rs. 15,053 crore is sanctioned for PM-AASHA implementation. The scheme henceforth is a reflection of Government's commitment and dedication to our 'Annadata'.

Procurement over the years:

During financial years 2010-14 total procurement was Rs. 3500 crore only whereas during financial years 2014-18, it has risen 10 times and reached to Rs. 34,000 crore. For procurement of these agri-commodities during 2010-14, Government Guarantee of Rs. 2500 crore was provided with expenditure of only Rs. 300 crore; while during 2014-18, Guarantee amount has been increased to Rs. 29,000 crore with expenditure of Rs. 1,000 crore.

Pro-farmer initiatives of the Government:

The Government is committed to realizing the vision of doubling farmers' income by 2022. The emphasis is on enhancing productivity, reducing cost of cultivation and strengthening post-harvesting management, including market structure. Several market reforms have been initiated. These include Model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing Act, 2017 and Model Contract Farming and Services Act, 2018. Many States have taken steps to adopt these through legislation.

Efforts are on for a new market architecture, so as to ensure that farmers get remunerative prices on their produce. These include setting up of Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs) so as to promote 22,000 number of retail markets in close proximity of farm gate; competitive and transparent wholesale trade at APMC through eNAM and a robust and pro-farmer export policy. Besides, several other pro-farmers' initiatives such as implementation of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana, Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana and distribution of Soil Health Cards have been undertaken. The commitment for farmer welfare is also reflected by unprecedented decision of announcing minimum support price based on the formula of 1.5 times the cost of cultivation.

ASI DISCOVERS 254 COPPER COINS OF MEDIEVAL ERA AT KHIRKI MOSQUE

Why in News: The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) discovered a collection of 254 Copper Coins in the premises of Khirki Mosque during the course of conservation of the monument.

This mosque lies on the southern periphery of the village Khirki, New Delhi. The mosque was built by Khan-i-Jahan Junan Shah, the Prime Minister of Firoz Shah Tughluq (1351-88) and is believed to be one of the seven mosques built by him.

How ASI came across the coins?

- Archaeological Survey of India took up the task of cleaning the area to initiate conservation of Khirki Mosque and during the cleaning, a hoard of 254 Coins of medieval period were found near entrance of the monument.



- Delhi Circle of the ASI has started scientific clearance of the area under technical supervision of archaeologists.

Important Points:

Post the discovery of coins, immediately, a team of archaeologist, constabulary assistant and photographers came to the site and took the hoard of coins under their possession.

Few coins got cleaned by the experts of Science of Branch of ASI; and on the basis of preliminary observation, it was found that some of the coins belong to the reign of Shershah Suri and his successors.

After cleaning of the coins process to decipher the same will be initiated with the help of experts.

Earlier in the year 2003, a hoard of 63 Coins was found from the same premises during cleaning and conservation.

About Khirki Mosque:

Built with rubble stone, the Khirki Mosque is double-storeyed.

The lower storey consists only of a series of basement cells.

Untidy bastions occupy its four corners, imparting it the look of a fortified building.

The gateways of three sides, except on the west, are edged by narrowed minarets; the main entrance is from the east.

Corresponding with the openings of cells on the lower storey, the upper storey contains holed windows (khirkis), which have given it its present name.

The pillared courtyard is divided into twenty - five squares, five on each side, each square consisting of nine smaller squares.

- The larger squares, together with the square in the centre of the courtyard, are each covered with a cluster of nine small low domes.

- Among the remaining squares, four on the diagonals are left uncovered to admit light, while the others are covered with flat roofs.
- This ingenious way of covering the courtyard is repeated only in one other mosque erected by the same builder. These two are the only examples of closed mosques in northern India.

About Archaeological Survey of India (ASI):

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is an attached office in the Ministry of Culture. It was set up in 1861 with the primary object of surveying antiquarian remains in this country and their study. ASI's function is to "explore, excavate, conserve, preserve and protect the monuments and sites of National & International Importance."

Functions and Powers:

Archaeological Survey of India is an attached office of department of Culture with headquarters in New Delhi. It has 24 regional Circles and 5 Regional Directorates.

Its main functions are:

preservation, conservation and environmental development of centrally protected monuments and sites, including World Heritage Monuments and antiquities maintenance of gardens & development of new gardens surrounding centrally protected monuments and sites

exploration and excavation of ancient sites specialized study of inscription and various phases of Indian architecture

maintenance of Archaeological site Museums

Operation of the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act

Research and Training in different areas of Archaeology

ASI is the successor of The Asiatic Society of India. It was founded in its current form in 1861 by Sir Alexander Cunningham with the help of the then Viceroy Canning.

It regulates all the archaeological activities in the country as per the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 and the Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972.

JHARKHAND GOVERNMENT INTRODUCES ELECTRIC CARS FOR OFFICIAL USE

Why in News: Marking the beginning of e-mobility in the state, Chief Minister Raghubar Das flagged off electric vehicles at Jharkhand Secretariat in the presence of senior government officials. Initially, 20 vehicles were handed over to Jharkhand Bijli Vitran Nigam Limited (JBVNL), with the remaining 30 to be given in the next two weeks.

Twelve charging stations have been set up at four offices of JBVNL, including its corporate office in Ranchi, for creating a supporting infrastructure, which is crucial for the promotion of e-mobility.

Objective

Use of electric vehicles will not only help curb pollution and protect the environment but it will also help save foreign currency.

Speaking on the occasion, Jharkhand Chief Minister Raghubar Das said that everyone will profit if the dependency on petroleum products becomes less. He also encouraged other departments in the state and the common people to start using such cars to make the state clean and green.

Important Points:

The electric cars are a part of a consignment of 50 such vehicles that the Energy Efficiency Services Limited will supply to Jharkhand Bijli Vitran Nigam (JBVNL) for its official use.

With the development, Jharkhand has become the fifth state of India and the first state in eastern India to procure the eco-friendly vehicles for government use.

While the first lot of 20 electric cars has been delivered, the rest 30 will arrive within the next two weeks.

All the state government offices in Jharkhand will soon start opting for the electric cars to reduce carbon emission and help keep the state pollution free.

The state's CM said that his government would appeal to people to buy such cars and open charging stations.

So far, 12 charging stations have been set up in Ranchi and more are set to come up soon.

- The move will help the state achieve the centre's e-mobility goal of replacing 30 per cent of government vehicles with electric cars by 2030.

Background

- Prior to Jharkhand, the governments of Delhi, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have procured electric cars for official purpose.
- Under the agreement signed between EESL and JBVNL, EESL would give this fleet of 50 cars, along with drivers, to JBVNL on a lease for six years. JBVNL would pay Rs 40,000 per car per month. The EESL has set up three charging stations at JBVNL corporate headquarters at HEC Township, its Kushai complex and near Raj Bhavan for these cars.

With this fleet of 50 electric cars, JBVNL is likely to save over 1.20 lakh litres of fuel a year to lead to an annual reduction of over 1,400 tonnes of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

About Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL):

Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) is an energy service company (ESCO) of the Government of India and is the world's largest public ESCO. It is 100% government owned, a joint venture of state-owned NTPC Limited, Power Finance Corporation, Rural Electrification Corporation and POWERGRID. EESL was formed under India's Ministry of Power to facilitate energy efficiency projects. Innovative business and implementation models can significantly reduce consumption and costs. EESL also acts as the resource centre for capacity building of state electricity distribution companies, electricity regulatory commissions (ERCs), State-designated agencies (SDAs), upcoming ESCOs, financial institutions, etc.

37% OF WOMEN DYING BY SUICIDE ARE INDIAN, MOSTLY YOUNG: LANCET

Why in News: Almost 37 percent of women who die by suicide globally were Indian and 24 percent among men in 2016, according to a study published in The Lancet.

Important Points:

- Suicide was the leading cause of death in the 15-39 age group in 2016, compared to its third rank globally. 63 percent of all suicide deaths reported in India are in this age group.
- According to the study, in 2016, India accounted for 17.8 percent of the global population but recorded 36.6 percent the suicides among women across the world.

- There was an increase of 40 percent in the number of suicide deaths between 1990 and 2016, with an estimated 2,30,314 deaths in 2016.
- However, the suicide death rate (SDR) has reduced by 15 percent from 1990 to 2016, she adds. The suicide death rate for women in India is 15 per one lakh women, double that of the global suicide rate for women in 2016, which is seven per one lakh women. The SDR for men has remained the same.
- Marriage is known to be less protective against suicide for women because of arranged and early marriage, young motherhood, low social status, domestic violence, and economic dependence.

The study does not delve into the cause behind these alarming numbers. But speaking about it, Professor Dandona said that low social status, financial problems, family issues and poor health are the main reasons.

There are stark state-wise variations in suicides in the country. The southern states are more affected. Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal and Tripura had high suicide death rates as compared to other states.

The study found that the suicide death rate is increasing in the elderly as well, especially among those above the age of 80 years.

For the elderly, social isolation, depression, functional disability, and the feeling of being a burden on their family have been cited as reasons for suicides globally, however, not much is known about reasons for suicides in the elderly in India.

INDIA'S HEALTH REPORT READS WORSE

Why in News: Indians have registered a 50% increase in the prevalence of ischemic heart disease and stroke over the period from 1990 to 2016, with the number of diabetes cases climbing from 26 million to 65 million. In the same period, the number of people ailing from chronic obstructive lung disease went up from 28 million to 55 million, according to the 'India State-level Disease Burden Initiative'.

The proportional contribution of cancers to the total loss of health in India has doubled from 1990 to 2016, but the incidence of different types of cancers varies widely between the States.

Important Points:

- The report is a joint initiative of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, along with experts and stakeholders associated with over 100 Indian institutions.

The State-wise disease burden showed that Punjab has been ranked at the top for the burden of ischemic heart disease, followed by Tamil Nadu, and vice-versa for diabetes. West Bengal topped with the largest number of stroke cases followed by Odisha, according to the comprehensive analysis of several major non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Kerala was ranked at the top for the burden of cancer, followed by Assam.

Being overweight was found to be a major risk factor for diabetes doubled in every State of India from 1990 to 2016.

The findings have been reported in a series of five research papers published in 'The Lancet Global Health', 'The Lancet Public Health', and 'The Lancet Oncology', along with a commentary in the medical journal The Lancet.

Professor Balram Bhargava, Secretary, Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and Director General, ICMR, said: "These papers, through detailed analysis, have elucidated disease and risk factor trends for major NCDs, and suicides, in every State, over 26 years."

He added that while it is known that NCDs have been increasing in India, a major finding of concern is that the highest rate of increase in ischemic heart disease and diabetes is in the less developed States of India.

"These States already have a high burden of chronic obstructive lung disease, and of a range of infectious and childhood diseases, so the control of NCDs in these States has to be boosted without delay," he said.

The papers showed that the proportional contribution of cancers to disease burden in India has doubled since 1990, but the incidence of individual cancers varies widely between the States, the reasons for which need to be understood better to guide prevention and control of cancer.

Ayushman Bharat

- Experts noted that the insights provided by these findings are very timely for the planning of Ayushman Bharat, the National Health Protection Mission announced recently by the Prime Minister. "ICMR is also working at creating a standard treatment workflow for Ayushman Bharat," said Dr. Bhargava.
- The Council added that they are all set to make public Mahatma Gandhi's health records - general health, blood pressure data, etc. - as part of the 150th commemorative issue of the Indian Journal of Clinical Research.

INDIA RANKS 130 IN UN'S HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX

Why in News: India climbed one spot to 130 among 189 countries in the latest human development Index by the United Nations Development Programme. Within South Asia, India's human development index (HDI) value is above the average of 0.638 for the region, with Bangladesh and Pakistan, countries with similar population size, being ranked 136 and 150 respectively.

Important Points:

In 2016, India's HDI value of 0.624 put it at 131 rank.

The HDI is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living.

India's HDI value for 2017 is 0.640, which put the country in the medium human development category, according to the Human Development Report (HDR) released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Between 1990 and 2017, India's HDI value increased from 0.427 to 0.640, an increase of nearly 50 per cent and an indicator of the country's remarkable achievement in lifting millions of people out of poverty.

Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Ireland and Germany led the ranking, while Niger, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Chad and Burundi have the lowest scores in the HDI's measurement of national achievements in health, education and income.

- The overall trend globally is toward continued human development improvements, with many countries moving up through the human development categories: out of the 189 countries for which the HDI is calculated, 59 countries are today in the very high human development group and only 38 countries fall in the low HDI group.
- Between 1990 and 2017, India's life expectancy at birth increased by nearly 11 years, with even more significant gains in expected years of schooling. Today's Indian school-age children can expect to stay in school for 4.7 years longer than in 1990. Whereas, India's gross national income per capita increased by a staggering 266.6 per cent between 1990 and 2017. About 26.8 per cent of India's HDI value is lost on account of inequalities. This confirms that inequality remains a challenge for India as it progresses economically, though the government and various state governments have, through a variety of social protection measures, attempted to ensure that the gains of economic development are shared widely and reach the farthest first. In India, despite considerable progress at the policy and legislative levels, women remain significantly less politically, economically and socially empowered than men. For instance, women hold only 11.6 per cent of parliamentary seats, and only 39 per cent of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education as compared to 64 per cent males. Female participation in the labour market is 27.2 per cent compared to 78.8 for men. India performs better than its neighbours Bangladesh and Pakistan, ranking 127 out 160 countries on the Gender Inequality Index.

About Human Development Index (HDI):

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a statistic (composite index) of life expectancy, education and per capita income indicators, which are used to rank countries into four tiers of human development. A country scores higher HDI when the lifespan is higher, the education level is higher, and the GDP per capita is higher. The HDI was developed by Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq and Indian economist Amartya Sen which was further used to measure the country's development by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

INDIA'S RETAIL INFLATION EASES TO 3.69 % IN AUGUST FROM 4.17 % IN JULY

Why in News: India's annual retail inflation eased to 3.69 percent in August from 4.17 percent in July, helped by smaller increases in food prices.

Important Points:

- Retail inflation in the country fell below the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) medium-term target of 4% last month. The inflation as measured by the consumer price index (CPI) eased to a 10-month low of 3.69% in August 2018, on the back of a decline in the prices of food products such as vegetables, pulses and sugar even as fuel prices increased. As per data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, retail inflation stood at 4.17% in July 2018 and 3.28% in August 2017.

Food and beverage

Within the index, food and beverage category inflation fell to 0.85% as compared with 1.73% in July 2018.

This was driven by a sharp decline in prices of fruits, vegetables, eggs, pulses and sugar and confectionery products.

Inflation numbers were lower for clothing and footwear category at 4.88% (as against 5.28% in July) and housing category at 7.59% (compared to 8.30% in July). There was slowdown in prices in the pan and tobacco category as well at 5.34%, down from 6.34% in July.

