

CURRENT AFFAIRS

**Month of
August-2018**



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CURRENT AFFAIRS

AUGUST-2018

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Current Affairs

AUGUST-2018

UN E-GOVERNMENT INDEX: INDIA RANKS 96TH

Why in News: India has jumped 22 places to 96th rank to break into the top 100 of the United Nation's E-Government Development Index (EGDI) 2018. Denmark, with an index value of 0.9150, topped the 2018 E-Government Development Survey. The E-Government survey is released by the United Nations in every two years. The 2018 edition was titled as 'Gearing E-Government to Support Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies'. India, which was ranked 118 in 2014, jumped 11 places to be ranked 96 in 2018. The jump shows how digital technologies and innovations are impacting the public sector and changing people's everyday lives.

Important Points:

The survey reveals that while the European countries lead e-government development globally, the American and Asian countries share almost equal standing in high and middle e-government index levels and many African countries continue to struggle to improve their e-government standing.

Two-thirds of countries in Asia (31 out of 47) and almost half of the American countries (15 out of 35) have above the world average EGDI score of 0.55.

Uruguay is the only Latin American country with Very-High EGDI scores, joining the other two forerunners in the American region- the United States and Canada.

Only 4 countries out of 54 in Africa score higher than the world average EGDI of 0.55, while 14 countries have very low EGDI scores below 0.25.

- In Oceania, Australia and New Zealand are the only two countries that have high scores of 0.9053 and 0.8806 respectively. The scores for the other 12 countries range between 0.2787 and 0.5348, which is below the world average of 0.55.

For the first time, the 2018 E-governance study also focused on local eGovernment development in 40 cities across the world.

This included assessment of municipal portals of 7 cities in Africa, 6 in America, 13 in Asia, 12 in Europe, and 2 in Oceania.

Among the assessed municipal portals, the ones that emerged as the top three leaders include Moscow, Cape Town and Tallinn.

Globally, almost two-thirds of 193 United Nations member states now demonstrate a high -level of e-government development with EGDI values between the range of 0.5 and 1.

On the other hand, the share of countries with low e-government levels, between the range of 0 to 0.25, has dropped by a significant 50 percent, from 32 countries to 16 countries in 2018.

Generally, there is a positive correlation between the country's income level and its e-government ranking. For example, the high-income countries have very-high or high EGDI scores.

However, this is not universal, as 22 upper middle-income and 39 lower-middle income countries have EGDI scores below the global EGDI average and 10 countries in the lower middle-income group have scores above the global EGDI average.

- In 2018, for the first time, the main contributor of EDGI scores improvement in all income groups was the development of online services. It revealed that there was a steady progress in improving e-government and public services provision online.

- The three most commonly used online services were found to be payment for utilities (140 countries), submitting income taxes (139 countries) and registration of new business (126 countries).
- The figures indicate that the digital divide could deepen between people who have access to the Internet and online services and those who do not, which could hamper the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development of leaving no one behind.

India's Score:

India scored well on the Online Services sub-index with a score of 0.9514.

However, it performed poorly in the Telecommunication Infrastructure Index, with a score of 0.20091.

On Human Capital Index, India scored far below the world average with a score of 0.6627.

India's overall score was 0.5484.

E-Government Development Index:

Top 10 Countries

S.No.	Country	Index
1.	Denmark	0.9150
2.	Australia	0.9053
3.	Republic of Korea	0.9010
4.	United Kingdom	0.8999
5.	Sweden	0.8882
6.	Finland	0.8815
7.	Singapore	0.8812
8.	New Zealand	0.8806
9.	France	0.8790
10.	Japan	0.8783

What is UN E-Governance Index?

The E-Government Development Index (EGDI) is a composite index based on the weighted average of three normalised indices:

- **Telecommunications Infrastructure Index (TII):** The index is based on data provided by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU)

- **Human Capital Index (HCI):** It is based on data provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- **Online Service Index (OSI):** It is based on data collected from an independent survey questionnaire, conducted by UNDESA, which assesses the national online presence of all 193 United Nations Member States.
- It mainly assesses e-government development at the national level. It measures countries' use of information and communications technologies to deliver public services. The Index captures the scope and quality of online services, status of telecommunication infrastructure and existing human capacity.

LOK SABHA PASSES INSOLVENCY CODE AMENDMENT BILL

Why in News: The Lok Sabha on July 31, 2018 passed the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Second Amendment) Bill, 2018. The Bill was introduced in the parliament on July 23, 2018. The Bill seeks to replace the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Ordinance 2018.

The Bill amends the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 to clarify that allottees under a real estate project should be treated as financial creditors. The voting threshold for routine decisions taken by the committee of creditors has been reduced from 75 percent to 51 percent. For certain key decisions, this threshold has been reduced to 66 percent. The Bill allows the withdrawal of a resolution application submitted to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) under the Code. This decision can be taken with the approval of 90 percent of the committee of creditors.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Ordinance 2018:

The committee of creditors's voting rights of resolution plans will be limited to 66 percent from earlier threshold of 75 percent, a move that will help speed up the resolution process.

- In order to facilitate the corporate debtor to continue as a going concern during the CIRP, the voting threshold for routine decisions has been reduced to 51 percent.

- Withdrawal of an insolvency application will be allowed, if 90 percent of the creditors agree.
- The Ordinance also provides for a mechanism to allow participation of security holders, deposit holders and all other classes of financial creditors that exceed a certain number, in the meetings of the Committee of Creditors.

Section 29(A) of the IBC, 2016 has been amended to exempt pure play financial entities from being disqualified on account of non-performing assets (NPA).

Taking into account the wide range of disqualifications contained in Section 29(A) of the Code, the Ordinance provides that the Resolution Applicant shall submit an affidavit certifying its eligibility to bid.

Promoters of companies with turnover of up to Rs 250 crore will be allowed to bid. Earlier, they were barred from bidding as the government feared that they will walk away with the stressed assets at a discount.

The ordinance proposes to facilitate implementation of the resolution plan by the successful bidder.

It provides a year time to the Resolution Applicant to obtain necessary statutory clearances from central, state and other authorities.

The other changes brought about by the Ordinance include - non-applicability of moratorium period to enforcement of guarantee; and liberalising terms and conditions of interim finance to facilitate financing of corporate debtor.

LOK SABHA PASSES BILL TO REPLACE HOMOEOPATHY COUNCIL

Why in News: The Lok Sabha on July 30, 2018 passed a bill, which seeks to replace the Central Council of Homoeopathy (CCH) with a board of governors. The bill - Homeopathy Central Council (Amendment) Bill 2018 - was passed through a voice vote after the House rejected several unofficial amendments while Congress MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury withdrew his statutory resolution disapproving the ordinance. The Bill seeks to replace an Ordinance promulgated by the President in May 2018. It amends Homoeopathy Central Council Act, 1973 which sets up Central Council of Homoeopathy and regulates homoeopathic education and practice.

The amendment in the bill is aimed at bringing accountability and quality in the homoeopathy colleges and education in the country.

Important Points:

- **Supersession of Central Council:** The Bill amends 1973 Act to provide for supersession of Central Council with effect from May 18, 2018. The Council will be reconstituted within 1 year from date of its supersession. In the interim period, Board of Governors constituted by central government will exercise powers of Central Council.

Board of Governors: It will consist of up to seven members including persons of eminence in field of homoeopathy education, eminent administrators, appointed by Union Government. The Central Government will select one of these members as Chairperson of Board. With regard to policy decisions, directions of the central government will be final.

Permission for existing homoeopathy colleges: The Bill states that if any homoeopathy medical college has been established or if any established homoeopathy medical college has opened new courses or increased its admission capacity before ordinance was promulgated, then it will have to seek permission from Union Government within 1 year. If homoeopathy medical college fails to seek such permission, then medical qualification granted by it to student will not be recognised under this law.

Important Points about Bill:

The law aims to abolish the CCH, as the body does not have the powers to deal with its corrupt chief and other members who recently faced grave charges of corruption.

The chief of CCH was recently arrested by the CBI for allegedly accepting bribe worth Rs 20 lakhs as part payment for granting approval to a homoeopathy college.

Hence, as per the bill, the members of the board of governors will replace the existing functionaries of the CCH.

- The new board will comprise seven eminent homeopathy practitioners and administrators who will be appointed by the government.

RAJASTHAN BECOMES 1ST INDIAN STATE TO IMPLEMENT BIOFUEL POLICY

Why in News: Rajasthan became first state in the country to implement National Policy on Biofuels unveiled by Union Government in May 2018. Its implementation was approved by high-power Biofuel Authority. It was also decided that state Government will release Biofuel Rules, 2018.

