

**NATIONAL****India's Longest Railroad Bridge**

The Bogibeel bridge is India's longest railroad bridge. It was inaugurated recently.

- The bridge is 4.94 km long in length. The double decker rail and road bridge, on the Brahmaputra river, will cut down the train-travel time between Tinsukia in Assam to Naharlagun town of Arunachal Pradesh by more than 10 hours.
- Built by the Indian Railways, the double-decker bridge is strong enough to withstand movement of heavy military tanks.
- The Bogibeel bridge will connect the south bank of the Brahmaputra river in Assam's Dibrugarh district with Silapathar in Dhemaji district, bordering Arunachal Pradesh. The railways have reduced the distance between Dhemaji and Dibrugarh from 500 Kms to 100 kms with the completion of the project.

**Amendments to the Information Technology (IT) Act**

In its bid to crack down on spread of fake news and rumours circulated on online platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook and other online platforms, the central government has proposed stringent changes under the draft of Section 79 of the Information Technology (IT) that govern online content.

**Implications:**

- The proposed amendments in the draft of the Information Technology [Intermediaries Guidelines (Amendment) Rules] 2018, Rule 3(9) is bound to force social media platforms like Whatsapp, Facebook and Twitter to remain vigil and keep users on their toes before posting or sharing anything that is deemed as "unlawful information or content".
- The changes proposed by the central government is aimed at curbing fake news or rumours being spread on social media and check mob violence ahead.

**What the new rules propose?**

- The changes will require online platforms to break end-to-end encryption in order to ascertain the origin of messages. The social media platforms to "deploy technology based automated tools or appropriate mechanisms, with appropriate controls, for proactively identifying or removing or disabling access to unlawful information or content".
- As per the amendment, the social media platforms will need to comply with the central government "within 72 hours" of a query.
- There should be a 'Nodal person of Contact for 24X7 coordination with law enforcement agencies and officers to ensure compliance. The social media platforms will be keeping a vigil on "unlawful activity" for a period of "180 days"

**Polavaram multi-purpose project**

Andhra Pradesh government has launched works for erection of the first radial gate – the 41st one – at the Polavaram project site. The state hopes that the project works would be completed by May 2019 and water would be released to canals under gravity by December 2019.

**Polavaram project:**

- Polavaram Project is a multi-purpose irrigation project.
- The dam across the Godavari River is under construction located in West Godavari District and East Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh state and its reservoir spreads in parts of Chhattisgarh and Orissa States also.
- The project is multipurpose major terminal reservoir project on river Godavari for development of Irrigation, Hydropower and drinking water facilities to East Godavari, Vishakhapatnam, West Godavari and Krishna districts of Andhra Pradesh.
- The project is likely to displace over 1.88 lakh people across 222 villages and so far, 1,730 persons in six villages have been rehabilitated by the government.

**Idea of a pan India judicial service**

In its report, 'Strategy for New India@75', the NITI Aayog mooted the creation of an All India Judicial Service (AIJS) for making appointments to the lower judiciary through an all India judicial services examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) in order to maintain "high standards" in the judiciary

Similar proposals were made by the Union Law Minister on three different occasions this year as a solution to the problems of vacancies in the lower judiciary and a lack of representation in the judiciary from marginalised communities

#### No constitutional hurdle in creating AIJS

- Articles 233 and 234 of the Constitution vested all powers of recruitment and appointment with the State Public Service Commission and High Courts
- During the Emergency, Parliament amended Article 312 of the Constitution to allow for the Rajya Sabha to pass a resolution, by a two-thirds majority, in order to kick-start the process of creating an all India judicial service for the posts of district judge
- Once the resolution is passed, Parliament can amend Articles 233 and 234 through a simple law (passed by a simple majority), which law will strip States of their appointment powers
- This is unlike a constitutional amendment under Article 368 that would have required ratification by State legislatures
- In other words, if Parliament decides to go ahead with the creation of the AIJS, State legislatures can do nothing to stop the process.

#### Prime Minister Inaugurates developmental works in Odisha

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has inaugurated projects worth around Rs 15,000 crore in Odisha as part of his Mission Purbodaya – a prosperous East for building a new India. The projects are related to health, road and highways, higher education and culture.

#### Projects Inaugurated

- New campus of IIT-Bhubaneswar at Aragul built at a cost of Rs 1660 crore to the Nation.
- ESIC hospital in Bhubaneswar costing 73.5 crore rupees.
- Lalitgiri Archaeological Museum which houses huge sculptures of the Buddha and various Buddhist deities.
- A commemorative coin and a postage stamp in memory of Paika Rebellion as this year marks the 200th anniversary of the Paika rebellion.
- Foundation stone for two projects Indian Oil's pipeline from Paradip to Hyderabad at a projected cost of 3,800 crore rupees and GAIL's gas pipeline from Angul to Bokaro in Jharkhand at a projected cost of 3,437 crore rupees under the Urja Ganga Yojana.