Fuel rises

However, fuel and light inflation stood at 8.47% in August, up from 7.96% in July.

Meanwhile, the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) expanded at 6.6% in the month of July 2018 driven by the manufacturing sector.

As per the data released on Wednesday, the IIP had expanded by just 1% in July 2017. The IIP growth for June 2018 stood at 6.8%.

- The manufacturing sector recorded a growth of 7% in July, while the consumer durables sector grew at 14.4%. Likewise, capital goods production grew by 3% during the month under review.

- In terms of industries, 20 out of 23 industry groups in the manufacturing sector showed positive growth during July 2018, with highest growth of 42.7% in 'manufacture of furniture' category, followed by 30.8% in 'manufacture of computer, electronics and optical products' and 28.4% in 'manufacture of tobacco products,' category.
- However, the industry group 'manufacture of paper and paper products' and 'printing and reproduction of recorded media' showed negative growth of 2.7% and 0.9%, respectively, the data showed.

What is the 'Consumer Price Index - CPI':

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a measure that examines the weighted average of prices of a basket of consumer goods and services, such as transportation, food and medical care. It is calculated by taking price changes for each item in the predetermined basket of goods and averaging them. Changes in the CPI are used to assess price changes associated with the cost of living; the CPI is one of the most frequently used statistics for identifying periods of inflation or deflation.

About Index of Industrial Production (IIP):

The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is an abstract number or ratio which measures the growth of various sectors in the economy. In India, IIP is a representative figure which measures the general level of Industrial activity in the country. Being an abstract number, it does not show volume of activity and only shows the magnitude which represents the status of production in the industrial sector for a given period of time as compared to a reference period of time.

INDO-US JOINT MILITARY EXERCISE 'YUDH ABHYAS 2018'

Why in News: Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2018, a joint military exercise of Indian and US armies, commenced on September 16, 2018 at Chaubattia, Uttarakhand with the unfurling of the national flags of both countries on the tunes of "Jana Gana Mana" and "The Star Spangled Banner".

Indian and US soldiers gave a ceremonial salute to the two senior most officers of the US and Indian side reviewing the ceremony. The exercise will conclude on September 29, 2018.

Exercise Yudh Abhyas is a series of one of the longest running joint military training and a major ongoing bilateral defence cooperation endeavour between India and the US.

This is the 14th edition of the joint military exercise hosted alternately by both countries. The two-week exercise will witness participation of about 350 personnel of the US Army and similar strength of Garud Division of the Indian Army.

Important Points:

Exercise Yudh Abhyas will provide an opportunity to the armed forces of both countries to train in an integrated manner at Battalion level with joint planning at Brigade level.

Multiple scenarios will be rehearsed during the joint exercise with a view to understand each-other's organisational structure and battle procedures.

The exercise is an ideal platform to learn from each-other's experiences of planning and execution of operations.

Both the sides will test the modern equipment for surveillance and tracking, specialist weapons for close quarter battle with terrorists, explosive and improvised explosive device detectors, as well as the latest communication equipment.

Both the armies will jointly train, plan and execute a series of well-developed operations for neutralisation of threats of varied nature.

The combined exercise will simulate a scenario where both nations are working together in counter insurgency and counter terrorism environment in mountainous terrain under UN charter.

Experts from both sides will hold expert academic and military discussions to share each other's experiences on varied topics for mutual benefit.

INDIA, SERBIA JOIN HANDS TO COMBAT TERROR, BOOST TRADE

Why in News: India and Serbia on Saturday signed agreements on cooperation in plant protection and plant quarantine and on-air services, following the talks between Vice President Venkaiah Naidu and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. The two sides also agreed to expand their bilateral cooperation, especially in the areas of economic and cultural relations and join hands to fight terrorism.

Important Points:

- "I had extensive discussion with President Vucic this morning on all important aspects of our bilateral relationship as well as global and regional issues of common interest. We expressed our commitment to further build on long-standing friendly ties between our two countries," Vice President Naidu said in a media statement following the bilateral talks between the two sides here.

He added that in the area of economic cooperation, both sides agreed to enhance cooperation in the areas of priority such as agriculture, food processing, defence manufacturing, science and technology, information technology, infrastructure, tourism and pharmaceuticals. He mentioned that the two sides have expressed satisfaction at the investments made by Indian companies in Serbia especially in sectors of farm equipment like tractors, food processing, and pharmaceuticals.

"India and Serbia are on the path of economic reforms to realise the goal of socio-economic development of our peoples. India as one of the fastest growing major economies in the world, presents opportunities for win-win partnership between Serbian and Indian entrepreneurs in multiple sectors to realize the vast potential of our bilateral relationship," Vice President Naidu said.

He added that the agreement on cooperation in plant protection and plant quarantine would contribute to increasing bilateral trade in agricultural products while the Air Services Agreement would boost trade and tourism by the launch of direct air connectivity between India to Serbia in future.

"We conveyed our mutual satisfaction at the growing cultural cooperation and people-to-people relations between the two countries. I thanked President Vucic for Serbia's unilateral decision to waive visa for short visits by Indians travelling to Serbia. India has also extended e-Visa facility to Serbian nationals. Our initiatives would further promote tourism and greater people-to-people contact," Vice President Naidu said.

He added that in their discussions on Saturday, they also exchanged views on multilateral issues and agreed to intensify cooperation in the areas of mutual interest. "India and Serbia have had close cooperation at the United Nations and other multilateral fora. We agreed that United Nations need

to be reformed to reflect the realities of today and to address current global challenges. We resolved to fight the scourge of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and agreed to strengthen cooperation in the fight against terrorism at various international fora. It is a global challenge and requires a global response," Vice President said.

- Vice President Naidu is scheduled to meet Speaker of Serbian National Assembly, Maja Gojkovic and Prime Minister Ana Brnabic. He will also address the special session of the National Assembly of Serbia. Vice President Naidu along with President Aleksandar Vucic will together attend the India-Serbia Business Forum and will interact with the business representatives of both countries.

India and Serbia are, this year, celebrating the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between them.

"India and Serbia have historic and special relations as co-founders of the Non-Aligned Movement. Our relationship is based on mutual trust, mutual understanding and support to each other on issues of core interest...I am happy that today, Serbia Post and India Post have jointly released commemorative stamps on the renowned Serbian scientist and inventor, Nikola Tesla and the great spiritual leader of India, Swami Vivekananda, to celebrate this occasion," Vice President Naidu said.

ISRO SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHES 2 EARTH OBSERVATION SATELLITES FOR UK

Why in News: India's PSLV C42 lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota on Monday and injected two UK satellites into "a very precise" orbit" after 17 minutes 44 seconds.

Important Points:

"I am extremely happy that the PSLV-C42 precisely launched two of our customer satellites at 583 km orbit. This was a unique night mission executed for the first time by us. The PSLV has proven yet again as a user-friendly vehicle in all aspects," said K Sivan, chairman of Indian Space Research Organisation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the team on the fully commercial launch. "Congratulations to our space scientists! ISRO successfully launched PSLV C42, putting two UK satellites in orbit, demonstrating India's prowess in the competitive space business. @isro," he tweeted.

- The satellites were injected at a distance of just 1 km and 3 km from the plotted apogee and perigee (the satellite's furthest and closest points to the earth) and at the exact inclination.
 - "The satellites were injected at a very precise orbit with only a 1 km and 3 km difference, whereas missions usually allow for a difference of 20 kms. This shows the prowess of the PSLV which has had 42 successful flights," said R Hutton, the mission director.
- The mission carried two small earth observation satellites developed and to be used by UK, NovaSar and S1-4, weighing a total of 889 kgs into a 583 km sun-synchronous orbit.
- A satellite is said to be in a sun-synchronous orbit when it changes its orientation throughout the year to ensure that the angle of sunlight is the same every time it passes over a particular geographical area on the surface of the earth.
- S1-4 is a high-resolution optical earth observation satellite used for disaster monitoring and monitoring of the environment and resources. NovaSar is a Synthetic Aperture Radar that will be used for mapping forests, land use and ice cover and floods and disasters.
- There were four stages in the mission, with two solid and two liquid fuel, and the core only version of the PSLV vehicle without the six strap-on motors was used.
- After a lull of five months, ISRO is gearing up for a launch every two weeks, with 18 more launches planned before March. The next PSLV C43, which will carry aboard Indian satellites as well as 31 other customer satellites. The launch of the communication satellite GSAT 11, which ISRO had recalled from French Guiana earlier this year, is likely to happen on December 4 and the much awaited Chandrayaan-2 mission on January 3, said Sivan.

SEBI REVISES SHARE BUYBACK NORMS

Why in News: SEBI has revised the share buyback mechanism to bring clarity on the requirement to make public announcements. In fact, the regulatory changes have come as record number of buybacks were announced by companies in the past couple of years that surpassed the money raised via new issues.

Important Points:

- Now buybacks cannot be made out of the proceeds of an earlier issue of the same kind of shares or the same kind of other specified securities.
- Buybacks are often made by companies from surplus cash or free reserves, which will now include securities premium account.
- Besides, clarity has been provided on timelines with respect to various requirements under buyback regulations. Explanation for 'free reserves' has been made in line with the Companies Act, 2013 and will be part of the new framework.

The revised norms came into effect from September 11.

The market regulator also said that credit rating agencies (CRAs) should not carry out any activity other than the rating of securities offered through public or rights issues.

The CRAs have to hive off other activity into a separate entity within two years, SEBI's news norms say.

Buyback norms were also reviewed to simplify language, remove inconsistencies and update references to the new Companies Act that came into force from April 2014.

SEBI said the definition of the buyback period and clarity on the need to make public announcement for the offer after declaration of postal ballot results has been provided in the amended regulations.

The buyback period has been defined as the time between the date of authorisation for buyback by a company's board of directors and the date on which the payment is made to shareholders who have accepted the offer.

Also, a change was made regarding filing requirement and time for public announcements. Now, a company authorised to do buyback of shares will have to make a public announcement within two working days of its declaration.

- Two days will be from the "date of declaration of results of the postal ballot for special resolution/ board of directors". A company can undertake buyback of shares out of its free reserves and securities premium account, among others.
- Markets regulator has also barred 'fugitive economic offender' from making an open offer or a competing offer for acquiring shares in a company. The move is expected to help in preventing such offender from taking control of a listed company. Besides, it has also relaxed initial public offering norms to allow companies to announce the price band two days before an offering. At present, the price band has to be announced five working days before the initial share sale opens for subscription.

About Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI):

The SEBI i.e. Securities and Exchange Board of India is the regulator for all the security markets in India. It was established in 1988 and was given statutory power on 12 April 1992 through the SEBI Act, 1992.

SEBI has its Head Quarters at the business district of Bandra Kurla Complex in Mumbai, and has regional offices in New Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and Ahmedabad.

Following are the powers vested in SEBI:

- To regulate and approve by-laws of stock exchanges
- Inspect the books of accounts of recognized stock exchanges and call for periodical returns
- Inspect the books of financial Intermediaries.
- Compel certain companies to get listed on one or more stock exchanges
- To handle the registration of brokers

What is a 'Buyback':

A buyback, also known as a share repurchase, is when a company buys its own outstanding shares to reduce the number of shares available on the open market. Companies buy back shares for a number of reasons, such as to increase the value of remaining shares available by reducing the supply or to prevent other shareholders from taking a controlling stake.

BANK OF BARODA, VIJAYA BANK AND DENA BANK TO BE MERGED

Why in News: The government proposed the merger of three banks - Bank of Baroda (NSE - 16.38%), Vijaya Bank (NSE- 5.75%) and Dena Bank (NSE 19.81)-aimed at creating the country's third-biggest lender. That's seen as preparing the ground for consolidation among the remaining 17 state-owned lenders that have been a drain on the exchequer and marking the next big move in banking reforms.

The Union Cabinet in August 2017 approved amalgamation of Public Sector Banks through Alternative Mechanism (AM) with an aim to facilitate consolidation among the Nationalised Banks to create strong and competitive banks.

Important Points:

The merger benefits include getting economies of scale and reduction in the cost of doing business.

Technical inefficiency is one of the main factors responsible for banking crisis. The scale of inefficiency is more in case of small banks. Hence, merger would be good.

Mergers help small banks to gear up to international standards with innovative products and services with the accepted level of efficiency.

Mergers help many PSBs, which are geographically concentrated, to expand their coverage beyond their outreach.

A better and optimum size of the organization would help PSBs offer more and more products and services and help in integrated growth of the sector.

The size of each business entity after merger is expected to add strength to the Indian Banking System in general and Public Sector Banks in particular.

This will also end the unhealthy and intense competition going on even among public sector banks as of now. In the global market, the Indian banks will gain greater recognition and higher rating.

The volume of inter-bank transactions will come down, resulting in saving of considerable time in clearing and reconciliation of accounts.

- The burden on the central government to recapitalize the public sector banks again and again will come down substantially. This will also help in meeting more stringent norms under BASEL III, especially capital adequacy ratio.

- After mergers, bargaining strength of bank staff will become more and visible. Bank staff may look forward to better wages and service conditions in future. The wide disparities between the staff of various banks in their service conditions and monetary benefits will narrow down.
 - Customers will have access to fewer banks offering them wider range of products at a lower cost. From regulatory perspective, monitoring and control of less number of banks will be easier after mergers. This is at the macro level.
- There are many problems to adjust top leadership in institutions and the unions.
- Mergers will result in shifting/closure of many ATMs, Branches and controlling offices, as it is not prudent and economical to keep so many banks concentrated in several pockets, notably in urban and metropolitan centres.

Way ahead:

Merger is a good idea. However, this should be carried out with right banks for the right reasons. Merger is also tricky given the huge challenges banks face, including the bad loan problem that has plunged many public sector banks in an unprecedented crisis. Since mergers are also about people, a huge amount of planning would be required to make the consolidation process smoother. Piecemeal consolidation will not provide a lasting solution and what is required is an integrated approach from all stakeholders including the government.

CHILD DEATHS BELOW FIVE DECLINED FASTER IN INDIA: UN

Why in News: According to the report, the gender gap in child survival has reduced almost four-fold in the last five years, with under-five mortality of girl child now being 2.5 per cent higher, compared to nearly 10 per cent in 2012.