Important Points:

The State Government will be putting emphasis on increasing production of oilseeds.

Further, the State Government is promoting research in the fields of alternative fuels and energy resources. Biodiesel plant with a capacity of eight tonnes per day has already been installed in the state.

There would be further emphasis on biofuel advertisements by the state government to create awareness about the same.

Women's self-help groups (SHGs) will be created by the State Rural Livelihood Development Council to encourage the use of biofuels.

It would also help farmers to dispose off their surplus stock in an economic manner and would also reduce the country's dependence on oil imports.

It encourages setting up of supply chain mechanism for biodiesel production from non-edible oilseeds, used cooking oil and short gestation crops.

WHAT IS BIODIESEL?

Biodiesel is an alternative fuel which can be used in place of fossil fuels.

It is manufactured from vegetable oils, recycled grease, algae, and animal fat.

National Policy on Biofuels - 2018:

The policy categorises of biofuels into first generation (1G), second generation (2G) and third generation (3G) to enable extension of appropriate financial and fiscal incentives under each category. It seeks to help farmers dispose of their surplus stock in economic manner and reduce country's oil import dependence.

It has expanded scope of raw material for ethanol production by allowing use of sugarcane juice, sugar containing materials like sweet sorghum, sugar beet, starch containing materials like corn, cassava, damaged food grains like broken rice, wheat, rotten potatoes, unfit for human consumption for ethanol production. It also encourages setting up of supply chain mechanisms for biodiesel production from non-edible oilseeds, used cooking oil, short gestation crops.

CHINA LAUNCHES HIGH-RESOLUTION EARTH OBSERVATION SATELLITE

Why in News: China successfully launched Gaofen-11, an optical remote sensing satellite, as part of the country's high-resolution Earth observation project. It was launched on board of Long March 4B rocket from Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center in northern Shanxi Province. It was overall 282nd flight mission by Long March carrier rocket.

Important Points:

Gaofen-11 is sub-meter resolution optical satellite. It was developed by China Academy of Space Technology (CAST). It is the sixth in Gaofen series launched this year, following triplet of Gaofen-1 satellites and larger Gaofen-5 and Gaofen-6, all placed in Sun-synchronous orbits.

It will become part of China High-resolution Earth Observation System (CHEOS) initiated in 2010 to provide all-weather, all-day coverage by 2020 with optical and synthetic aperture radar satellites, and could also include airborne and near-space systems such as stratospheric balloons.

Gaofen-11 satellite will be used for land survey, urban planning, road network design, agriculture, and disaster relief. Its data will also be used for Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China had unveiled BRI in 2013 with aim to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Gulf region, Africa and Europe with network of land and sea routes.

Gaofen Project:

Gaofen means "high resolution" in Chinese. It is ambitious space project of China that aims to launch seven high-definition observation satellites before 2020. Gaofen-1 was the first satellite of the project series which was launched in April 2013. Presently, Gaofen-1 and Gaofen-2 satellites part of Gaofen project series are orbiting around the earth at low orbits around 600-700km. Since launch of Gaofen project, China has gained increasingly clearer view of planet.

STARTUP INDIA YATRA LAUNCHED IN CHHATTISGARH

Why in News: The Startup India Yatra was launched in Raipur, the capital city of Chhattisgarh. The first boot camp saw a large number of students queue up to register themselves. From there, the Startup India yatra van travelled to Bilaspur for the second boot camp at the Government Engineering College in Bilaspur on July 31. In the coming days, the van will travel to several other cities of Chhattisgarh including Korba, Korja, Surguja, Jashpur, Raigarh, Balodabazar, Durg, Rajnandgaon, Balod, Dhamtari, Kanker, Kondagaon, Jagdalpur and Dantewada and hold boot camps in the Government Engineering colleges and Polytechnic Institutes.

Important Points:

The startup India yatra van is equipped with facilities for individuals and startups to pitch their ideas.

The Yatra conducts boot camps where students are taught lessons in business planning.

The boot camps also include presentations on Startup India and Chhattisgarh Startup Policy followed by extensive ideation workshops.

The lessons and presentations are followed by an idea pitching session to select the best ideas and Startups.

Shortlisted business ideas get incubated in state-run incubators.

Aspiring entrepreneurs can register at 'startupindiahub.org.in' to participate in the Yatra.

Startup India Yatra has previously been held in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh.

To promote job creation in tier 2 and tier 3 towns and cities, Startup India organizes the Startup India Yatra in one state every month. The Yatra conducts boot camps where students are taught lessons in business planning followed by a pitch fest where ideas are invited.

- Shortlisted business ideas get incubated in State run incubators. A total of 19,000 students across 40 districts have benefitted from the Yatra through the boot camps, with over 90 received grants or incubation offers from the State governments.

- The Startup India initiative of the Government of India envisages to build a robust startup ecosystem in the country for nurturing innovation and providing opportunities to budding entrepreneurs.
- In tandem with this mission, the program has been able to gather registration of 10,999 startups, generating employment to 1,09,869 people.

About Startup India:

Startup India is a flagship initiative of the Government of India. It aims to build a strong eco-system for nurturing innovation and Startups in the country that will drive sustainable economic growth and generate large scale employment opportunities. The Government through this initiative aims to empower Startups to grow through innovation and design. In order to meet the objectives of the initiative, the Union Government announced an Action Plan that addresses all aspects of the Startup ecosystem on January 16, 2016.

Main pillars of the Action Plan include:

- Simplification and Handholding
- Funding Support and Incentives
- Industry-Academia Partnership and Incubation

NITI AAYOG LAUNCHES MOVE HACK

Why in News: NITI Aayog has launched Move Hack, a global mobility hackathon to crowdsource solutions aimed at the future of mobility in India. Envisaged to be one of the largest hackathons globally, Move Hack is focused on 10 themes and structured over three legs: online, followed by Singapore leg, and the finals in New Delhi. It is first platform in the world that has enmeshed public transport, private transport, road safety, multimodal connectivity and new age transport technologies such as zero emission vehicles and intra city aerial transport spearheaded by Government.

About MoveHack:

MoveHack aims to bring about innovative, dynamic and scalable solutions to problems pertaining to mobility. It is organized in partnership with Government of Singapore and is powered by Hacker Earth. PwC is knowledge partner and NASSCOM is strategic partner.

The hackathon is focused on 10 themes and structured over three legs: Online leg, followed by Singapore leg, and finals in New Delhi. It has two-pronged campaign approach. They are "Just Code It" aimed at solutions through innovations in technology, product, software and data analysis, and "Just Solve It" aimed at innovative business ideas or sustainable solutions to transform mobility infrastructure through technology.

Move Hack is open to individuals from all nationalities. It is expected to unravel pioneering and ingenious solutions to pertinent mobility-related challenges and pave way for developing integrated, interconnected and inventive global community.

Hackathon Competition:

The top 30 teams from online submissions will travel to Singapore in September 2018 and will be mentored by curated group of top experts advising teams on host of parameters including design improvement, business viability, technical solution and customer targeting and marketing.

Top 20 teams from Singapore leg will participate in Final Round to be held in New Delhi later in September 2018. The winners will be announced during Move Summit 2018 organized by NITI Aayog on 7 and 8 September 2018 in New. The awards of hackathon include recognizing top 10 winners with total prize of more than Rs. 2 crores. The evaluations will be done by jury comprising of subject matter experts, venture capitalists, business leaders and successful entrepreneurs.

Background:

Transportation and mobility are emerging sector and as potential drivers of innovation and economic growth of 21st century. Rapidly evolving technologies and business models for delivering mobility services have played dramatic potential role to transform global transportation sector. Mobility ranging from pedestrian and personal transport to public transit and freight movement is extremely critical and impacts rural and urban daily lives.

LOK SABHA PASSES BILL TO GIVE CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS TO NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

Why in News: Lok Sabha has unanimously passed Constitution (123rd Amendment) Bill, 2017 by two-third majority. The constitutional amendment bill seeks to grant National Commission on Backward Classes (NCBC) constitutional status at par with National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCSTs).

Important Points:

Role of NCSC: The Bill removes power of NCSC to examine matters related to backward classes. Currently, under Constitution NCSC has power to look into complaints and welfare measures with regard to Scheduled Castes (SCs), backward classes (OBCs) and Anglo-Indians.

Constitutional status to NCBC: The Bill seeks to make NCBC Constitutional body by inserting new article 338B in constitution composition, mandate, functions and various officers of NCBC. Article 338B will give NCBC authority to examine complaints and welfare measures regarding socially and educationally backward classes.