PM Modi announced that the centre is taking steps for establishing five medical colleges in the state.

Urja Ganga Yojana: Urja Ganga Yojana aims at providing piped cooking (PNG) gas and CNG gas for the vehicles to residents of the eastern region of the country. The programme involves laying of 2,050-km pipeline connecting Jagdishpur (UP) to Haldia (West Bengal) by 2018 covering the states of UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha. The project is being implemented by GAIL.

Ayushman Bharat: Ayushman Bharat-National Health Protection Scheme will cover over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families (approximately 50 crore beneficiaries) providing coverage up to 5 lakh rupees per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization. Ayushman Bharat – National Health Protection Mission also subsumes the ongoing centrally sponsored schemes like Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS).

## **INTERNATIONAL AND BILATERAL**

### Chabahar port

India has formally taken over operations of Iran's strategic Chabahar Port. Iran formally handed over the port to India during a first meeting of the follow-up committee for the implementation of the Chabahar Agreement between Iran, Afghanistan, and India held recently in the port city Tehran. The Chabahar Agreement was signed in June 2015 and approved by Iran's Guardian Council in November 2016. Chabahar is being seen as a gateway for trade by India, Iran and Afghanistan with Central Asian countries.

Chabahar port: Iran's Chabahar port is located on the Gulf of Oman and is the only oceanic port of the country. The port gives access to the energy-rich Persian Gulf nations' southern coast.

#### Importance of the Chabahar Port for India:

- The first and foremost significance of the Chabahar port is the fact that India can bypass Pakistan in transporting goods to Afghanistan. Chabahar port will boost India's access to Iran,

the key gateway to the International North-South Transport Corridor that has sea, rail and road routes between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.

- Chabahar port will be beneficial to India in countering Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea which China is trying to ensure by helping Pakistan develop the Gwadar port. Gwadar port is less than 400 km from Chabahar by road and 100 km by sea.
- With Chabahar port being developed and operated by India, Iran also becomes a military ally to India. Chabahar could be used in case China decides to flex its navy muscles by stationing ships in Gwadar port to reckon its upper hand in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Middle East.
- With Chabahar port becoming functional, there will be a significant boost in the import of iron ore, sugar and rice to India. The import cost of oil to India will also see a considerable decline. India has already increased its crude purchase from Iran since the West imposed ban on Iran was lifted.
- Chabahar port will ensure in the establishment of a politically sustainable connectivity between India and Afghanistan. This will in turn, lead to better economic ties between the two countries.

From a diplomatic perspective, Chabahar port could be used as a point from where humanitarian operations could be coordinated.

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### **Bullet Train project:**

The latest information obtained by an activist under the Right to Information (RTI) has revealed that Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project may turn out to be a loss-making proposition and burden Maharashtra's already dwindling finances.

### **Concerns over the project:**

- Several objections have been raised by various departments over the economic viability of the Shinkansen train, which could result in losses in the form of wasted Floor Space Index (FSI) and delayed loan repayment in the absence of proper frameworks.
- Some part of the FSI at the station proposed at Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) in Mumbai could "remain unutilised because of the height restrictions, leading to revenue losses".

### **Criticisms:**

- The government is being criticised for clearing a project which has no practical benefit for the State and would add financial stress.
- Moreover, the ministerial committee headed by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has not met to discuss the project since being incorporated in February 2017. The committee was tasked with carrying out an in-depth study of the Japan International Cooperation Agency report and the project's feasibility.

**About the project:** The train, with a capacity of 750 passengers, will travel at speeds between 320 km/hr and 350km/hr and is expected to reduce travel time between Ahmedabad and Mumbai to three-and-a-half hours or less from the present eight. The project is expected to be completed in seven years.

How India benefits from bullet train?

- High-speed connectivity – This will facilitate economic growth. Smaller cities along the way can also be connected with high-speed transit facility to these economic Centres through the bullet train network.
- The bullet train project is expected to create 4,000 direct job opportunities, along with 20,000 indirect jobs. 20,000 construction workers will also be employed during the set up period of Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train.
- Urban expansion – New bullet train stations set to come up along the route will attract urban growth. This will again shift the pressure of urbanisation from the existing urban Centres.
- Open new avenues – When completed, the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train project will present as a favorable destination for high-speed train technologies, attracting other parties working in the field.