Important Points:

- The under-five mortality rate of India at 39 per 1000 now equals that of the world, highlighting the much faster decline by India in the last five years as compared to the global decline. (Under-five mortality of India: 39 per 1,000 and global also is 39 per 1,000).
 - According to the report, the gender gap in child survival has reduced almost four-fold in the last five years, with under-five mortality of girl child now being 2.5 per cent higher, compared to nearly 10 per cent in 2012.
 - However, as per the report released by Unicef, the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Population Division and the World Bank Group, an estimated 6.3 million children under 15 years of age died in 2017 and the vast majority of these deaths -- 5.4 million -- occurred in the first five years of life, with newborns accounting for around half of the deaths.
- Without urgent action, 56 million children under five will die from now until 2030 - half of them newborns. We have made remarkable progress to save children since 1990, but millions are still dying because of who they are and where they are born. With simple solutions like medicines, clean water, electricity and vaccines, we can change that reality for every child," said Laurence Chandy, Unicef Director of Data, Research and Policy, in a statement.
- Globally in 2017, half of all deaths under five years of age took place in sub-Saharan Africa, and another 30 per cent in Southern Asia.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, one in 13 children died before their fifth birthday. In high-income countries, that number was one in 185.
- In 2017, 2.5 million newborns died in their first month. A baby born in sub-Saharan Africa or in Southern Asia was nine times more likely to die in the first month than a baby born in a high-income country.
- As per the UN, most children under five die due to preventable or treatable causes such as complications during birth, pneumonia, diarrhoea, neonatal sepsis and malaria.
- Under-five mortality rates among children in rural areas are, on average, 50 per cent higher than among children in urban areas. In addition, those born to uneducated mothers are more than twice as likely to die before turning five than those born to mothers with a secondary or higher education.

Infant Mortality:

Infant mortality is defined as the number of deaths of children under 1 year of age per 1,000 live births. The neonatal mortality rate is defined as the number of neonatal deaths per 1000 live births.

MAN PORTABLE ANTI-TANK GUIDED MISSILE (MPATGM)

Why in News: Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted first successful trials of indigenously developed third generation Man Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM). Two rounds of missile were flight tested in operational configuration in two days from Ahmednagar range in Maharashtra.

MP-ATGM

The man-portable anti-tank guided missile (MP-ATGM) is a third-generation anti-tank guided missile, which has been under development with the DRDO in partnership with Indian defense contractor VEM Technologies Ltd. since 2015.

The missile, fitted with a high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT) warhead, reportedly boasts of a top attack capability and has a maximum engagement range of about 2.5 kilometers.

Importance:

The missile would help the Indian army destroy enemy tanks during a war in the future. The Indian army needs close to 75,000 such missiles for future battles.

Background:

The Indian Defence Research and Development Organisation had promised the Indian Army to hand over the first MPATGM prototype by the end of 2018 for user trials.

The mass production of the missile is expected to begin in 2021. The Indian government scrapped a \$500 million deal with Rafael for 321 Spike ATGM systems and 8,356 missiles in favor of the MPATGM system in December 2017.

The Union Defence Ministry selected the Spike ATGM over the US-made FGM-148 Javelin ATGM system in October 2014.

- The Indian Army intends to equip all of its infantry and mechanised units with a third-generation ATGM by the early 2020s. The third-generation ATGMs are expected to have a strike range of over 2.5 km.

- The requirements of the Indian Army are so huge that they will have to be met with missile systems supplied from other nations along with the ones being developed indigenously by the DRDO.

MACHINES WILL DO MORE TASKS THAN HUMANS BY 2025

Why in News: Robots will handle 52 per cent of current work tasks by 2025, almost twice as many as now, a World Economic Forum (WEF) study.

Important Points:

The sharp increase could also see a net gain in "new roles" for humans, who will have to revamp skills to keep pace with the "seismic shift" in how we work with machines and computer programmes, the forum estimated.

By 2025 more than half of all current workplace tasks will be performed by machines as opposed to 29 per cent today.

Simultaneously, rapid changes in machines and algorithms, or computer processes that are designed to solve problems, "could create 133 million new roles in place of 75 million that will be displaced between now and 2022," the group forecast.

Based near Geneva, the WEF is known for the annual pow-wow of wealthy individuals, politicians and business leaders that it organises in Davos, Switzerland.

Its report, The Future of Jobs 2018, foresees robots swiftly replacing humans in the accounting, client management, industrial, postal and secretarial sectors.

Jobs that require "human skills" such as sales, marketing and customer service should see demand increase meanwhile, along with e-commerce and social media.

A major challenge will be to retrain workers, who will themselves be pressed to update skills especially in the areas of "creativity, critical thinking and persuasion", the study found.

- It surveyed personnel directors and senior executives from a broad range of companies around the world that account for 70 per cent of global output.

- Between now and 2022, they believe the aviation, travel and tourism sectors in particular will have to retrain workers, and identified an overall trend towards lifelong learning and adaptation.
- Governments were advised meanwhile to prepare safety nets for workers and communities threatened by what the WEF concluded would be "a significant shift" in the quality and permanency of the new jobs.

ALL INDIA PENSION ADALAT FOR PENSIONERS' WELFARE

Why in News: The Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Development of North-Eastern Region (DoNER), MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh inaugurated the 'Pension Adalat', organised by the Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Government of India.

Pre-Retirement Counselling:

The Government also organised a Pre-Retirement Counselling (PRC) on the occasion for the central government employees who are about to retire in the next six months.

Around 600 retiring Central Government employees are expected to participate in the counseling, among which, a significant number will also be from the central armed police forces.

Objective

The objective of the PRC will be to create awareness about post-retirement entitlements as well as to educate them on advance planning for retirement including medical facilities and participation in voluntary activities after retirement.

Important Points:

- The measure is expected to resolve issues of thousands of pensioners in one day, in a single sitting across the country.
- This is a great reformative measure to get the grievances resolved in the quickest possible way by avoiding unnecessary recourse by the pensioners to Courts.

- On the occasion, all the central government ministries would be conducting their respective pension adalats, in which on-the-spot resolution would be provided across the table to the grievance holder.
- All the concerned stakeholders of the pensioner's case including the department, pay and account officer, bank, along with the pensioner or his representative, will settle the grievance within the framework of extant rules.
- In addition to the central ministries, the offices of accountant general would be separately addressing the pensioner grievances of all-India service officers, in all the states across the country.

About Anubhav Awards-2018:

The Union Minister of State, Jitendra Singh also gave away the Anubhav Awards-2018 to recognise the contribution of the Central Government employees to the Anubhav Portal, which is designed to create an institutional memory for successive generations of Central Government employees.

The Anubhav scheme was instituted in 2015 to encourage retiring and retired employees to submit an account of their experiences while working in the government and thereby create an institutional memory to help in future governance as well as to motivate and inspire different generations of government officials in their respective assignments.

The scheme has resulted in registering more than 5,000 Anubhavs from Government employees till date from 91 Departments.

WORLD'S FIRST HYDROGEN TRAIN : CORADIA ILINT

Why in News: Germany has rolled out the world's first hydrogen-powered train, signalling the start of a push to challenge the might of polluting diesel trains with costlier but eco-friendly technology.

Important Points:

Hydrogen trains are equipped with fuel cells that produce electricity through a combination of hydrogen and oxygen, a process that leaves steam and water as the only emissions. Excess energy is stored in ion lithium batteries on board the train.



The future is here! Germany launched world's first hydrogen-powered passenger train. The locomotives, built by the French train-maker firm, Alstom, entered regular service from September 17 onwards, operating on a 62 mile stretch of line in northern Germany.

Though they remain pricey than the diesel train, hydrogen fuel cells have advantages over batteries. Instead of recharging, it can easily be refueled like a gas or diesel engine. And because train schedules are highly predictable, it's easier to build refueling infrastructure.

The locomotives are also eco-friendly.

The only disadvantage is that they are more expensive than the fossil fuel-based trains, but are cheaper to run.

FEATURES OF THE CORADIA ILINT TRAINS

1. The new Coradia iLint, nicknamed Hydrail, will be the first of two in a growing network of quiet, zero-emission trains operating on Germany's railways.
2. The trains can run for around 620 miles (1,000 km) on a single tank of hydrogen, similar to diesel trains.
3. It can carry up to 300 passengers with seats for 150, boasting a top speed of 140 km/h (87 mph), and has acceleration and braking performances similar to the diesel-powered Coradia Lint 54.
4. In between runs, the Coradia iLint trains will be fuelled at a mobile hydrogen filling station.
5. Hydrogen will be pumped into the trains from a 40-foot (12 metre) high steel hydrogen gas container next to the tracks at Bremervoerde station, Germany.
6. With one tank, they can run throughout the network for the whole day.

FUTURE PLANS

- Alstom is betting on the technology as a greener, quieter alternative to diesel on non-electrified railway lines - an attractive prospect to many German cities scrambling to combat air pollution.

Alstom will deliver a further 14 Coradia iLint trains, and if they prove to be a success, more will likely be seen in other regional areas of the country.

A stationary filling station on Elbe-Weser Train (EVB) premises is also scheduled to go into operation in 2021.

OTHER COUNTRIES TO USE THIS TECHNOLOGY

- Other countries are also looking into hydrogen trains including Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Italy, and Canada.

In France, the government has already said it wants the first hydrogen train to be on the rails by 2022.

PHASING OUT FOSSIL FUEL ENERGY

In 2017, Germany planned on achieving an overall 60 per cent share of renewable energy sources by 2050.

Costa Rica is also planning to be completely free of fossil fuels, becoming the first country to accomplish decarbonization.

Maharashtra to set up cyber varsity:

The Maharashtra Government has taken the first step towards setting up a varsity dedicated to mitigating cyber threats. It has set aside Rs. 80 crore for the first round of its funding and the proposal for the project will be tabled in the State cabinet's consideration in the first week of October.

Role and functions:

The new Cyber University will train 3,000 professionals to fight online space cyber-attacks, internet crimes, and conduct cyber forensics. It will also impart training in 15 other Internet of Things (IoT) areas such as Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The varsity will provide for and prepare internet professionals on the lines of the Microsoft Certified Professional Program. The courses will cost less than Rs. 5 lakh for courses in data analytics, cloud computing, blockchain, AI, cyber forensics and cyber investigations.

ATAL BIMIT VYAKTI KALYAN YOJNA ROLLED OUT

Why in News: The ESI Corporation during its 175th Meeting held in New Delhi under the Chairmanship of Shri Santosh Kumar Gangwar, Union Minister of State for Labour & Employment (I/C) has taken some very important decisions towards improvements in its services and benefits being provided to Insured Persons and their dependents.

Important Points:

Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna was launched keeping in mind change in employment pattern. The current scenario of employment in India has been transformed from long employment to fixed short term engagement in the form of contract and temping. So, there was need to provide assistance to employees in case they get unemployed for some time and search new job.

It aims to financially support those who lost their jobs or rendered jobless for whatsoever reasons due to changing employment pattern. Its beneficiaries will be insured persons covered under Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948 for period of two years continuously.

Under it, relief will be payable in cash directly to bank account of insured persons in case of unemployment. This financial assistance will be given to insured persons even while they search for new engagement. Beneficiary insured workers will be paid money, from their own contribution towards ESI scheme, in cash through bank account transfer.

Under this scheme, workers will be able to draw 47% of their total contributions towards ESIC after remaining unemployed for at least three months from date of leaving their previous jobs. They can choose to receive the cash at one go or in instalments. It will be applicable to all factories and establishments employing at least 10 workers.

About Employee's State Insurance (ESI):

ESI is self-financing social security and health insurance scheme for Indian workers. It is autonomous corporation by statutory creation under Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India. It is managed by Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) according to rules and regulations stipulated there in the ESI Act 1948. It was founded in 1952 and is headquartered in New Delhi.

WORLD-CLASS CONVENTION CENTRE IN DELHI

Why in News: Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, will lay the foundation stone of India International Convention and Expo Centre (IICC) in New Delhi. The IICC is being developed as a state of the art centre to promote Meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) activities to attract and promote business and industry for growth of industrial development in the country. The project is planned over an area of 221.37 acres in Sector 25 Dwarka, New Delhi, at an estimated cost of Rs.25,703 crores.

Important Points:

The IICC will be an integrated complex with a host of mutually beneficial facilities such as exhibition halls, convention centre comprising plenary hall, ballroom and meeting rooms, a multi-purpose arena, open exhibition spaces, mixed-use commercial spaces like star hotels, retail services and high-end offices.

The facilities will be at par with the world's best in terms of size and quality. They will enable the centre to host international and national events, meetings, conferences, exhibitions and trade shows.

Upon completion, the centre will be the biggest indoor exhibition space in India and will rank among the world's top 10. It is expected to host more than 100 national and international events every year.

In terms of employment, the centre is expected to generate over 5 lakh employment opportunities.

The complete project will be delivered through two distinct models:

The exhibition and convention centre including the trunk infrastructure will be built with investment by IICC Ltd.

The entire mixed-use infrastructure including hotels, retail, commercial, office and arena will be developed through private investment.

Project Details:

The project will be developed in two phases:

- **Phase-I:** This phase will include construction of the convention centre and two exhibition halls with adjoining foyer and related support facilities. It will be completed by December 2019.

- **Phase-II:** It will include construction of 3 exhibition complexes, multi-purpose arena, metro connectivity, hotels, retail and office space. It will be completed by December 2024.
- The project complex will have a dedicated underground Metro station, which will be an extension of the airport high-speed metro corridor. It is being constructed by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation.

The implementation agency for the project is India International Convention and Exhibition Centre Limited (IICC Ltd.), which is a fully government-owned company set up by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP).

Eco-Friendly Design:

Sustainable approaches will be made in the planning and design of the centre including in transportation, alternative energy production, energy conservation, water resource management, solid waste management and efficient land use.

The eco-friendly building design will be cost-effective and it will also be in line with green building principles and the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) Platinum rating standards.

Out of the total allotted space, over 40 per cent will be developed as an open and green area with the total built-up area being 10.70 lakh sqm.

INDIA HAS ONLY 1/4TH OF THIRD GRADE STUDENTS WHO CAN READ AND UNDERSTAND SHORT STORIES

Why in News: Only a quarter of third grade students can read and understand a short story with a few simple sentences or subtract two-digit numbers from another in India, according to a new report.

A report by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation said that the Indian government's own National Assessment Survey also shows that a high percentage of children have low learning levels.

Important Points:

- While 1 billion people have lifted themselves out of poverty over the past 20 years, rapid population growth in the poorest countries, particularly in Africa, puts future progress at risk.
- If current trends continue, the number of extremely poor people in the world could stop its two-decade decline and could even rise, the report observed. The foundation launched its second annual Goalkeepers Data Report, pointing to demographic trends that could stall unprecedented progress in reducing global poverty.
- As per the report of PTI, this crisis has been clearly outlined and thus learning has started to get the attention it requires, both inside and outside of India.
- From PM Narendra Modi to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and state governments in Delhi and Rajasthan that are instituting reforms, the leaders of India are now putting learning outcomes on the map of the agenda.

According to the Goalkeepers Data Report, although more students in low- and lower-middle-income countries are enrolled in school today than ever before, many are not learning what they need to succeed.