Backward classes: The Bill inserts article 342-A to empower President to specify socially and educationally backward classes in various states and union territories. He can do this in consultation with Governor of concerned state. However, law enacted by Parliament will be required if list of backward classes is to be amended.

Composition and service conditions: The Bill mentions that NCBC will comprise of five members appointed by President. Their tenure and conditions of service will also be decided by President through rules.

Functions:

Bill defines following duties of NCBC (i) investigate and monitor safeguards provided to backward classes under Constitution and other laws are being implemented (ii) inquire into specific complaints regarding violation of rights of backward classes and (iii) advise and make recommendations on socio-economic development of such classes.

Union and State governments will consult NCBC on all major policy matters affecting socially and educationally backward classes. NCBC will be required to present annual reports to President on working of safeguards for backward classes. These reports will be tabled in Parliament and state legislative assemblies of concerned states.

Powers of a civil court: The Bill gives NCBC powers of civil court while investigating or inquiring into any complaints. These powers will include summoning people and examining them on oath, production of any document or public record and receiving evidence.

TEJAS TEST RUNS FOR LANDING ON INS VIKRAMADITYA

Why in News: A test pilot flying a light combat aircraft (LCA) Tejas successfully snagged the jet's tail hook on the arresting wire at a test facility in Goa, said a Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) spokesperson. The naval variant of the homegrown LCA took the first step towards landing on the flight deck of India's only aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya.

Important Points:

The naval variant of the homegrown LCA took the first step towards landing on the flight deck of India's only aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya. The carrier, currently, operates Russian-origin MiG-29K fighters from its deck. This was the first in a series of rigorous tests that will be carried out before the fighter can be tested for actual flight deck operations, which could take more than a year.

Landing on a carrier requires snagging a maritime fighter's tailhook on one of the arresting wires on the flight deck as the runway space is scarce.

- The 'arrested landing' brings the fighter to a grinding halt, with its landing speed coming down from 130 knots to zero in a couple of seconds.

WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK (AUGUST 1 TO 7)

Why in News: August 1 to 7 every year is observed as World Breastfeeding Week. Breastfeeding is an important task both for the mother and child. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), breastfeeding is recommended for first 6 months of the baby, exclusively. Breastmilk must not be replaced by formula milk, juice or water during the first 6 months of newborn. After 6 months, breastfeeding should be continued along with other nourishing foods for the baby. This is because breastmilk provides ideal nutrition to infants. It has the perfect blend of fat, vitamins, proteins and everything else that your baby needs for a healthy growth. On World Breastfeeding Week 2018, we take a special look at benefits of breastfeeding for baby and mother.

This year's theme focuses on "Breastfeeding: Foundation of Life."

Important Points:

Breastfeeding is an important efficient and cost-effective intervention promoting child survival and health.

Breastfeeding within an hour of birth could prevent 20% of the newborn deaths.

Infants who are not breastfed are 15 times more likely to die from pneumonia and 11 times more likely to die from diarrhoea than children who are exclusively breastfed, which are two leading causes of death in children under-five years of age.

In addition, children who were not breastfed are at increased risk for diabetes, obesity, allergies, asthma, childhood leukemia, sudden infant death syndrome etc. Apart from mortality and morbidity benefits, breastfeeding also has tremendous impact on improved IQ.

A new report released by UNICEF and the World Health Organisation (WHO) has ranked Sri Lanka at the top of the list of countries with early initiation of breastfeeding.

India ranks 56th among the 76 countries that were analysed.

Countries like Kazakhstan, Rwanda, Bhutan and Uruguay have fared much better than India.

- Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Montenegro are at the bottom.
- Only two in five newborns are breastfed within the first hour of life across the world.

MAA programme:

To intensify the efforts further for promotion of breastfeeding, the Health Ministry has initiated a nationwide programme called "MAA-Mother's Absolute Affection" to bring undiluted focus on promotion of breastfeeding and provision of services towards supporting breastfeeding, along with ongoing efforts of routine health systems.

The key components of the MAA programme are awareness generation, promotion of breastfeeding & inter personal counselling at community level, skilled support for breastfeeding at delivery points and monitoring and Award/ recognition of health facility.

Under this programme, ASHA has been incentivized for reaching out to pregnant and lactating mothers and provide information on benefits and techniques of successful breastfeeding during interpersonal communication. ANMs at all sub-centres and health personnel at all delivery points are being trained for providing skilled support to mothers referred with issues related to breastfeeding.

Under NHM, funding support has been recommended for all States and UTs for successful implementation of the MAA programme.

**BALLISTIC MISSILE INTERCEPTOR AAD
SUCCESSFULLY FLIGHT TESTED**

Why in News: Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted the successful test of the Ballistic Missile Interceptor Advanced Area Defence (AAD) from Abdul Kalam Island, Odisha. The endo-atmospheric missile, capable of intercepting incoming targets at an altitude of 15 to 25 kms was launched against multiple simulated targets of 1500 km class ballistic missile.

All the mission objectives were successfully met. Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal BS Dhanoa, witnessed the flight test along with other senior officials.

About Ballistic Missile Interceptor AAD:

Indigenously developed by DRDO, the AAD interceptor is a single-stage missile powered by solid propellants.

It has been developed as part of indigenous efforts to have multi-layer ballistic missile defence system, capable of destroying incoming hostile ballistic missiles.

It is 7.5 metres tall and weighs around 1.2 tonnes. The interceptor missile has its own mobile launcher, secure data link for interception, independent tracking and homing capabilities and sophisticated radars.

About BMD:

India follows 'No First Use policy'. A robust BMD provides an opportunity to the nation to strike back if a nuclear projectile is launched by an enemy state.

About WABA:

World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declarations, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding.

- WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).

BMD would shield from non-state actors initiated missile warfare and thus could avoid Mutual Destruction trap.

BMD reduces the incentive for the enemy state to launch a nuclear attack, thus enhancing strategic stability.

- An indigenous system would reduce the import bill of defence systems from other nations.

Technology developed for BMD can be used in other sectors, especially in space technology.

Background:

The Indian Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) Programme is an attempt to develop and to use a multi-layered ballistic missile defence system to protect from ballistic missile attacks. The India's decision to develop Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) was introduced in the light of the ballistic missile threat mainly from Pakistan, especially can be attributed to the Kargil War in 1999.

NHAI TO INK MOU WITH SBI FOR RS 25K CR LOAN

Why in News: National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is getting an unsecured loan of Rs 25,000 crore from State Bank of India for 10 years with 3 years of moratorium on repayments. This is the largest amount of loan to have been sanctioned to NHAI in one stroke by any institution. This is also the largest long term unsecured loan sanctioned by SBI at a time to any entity. An MoU in this regard will be signed between the two organizations in the presence of Shri Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport & Highways, Shipping, Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation in New Delhi tomorrow.

Important Points:

NHAI had invited an Expression of Interest from Scheduled Commercial Banks to fund Rs. 25000 Crore as an unsecured loan for 10 years with 3 years of moratorium on repayments. In response to this EOI, SBI offered to fund the entire requirement of Rs 25000 Crore based on one month MCLR.

The loan sanctioned by SBI is unsecured. There is no principal repayment liability for initial three years. After three years, the repayment would be done in 14 equal half yearly instalments. The total loan tenure is 10 years. NHAI can repay/ prepay it at any time without any prepayment penalty.

The total sanctioned amount of Rs 25000 Crore is to be disbursed within 31st March 2019. Rate of interest would be based on one month MCLR. Interest accrued on the amount actually outstanding will be paid on monthly basis. NHAI can draw the amount in any number of tranches, latest by 31st March 2019.

NHAI has traditionally relied on borrowing through long term bonds issued to various investors, including LIC, EPFO and other qualified investors, and Tax Free bonds and Masala Bond issued in year 2017.

About National Highways Authority of India (NHAI):

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is an autonomous agency of the Government of India, responsible for management of a network of over 50,000 km of National Highways out of 1,15,000 km in India. It is a nodal agency of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. NHAI has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Indian Space Research Organisation for satellite mapping of highways.

GOVERNMENT APPROVES 122 RESEARCH PROJECTS UNDER 'IMPRINT-2' SCHEME

Why in News: Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has approved 122 new research project proposals worth Rs 112 crore for funding under its

IMPRINT-II (Impacting Research Innovation and Technology) scheme. These projects were approved at IMPRINT-II Apex Committee meeting chaired by HRD Minister Prakash Javdekar in New Delhi. The initiative aims to advance research in energy, healthcare, security and defence domains in the high education institutions.