Unfortunately, the strategy for improving school outcomes is not as clear-cut as the strategy for improving school access.

Bill and Melinda Gates will be producing the Goalkeepers Data Report every year through 2030, timing it to the annual gathering of world leaders in New York City for the UN General Assembly.

The report is designed to highlight best practices and help hold the Gates Foundation, its partners, and leaders around the world accountable.

It aims to document not just what is working, but where the world is falling short.

About Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF),

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), also known as the Gates Foundation, is a private foundation founded by Bill and Melinda Gates. It was launched in 2000, and is said to be the largest private foundation in the United States, holding US\$50.7 billion in assets. The primary aims of the foundation are, globally, to enhance healthcare and reduce extreme poverty, and the US, to expand educational opportunities and access to information technology. The foundation, based in Seattle, Washington, is controlled by its three trustees: Bill and Melinda Gates, and Warren Buffett.

A CHILD UNDER 15 DIES EVERY 5 SECONDS AROUND THE WORLD: UN

Why in News: An estimated 6.3 million children under 15 years of age died in 2017, or 1 every 5 seconds, mostly of preventable causes, according to new mortality estimates released by UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations (UN) Population Division and the World Bank Group.

Important Points:

The latest Levels and Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2018 from UNICEF and partners in the UN Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME), shows the full scope of child and mortality rates across the world - from newborns to adolescents.

This report presents the UN IGME's latest estimates - up to the year 2017 - of under-five, infant, and neonatal mortality as well as mortality among children aged 5-14.

It assesses progress in the reduction of child and young adolescent mortality at the country, regional and global levels, and provides an overview of the methods used to estimate the child mortality indicators.

Globally, in 2017, half of all deaths under five years of age took place in sub-Saharan Africa and another 30 percent in Southern Asia. In sub-Saharan Africa, 1 in 13 children died before their fifth birthday. In high-income nations, that number was 1 in 185

A child born in sub-Saharan Africa or in Southern Asia was 9 times more likely to die in the first month than a baby born in a high-income country and progress towards saving newborns has been slower than for other children under five years of age since 1990.

Even within countries, disparities persist. In rural areas, under 5 mortality rates among children are on average 50 percent higher than among children in urban areas.

- Neonatal mortality: Everywhere, the most-risky period of life for a child is the first month. In 2017, 2.5 million newborns died in their first month, approximately 7,000 every day, most of whom died in the first week after birth.

- Uneducated are more likely at risk: In addition, those children who are born to uneducated mothers are more than twice as likely to die before turning five years than those born to mothers with a secondary or higher education.
- Most children under 5 die due to preventable or treatable causes such as complications during birth, pneumonia, diarrhea, neonatal sepsis and malaria. By comparison, among children between 5 and 14 years of age, injuries become a more prominent cause of death, especially from drowning and road traffic.

Within this age group, regional differences exist, with the risk of dying for a child from sub-Saharan Africa 15 times higher than in Europe.

The report adds that even within countries, disparities persist. Under-five mortality rates among children in rural areas are, on average, 50% higher than among children in urban areas. In addition, those born to uneducated mothers are more than twice as likely to die before turning five than those born to mothers with a secondary or higher education.

Laurence Chandy, UNICEF director, data, research and policy, said: "Without urgent action, 56 million children under five will die from now until 2030 - half of them newborns."

REASON BEHIND THE SITUATION

Disease and lack of medical facilities: Most children under five do not survive due to preventable or treatable causes such as complications during birth, neonatal sepsis, pneumonia, diarrhea, and malaria.

Unaffordable treatment: More than 6 million children die before their 15th birthday due to the treatment cost that their parents cannot afford.

Injuries: By comparison, among children between 5 and 14 years of age, injuries become a more prominent cause of death, especially from drowning and road traffic.

- Regional differences: In the early years, regional differences also exist, with the risk of dying for a child from sub-Saharan Africa 15 times higher than in Europe.

Simple solutions:

- With simple solutions like medicines, clean water, electricity and vaccines, we can change that reality for every child.
- Globally, in 2017, half of all deaths under five years of age took place in sub-Saharan Africa, and another 30% in Southern Asia. Despite these challenges, fewer children are dying each year worldwide. The number of children dying under five has fallen dramatically from 12.6 million in 1990 to 5.4 million in 2017. The number of deaths in older children aged between 5 to 14 years dropped from 1.7 million to under a million in the same period.

21 SEPTEMBER:

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

Why in News: Since 1982, the United Nations has been celebrating International Peace Day every year as a day "devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and peoples". This year, nations across the world are observing 21 September as the International Peace Day, in order to remind each other and their governments of the importance of peace in the ever-changing multicultural world. The theme for the first International Peace Day was the right to peace of people.

Theme: 2018 Theme: "The Right to Peace - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 70"

Important Points:

This year's theme celebrates the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a milestone document in the history of human rights. The Declaration was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948 as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. It was drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world. The Universal Declaration is the most translated document in the world, available in more than 500 languages. It states in Article 3, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person" and these elements build the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

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

International Day of Peace activities

Everyone observing International Day of Peace can observe a shared minute of silence at 12pm in all time zones.

Peace Day events will take place all around the world. Here are a few you can participate in:

Global Mala (yoga) project

The Global Mala project combines yoga, service and collective action to form a 'mala around the Earth'. It's based upon the sacred cycle of 108.

Compassion Games International

Compassion Games International provides fun ways to get young people excited about International Peace Day. Check out the many kid-friendly peace day activities offered.

BONDS TO RESCUE THE RUPEE

Why in News: The sharp slide in the value of the rupee has led to speculation that the RBI might opt to issue NRI bonds worth \$30-35 billion in order to help attract dollar investment into the country. The rupee's fall of 13.7% since the beginning of the year has been caused by two factors. On the one hand, capital has been moving out of India's capital markets. Foreign portfolio investors pulled out Rs. 47,836 crore in the first half of the year, a 10-year high. On the other, Indian exports have been losing demand, while imports of commodities like crude oil have risen significantly. India's current account deficit hit a five-year high in July. Both these factors have combined to cause an increase in the demand for the dollar, thus leading to the fall in the value of the rupee.

Important Points:

- NRI bonds could theoretically help increase demand for the rupee and stabilise its value against the dollar. The actual effect of these bonds on the rupee, however, will depend on how attractive they are to NRIs.
 - In 2013, when the rupee witnessed a fall of about 25% in just four months following the U.S. Federal Reserve's decision to taper down its bond-purchase programme, the RBI was able to collect more than \$30 billion worth of foreign capital.
- NRI bonds were also issued in 1998 and 2000 to help curb the slide of the rupee. While these bonds can provide temporary assistance to the rupee by encouraging capital inflows into the economy, they may not address the fundamental economic issues that are causing the fall of the rupee.
- Until the RBI can rein in domestic inflation and the government can take steps to boost exports and curb imports, emergency measures like the issuance of NRI bonds can only offer temporary respite to the rupee.

What are NRI bonds?

These are bonds issued by the Reserve Bank of India to non-resident Indians who are interested in investing their money in India. Since these bonds offer higher returns than other similar investments, they can be used as a tool to attract capital during times when other domestic assets fail to attract the interest of foreign investors. Many investors view them as a safe investment as these bonds are issued by the Indian central bank.

TWO PORTALS TO STRENGTHEN WOMEN SAFETY

Why in News: Union Home Minister, Shri Rajnath Singh here today launched two separate portals to strengthen Women Safety. The portal "cybercrime.gov.in" will receive complaints from citizens on objectionable online content related to child pornography, child sexual abuse material, sexually explicit material such as rape and gang rape.

The National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO), which is accessible only to law enforcement agencies, will assist in effectively tracking and investigating cases of sexual offences.

Important Points:

- The Cyber Crime Prevention Against Women and Children (CCPWC) portal is convenient and user friendly that will enable complainants in reporting cases without disclosing their identity.
 - This will not only aid the victims/complainants but also help the civil society organizations and responsible citizens to anonymously report complaints pertaining to child pornography, child sexual abuse material or sexually explicit material such as rape and gang rape.
- Complainants can also upload the objectionable content and URL to assist in the investigation by the State Police. The complaints registered through this portal will be handled by police authorities of respective State/UTs. There are other features such as a victim or complainant can track his/her report by opting for "report and track" option using his/her mobile number.
- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) will proactively identify such objectionable content and take up with intermediaries for its removal. For this NCRB has already been notified as the Government of India agency to issue notices under Section 79(3)b of IT Act.
- The second portal unveiled by the Union Home Minister relates to the National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO). It is a central database of "sexual offenders" in the country which will be maintained by the NCRB for regular monitoring and tracking by the State Police.
- The database is accessible only to the law enforcement agencies for investigation and monitoring purpose. The database will include offenders convicted under charges of rape, gang rape, POCSO and eve teasing. At present the database contains 4.4 lakh entries.
- The State Police have been requested to regularly update the database from 2005 onwards. The database includes name, address and photograph and fingerprint details for each entry. However, the database will not compromise any individual's privacy.

Background:

Ministry of Home Affairs has already released a grant of Rs. 94.5 crore to States/UTs for establishing cyber forensic-cum-training laboratories to strengthen cybercrime investigation and conduct training programmes to enhance capabilities of Police officers, public prosecutors and judicial officers.

WHO CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION TO END THE TUBERCULOSIS EPIDEMIC

Why in News: The World Health Organization (WHO) has released a 2018 edition of its Global Tuberculosis Report. The report provides a comprehensive and up-to-date assessment of the tuberculosis epidemic and progress in the response, at global, regional and country levels.

The United Nations general assembly high-level meeting on the fight against tuberculosis (TB) will take place on 26 September 2018. The meeting follows from last year's Global Ministerial Conference on ending the tuberculosis epidemic (held in Moscow).

Important Points:

TB remains the top infectious killer in the world claiming over 4,000 lives a day. Actions and investments to end the epidemic fall far short, which is why heads of state will meet at the first ever United Nations general assembly high-level meeting on TB in New York, to commit to accelerate the TB response.

Although last year fewer people fell ill and died from TB, countries are still not doing enough to end TB by 2030, warns the WHO. Although global efforts have averted an estimated 54 million TB deaths since 2000, it remains the world's deadliest infectious disease.

WHO's 2018 Global TB Report, released in New York earlier this week, calls for an unprecedented mobilisation of national and international commitments. It urges political leaders gathering next week to take concrete decisive action.

Overall, TB deaths have decreased over the past year. In 2017, there were 1.6 million deaths including 300,000 HIV-positive people. Since 2000, a 44 percent reduction in TB deaths has been witnessed among people infected with HIV.

- An estimated 10 million people developed TB in 2017. The number of new cases is falling by 2 percent every year, although faster reductions have occurred in Europe and Africa between 2013 and 2017.

- Few countries are moving faster than others as evidenced in countries such as Lesotho, Eswatini, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe which witnessed annual declines of 4-8 percent.
- In the Russian Federation, high level political commitment and intensified TB efforts have led to more rapid 5 percent decline in cases and 13 percent decline in deaths.
- Despite all these efforts, drug-resistant TB remains a global public health crisis. In 2017, 558,000 people developed disease resistant to rifampicin, the most effective first-line TB drug. The vast majority of people had multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB), the combined resistance to rifampicin and isoniazid medicines.

TB Response: Challenges:

Underreporting and under-diagnosis of TB cases remains a major challenge. Of the 10 million people who fell ill with TB in 2017, only 6.4 million were officially recorded, leaving 3.6 million people undiagnosed, or detected but not reported.

Ten countries accounted for 80 percent of the gap of underreporting and under-diagnosis, with India, Indonesia and Nigeria topping the list.

Treatment coverage lags behind at 64 percent and must increase to at least 90 percent by 2025 to meet the TB targets.

To improve detection, diagnosis and treatment rates, WHO along with the Stop TB Partnership and the Global Fund launched the new initiative 'Find. Treat. All. 'EndTB' in 2018, providing quality care to 40 million people with TB from 2018 to 2022.

Only around half of the estimated 920,000 people with HIV-associated TB were reported in 2017, of these, 84 percent were on antiretroviral therapy.

Only one in four people with MDR-TB were reported to have received treatment with a second-line regimen.

China and India alone were home to 40 percent of patients requiring treatment for MDR-TB, but not reported to be receiving it.

- Globally, MDR-TB treatment success remains low at 55 percent, often due to drug toxicity making it impossible for patients to stay on treatment.

- The report predicts that at least 30 million people should be able to access TB preventive treatment between 2018 and 2022, based on new WHO guidance.
- One of the most urgent challenges is to scale up funding. In 2018, investments in TB prevention and care in low- and middle-income countries fell short of USD 3.5 billion. Without an increase in funding, the annual gap will widen to USD 5.4 billion in 2020.
A further USD 1.3 billion per year is required to accelerate the development of new vaccines, diagnostics and medicines.

Recommendation:

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

HEALTH MINISTRY TIES-UP WITH DELL, TATA TRUSTS

Why in News: Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has recently exchanged MoUs with Tata Trusts and Dell to provide technological platform for nationwide prevention, control, screening and management program of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs).

To bring healthcare technology transformation in Comprehensive Primary Health Care NCD programme under the Ayushman Bharat, the Health Ministry is working with Dell as technology partner and the Tata Trusts as deployment partner.

Important Points:

- The technology solution is hosted on a Government Data Center and managed by Centre for Health Informatics, MoHFW.
- Dell developed the technology platform, while the Tata Trusts provided the implementation support of the NCD programme.
- The programme, which is one of the modules in Ayushman Bharat's Comprehensive Primary Healthcare (CPHC) Initiative, is currently being deployed in about 200 districts across the country.
- Through implementation of the software, it will also be possible to track health trends across the country.
- A cloud-based mobile, web and analytics solution has been developed to digitise health records to aid the population-based screening program and to bring quality health services at door step.
- It will enable increased productivity for health workers and doctors and will facilitate monitoring of delivery of services by state and district administrators.
- It will provide health records for citizens, mobile applications for health workers, a web portal for the medical officers and dashboards for health officials.

Partnership with Dell

This technology solution has been developed by Dell, through Dell Giving, Dell's CSR program, and in collaboration with reputed institutions and experts from:

AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences) DGHS (Directorate General of Health Services) WHO (World Health Organization) India ICMR (Indian Council for Medical Research) NHSCR (National Health Systems Resource Center) NICPR (National Institute of Cancer Prevention Research) Tata Trusts, NIC (National Informatics Center) CHI (Center for Health Informatics) IndiaStack team at iSPIRT State Health Departments

Partnership with Tata Trusts

The Tata Trusts is supporting the quality implementation of the programme in States through training, and programme management activities to ensure technology adoption amongst health staff and steady progress through continuous monitoring.

Through the Tata Trusts' trained and skilled personnel on the field, health workers, doctors and local administrators have ready access to support and guidance on challenges they may face.

- The NCD IT solution covers program-level data for screening, referral, diagnosis, treatment and follow-up activities of non-communicable diseases.

NCD screening program:

NCD screening program addresses Hypertension, Diabetes, Oral, Breast and Cervical cancers. It covers all men and women over age of 30 years. The program is one of modules in Ayushman Bharat's Comprehensive Primary Healthcare (CPHC) Initiative, currently being deployed in about 200 districts across the country.

INDIA SUCCESSFULLY TEST FIRES PRAHAAR MISSILE

Why in News: The missile has been developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). It was test-launched from launch pad-3 of the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur, near Balasore. It is capable of filling the gap between the multi-barrel rocket system 'Pinaka' and medium-range ballistic missile 'Prithvi'.

Important Points:

'Prahar', developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), is capable of filling the gap between the multi-barrel rocket system 'Pinaka' and medium-range ballistic missile 'Prithvi'. It can also engage multiple targets in different directions. It has length of 7.3 meter, diameter of 420 mm and weighs 1,280 kg. It has operational range of 150 km and flight altitude of 35 km. It is a solid-fuelled short-range missile fitted with inertial navigation system.

The missile is equipped with state-of-the-art navigation, guidance and electromechanical actuation systems with advanced on board computer.

It is a quick-reaction, all-weather, all-terrain, highly accurate battlefield support tactical weapon system.

It is fitted with an inertial navigation system and is capable of engaging multiple targets in different directions.

Further, the missile is a quick-reaction, all-weather, all-terrain and highly accurate battlefield support tactical weapon system.

The DRDO used various tracking radars as well as electro-optic equipment to track and monitor the trajectory of the missile.

- As a safety measure, 4,494 people residing in five villages adjacent to the missile launch site were temporarily shifted by the district administration before the launch to nearby two shelters with compensation.

- The people returned to their houses after getting clearance from ITR authorities soon after the test was over.
- The indigenously developed Prahaar missile is expected to further strengthen the defence capabilities of the Indian Army.
- It can be launched from a road-mobile launch platform, which can carry six missiles at a time. It can be fired in all directions from the launcher. It could be used for striking both tactical and strategic targets.

Background:

The Prahaar missile was test-fired successfully for the very first time in July 2011 from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur.

During the test, the missile had traveled a distance of 150 km in about 250 seconds, meeting all launch objectives and struck a pre-designated target in the Bay of Bengal with a high degree of accuracy of less than 10 m (33 ft).

271 MILLION PEOPLE MOVED OUT OF POVERTY IN INDIA: UN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Why in News: India has made momentous progress in reducing multidimensional poverty with its incidence almost halving between 2005-6 and 2015-16, climbing down to 27.5 per cent from 54.7 per cent, according to estimates from the 2018 global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI).

Important Points:

In India, the first country for which progress over time has been estimated, 271 million people moved out of poverty between 2005-06 and 2015-16.

"The poverty rate here has nearly halved, falling from around 55 per cent to around 28 per cent over the 10-year period," said the estimates released by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI).

- Among South Asian countries, only Maldives has a lower headcount ratio than India at 1.9 per cent, with Nepal (35.3), Bangladesh (41.1), and Pakistan (43.9) having higher incidences of multidimensional poverty.

- According to a UNDP statement, though the traditionally disadvantaged groups - across states, castes, religions, and ages -are still the poorest, they have also experienced the biggest reductions in MPI through the decade, showing that they have been "catching up".
- This is in line with global trends, where deeper progress among the poorest groups is reflected in the global MPI being cut by half. That pockets of poverty are found across India, but multidimensional poverty is particularly acute -- and significant - in the four states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. These accounted for 196 million MPI poor people -- more than half of all MPI poor in India.
But there was also progress. Jharkhand made the biggest strides among all states in reducing multidimensional poverty, with Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Nagaland only slightly behind.
Delhi, Kerala and Goa have the lowest incidence of multidimensional poverty.
Across nearly every state, poor nutrition is the largest contributor to multidimensional poverty. Not having a household member with at least six years of education is the second largest contributor. Insufficient access to clean water and child mortality contribute least. Relatively fewer people living in poverty experience deprivations in school attendance - a significant gain.
The MPI looks beyond income to understand how people experience poverty in multiple and simultaneous ways. It identifies how people are being left behind across three key dimensions: health, education and living standards, and 10 indicators - nutrition, child mortality, years of schooling, school attendance, sanitation, cooking fuel, drinking water, electricity, housing and assets. The 2018 report, which is now closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, cover almost three-quarters of the world's population.
- Despite the massive gains made in reducing multidimensional poverty, 364 million Indians continue to experience acute deprivations in health, nutrition, schooling and sanitation.

- Globally, around 1.3 billion people live in multidimensional poverty, which is almost a quarter of the population of the 104 countries for which the 2018 MPI is calculated. Of these 1.3 billion, almost half -- 46 per cent -- are thought to be living in severe poverty and are deprived in at least half of the dimensions covered in the MPI.
- Although the level of poverty - particularly in children - is staggering so is the progress that can be made in tackling it. In India alone some 271 million have escaped multidimensional poverty in just 10 years.

AYUSHMAN BHARAT HEALTH SCHEME

Why in News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi out the Centre's flagship scheme - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Abhiyaan, also known as Ayushman Bharat or the National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM). This is the world's largest health scheme which will serve a population that equals 27-28 European countries. The beneficiaries are almost equal to the population of Canada, Mexico and US put together.

Important Points:

The government-sponsored health insurance scheme will provide free coverage of up to Rs. 5 lakh a family a year in any government or even empanelled private hospitals all over India. Meant 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 is an opportunity to serve poor people.

Addressing a mammoth crowd at Prabhat Tara ground in Ranchi, the Prime Minister further said that this scheme would be a role model for all future health schemes around the world.

This scheme will strengthen our health service in the country. Fifty crore people will benefit from this scheme. 13,000 hospitals in the country have been coordinated.

"Those who won medals in Asian games recently were from remote villages, poor families. We have to identify poor people and give them the opportunity to excel in life.

- The Prime Minister also launched a toll free number 14555 for people to get more information about Ayushman Bharat scheme.

- While the scheme beneficiaries have been selected on the basis of socio-economic caste census-2011 (SECS-2011) data, the government has decided to also extend the scheme additionally to those families that were availing of the government's earlier Rashtrya Swasthya Bima Yojna (RSBY).
- On the basis of census 2011 data, there are about 10.74 crore beneficiary families but we have decided to add those also who used to get cover under the RSBY as we don't want to take away the benefits from anyone.

The number of beneficiary families will now go up to 12 crores after two more states joined the scheme.

An estimated Rs 12,000 crores will be spent under the Ayushman Bharat mission with 60% being borne by the Centre and 40% by state. Beneficiaries can avail hospitalization treatment for 1350 pre-identified diseases.

Who will be the beneficiaries?

The scheme is targeted at poor, deprived rural families and identified occupational categories of urban workers' families. So, if we were to go by the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) 2011 data, 8.03 crore families in rural and 2.33 crore in urban areas will be entitled to be covered under these scheme, i.e., it will cover around 50 crore people. To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and the elderly), there will be no cap on the family size and age under the AB-NHPS. The scheme will be cashless and paperless at public hospitals and empanelled private hospitals.

How much will it cost?

Ayushman Bharat may cost the exchequer around Rs 5,000 crore this year because of the time taken to rollout the scheme. The scheme will cost Rs 10,000 crore when its rolled out across India next year. While this year there are likely to be 8 crore beneficiaries, the target is to cover 10 crore by FY 20.

In the first year, out of the total expenditure of Rs 5,000 crore, the central government may bear the burden of around Rs 3,000 crore which will increase to almost Rs 7,000 crore in FY20. The scheme aims to provide a benefit cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year. It will subsume the existing Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), launched in 2008 by the UPA government.

- According to international rating agency Moody's, Ayushman Bharat is credit positive for insurance companies as it will aide in higher premium growth. "The launch of universal health coverage is credit positive for the country's insurers because it will help grow health premiums and provide insurers with cross-selling and servicing opportunities," Moody's said in a report last month.

LIVE-IN PARTNERS CAN ADOPT NOW

Why in News: Individuals in a live-in relationship will once again be able to adopt children from and within India after the country's nodal adoption agency decided to withdraw a circular issued earlier this year disallowing them from doing so. Child Adoption Regulatory Authority (CARA) has allowed individuals in a live-in relationship to adopt children from and within India.

Important Points:

The Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA), in a circular issued on May 31, barred applicants in a live-in relationship from adopting a child on the ground that "the Authority would like the children to be placed only with a stable family and individuals in a live-in relationship cannot be considered as stable family."

The eligibility criteria under Adoption Regulations, 2017, permit single women to adopt a child of any gender, while single men can adopt only boys.

When a married couple seeks to adopt a child, it needs to give its consent for adoption and should be stable marriage for at least two years. Applicants have to be physically, mentally and financially stable to raise a child.

About CARA:

Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is a statutory body of Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India.

It functions as the nodal body for adoption of Indian children and is mandated to monitor and regulate in-country and inter-country adoptions.

- CARA is designated as the Central Authority to deal with inter-country adoptions in accordance with the provisions of the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 1993, ratified by Government of India in 2003.

- CARA primarily deals with adoption of orphan, abandoned and surrendered children through its associated /recognised adoption agencies.

SCHEME FOR PROTECTION OF EXOTIC NEELA KURINJI PLANTS

Why in News: Tamil Nadu government has announced Scheme for protection of exotic Neela kurinji (*Strobilanthus kunthianus*) plants that flower only once in 12 years. This scheme comes following complaints that these rare and ecologically unique flowers are being packaged and sold on the commercial basis.

About Neelakurinji plant:

Neelakurinji is a tropical plant species. It is native to Shola forests in Western Ghats. It is also seen in Shevroys Hills in Eastern Ghats, Anamalai hills and Agali hills in Kerala and Sanduru hills in Karnataka. It grows at height of 30 to 60 cm on hills slopes at an altitude of 1300 to 2400 meters where there is no tree forest.

The flowers of Neelakurinji are purple-blue in colour and blooms once in 12 years.

The flower has no smell or any medicinal value. It is because of these flowers, Nilgiri hills in southern tip of Western Ghats are called Blue Mountains.

It is rarest of rare plant species that grows in Western Ghats and does not grow in any other part of the world.

It has been categorized as endangered species.

In ancient Tamil literature, kurinji flowers symbolize love. Paliyan tribal people living in Tamil Nadu use this flower bloom as reference to calculate their age.

These rare and ecologically unique flowers are being packaged and sold on the commercial basis.

The district administration put up a prominent notice board near the forest patch where the flower was blooming, that people caught plucking flowers would be fined Rs. 5,000.

It is the most rigorously demonstrated, with documented bloomings in 1838, 1850, 1862, 1874, 1886, 1898, 1910, 1922, 1934, 1946, 1958, 1970, 1982, 1994, 2006 and 2018

- Some Kurinji flowers bloom once every seven years, and then die. Their seeds subsequently sprout and continue the cycle of life and death.

- The Paliyan tribal people living in Tamil Nadu used it as a reference to calculate their age.

CYCLONIC STORM 'DAYE' CROSSES ODISHA COAST

Why in News: Cyclonic storm 'Daye' crossed the coast near Gopalpur in Odisha early, triggering heavy downpour accompanied by high velocity wind in several parts of the state.

The cyclonic storm "Daye" over northwest Bay of Bengal moved west-northwestward with a speed of about 23 kmph and crossed south Odisha and adjoining Andhra Pradesh coast close to Gopalpur in the early hours of Director, Meteorological Centre, Bhubaneswar, H.R. Biswas said.

The cyclonic system then lay centred over south Odisha, about 40 km west-northwest of Gopalpur and about 150 km east-southeast of Bhawanipatna.

Important Points:

As the cyclonic storm made a landfall, it brought heavy to very heavy rainfall in some places in Gajapati, Ganjam, Puri, Rayagada, Kalahandi, Koraput, Malkangiri and Nabarangpur districts of the state..

Under its impact, heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely to lash several places in Rayagada, Kalahandi, Koraput and Nabarangpur districts .

Heavy to very heavy rainfall is also likely to occur at some places in Balangir, Bararh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Sundargarh, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj districts .

The impact of the cyclonic storm was felt more in Gajapati, Ganjam, Khordha, Nayagarh and Puri districts.

The State government has instructed officials in coastal districts and various departments to be alert to tackle any emergency situation.

- The cyclone warning division's (CWD) advisory said the sea will be very rough over central and north Bay of Bengal and off Odisha, West Bengal and north Andhra Pradesh coasts.

What is a cyclone?

Cyclone is a weather phenomenon. Cyclone refers to many different types of storms. It is a system of winds rotating inwards to an area of low barometric pressure, with an anticlockwise or clockwise circulation.

What are cyclones, hurricanes typhoons?

Hurricanes, cyclones, and typhoons are all the same weather phenomenon, but they have got different names in different parts of the world. For example - Hurricane in the Atlantic, Typhoon in the Pacific and Cyclone in the Indian Ocean.

How are cyclones named?

At present, tropical cyclones are officially named by one of the eleven warning centers spread across the globe under the aegis of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). All cyclone names are submitted to the World Meteorological Organization Regional Tropical Cyclone Committee for the SE Pacific for final approval. This committee can (and often does) reject or adjust names that are submitted to it and may substitute their own name. The process also involves several countries in the region. A name is selected on the basis of a popular mandate.

To get names more organised, weather scientists start naming cyclones alphabetically, like a cyclone's name starting with A, would be the first storm to occur in the year.

If the storm causes large amount of deaths or damages, any member of the WMO's hurricane, typhoon and tropical cyclone committees, can request for the withdrawal of the cyclone's name from the naming list. A replacement name is then submitted to the committee concerned and voted upon.

How are cyclones classified?

Cyclones are classified on the basis of the wind speed.

The lowest official classification used in the North Indian Ocean is a Depression, which has 3-minute sustained wind speeds of between 20-31 mph (31-49 km/h).

- Deep Depression: If the depression intensifies further then it will become a Deep Depression, which has speeds of between 32-38 mph (50-61 km/h).

- Cyclonic storm: If the Deep Depression develops gale force wind speeds of between 39-54 mph (62-88 km/h), it is called a Cyclonic storm and the IMD assigns a name to it.
 - Severe Cyclonic Storm: Severe Cyclonic Storms have storm force wind speeds of between 55-72 mph (89-117 km/h)
 - Very Severe Cyclonic Storm: Very Severe Cyclonic Storms have hurricane-force winds of 73-102 mph (118-166 km/h).
 - Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm: Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storms have hurricane-force winds of 166-221 km/h (104-137 mph).
- Super Cyclonic Storm: The highest classification used in the North Indian Ocean is a Super Cyclonic Storm, which have hurricane-force winds of above 138 mph (222 km/h).