Important Points:

The selected proposals include 35 (ICT), 18 (Advanced Materials), 17 (Healthcare Technology), 12 (Energy Security), 11 (Security & Defence), 9 (Sustainable Habitat), 7 Water Resource & River Systems, 5 (Environment & Climate), 4 (Manufacturing) and 4 (Nano Technology).

Among 2145 proposals, 122 best proposals were selected for funding under IMPRINT-2. Of the selected 122 new projects, 81 are sponsored by the industry.

- The implementation of 142 projects under IMPRINT-1 has got underway. These projects have received support from several ministries, councils and departments in addition to the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- The knowledge portal for monitoring the progress of these research projects and to disseminate findings will be launched in October 2018.

About IMPRINT scheme:

IMPRINT is the first of its kind government-supported initiative to address the major science and engineering challenges that India must address and champion to enable, empower and embolden the nation for inclusive growth and self-reliance.

The initiative is aimed at:

- Developing new engineering education policy
- Creating a road map to pursue engineering challenges

It also provides the overarching vision that guides research into areas that are predominantly socially relevant.

Among the selected projects under IMPRINT-1, the following are under implementation:

Development of cost-effective Magneto-Rheological (MR) Fluid Damper in two wheelers and four wheelers automobile to improve ride comfort and stability.

Indigenous development of ultra high strength steel with stainless property for space application.

High strength, wear and corrosion resistant steel for high-speed rail and elastic clip.

Low-cost indoor occupancy and climate monitoring system for energy conservation.

Development of artificial pancreas for closed loop blood glucose control of type-1 diabetic patients in India.

Development of a smartphone camera-based sensor for detection and remediation of chromium pollution in water.

Efficient glycemic control for the management of diabetes complications and intervention with a novel point of care device for community healthcare.

- Smart classrooms: Technology aids for effective teaching in large classrooms.
- Designing and fabrication of an aerodynamic lens for nanoparticles of variable size.

AUGUST-2018

INDIA THIRD ASIAN NATION TO GET STA-1 STATUS FROM U.S.

Why in News: India has become the third Asian country after Japan and South Korea to get the Strategic Trade Authorization-1 (STA-1) status after the US issued a federal



notification to this effect, paving the way for high-technology product sales to New Delhi, particularly in civil space and defense sectors.

Important Points:

India is the 37th country to be designated the STA-1 status by the United States.

The federal notification, issued yesterday, gains significance as the Trump Administration made an exception for India, which is yet to become a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

Traditionally, the US has placed only those countries in the STA-1 list who are members of the four export control regimes: Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), Wassenaar Arrangement (WA), Australia Group (AG) and the NSG.

In its federal notification, the Trump Administration notes that India is a member of three of the four multilateral export regimes.

Mainly because of the political opposition from China, India's membership application has been pending before NSG, which takes decision by consensus.

By placing India in the STA-1 list, the United States has acknowledged that for all practical purposes India adheres to the export control regimes of the NSG.

This exception for New Delhi is intended to send a strong political message to China and the world, taking into account that America's closest ally Israel is yet to be given this status, primarily because it is not a member of these multilateral export control regimes.

- The Indian high-tech industry, being part of STA-1 could open up doors for sales and manufacturing in India. Industry can set up manufacturing bases in India without worrying whether the licence will come through.

- Even third countries seeking to set up high-technology manufacturing units that require import of dual-use equipment from the US, will not have to go through the process of obtaining a licence.
- Ahead of the 2+2 dialogue between the Indian and US Foreign and Defence Ministers on 6 September, this is a major takeaway, as India inches closer to realising the potential of being a Major Defence Partner of the US.
- The bi-weekly Ekatmata Express, train connecting Lucknow and Deen Dayal Upadhyay Junction, was also launched.
- The three leaders will flag off a passenger train and a goods train with an all-woman crew, also launch a "smart yard" project at the century-old station on the busy Delhi-Howrah route. The building is being touched up with saffron paint at places and signboards with the new name being put up.

Importance:

It will provide India greater supply chain efficiency, both for defence and for other high-tech products that will increase activity with US systems, interoperability of systems and will reduce time and resources needed to get licensing approved. It will improve India's partnership with United States to improve its own export control regimes and has met most of the export control rules which the US thinks is useful. It will be also competitive advantage for US, in terms of supplying those kinds of products to India.

AFTER 156 YEARS, MUGHALSARAI STATION RENAMED AS PANDIT DEEN DAYAL UPADHYAYA JUNCTION

Why in News: The iconic Mughalsarai Railway Junction of Uttar Pradesh was renamed as Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Junction Railway station. Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) National President Amit Shah inaugurated the renamed station. The Mughalsarai station got a new name after Uttar Pradesh Governor Ram Naik gave his assent to the proposal in June 2018 following the in-principle approval by the Union Government in 2017 to the state government's proposal.

RSS ideologue Deen Dayal Upadhyaya was found dead in mysterious circumstances near the Mughalsarai station in February 1968. Mughalsarai is also the birthplace of former prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri.

Important Points:

On the same occasion, a goods train with an all-woman crew was flagged off. It will be the first time in the country that an all-woman crew will run a goods train.

- The state government also launched the smart yard project for the Mughalsarai station, the century-old station on the busy Delhi-Howrah route.

Mughalsarai Junction:

The Mughalsarai junction, one of country's busiest railway stations, was set up in 1862 when the East India Company linked Howrah to Delhi by rail. The British built the station to transport goods from northern India to port cities in the east. It is located on the main Howrah-Delhi Grand Chord line. With time, the station became Asia's biggest goods train yard and one of the busiest stations of the country with the daily movement of around 250 trains.

**TECH MAHINDRA AND TELANGANA
GOVT. COLLABORATE TO LAUNCH
INDIA'S FIRST BLOCKCHAIN DISTRICT**

Why in News: Telangana State Information Technology, Electronics and Communication department (ITE&C) signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Tech Mahindra to launch India's first Blockchain district.

The MoU was signed at International Blockchain Congress 2018 held in Hyderabad.

Important Points:

Tech Mahindra as its founding member will provide platform and technology assistance to all incubators in it. It will also empower accelerators to develop and solve market problems across its global customer ecosystem. Telangana ITE&C Department will provide regulatory and policy support to enable and promote Blockchain growth both in India and globally.

- It will be centre of excellence, incubator and process development for emerging technology with innovative infrastructure and facilities to foster growth of Indian blockchain start-ups and companies.

- **Blockchain district will be global talent hub which can help to unlock value of blockchain technology in democratising data and solving big scale world problems. It is also huge step in reskilling and right skilling workforce of the future. It will provide an opportunity for blockchain ecosystem in India to collaborate and work towards building a blockchain district in Telangana and transforming India as the blockchain capital of the world.**

Initially it would be a virtual cluster, connecting with the stakeholders working in the emerging technology. It would have a physical building at a later phase.

In short, it will be "a cluster of buildings", which will house start-ups and other stakeholders working on the development of the platform.

create more transparent, accountable, and efficient governments.

What is Blockchain technology?

Blockchain is a new-age technology that helps in record-keeping through the use of cryptography, a secure method of writing digital codes. With blockchain, many people can write entries into a record of information, and a community of users can check the records to reduce the scope of fraudulent practices in altering information.

Benefits of blockchain technology:

As a public ledger system, blockchain records and validate each and every transaction made, which makes it secure and reliable.

All the transactions made are authorized by miners, which makes the transactions immutable and prevent it from the threat of hacking.

Blockchain technology discards the need of any third-party or central authority for peer-to-peer transactions.

It allows decentralization of the technology.

How blockchain can be used in public administration?

Blockchain has the potential to optimize the delivery of public services, further India's fight against corruption, and create considerable value for its citizens.

By maintaining an immutable and chronologically ordered record of all actions and files ("blocks") linked together ("chain") in a distributed and decentralized database, Blockchain creates an efficient and cost-effective database that is virtually tamper-proof. By doing so, blockchain promises to

- In addition to creating a more efficient government, blockchain can also help create a more honest government. A public blockchain, like the one Bitcoin uses, records all information and transactions on the decentralized database permanently, publicly, and most importantly, securely. By allowing governments to track the movement of government funds, blockchain can hold state and local actors accountable for any misappropriations.
- Blockchain not only deters corruption through accountability, but it can also do so by bypassing the middleman entirely. Earlier this year, the World Food Programme began testing blockchain-based food and cash transactions in Pakistan's Sindh province. Refugees in Jordan's Azraq camp are now using the same technology, in conjunction with biometric registration data for authentication, to pay for food.