PAKYONG : SIKKIM'S FIRST-EVER AIRPORT

Why in News: To visit Sikkim by air means landing at West Bengal's Bagdogra airport, then travelling 124 km uphill on winding roads to reach Gangtok, its capital. However, Sikkim will finally get its own airport - perched between the Himalayan ranges at a height of 4,500 ft! The Pakyong airport will be the country's 100th functional airport - and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate it.

The Greenfield Airport - the Northeast's first - which has been conceived at a budget of Rs 605.59 crore is skilfully engineered to include soil reinforcement and slope stabilisation techniques in context of the altitude it has been built in. Speaking on the occasion, the Prime Minister said that with the Pakyong Airport, the country has hit a century of airports. The development not only eases connectivity to the Himalayan state but also brings it on the air-map of the world. The airport was constructed by the Airports Authority of India. Until now, Sikkim was the only state in India remaining without a functional airport.

Important Points:

- Location: The airport is spread over 201 acres and is located on top of a hill about two km above Pakyong village at 4,500 feet above sea level.
- Strategic Location: It is around 60 km from the Indo-China border and around 30km away from Sikkim's capital city, Gangtok.

- **Strategic Relevance:** The airport's location makes it strategically relevant from the country's security point of view. The Indian Air Force (IAF) will find this airport convenient for the landing and taking off of its aircrafts.
- **Runway width:** The runway of the Pakyong airport is 1.75 km.
- **Expenditure:** The Pakyong airport was built at an estimated cost of over Rs 605 crore.

Travel Time Cut: With the new airport, the travelling time to Sikkim will be get cut down by almost 5 hours because, earlier, the nearest airport to which the tourists could fly down was Bagdogra in West Bengal.

Passenger capacity: It has a capacity to handle 50 in-bound and as many out-bound passengers.

Connectivity: It will give a huge big boost to connectivity and tourism in the north-east as it is one of the few airports in the region.

Engineering marvel: The airport was carved from the mountain side using massive geo technical 'cut and fill' engineering works.

Tourism: Sikkim has been one of the favorite destinations for tourists, almost all throughout the year. Hence, from the tourist point of view, the airport will be a major booster, as it will help improve connectivity and save travel time for the tourists.

Important Facts:

The first commercial flight from Pakyong is scheduled to begin from October 4, when Spicejet will start its daily Kolkata-Sikkim flights.

The airport is not only India's 100th functional airport but also one of the country's five highest airports.

Following this, SpiceJet will operate 78-seater Bombardier Q400 flights to and from Delhi, Kolkata and Guwahati every day under the Civil Aviation Ministry's Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) scheme.

Initially, the airport will cater only to domestic flights, but later it will also provide international flight services connecting Sikkim with other countries like Paro in Bhutan, Kathmandu in Nepal and Dhaka in Bangladesh.

Background:

- On March 5, IAF's Dornier-228 aircraft was tested from Pakyong. SpiceJet followed it by conducting test runs of its 78-seater Bombardier Q400 from Kolkata to Pakyong in the same month.
- The test runs led to security clearances for commercial operations. The Sikkim Police has been entrusted with the security of the Pakyong airport.

INDIA HAS ONLY 19 JUDGES PER

10 LAKH PEOPLE: LAW MINISTRY

Why in News: India has 19 judges per 10 lakh people on an average, according to a Law Ministry data which also states that the judiciary faces a combined shortage of over 6,000 judges, including over 5,000 in the lower courts itself.

According to the data, part of a document prepared in March this year for discussion in Parliament, the judge-population ratio is 19.49 per million (10 lakh) people.

Important Points:

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

The data is a part of a document that the Ministry had prepared for discussion in the Parliament.

The data reveals that the judiciary faces a combined shortage of over 6,000 judges, including over 5,000 in the lower courts.

The document states that the working strength of the lower judiciary is 16,726, while the approved strength is much higher at 22,474.

In the case of high courts, while the approved strength is 1079, the actual strength is 673.

On the other hand, in the case of the Supreme Court that has a sanctioned strength of 31 judges, there are a total of six vacancies.

- Overall, the data reveals that the total number of vacancies in the SC, HCs and the lower courts come to around 6160 judges.

Background:

The debate on the ratio of judges in comparison to the population of the nation was re-ignited in April 2016 by the then Chief Justice of India T S Thakur. He had said "nothing has moved" since 1987 when the Law Commission had recommended an increase in the number of judges from 10 judges per 10 lakh people to 50. The government had then pointed out that in the 245th report, the Law Commission had observed that filing of cases per capita varies substantially across geographic units as filings are associated with economic and social conditions of the population. In fact, recently in August 2018, Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad urged the chief justices of 24 high courts to speed up recruitment of judicial officers for the lower judiciary, as according to him one of the main reasons for high pendency was the inordinate delay in filling up the vacancies of judicial officers. The Minister urged the chief justices to hold timely examination and interviews to recruit judges for lower courts. The Minister in his letter pointed out that there were a total of 2,76, 74,499 cases pending in the district and subordinate courts of the country.

COUNTRY PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Why in News: The World Bank Group (WBG) Board of Executive Directors has endorsed a new Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for India.

Need

India is well-positioned to become a high middle-income country by 2030 as it has posted incredible growth and development over last several decades. India's fast-growing economy, global stature and unique experience of lifting highest number of poor out of poverty in past decades has helped it to enter economic transformation from low-middle income to high-middle income country.

CPF for India

CPF will be mainly based on three elements viz Government of India's development priorities, World Bank's Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD) for India, which presents its analysis of key challenges faced by India and lastly, World Bank's comparative advantage and value proposition to support India. CFP will address key themes including addressing climate change in support of India's national determined contributions on climate change, gender gap focusing on women's economic empowerment and impact of technology changes for bringing about economic transformation in India.

- CPF also incorporates lessons learned from last five years of implementation of Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) FY13-17 which includes scarcity and inefficiency of resources: land, water and air, disparities and divergence in the creation of jobs and inclusion across locations and uneven state capability.

Significance

The framework recognizes that India has gone from low-income country status to low-middle income and now India is entering economic transformation from low-middle income to high-middle income (country). It is expected to bring financial support worth US \$25-30 billion from World Bank's sister agencies such International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA).

What is World Bank's Country Partnership Framework (CPF)?

It is central tool of management and board for reviewing and guiding WBG's country programs and gauging their effectiveness. It identifies key objectives and development results through which WBG intends to support member country in its efforts to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity in sustainable manner. It takes into consideration member country's vision of its development goals, which are laid out in poverty focused national development strategy. The WBG and member country at first draw upon Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD) to develop CPF objectives together. Then CPF outlines selective and flexible program that will help member country achieve CPF objectives.

Need of the hour:

The future of India lies in the States of India. The country's transition to high middle-income status will be determined in large part by the effectiveness of India's federal compact. In this context, an important focus of the CPF will be to deepen engagement with India's States and invest in the institutions and capabilities of the states and local governments to address their development priorities.

What is Country Partnership Framework (CPF)?

The World Bank Group's Country Partnership Framework (CPF) aims to make our country-driven model more systematic, evidence-based, selective, and focused on the Bank's twin goals of ending extreme poverty and increasing shared prosperity in a sustainable manner. The CPF replaces the Country Assistance Strategy (CAS). Used in conjunction with a Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD), the CPF guides the World Bank Group's (WBG) support to a member country.

What's Next?

The WBG will focus on three broad areas under the new CPF: promoting a resource efficient growth path, particularly in the use of land and water, to remain sustainable; enhancing competitiveness and enabling job creation; and investing in human capital

- in health, education, skills - to improve quality and efficiency of service delivery.

Within these, some areas of deeper WBG's engagement will include addressing the challenge of air pollution, facilitating jobs for women, increasing the resilience of the financial sector and investing in early years of children's development. Across the sectors, the WBG will invest in harnessing the impact of new technology.

FIRST HUMAN OESOPHAGUS CREATED IN LAB USING STEM CELLS

Why in News: In a first, scientists have successfully grown oesophageal organoids -- miniature, functional versions of the human food pipe -- using stem cells, paving the way for new ways to study and test drugs against gut disorders. The research, published in the journal *Cell Stem Cell*, shows how human oesophageal tissue was grown entirely from pluripotent stem cells (PSCs), which can form any tissue type in the body.

The work by researchers at the Cincinnati Children's Center for Stem Cell and Organoid Medicine (CuSTOM) in the US may lead to personalised diagnostic methods and focused in part on developing regenerative tissue therapies to treat or cure GI disorders. It will help to study birth defects like esophageal atresia, organoids, eosinophilic esophagitis and Barrett's metaplasia. Moreover bioengineer genetically matched esophageal tissue can be also transplanted in individual patients.

About Oesophagus:

It is long muscular tube part of digestive system that connects mouth to stomach to actively pass food. It is also called as gastro-intestinal tract (GI tract or gullet or food pipe). It is around 25cm long in adults. After food is swallowed walls of oesophagus squeeze together (contract) and moves food down to the stomach. The area where oesophagus joins stomach is called gastro-oesophageal junction.

Oesophagus has four layers:

Mucosa - inner layer, which is moist to help food pass smoothly into stomach.

Submucosa -Contains glands that produce mucus (phlegm), which keeps oesophagus moist.

Muscularis - It is muscle layer, which pushes food down to stomach.

Adventitia - It is outer layer, which attaches oesophagus to nearby parts of body.

Oesophagus can be affected by congenital diseases, such as oesophageal atresia, a medical condition causing narrowing or malformation of oesophagus due to genetic mutations. Other diseases related to it includes oesophageal cancer, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), or rare ailment called achalasia, a disease affecting muscles of lower oesophagus that prevents contraction of organ and passage of food.

About Stem cell:

Stem cell is undifferentiated cell of multicellular organism which is capable of giving rise to indefinitely more cells (through mitosis) of same type and from which certain other kinds of cell may be formed by the cellular differentiation. There are two types of stem cells widely used.

Embryonic stem cells: They come from human embryos that are three to five days old. They are harvested during process called in-vitro fertilization. They are known as pluripotent stem cells. These cells can give rise to virtually any other type of cell in the body.

- **Induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs):** They can differentiate into all types of specialized cells in body. They can potentially produce new cells for any organ or tissue.

ODISHA GOVERNMENT CHANGED NORMS IN FOOD AND PROCUREMENT POLICY

Why in News: The Odisha government on Monday decided to facilitate entry of more small and marginal farmers and share-croppers into the procurement fold by bringing changes in the norms of food and procurement policy for the Kharif Marketing Season (KMS) 2018-19.

Important Points:

According to the Department of Food Supply and Consumer Welfare, the individual consumption at the rate of three quintals per member in the farmer's family has been exempted from the KMMS 2018-19 for the calculation of marketable surplus of paddy. Paddy procurement will be done from May to June 2019.

According to the decision taken by the cabinet, an experimental target of buying 55 lakh tonnes of paddy from farmers has been set, which is about 37 lakh tonnes in the case of rice.

The Minister of Food Supply and Consumer Welfare has been authorized to revise the target according to the requirement.

The farmers will be paid a minimum support price (MSP) of Rs. 1,750 per quintal for the common variety of paddy fixed by the Central Government and Rs. 1,770 per quintal for Grade A variety.

Payment of money will be done directly within the bank accounts of farmers within three days of purchase.

In order to control the food and procurement policy for the year 2019 with the objective of controlling all aspects of procurement of paddy and rice during the upcoming agricultural session, the Cabinet decided that procurement of Kharif crop of paddy will be between November 2018 and April 2019.

MoU with Centre:

- While 23 lakh tonnes of the procured rice will be pumped into the Public Distribution System in the State, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) will evacuate the remaining 14 lakh tonnes of rice to other States as per the MoU with the Centre.

- Like previous year, paddy procurement process in all 308 procuring blocks will be conducted through paddy procurement automation system (P-PAS). All documents in connection with paddy procurement shall be generated from computer through P-PAS software to make the process hassle-free and transparent.

About Minimum Support Price:

- Minimum Support Price or MSP is an Agriculture product price set by the Government of India to purchase directly from the farmer. This rate is to safeguard farmer to minimum profit for the harvest, if the open market has lesser price than the cost incurred. The Indian government sets the price for 23 commodities from time to time. The Indian Union Budget for 2018-19 has promised to support MSP for at least 50 per cent returns on production costs. The governments face protests from farmers when the market prices for products fall and there is a demand to increase MSP rates.

NEPAL : FIRST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD TO DOUBLE ITS TIGER POPULATION

Why in News: Nepal is set to become the first country in the world to double its tiger population as part of the World Wildlife Foundation's (WWF) 'Tx2' programme which aims to double the number of tigers all over the world. The government of Nepal recently announced that there are now an estimated 235 wild tigers in the nation, nearly double the number from around 121 in 2009. This trend is against global trend where number of tigers in many countries is witnessing a decline.

Important Points:

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

About 'Tx2' programme:

The World Wildlife Foundation had launched its ambitious TX2 programme at the St Petersburg Tiger Summit in 2010. The programme aims to double the world tiger population by 2022, which is the year of the tiger in the Chinese calendar.

What is wwf's role?

WWF remains a major driving force behind Tx2. It aims at:

Driving political momentum to ensure tigers remain a top priority for world leaders.

Professionalising wildlife protection by training rangers, developing conservation standards (CA|TS) and technology (SMART) to achieve Zero Poaching.

Tackling the illegal wildlife trade through our partnership with TRAFFIC.

Focusing efforts in key tiger landscapes.

Ensuring there is space for both tigers and people in the future.

Who are the tiger range countries?

Wild tigers are found in a variety of habitats across Asia. There are currently 13 tiger range countries; Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Viet Nam.

RESERVATION IN JOB PROMOTIONS NOT COMPULSORY, SUPREME COURT REITERATES

Why in News: The Supreme Court today turned down an appeal to reconsider its own earlier order that had rejected the idea of reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs) or Scheduled Tribes (STs) in job promotions. The court essentially upheld its 2006 order that had said that it was not mandatory for the government to give reservations in promotions in public sector jobs.

Important Points:

However, the court overturned one aspect of the 2006 order that had put a condition for the government to follow in case it wished to provide reservation in jobs. The Supreme Court held that states need not collect quantifiable data on the backwardness of SCs and STs for giving quota in job promotions.

- The 2006 order had made it mandatory for states to collect this data in case they wished to give reservations in job promotions.
- A plea had asked the Supreme Court to set up a bench larger than the one that delivered the 2006 verdict and to reconsider the idea of having reservations for SCs and STs in job promotions.
- The unanimous judgment today was pronounced by a five-judge Constitution bench.
- The bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra said that the states need not collect quantifiable data on the backwardness of SCs and STs for giving quota in job promotion to SC and ST employees.

The top court did not comment on two other conditions given in the 2006 verdict which dealt with the adequacy of representation of SCs and STs in promotions and not to disturb administrative efficiency.

The bench had reserved its verdict on August 30 after hearing various stakeholders, including the Centre, on the matter.

A five-judge constitution bench, in its 2006 verdict in the M Nagaraj case, had said the states are bound to provide quantifiable data on the backwardness of SCs and STs, the facts about their inadequate representation in government jobs and the overall administrative efficiency, before providing quota in promotions to members of these communities.

The Centre and various state governments have also sought reconsideration of this verdict on various grounds, including that the members of the SC and ST communities are presumed to be backward and considering their stigma of caste, they should be given reservation even in job promotions.

The Centre has alleged that the verdict in the M Nagaraj case had put unnecessary conditions in granting quota benefits to the SC and ST employees and sought its reconsideration by a larger bench.

Attorney General K K Venugopal, appearing for the Centre, had strongly argued in favour of granting quota to SC and ST employees, saying there was a presumption of backwardness in their favour.

- He had said the SC and ST communities have been facing caste-based discrimination for long and the stigma of caste is attached to them despite the fact that some of them have come up.

- During one of the hearings, senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, who represents those opposing quota in promotions, had told the bench that earlier there was a presumption of backwardness with regard to scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities.
- There should not be quota in promotions for higher services as the presumption of backwardness of SC and ST employees "vanishes" once they join government service, he had claimed.

Earlier, the top court had questioned the logic behind granting quota in promotions in government jobs to the kith and kin of affluent persons among the SC and ST communities who have been holding high official positions. It had asked why the 'creamy layer' principle, used to exclude the affluent among Other Backward Classes (OBCs) from enjoying the fruits of reservation, cannot be made applicable to deny quota benefits in promotion to those affluent among the SC and ST communities.

INDIA'S PER CAPITA ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION DOUBLES IN 11 YEARS

Why in News: Per capita alcohol consumption in India has more than doubled from 2005 to 2016, according to a report by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The consumption of alcohol has increased from 2.4 litres in 2005 to 5.7 litres in 2016 with 4.2 litres being consumed by men and 1.5 litre by women.

Important Points:

The total alcohol per capita consumption (15+ years) is expected to increase in half of the WHO regions by 2025 and the highest increase is expected in the South-East Asia Region. An increase of 2.2 litres is expected in India alone which represents a large proportion of the total population in this region.

However, increases, although smaller, are also expected in Indonesia and Thailand (with the second-and fourth-largest largest populations).

- The second-highest increase is projected for the populations of the Western Pacific Region, where the population of China is the largest, with an increase in per capita consumption of 0.9 litres of pure alcohol by 2025.

- Total alcohol per capita consumption has increased globally after a relatively stable phase between 2000 and 2005. Since then, total per capita consumption rose from 5.5 litres in 2005 to 6.4 litres in 2010 and was still at the level of 6.4 litres in 2016.

- However, diverging trends were noticed in different regions of the world.

- The harmful impact of alcohol is one of the leading risk factors for populations worldwide and has a direct impact on many health-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including those for maternal and child health, infectious diseases (HIV, viral hepatitis, tuberculosis), non-communicable diseases and mental health, injuries and poisonings.

In 2016, the harmful use of alcohol resulted in some three million deaths (5.3% of all deaths) worldwide and 132.6 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs). Mortality resulting from alcohol consumption is higher than that caused by diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and diabetes.

2.3 million deaths:

Among men in 2016, an estimated 2.3 million deaths and 106.5 million DALYs were attributable to the consumption of alcohol. Among women 0.7 million died and they experienced 26.1 million DALYs attributable to alcohol consumption.

The harmful use of alcohol is a causal factor in more than 200 diseases and injury conditions, the report stated. Some 2.3 billion people are current drinkers. Globally more than a quarter (26.5%) of all 15-19 year-olds are current drinkers, amounting to 155 million adolescents.

ADULTERY IS NOT A CRIME, SECTION 497 OF IPC UNCONSTITUTIONAL: SC

Why in News: In a unanimous decision, a five-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court today struck down the 150-year-old penal law on adultery. Pronouncing its verdict on pleas challenging the constitutional validity of the Section 497 of Indian Penal Code, the top court quashed the law as violative of Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution. The top court held that the act adultery can be a ground for divorce, but not a criminal offence.

On the petition challenging the validity of Section 497 (Adultery) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), CJI Dipak Misra said, "The magnificent beauty of the democracy is I, you and we. Equality is the governing principle of a system. Husband is not the master of the wife. Women must be treated with equality. Any discrimination shall invite the wrath of Constitution. Section 497 IPC which deals with Adultery is absolutely manifestly arbitrary."

Important Points:

The apex court also declared part of Section 198 of the Cr PC which deals with adultery as unconstitutional. "Section 497 is manifestly arbitrary, offends dignity of women," Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra said. Section 497 IPC affects the right to life of a woman under Article 21 of the constitution of India, the court added.

In August, a five-judge Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra and comprising Justices R F Nariman, A M Khanwilkar, D Y Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra had reserved its verdict on the matter. Previously the law only provides that only a man and not a married woman be punished for the crime of adultery. The law sees the woman only as a victim and not the abettor of the crime of adultery.

While the petitioners contend that the law does not treat men and women equally and should thus be scrapped, the Centre has defended the law saying adultery must remain a crime so that the sanctity of marriage is maintained.

"It is an action willingly and knowingly done with the knowledge that it would hurt the spouse, the children and the family. Such intentional action which impinges on the sanctity of marriage and sexual fidelity encompassed in marriage, which forms the backbone of the Indian society, has been classified and defined by the Indian State as a criminal offence in exercise of its Constitution powers," the Centre had said.

What the Judges said:

- Justice D Y Chandrachud says Section 497 destroys and deprives women of dignity
- Justice R F Nariman terms Section 497 dealing with adultery as archaic law

- We declare Sect 497 IPC and Sec 198 CrPC dealing with prosecution of offences against marriage as unconstitutional: CJI & Justice Khanwilkar
- Nariman concurs with CJI, Justice Khanwilkar and says Section 497 is violative of right to equality and right to equal opportunity to women
- Adultery might not be cause of unhappy marriage, it could be result of an unhappy marriage: CJI
- Law deprives married women the agency of consent:

Justice D Y Chandrachud

A woman loses her voice, autonomy after entering marriage and manifest arbitrariness is writ large in Section 497: Justice Chandrachud
Section 497 offends sexual freedom of women: Justice Chandrachud

All about Section 497

Section 497 of the 158-year-old Indian Penal Code says: "Whoever has sexual intercourse with a person who is and whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the wife of another man, without the consent or connivance of that man, such sexual intercourse not amounting to the offence of rape, is guilty of the offence of adultery." If we simplify it, Section 497 of Indian Penal Code convicts and penalises a man if he is found guilty of engaging in adultery. Women have been given immunity from this law. Apart from this, if the wife is given consent by her husband to have sex with another man, it constitutes no offence.

What are the arguments?

The main crux of the argument is that Section 497 is "violative of gender equality". The law only identifies men as a victim. It also does not empower women to prosecute her husband even if he is engaged in adultery.

The court's view

A petition against the Section 497 was filed in 2017 and the matter came up for hearing at the Supreme Court in December 2017. The plea was filed by Joseph Shine. On January 5, the apex court had referred to a five-judge Constitution bench the plea challenging the validity of the penal law on adultery. The court had taken a prima facie view that though the criminal law proceeded on "gender neutrality", the concept was absent in Section 497. A five-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra on August 8 had reserved its verdict.

What Centre says on Section 497

The central government has voiced its views against the repeal of the Act stating that adultery is a public wrong which causes mental and physical injury to the spouse, children and the family. "It is an action willingly and knowingly done with the knowledge that it would hurt the spouse, the children and the family. Such intentional action which impinges on the sanctity of marriage and sexual fidelity encompassed in marriage, which forms the backbone of the Indian society, has been classified and defined by the Indian State as a criminal offence in exercise of its Constitution powers," the Centre had said in court.

MEDICAL COUNCIL OF INDIA DISSOLVED

Why in News: The government dissolved the Medical Council of India (MCI), the apex body that regulated medical education in the country, and replaced it with a seven-member Board of Governors (BoG) by bringing an ordinance.

The BoG has been appointed initially for a period of one year, and will be the sole decision-making body till the National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill, 2017 - meant to replace the MCI -- is cleared in Parliament.

Important Points:

A bill to replace the Council with a National Medical Commission is pending in Parliament. The National Medical Commission is expected to replace the Medical Council of India as the top medical education regulator in the country.

In March 2018, the Union Cabinet had made amendments to the National Medical Commission Bill after considering recommendations made by a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare.

The bill proposes setting up of four autonomous boards to oversee undergraduate and post-graduate courses, assess and accredit medical institutes and register practitioners under the National Medical Commission.

The bill also proposes a common entrance exam and licentiate exams that all medical graduates will have to clear to get practicing licences.

- The bill was sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee following protests by the medical fraternity across the country on the grounds that it would lead to more corruption in the medical field.

Composition of the Board

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

The Background

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

NARENDRA MODI SELECTED FOR UN'S HIGHEST ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD

Why in News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron are selected for this year's 'Champions of the Earth' award - UN's highest environmental honour. Both of them are selected in the Policy Leadership category for their pioneering work in championing the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and promoting new areas of levels of cooperation on environmental action, said the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Important Points:

India and France had together launched the ISA on sidelines of the UN climate conference (COP21) in Paris in 2015. The ISA is an inter-governmental body of solar rich nations whose objective is to galvanise actions for increasing solar power footprints in 121 potential member countries across the globe. The ISA is headquartered in Gurugram near New Delhi in India.

- India's Cochin International Airport - the world's first fully solar-powered airport - is also selected for the award. It is selected in the Entrepreneurial Vision category for its leadership in the use of sustainable energy.
- The UNEP while announcing the award noted Macron's work on the Global Pact for the Environment and Modi's "unprecedented pledge" to eliminate all single-use plastic in India by 2022.

The annual 'Champions of the Earth' prize is awarded to outstanding leaders from government, civil society and the private sector whose actions have had a positive impact on the environment.

Total 84 persons and organisations - ranging from leaders of nations to grassroots activists - in the categories of policy, science, business and civil society have, so far, been honoured with this UN Environmental awards in the past 13 years. The 'Champions of the Earth' are organised in partnership with Weibo - China's leading social media outlet.

Other winners of the 2018 'Champions of the Earth' awards include Joan Carling (lifetime achievement award) for her work as one of the world's most prominent defenders of environmental and indigenous rights; Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods (jointly recognised in the Science and Innovation category) for their revolutionary development of a popular, plant-based alternative to beef, and for their efforts to educate consumers about environmentally conscious alternatives and China's Zhejiang's Green Rural Revival Programme for inspiration and action for the transformation of a once heavily polluted area of rivers and streams in East China's Zhejiang province.

The awards will be presented during the Champions of the Earth Gala in New York City, on the sidelines of the 73rd UN General Assembly. The gala, hosted by actor and environmental activist Alec Baldwin and model, actress, producer and UN Environment Goodwill Ambassador Dia Mirza, will bring together a cross section of world leaders and influencers to celebrate momentum for change in defense of our one planet.

- The Champions of the Earth award is the UN's highest environmental recognition celebrating exceptional figures from the public and private sectors and from civil society, whose actions have had a transformative positive impact on the environment. Past laureates include: Afroz Shah, who led the world's largest beach cleanup (2016), Rwandan President Paul Kagame (2016), former US Vice-President Al Gore (2007), Ocean Cleanup CEO Boyan Slat (2014), scientist-explorer Bertrand Piccard, and developer of Google Earth Brian McClendon (2013).

ANDHRA PRADESH GETS 1ST RANK IN EASE OF LIVING INDEX UNDER AMRUT

Why in News: Andhra Pradesh has topped Ease of Living Index rankings under AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation). It is followed by Odisha and Madhya Pradesh.

Ease of Living Index:

The index was conceived by Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs in June 2017. It aims to help cities assess their liveability vis-a-vis global and national benchmarks and encourage them to move towards 'outcome-based' approach to urban planning and management.

It was launched to rank 116 cities that are smart city contenders, capital cities and cities with population of 1 million plus based on the liveability parameters. The first edition of index released in January 2018 had ranked 111 Indian cities and was topped by Pune.

It captures quality of life based on data collected from urban local bodies on four parameters, which were further broken down into 15 categories. It seeks to help cities undertake 360-degree assessment of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

The four parameters include institutional (governance), social (identity, education, health, security), economic (economy, employment) and physical factors (waste water and solid waste management, pollution, housing/ inclusiveness, mixed land use, power and water supply, transport, public open spaces). Institutional and social parameters carry 25 points each, physical factors have weightage of 45 points and economic factors 5 points totalling to 100 mark scale on which cities were evaluated.

About AMRUT:

AMRUT is the new avatar of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM).

- It adopts a project approach to ensure basic infrastructure services relating to water supply, sewerage, storm-water drains, transportation and development of green spaces and parks with special provision for meeting the needs of children. Under this mission, 10% of the budget allocation will be given to states and union territories as incentive based on the achievement of reforms during the previous year.

AMRUT will be implemented in 500 locations with a population of one lakh and above. It would cover some cities situated on stems of main rivers, a few state capitals and important cities located in hilly areas, islands and tourist areas.

Under this mission, states get the flexibility of designing schemes based on the needs of identified cities and in their execution and monitoring. States will only submit state annual action Plans to the centre for broad concurrence based on which funds will be released. But, in a significant departure from JNNURM, the central government will not appraise individual projects. Central assistance will be to the extent of 50% of project cost for cities and towns with a population of up to 10 lakhs and one-third of the project cost for those with a population of above 10 lakhs.

Under the mission, states will transfer funds to urban local bodies within 7 days of transfer by central government and no diversion of funds to be made failing which penal interest would be charged besides taking other adverse action by the centre.

G4 MINISTERS FROM INDIA, BRAZIL, GERMANY, JAPAN REVIEW UNSC REFORM

Why in News: G-4 Nations viz. India, Brazil, Germany and Japan have voiced concern over lack of substantive progress in long-pending United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reform. It was convened during meeting of Ministers from four G4 Countries which was hosted by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj at Indian Mission to UN to review the reform progress. India and other Group 4 countries reaffirmed their commitment to multilateralism and called for the early reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Given the American disinterest in the UN and other multilateral bodies, China, one of the five permanent members of the UNSC, has slowed down the move to expand the body, according to diplomats tracking the process. The U.S. has no active opposition to the demand of these four countries to be included as permanent members of the UNSC, but the Trump administration has taken a benign approach to the reform.