A LIBRARY FOR DIGITAL LITERACY

Why in News: Social networking giant Facebook has launched "Digital Literacy Library" to help young people build

skills they need to safely enjoy online technology. The lessons can be found on Facebook's Safety Center as well as on Berkman Klein's Digital Literacy Resource Platform.

Important Points:

The Library aims to help young people build the skills they need to safely enjoy online technology.

The library is a collection of lessons to help young people think critically and share thoughtfully online. Divided into themes such as privacy and reputation, identity exploration, security, safety and well-being, the lessons reflect the voices of young people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, geographies, and educational levels.

The lessons can be found on Facebook's Safety Center as well as on Berkman Klein's Digital Literacy Resource Platform.

- There are 830 million young people online around the world, and this library is a resource for educators looking to address digital literacy and help these young people build the skills they need to safely enjoy digital technology.

GOVERNMENT THROWS 11 DEFENCE CHALLENGES AT STARTUPS

Why in News: Defence India Startup Challenge is part of iDEX (Innovation for Defence Excellence) scheme announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in April meant to build an eco-system of innovation and entrepreneurship in India for the defence sector to make India self-reliant. It is an initiative to tap startups for finding safe and futuristic Indian solutions to critical needs of the three Armed Forces.

Important Points:

Those that come up with prototypes of usable products would be supported with Rs.1.5 crore each and friendly procurement procedures from the Ministry under SPARK or Support for Prototype & Research Kick start in Defence.

A list of 11 technologies that the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force need, have been chosen. They included remote air vehicles, laser weapons, secure and safe communication systems and bandwidth, precision targeting systems, sensors, and protected and informed movement of soldiers in battle tanks.

DELHI ASSEMBLY PASSES RESOLUTION FOR SEPARATE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Why in News: The Delhi Legislative Assembly adopted a resolution seeking a separate Public Service Commission for the Capital, the lack of which, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia alleged was part of a "conspiracy" to sabotage work by the Aam Aadmi Party government.

The resolution directs the government to take all necessary steps to complete the process of setting up such a commission within a period of six weeks so that the "deficiency" in providing services in sectors ranging from education, health, environment or other sectors becomes a "thing of past". Mr. Sisodia assured the House that the task would be fulfilled within the given timeline.

State Public Service Commission:

The Government of India Act, 1935 provided for the establishment of the Public Service Commission at the Provincial level known as the State Public Service Commission and the constitution of India gave it a constitutional status as autonomous bodies. The State Public Service Commissions were constituted under the provisions of the Constitution of India

Composition State Public Service Commission (SPSC):

A State Public Service Commission (SPSC) comprises of a chairman and other members appointed by the governor of the state. One half of the appointed members of the commission should have held office for at least ten years either under the government of India or under the government of a state. The constitution has not specified the strength of the commission. The governor is empowered to determine the number of members as well as staff of the commission and their conditions of service.

Duties and Functions:

The duties and functions of the SPSC are follows:

- (i) It conducts examinations for appointments to the services of the state.
- (ii) It is consulted on the matters below:
 - (a) All matters relating to methods of recruitment to civil services and for civil posts.
 - (b) The principles to be followed in making appointments to civil services and posts and in making promotions and transfers from one service to another and on the suitability of candidates for such appointments, promotions or transfers.
 - (c) All disciplinary matters affecting a person serving under the Government of India in a civil capacity, including memorials or petitions relating to such matters.
 - (d) Any claim of costs incurred by a civil servant in defending legal proceedings instituted against him in respect of acts done or purporting to be done in the execution of his official duty.
 - (e) Any claim for the award of a pension in respect of injuries sustained by a person while serving under the Government of India and any question as to the amount of any such award.

RISECREEK

Why in News: Computer scientists from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras have developed first of family of six industry-standard microprocessors under Project Shakti. The initial batch of 300 chips have been named RISECREEK and have been fabricated at Intel's facility at Oregon, US for free to run Linux operating system.

RISECREEK microprocessors:

- Their design is open source and can be adapted by others. They optimise power use and compete with international units such as Cortex A5 from Advanced RISC Machines (ARM). They have better performance in terms of DMIPS per megahertz rating than A5 and score of 1.68 against competition's 1.57.
These viable industry-grade microprocessors can operate at frequency of 350 MHz, thus meets demands of defence and strategic equipment of country such as NAVIC (Indian Regional Navigation Satellite) and Internet of Things (IoT) electronics. These processors can also be tapped for future efforts in semiconductors.
- Iran's economy, which is heavily dependent on oil exports, has taken a hit since May as companies have called off deals and cancelled investments, and the rial has crashed to half of its April value. The US has told third countries they must halt imports of Iranian oil or face US sanctions.
- Iranians are already seeing the effects of the sanctions, with Iran's rial currency losing around half its value since Trump announced the US would withdraw from the 2015 nuclear accord. In November they ratchet up to yet another level. Anyone doing business with Iran will NOT be doing business with the United States. I am asking for WORLD PEACE, nothing less 'Donal Trump'. so if that means joining hands with China and Russia.

About Project Shakti:

The Shakti plan started in 2014 as an IIT-M initiative. Last year, the Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology funded a part of the project.

The Shakti project is not aimed at only building processors. It also aims to build high speed interconnects for servers and supercomputers based on variants of the RapidIO and GenZ standards. These are key to build large clusters of processors to get Petaflop and Exaflop level supercomputers.

US REIMPOSES SANCTIONS ON IRAN

Why in News: The unilateral US sanctions reimposed prohibit Iran's purchase of US dollars and precious metals, part of a larger move that attempts to cut the country off from the international financial system. Broad sanctions on Iranian industry, ranging from carpets and health care to the automotive sector are also being reimposed.

Important Points:

The sanctions re-imposed are "extraterritorial" - they apply to not just American individuals and businesses, but to non-American businesses or individuals as well. Their aim is to penalise trade and investment activity related to Iran by everyone who is not specifically excluded from the sanctions. The Europeans' statements of outrage notwithstanding, many economists and strategic affairs experts question their ability and determination to stand by Tehran in a direct "with-us-or-against-us" confrontation with the US, more

The following sanctions will "snap back":

On Iran buying/acquiring US dollars; On

Iran's trade in gold/precious metals;

On direct or indirect sale or supply from or to Iran of graphite, aluminum, steel, coal, software for integrating industrial processes;

On "significant transactions" related to purchase or sale of Iranian rials, or maintenance of "significant funds or accounts" in rials outside Iran;

On buying or facilitating the issuance of Iranian sovereign debt; and

On Iran's automotive sector. Thereafter, sanctions will return on:

The second phase of US sanctions, which takes effect November 5 and will block Iran's oil sales,

is due to cause more damage, though several countries including China, India and Turkey have indicated they are not willing to entirely cut their Iranian energy purchases.

The additional three months are available to companies in Iran's energy, infrastructure and financial sectors.

Iranian port, shipping and shipbuilding operations;

Purchase of petroleum and petroleum products from Iran;

- Transactions by foreign financial institutions with the Iranian central bank and financial institutions;
- Providing underwriting, insurance, or reinsurance services in Iran; and Iran's energy sector.

Impact of sanctions:

- The main oil market price drivers of recent months have been output levels by top producers Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United States, renewed Iran sanctions, the US-China trade dispute, and unplanned supply disruptions. Some analysts warned that a global heat wave could also now affect oil demand.

However, there are indications that India, as one of the biggest importers of Iranian oil, might get some waiver.

Experts here fear that if Iran fails to export oil, a backbone of its economy, West Asia might plunge into crisis. Currently, other five signatories to Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and Iran are trying to salvage the nuclear deal. If Iran is forced to exit JCPOA, Tehran might have to revisit its original nuclear doctrine, one of the above quoted experts pointed out.

The two sides have not only agreed to maintain momentum in Chabahar port project, but also build partnership in areas of counter-terrorism, Afghanistan and anti-narcotics campaign.

WORLD'S FIRST THERMAL BATTERY PLANT

Why in News: The world's first-ever facility to create thermal batteries will be inaugurated in Amravati, Andhra Pradesh. The state's Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu will be present at the unveiling of the plant, that will see thermal batteries being manufactured by Bharat Energy Storage Technology Private Limited (BEST). These batteries are based on alternative sources of energy production, and their presence is expected to reduce the dependence on fossil fuels.

This plant aims to create new energy storage form that is expected to have commercial applications, while also maintain low carbon footprint and less dependent on external factors like weather.