Trump's accusations

- In his speech, Mr. Trump attacked the UN Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court. "America is governed by Americans. We reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism," Mr. Trump said in the speech that made sweeping accusations against multilateral institutions.

G-4 ministers noted that despite an overwhelming majority of UN member states supporting Security Council reform, the negotiations launched in 2009 have not produced substantive progress over the 10 years. "The G-4 Ministers emphasised the need to revitalise process of the Security Council reform, and they tasked their respective officials to consider the way forward to advance the reform," the statement said.

While there is no active American support for reform Mr. Trump's call for other countries to step up and share the responsibility of managing the UN might support the reform, even in the face of active Chinese opposition, according to an official. Germany and Japan contribute one fifth of the UN budget while the four countries together have one fifth of the world population. The ministers agreed that the "current composition of the UNSC does not reflect the changed global realities and they stressed that Security Council reform is essential to address today's complex challenges." They "reiterated their commitment to work to strengthen the functioning of the UN and the global multilateral order as well as their support for each other's candidatures," the statement said.

Important Points:

Ministers from G4 countries reaffirmed need for early reform of UNSC including expansion of both permanent and non-permanent categories of membership to enhance its legitimacy, effectiveness and representativeness in order to safeguard legitimacy and credibility of UNSC which deals with international peace and security.

- They discussed pathways to reform UNSC and tasked their diplomats to consider way forward to advance the reform process known as Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN). They also held that it is time to finally initiate text-based negotiations to safeguard the legitimacy and credibility of the powerful UN organ.

G4 nations:

The G4 nations comprise of Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan which support each other's bids for permanent seats to United Nations Security Council. G4's primary aim is permanent member seats on Security Council. Each of these four countries have figured among elected non-permanent members of UNSC since UN's establishment. The economic and political influence of these four has grown significantly in last decades, reaching scope comparable to five permanent members (P5) of UNSC viz. US, China, Russia, United Kingdom and France. However, G4's bids are often opposed by Uniting for Consensus movement or Coffee Club (ground 12 countries including Pakistan led by Italy) and particularly their economic competitors or political rivals.

SC FOR LIVE-STREAMING, VIDEO RECORDING OF COURT PROCEEDINGS

Why in News: The Supreme Court approved the live-streaming of the court proceedings as it observed the use of technology can virtually expand the court beyond the four walls of the courtroom.

A Bench of Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra, Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and D.Y. Chandrachud said that the live-streaming of the courtroom would help people who are in distant places to witness the proceedings. SC also laid down several conditions, mostly in correspondence with those handed over by Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal.

Important Points:

- The judgment also contained a set of model guidelines, suggested to steer the implementation of the pilot project. The guidelines detail the exceptions to the category of cases that can be live-streamed, the use of appropriate technology, agencies to implement live-streaming and other facets of implementation.
- The verdict stated that the guidelines were only of a "suggested nature" and would not interfere with the authority to frame Rules under Article 145(1).

Regarding the types of matters to be live-streamed, the guidelines excluded cases falling under the following categories:

- Matrimonial matters, including transfer petitions
- Cases involving sensitive issues as in the nature of sexual assault
- Matters where children and juveniles are involved, like POCSO cases
- Where objections are filed by a litigant against live-streaming of a case on any grounds, the final authority on live-streaming the case shall lie with the presiding judge.

Regarding the manner of live-streaming:

Live-streamed and archived videos of the broadcast shall be made available on the official website of the Supreme Court. The recorded broadcast of each day shall be made available as archives on the official website of the Supreme Court by the end of day.

The presiding judge of the courtroom shall be provided with an appropriate device for directing the technical team to stop live-streaming, if the Bench deems it necessary in the interest of administration of justice.

Live-streaming of the proceedings should be carried out with a delay of two minutes.

Proceedings shall only be live-streamed during working hours of the court.

To give full effect to the process of live-streaming, advocates addressing the Bench, and judges addressing the Bar, must use microphones, while addressing the Court.

Recording of courtroom proceedings shall be done by the Registry with the technical support of National Informatics Centre or any other public/private agency authorised by the Supreme Court or the Ministry of Information and Technology.

- The portions of proceedings which are not broadcast online, on the direction of the presiding judge of the Bench shall not be made part of the official records and shall be placed separately as 'confidential records'.

Regarding archiving:

- The audio-visual recording of each day's proceedings shall be preserved in the Audio-Visual Unit of the Supreme Court Registry
- Archives of all broadcasts of courtroom proceedings which have been live-streamed should be made available on the website of the Supreme Court. Hard copies of the video footage of past proceedings may be made available according to terms and conditions to be notified by the Supreme Court Registry. The video footage shall be made available for the sole purpose of fair and accurate reporting of the judicial proceedings of the Supreme Court.

153B-The Civil Procedure Code 1908:

The place in which any Civil Court is held for the purpose of trying any suit shall be deemed to be an open Court, to which the public generally may have access so far as the same can conveniently contain them:

Provided that the presiding Judge may, if he thinks fit, order at any stage of any inquiry into or trial of any particular case, that the public generally or any particular person, shall not have access to, or be or remain in, the room or building used by Court.]

National Digital Communications Policy-2018

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved the National Digital Communications Policy-2018 (NDCP-2018) and re-designation of the Telecom Commission as the "Digital Communications Commission".

Impact:

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

The key objectives of the policy are:

- Broadband for all.
 - Creating four million additional jobs in the Digital Communications sector.
 - Enhancing the contribution of the Digital Communications sector to 8% of India's GDP from ~ 6% in 2017.
 - Propelling India to the Top 50 Nations in the ICT Development Index of ITU from 134 in 2017.
 - Enhancing India's contribution to Global Value Chains.
- Ensuring Digital Sovereignty.
These objectives are to be achieved by 2022.

The policy aims to:

Provide universal broadband connectivity at 50 Mbps to every citizen.

Provide 1 Gbps connectivity to all Gram Panchayats by 2020 and 10 Gbps by 2022.

Ensure connectivity to all uncovered areas.

Attract investments of USD 100 billion in the Digital Communications Sector.

Train one million manpower for building New Age Skill.

Expand IoT ecosystem to 5 billion connected devices.

" Establish a comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals.

Facilitate India's effective participation in the global digital economy.

Enforce accountability through appropriate institutional mechanisms to assure citizens of safe.

Secure digital communications infrastructure and services.

The policy advocates:

Establishment of a National Digital Grid by creating a National Fibre Authority.

Establishing Common Service Ducts and utility corridors in all new city and highway road projects.

Creating a collaborative institutional mechanism between Centre, States and Local Bodies for Common Rights of Way, standardization of costs and timelines.

- Removal of barriers to approvals.
- Facilitating development of Open Access Next Generation Networks.

Background:

- As the present world has entered the era of modern technological advancements in the Telecom Sector such as 5G, IoT, M2M etc., a need was being felt to introduce a 'customer focused' and 'application driven' policy for the Indian Telecom Sector, which can form the main pillar of Digital India by addressing emerging opportunities for expanding not only the availability of telecom services but also telecom based services.

Accordingly, the new National Digital Communications Policy - 2018 has been formulated, in place of the existing National Telecom Policy-2012, to cater to the modern needs of the digital communications sector of India.

ALLOWS WOMEN OF ALL AGE GROUPS TO ENTER SABARIMALA TEMPLE : SC

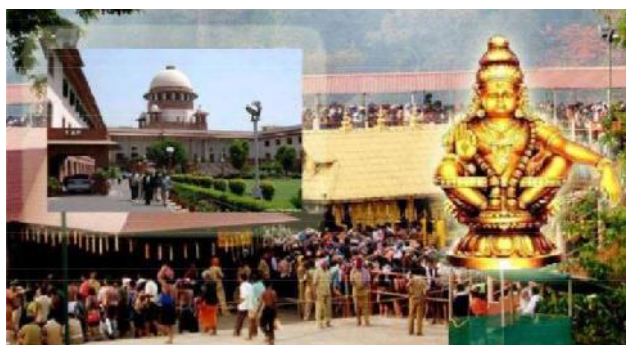
Why in News: The Supreme Court, in a majority opinion of 4:1, lifted the centuries-old practice of prohibiting women from the age of menarche to menopause to enter the Lord Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala in Kerala. "Right to pray" in the temple for women between 10 and 50 years of age won over the 'right to wait' campaign as the Supreme Court condemned the prohibition as "hegemonic patriarchy". Patriarchy cannot trump freedom to practice religion, it said.

The main opinion shared by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dipak Misra and Justice A.M. Khanwilkar said, "One side we pray to goddesses; on the other, women of a certain age are considered 'impure'. This dualistic approach is nothing but patriarchy practised in religion. The ban 'exacts' more purity from women than men".

It said that exclusion on grounds of biological and physiological features like menstruation was unconstitutional. It amounted to discrimination based on a biological factor exclusive to gender. It was violative of the right to equality and dignity of women.

Important Points:

- In a separate, but concurring opinion, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud held that to treat women as the children of a lesser God was to blink at the Constitution. The prohibition was a form of untouchability.



- He said the logic behind the ban was that presence of women deviated men from celibacy. This was placing the burden of a men's celibacy on women thus, stigmatising women and stereotyping them. Individual dignity of women could not be at the mercy of a mob. Morality was not ephemeral. It transcended biological and physiological barriers.

Chief Justice Misra wrote that relation with the Creator was a transcending one. Physiological and biological barriers created by rigid social dogma had no place.

The CJI and Justice Khanwilkar held that the Sabarimala prohibition was a prejudice against women, which was zealously propagated and was not an essential part of religion.

The majority view declared Rule 3(b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Act of 1965, which mandates the prohibition in Sabarimala temple, as ultra vires the Constitution.

The CJI and Justice Khanwilkar held that the Rule violated the fundamental right of a Hindu woman to offer worship at a place of her choice. Right to worship is equally available to men and women.

The majority on the Bench agreed that Ayyappa devotees do not form a separate religious denomination.

- Justice Rohinton Nariman held that Ayyappa devotees do not form a separate denomination just because of their devotion to Lord Ayyappa, but it was only a part of Hindu worship.

- Justice Indu Malhotra, the lone woman judge on the Constitution Bench, dissented from the majority opinion. She held that the determination of what constituted an essential practice in a religion should not be decided by judges on the basis of their personal viewpoints. She held that essentiality of a religious practice or custom had to be decided within the religion. It was a matter of personal faith. India was a land of diverse faiths. Constitutional morality in a pluralistic society gave freedom to practice even irrational or illogical customs and usages.

Justice Malhotra observed that the freedom to practice their beliefs was enshrined in Article 25 of the Constitution. Harmonisation of fundamental rights with religion included providing freedom for diverse sects to practise their customs and beliefs.

The Judge held that there were strong, plausible reasons to show that Ayyappa devotees had attributes of a religious denomination. They have a distinct names, properties. Besides, the Sabarimala temple was not funded out of the Consolidated Fund.

Senior advocate K. Parasaran, for the Nair Service Society, countered the apex court's observations about patriarchy. The prohibition was not based on misogyny but the celibate nature of the deity, he said. Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, for the Travancore Devaswom Board, argued that Sabarimala did not practice exclusion. People from all walks of life and from every creed, caste and religion entered and offered their prayers in the temple. He submitted that it was also physiologically impossible for women to observe the 41-day penance before the pilgrimage. He reiterated that the restriction found its source in the celibate status of the Sabarimala deity and not in patriarchy.

However, the Kerala government reaffirmed its complete support for lifting the prohibition.

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court has set aside a 27-year-old Kerala High Court judgment that upheld the prohibition. The High Court had pointed out that the 'Naisthik Brahmachari' nature of the deity was "a vital reason for imposing this restriction on young women".

WTO SLASHES GLOBAL TRADE GROWTH FORECAST TO 3.9%

Why in News: The World Trade Organisation (WTO) anticipated growth in merchandise trade volume of 3.9% in 2018, with trade expansion slowing further to 3.7% in 2019. According to WTO, escalating trade tensions and tighter credit market conditions in important markets will slow trade growth for the rest '18 in '19

Important Points:

- The new forecast for 2018 is below WTO's April 12 estimate of 4.4 per cent but falls within the 3.1 per cent to 5.5 per cent growth range indicated at that time. Trade growth in 2018 is now most likely to fall within a range from 3.4 per cent to 4.4 per cent.

"While trade growth remains strong, this downgrade reflects the heightened tensions that we are seeing between major trading partners. More than ever, it is critical for governments to work through their differences and show restraint," WTO Director General Roberto Azevedo said.

The report, however, did not directly mention the US and China which are engaged in a tariff war. The updated trade forecast is based on the expectations of world real GDP growth at market exchange rates of 3.1 per cent in 2018 and 2.9 per cent in 2019.

The WTO cautioned that developing and emerging economies could experience capital outflows and financial contagion as developed countries raise interest rates, with negative consequences for trade.

"Geopolitical tensions could threaten resource supplies and upset production networks in certain regions. Structural factors such as the rebalancing of the Chinese economy away from investment and towards consumption are still present and could weigh on import demand due to high import content of investment," the release said.

About WTO:

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations. At its heart are the WTO agreements, negotiated and signed by the bulk of the world's trading nations and ratified in their parliaments. The goal is to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible.

The World Trade Organization is a global organization made up of 164 member countries that deals with the rules of trade between nations. Its goal is to ensure that trade flows as smoothly and predictably as possible.

CABINET APPROVES PROPOSAL TO CONVERT GSTN INTO GOVT ENTITY

Why in News: The Union Cabinet has approved conversion of Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) into government-owned company. Government will now own 100% of GSTN which is IT backbone to GST regime. Majority of Goods and Services Tax (GST) processes including registration, filing of returns, payment of taxes, processing of refunds is IT driven and mainly through GSTN.

Important Points:

Earlier in May 2018, GST Council, chaired by Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and comprising state finance ministers had agreed to make GSTN a government company with Centre owning 50% stake and states together holding the remaining 50%.

Over 1.1 crore businesses are registered on GSTN portal. With enhanced role of GSTN from just collecting taxes to data analytics,

Government had felt that it should now be the majority owner in the IT backbone provider.

About Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN):

- GSTN was set up as not for profit, non-Government, private limited company in 2013. It was established primarily to provide IT infrastructure and services to Central and State Governments, tax payers and other stakeholders for implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Currently, Centre and states together hold 49% stake (24.5% each) in GSTN. The remaining 51% is owned by five private financial institutions- ICICI Bank, NSE, HDFC Ltd, HDFC Bank and LIC Housing Finance Ltd. Its revenue model after GST was rollout out consisted of User Charge to be paid by stakeholders who will use the system and making it self-sustaining organization.



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