Important Points:

- The plant will begin its commercial operations from May 2019. BEST is planning to create a battery capacity of 1000MW. This is expected to be upgraded to a 10GW capacity by 2025.
- The thermal battery is based on alternative sources of energy production, and its presence is expected to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. It provide energy

solutions for electrical grids, transport and telecom services. Before we look at its applications, here is a lowdown on the science behind thermal battery technology. This plant is based on technology patented in India by Dr Patrick Glynn in 2016.

What is thermal battery technology?

A thermal energy battery is used for storing and releasing thermal energy. It allows for available energy to be temporarily stored and be released for use whenever necessary. Standard battery technology is based on charging and discharging cycles mainly operated by electricity. The most commonly used Lithium-ion battery works on electrical energy. However, thermal batteries operate on thermal energy, which can be defined as energy created by temperature differences.

How it works?

Thermal batteries use thermal energy to operate, i.e., the energy created by temperature differences. Therefore, the energy transfer in thermal batteries helps store heat when heat travels from one part of the battery setup to the other.

For that to happen, a thermal battery consists of two parts: a cool zone known as sink, and a hot source called source. Both these sides consist of compounds known as phase-changing materials (PCMs), which can change their state of matter on the basis of a physical/chemical reaction.

When the sink of a thermal battery receives heat, it transforms physically or chemically, thereby storing energy, while the source cools down. During operation, the sink is cooled down, so it releases the stored energy, while the source heats up. Depending on the nature of the battery, the system can derive heat from any source, which makes a thermal battery very versatile.

How it is different from Conventional battery technology?

Conventional battery technology work on basis of electrical energy and is based on system of charging and discharging cycles that are driven by electricity. For example Lithium-ion (Lion) battery, staple of many electronic devices, consists of electric charges being transferred from electrodes. Energy is derived from this battery, when lithium atoms turn into lithium ions (Li+), and get stored when this reaction reverses.

Benefits:

Thermal battery is hailed as perfect alternative to non-renewable energy sources. It is considered to be even better than solar energy. It will be energy source for power telecommunications services, electrical grids, electric vehicles (electric buses, on a single charge expected to run for upto 800kms). It has lesser heat sensitivity, and low carbon footprint these are better than Li-ion batteries and outperform solar panels, which have expensive maintenance, and high weather-dependent operation. Solar batteries cannot be charged or utilised to their optimum potential after sunset or even when the skies are densely clouded. Though thermal batteries are priced at par with widely used Lithium-ion batteries, but they have low carbon footprint and also last longer.

NITI AAYOG IDENTIFIED 117 DISTRICTS AS ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICTS FOR RUSA SCHEME

Why in News: NITI Aayog has identified 117 districts as 'Aspirational Districts'. These districts have been selected on the basis of composite index which includes published data of deprivation enumerated under Socio-Economic Caste Census, Health & Nutrition, Education and Basic Infrastructure.

Important Points:

During the second phase of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), central assistance is provided for opening of new Model Degree Colleges (MDCs) in 'Aspirational Districts' identified by NITI Aayog and in unserved & underserved districts in North Eastern and Himalayan States. The Project Approval Board (PAB) of RUSA has approved central support for one MDC each in 70 such districts including 6 in Odisha.

An Expert Committee constituted by the University Grants Commission (UGC) had identified 374 Educationally Backward Districts (EBDs) where Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education was less than the national average of 12.4% based on 2001 census data.

- During the first phase of RUSA, central assistance to States has been provided for creation of one Model Degree College each in 60 EBDs including 8 in Odisha.

- The central support provided under the component of new MDCs is infrastructural in nature in which funds are released for creation of Colleges with requisite infrastructure such as appropriate number of class rooms, library, laboratory, faculty rooms, toilet blocks and other essential requirements for technologically advanced facilities. Further, under this component, a commitment is given by the State Governments that all recurring expenditure (including salaries) in respect of the MDC being established, will be borne by the respective State Government.

Additionally, under a separate component of RUSA viz., Faculty Recruitment Support, central support is provided for creation of additional posts of Assistant Professors subject to specific norms and approved period of the scheme (i.e. upto 31st March 2020). Further, under this component, a commitment is required to be given by the State Governments to take over liability of such faculty positions after 31st March 2020.

About RUSA:

Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), launched in 2013 aims at providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions.

Funding:

The central funding (in the ratio of 60:40 for general category States, 90:10 for special category states and 100% for union territories) would be norm based and outcome dependent.

- The funding would flow from the central ministry through the state governments/union territories to the State Higher Education Councils before reaching the identified institutions.

- The funding to states would be made on the basis of critical appraisal of State Higher Education Plans, which would describe each state's strategy to address issues of equity, access and excellence in higher education.

Objectives:

The key objectives of RUSA are to improve access, equity and quality in higher education through planned development of higher education at the state level. Objectives include creating new academic institutions, expanding and upgrading the existing ones, developing institutions that are self-reliant in terms of quality education, professionally managed, and characterized by greater inclination towards research and provide students with education that is relevant to them as well the nation as a whole.

Components:

RUSA would create new universities through upgradation of existing autonomous colleges and conversion of colleges in a cluster.

It would create new model degree colleges, new professional colleges and provide infrastructural support to universities and colleges.

Faculty recruitment support, faculty improvements programmes and leadership development of educational administrators are also an important part of the scheme.

In order to enhance skill development the existing central scheme of Polytechnics has been subsumed within RUSA. A separate component to synergise vocational education with higher education has also been included in RUSA.

Besides these, RUSA also supports reforming, restructuring and building capacity of institutions in participating state.

NITI AAYOG AND CII LAUNCH PARTNERSHIP ON SDGS

Why in News: The NITI Aayog and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and entered into a three-year partnership. The MoU was signed during the Government and Business Partnership Conclave in New Delhi. The conclave was organised jointly by NITI Aayog, Confederation of Indian Industry and the United Nations.

The Conclave witnessed participation from senior officials from Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Ministry of Power, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy and Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.

Important Points:

- CII-NITI Aayog have entered into a three-year partnership and an MoU was signed. This partnership focuses on specific activities that seeks to develop:

1. **Vision and Action Agenda for businesses and industries to contribute to SDGs;**
2. **Annual Status Reports;**
3. **Sector-specific Best Practise Documents.**

CII launched the report-Indian Solutions for the World to Achieve SDGs. The report deep-dives into each of the SDGs, targets and business implications thereof.

The report cites examples that illustrate how companies have incorporated the SDGs framework into their business strategy and gone about achieving them.

Rakesh Bharti Mittal, President CII mentioned that the the current theme of CII 2018-19 is 'India RISE: Responsible. Inclusive. Sustainable.', which very well aligns with the sustainability agenda. Moreover, CII's nine Centres of Excellence are also well-aligned to the SDGs.

Sustainable development three things matter the most: energy, water and circular economy/green industry. To action his 2022 agenda, he expressed confidence that India will achieve its clean energy goals even earlier than 2022 and urged everyone to be conscious and responsible towards the environment.

About Confederation of Indian Industry (CII):

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) works to create and sustain an environment conducive to the development of India, partnering industry, Government, and civil society, through advisory and consultative processes.

CII is a non-government, not-for-profit, industry-led and industry-managed organization, playing a proactive role in India's development process. Founded in 1895, India's premier business association has around 9000 members, from the private as well as public sectors, including SMEs and MNCs, and an indirect membership of over 300,000 enterprises from around 265 national and regional sectoral industry bodies.

About NITI Aayog:

NITI stands for "National Institution for Transforming India" is a PREMIER POLICY THINK-TANK of Government of India which is providing two important things i.e. DIRECTIONAL INPUTS & POLICY INPUTS.

- NITI AAYOG was established by the Narendra Modi's NDA government to replace the Planning Commission.
- NITI AAYOG was formed via "EXECUTIVE ACTIONS" on 1 January 2015.

It's basically a platform of the Government of India to institute States to act together in NATIONAL INTEREST thereby encourage COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM.

'NIRYAT MITRA' MOBILE APP

Why in News: Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry has launched Niryat Mitra mobile application for exporters and importers of the country. The app developed by Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO), the largest exporters organisation of the country. It is available both on Android and on IOS platforms.

Important Points:

The app provides wide range of information required to undertake international trade right from policy provisions for export and import, applicable GST rate, available export incentives, tariff, preferential tariff, market access requirements - SPS and TBT measures.

It provides all the information at tariff line. The app works internally to map Indian Trade Clarification (ITC) Harmonized Item Description and Coding System (HS) code of other countries with that of India.

It also provides all the required data without users bothering about HS code of any country. Presently, app has data of 87 countries.

It also provides notifications of export promotion programmes organised by FIEO to provide opportunity to industry to participate in them.

About Federation of Indian Export Organisations:

The Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) represents the Indian entrepreneurs' spirit of enterprise in the global market.

- Set up in 1965, it is an apex body of the export promotion councils, commodity boards and export development authorities in India.

- It provides the crucial interface between international trading community of India & the Central and State Governments, financial institutions, ports, railways and all engaged in export trade facilitation.
- It serves the interests of over 100000 exporters from every goods and services sector in the country.

ALL-WOMEN EXPEDITION TO MT. MANIRANG

Why in News: The Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports & Information and Broadcasting Col. Rajyavardhan Rathore flagged off an all-women expedition to Mt. Manirang in Himachal Pradesh. The expedition commemorates the silver jubilee of 1993 Women Everest expedition.

Important Points:

The 19-member expedition team to Mt. Manirang is being led by Ms Bimla Negi, a veteran mountaineer who was a member of the 1993 team. The team also includes nine members of the 1993 team in addition to young women mountaineers, who hail from different states of the country like Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Sikkim, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Gujarat, Manipur and Himachal Pradesh. The expedition is expected to make the summit attempt around 24th August, 2018.

The Indo-Nepalese women's Everest expedition in 1993 was the first all women expedition, launched by Indian Mountaineering foundation.

It was funded by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. The 21-member team was led by Ms. Bachendri Pal. The historic expedition set up several world records at the time which included the largest number of persons (18) of a single expedition to climb Mount Everest, largest number of women (six) from a single country to climb Mount Everest.

- Santosh Yadav, member of the team, became the first woman in the world to climb Mount Everest, while Miss Dicky Dolma became the youngest women (19) years in the world to climb the highest peak in the world.

About Mt. Manirang:

- Manirang is one of the highest mountains in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. It lies on the border between Kinnour and Lahaul and Spiti district.
- Mount Manirang (Altitude: 6593 mtr. / 21625.04 ft) is known as the crown of the Spiti valley.
- The whole region is situated in the rain shadow area and more or less lies dry other than winter.

XINGKONG-2: CHINA SUCCESSFULLY TESTS FIRST HYPERSONIC AIRCRAFT

Why in News: The China Academy of Aerospace Aerodynamics (CAAA), run by state-owned space contractor China Aerospace science and Technology Corp, announced it had conducted a successful first flight test of the Xingkong-2, which has been named Starry Sky-2. Waverider is flight vehicle that flies in atmosphere and uses shockwaves generated by its own hypersonic flight with air to glide at high speed.

Important Points:

The Xingkong-2 hypersonic waverider flight vehicle was released in air from rocket after about 10 minutes. After its launch, it flew independently, made large-angle turning maneuvers and landed in targeted area as planned.

During test, it had reached 30 kms in altitude at Mach 5.5-6 speed. The test successfully proved various parameters of flight vehicle, thus marking successful launch of Xingkong-2 and first flight of Chinese waverider.

The hypersonic waverider flight vehicle was designed by state-run China Academy of Aerospace Aerodynamics (CAAA) in collaboration with China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation. It can carry both conventional and nuclear warheads.

It has capability to penetrate any current generation anti-missile defence systems due to its high speed and unpredictable trajectory. As compared to it, current generation of anti-missile defence systems is mainly designed to intercept cruise and ballistic missiles which are either slower or easier to predict, making them possible to intercept. In addition to its military use, hypersonic waverider flight vehicle may also see civil use in the future.

- The test showed that China is advancing shoulder-to-shoulder with US and Russia in developing hypersonic waverider flight vehicle. China is expected to test this wave rider more frequently in future before being handed over for final deployment to People's Liberation Army (PLA).

KHANGCHENDZONGA BIOSPHERE RESERVE BECOMES 11TH BIOSPHERE RESERVE FROM INDIA

Why in News: The Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve has become the 11th Biosphere Reserve from India that has been included in the UNESCO designated World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR). The decision to include Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve in WNBR was taken at the 30th Session of International Coordinating Council (ICC) of Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme of UNESCO held at Palembang, Indonesia, from July 23-27, 2018.

Important Points:

India has 18 Biosphere Reserves and with the inclusion of Khangchendzonga, the number of internationally designated WNBR has become 11, with 7 Biosphere Reserves being domestic Biosphere Reserves.

Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve is a National Park and a Biosphere Reserve located in Sikkim, India. The park is named after the mountain Kangchenjunga, which with a height of 8,586 metres (28,169 ft), is the third-highest peak in the world.

The Biosphere Reserve is one of the highest ecosystems in the world, reaching elevations of 1, 220 metres above sea-level. It includes a range of ecotones, varying from sub-tropical to Arctic, as well as natural forests in different biomes, which support an immensely rich diversity of forest types and habitats.

The core zone - Khangchendzonga National Park was designated as a World Heritage Site in 2016 under the 'mixed' category.

- The core zone of this biosphere reserve alone has over 150 glaciers and 73 glacial lakes, the prominent is famous 26-km-long Zemu glacier. It is also home to number of globally threatened fauna including musk deer, snow leopard, red panda and Himalayan Tahr and many ethnic communities including Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepalese.
- Over 118 species of large number of medicinal plants are found in Dzongu Valley of this reserve which are of ethno-medical utility. The transition zone of reserve is targeted for eco-development activities, afforestation, plantation of medicinal herbs and soil conservation measures.

Biosphere reserves:

Launched in 1971, UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) is an Intergovernmental Scientific Programme that aims to establish a scientific basis for the improvement of relationships between people and their environments.

MAB combines the natural and social sciences, economics and education to improve human livelihoods and the equitable sharing of benefits, and to safeguard natural and managed ecosystems, thus promoting innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate, and environmentally sustainable.

Its World Network of Biosphere Reserves currently counts more than 600 sites in 122 countries all over the world, including 20 transboundary sites.

The first of India's reserves to make it to UNESCO's list was Tamil Nadu's Niligiri Biosphere Reserve in 2000.

Protection is granted not only to the flora and fauna of the protected region, but also to the human communities who inhabit these regions, and their ways of life.

BIOSPHERE RESERVES- DEFINITION:

A Biosphere Reserve is a unique and representative ecosystem of terrestrial and coastal areas which are internationally recognized, within the framework of UNESCO's Man and Biosphere (MAB) programme. The biosphere reserve should fulfill the following three objectives:

- In-situ conservation of biodiversity of natural and semi-natural ecosystems and landscapes.

- Contribution to sustainable economic development of the human population living within and around the Biosphere Reserve.
- Provide facilities for long term ecological studies, environmental education and training and research and monitoring.

In order to fulfill the above objectives, the Biosphere Reserves are classified into zones like the core area, buffer area. The system of functions is prescribed for each zone.

Man & Biosphere Programme

UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme was launched in 1971 with aim of promoting interdisciplinary research, training, and communications in field of ecosystem conservation and rational use of natural resources. The programme is suited to respond to results of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and especially the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

WORLD BIO-FUEL DAY 2018

Why in News: World Bio-fuel Day (The International Biodiesel Day) is observed every year on August 10 to create awareness about the importance of non-fossil fuels i.e. Green Fuels or Bio-fuels an alternative to conventional fossil fuels. Bio-fuels are renewable, biodegradable, sustainable and environment friendly fuel. It can be seen as alternative to conventional fossil fuels.

In India, World Biofuel Day is being observed by the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas. This year it had organized World Biofuel Day programme at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi. It had conducted separate interactive sessions on ethanol, bio-diesel, bio-CNG and 2nd Generation biofuels.

Important Points:

The biofuels programme is in synergy with Government's other initiatives for Make in India, Swachh Bharat and doubling farmers' income by 2022. Government's major interventions in this sector includes administrative price mechanism for ethanol, simplifying procurement procedures of OMCs, amending provisions of Industries (Development & Regulation) Act, 1951 and enabling lignocellulosic route for ethanol procurement.

- Considering benefits of biofuels in reducing import dependency on crude oil, as clean environment fuel and generating additional income to farmers and employment generation in rural areas, Government has undertaken number of initiatives such as biofuels programme and increasing blending of biofuels etc.
- Oil PSUs are also planning to set up 12 Second Generation (2G) Bio-refineries to augment ethanol supply and address environmental issues arising out of burning of agricultural biomass especially in North India. Government also has approved National Policy on Biofuels-2018 in June 2018. It aims at reaching 20% ethanol-blending and 5% biodiesel-blending by year 2030.

It also has expanded scope of feedstock for ethanol production and has provided for incentives for production of advanced biofuels. Government also has increased price of C-heavy molasses-based ethanol to boost to Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP). It also has fixed price of B-heavy molasses-based ethanol and sugarcane juice-based ethanol for the first time at Rs. 47.40.

It also has reduced GST on ethanol for blending in fuel from 18% to 5%. Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas is making all efforts to increase ethanol supply for petrol and has taken several steps in this direction.

Ethanol blending in petrol has increased from 38 crore litres in the ethanol supply year 2013-14 to an estimated 141 crore litres in the ethanol supply year 2017-18.

Bio-diesel blending in the country started from 10th August, 2015 and in the year 2018-19, Oil Marketing Companies have allocated 7.6 crore litres of biodiesel.

Background:

On 10 August 1893, Sir Rudolph Diesel, inventor of the diesel engine, for the first time successfully ran mechanical engine with Peanut Oil.

- His research experiment had predicted that vegetable oil is going to replace the fossil fuels in the next century to fuel different mechanical engines.
- Thus, to mark this extraordinary achievement, World Bio-fuel Day is observed every year on 10 August.

BEGGING IN DELHI NO MORE A CRIMINAL OFFENCE: DELHI HIGH COURT

Why in News: Delhi High Court has declared 25 sections of Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 which have been extended to Delhi, as "unconstitutional". With this, it has struck down legal provision criminalising begging in national capital. The court's order came on PILs which had sought decriminalisation of begging in capital and beggar by challenging provisions of the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act. The PILs had argued that poverty can never be crime and if a person is destitute and begs for living, such person cannot be treated as criminal.

Important Points:

Currently, there is no central law on begging and destitution and most states have adopted the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959, which criminalises begging.

The Act prescribes a penalty of more than three years of jail in case of first conviction for begging and a beggar can be ordered to be detained for 10 years in subsequent conviction.

The provisions that treat begging as an offence or deal with ancillary issues like power of officers to deal with this offence "are unconstitutional and are struck down".

The court observed that people beg on streets not because they wish to, but because they need to. Begging is their last resort to subsistence as they have no other means to survive. It also held that begging is symptom of disease, of fact that person has fallen through socially created net.

Government has mandate to provide social security for everyone, to ensure that all citizens have basic facilities and presence of beggars is evidence that state has not managed to provide these to all its citizens.

Criminalising begging violates most fundamental rights of some of most vulnerable people in our society. People in this stratum do not have access to basic necessities such as food, shelter and health, and in addition, criminalising them denies them the basic fundamental right to communicate and seek to deal with their plight. State can bring in alternative legislation to curb rackets of forced begging, after undertaking an empirical examination on the sociological and economic aspects of the matter.

Background:

The Bombay Prevention of Begging Act prescribes penalty of more than 3 years of jail in case of first conviction for begging and person can be ordered to be detained for 10 years in subsequent conviction. At present, there is no central law on begging and destitution but most states have adopted Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959. This law functions as derivative figure for all state anti-begging laws. 20 States and two Union Territories have either enacted their own legislations or adopted legislations enacted by other State.

BILL TO ALLOW PROXY VOTING BY NRIS PASSED BY LOK SABHA

Why in News: Lok Sabha has passed Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 2017 to extend the facility of 'proxy voting' to overseas Indians, on the lines of service voters. The Bill seeks to amend Representation of People Act (RPA), 1950 and Representation of People Act (RPA), 1951 to allow for proxy voting and make certain provisions of these Acts gender-neutral.

Important Points:

The Bill proposes to allow non-resident Indians (NRIs) to emerge as a decisive force in the country's electoral politics on their own terms. The amendment paves the way to remove an "unreasonable restriction" posed by Section 20A of the Representation of the People Act, which requires overseas electors to be physically present in their electoral constituencies to cast their votes.

According to rough estimates, there are about 1 crore Indians settled abroad, of which 60 lakh may be within eligible voting age. By granting them proxy voting rights, overseas Indians will be able to exercise franchise during elections and also need not to spend foreign currency to come to India during elections. Moreover, this decision will also enable overseas Indian to considerably sway in election results, especially in states such as Punjab, Kerala and Gujarat where a number of expats hail from.

Section 20A of the Act provides for registration and inclusion of overseas electors in the electoral rolls. The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 provide for overseas electors to register themselves in the electoral rolls of their respective constituencies on the basis of self-attested copies of their passport

and valid visa, and exercise their franchise in person on production of the original passport at the time of voting at the specified polling booth.

- Thus, the rules demand for the physical presence of overseas electors in their respective polling stations in India on the day of polling. This causes hardship to the overseas electors. This amendment proposes facilitating an external mode of voting, that is, voting by proxy, whereby such electors can exercise their franchise from their places of residence abroad.

If the Bill is passed, overseas voters can appoint a proxy to cast their votes on their behalf, subject to certain conditions to be laid down in the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961. This would considerably mitigate the difficulties presently faced by overseas electors in exercising their franchise.

What is voting by proxy?

According to the provisions of 'Representation of the People Act (Amendment) Bill, 2017 overseas Indians, who are entitled to vote in India, can appoint a proxy voter to cast their votes on their behalf. Also, the overseas Indians would be allowed to use the option of proxy, which till now was only available to service personnel.

Drawbacks of the proxy voters:

It threatens the very core of democracy as the special treatment violets the fact that there are many times more domestic migrants who also seek to have a voting right at their homes.

The proxy voter may cast vote for the candidate who is not desired by oversea Indians.

There can be no guarantee of NRI voters exercising their vote in a free and fair manner as there can be no check on coercion or inducement by the employers.

There is no guarantee that votes would not be sold to the so called proxy.

There is no fixed number of votes a proxy could cast in an election.

ONE DISTRICT ONE PRODUCT (EK ZILA - EK UT PADAN) SCHEME

Why in News: Uttar Pradesh government had recently organized 'One District One Product' Summit to promote traditional industries in every district of the state.

Important Points:

- ODOP is aimed at giving a major push to traditional industries synonymous with the respective districts of the state.
- The objective of the ODOP is to optimise production, productivity and income, preservation and development of local crafts, promotion of art, improvement in product quality and skill development.

Under this, one product indigenous to every district would be showcased at the three-day UP Diwas event. This will boost economic development of the state, and also help in generation of five lakh new jobs annually.

The ODOP Summit is stated to be the first of its kind in the country and is expected to give a big boost to the MSME and handicraft in the state.

The summit, which aims to give boost to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME), will be a corollary of the UP Investors Summit held in the state capital in February this year, followed by the groundbreaking ceremony for the launch of 81 projects in July.

UP is uniquely famous for product-specific traditional industrial hubs across 75 districts, including Varanasi (Banarasi silk sari), Bhadohi (carpet), Lucknow (chikan), Kanpur (leather goods), Agra (leather footwear), Aligarh (locks), Moradabad (brassware), Meerut (sports goods) and Saharanpur (wooden products).

Background:

ODOP is basically a Japanese business development concept, which gained prominence in 1979. It is aimed at promoting a competitive and staple product from a specific area to push sales and improve the standard of living of the local population. Over time, it has been replicated in other Asian countries as well.

CENTRAL SILK BOARD NOTIFIES RECENTLY DEVELOPED RACES OF SILK WORM SEED

Why in News: Central Silk Board (CSB) has notified recently developed races of silkworm seed of mulberry and Vanya silk for increasing the productivity of cocoons and to increase the income of the farmers engaged in sericulture.

Important Points:

- Tropical Tasar Silkworm (BDR-10) race developed by the CSB have 21% more productivity than the traditional Daba breed. Farmers can get upto 52 kg cocoons per 100 disease free layings (dfis).
- Thissilkworm breed will help the tribal farmers of Jharkhand, Chattishgarh, Odisha, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Maharastra, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh.

- Multivoltine x Bivoltine Mulberry hybrid (PM x FC2) race of silkworm can produce 60 kg per 100 Dfls and the race is better than earlier race PM x CSR. Due to high quality silk and significant egg recovery, this race is suitable for the farmers of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Maharastra.

Eri Silkworm (C2) race has been found better than local breed and it can produce 247 numbers of Eri cocoons per 100 Dfls. This race is suitable for the farmers in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Maharastra, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.

Silk worm breeds for specific agro-climatic condition are essential for increasing the productivity of cocoons. The recently notified silkworm races will improve the income of the farmers by its enhanced productivity and quality.

CSB:

Central Silk Board (CSB) is a Statutory body established in 1948 by an Act of Parliament. It is working under the administrative control of Ministry of Textiles, Government of India.

SEBI PANEL RECOMMENDS SEEKING POWERS TO TAP PHONE CALLS

Why in News: A committee on fair market conduct has suggested that market regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), should seek powers to tap telephones and other electronic communication devices to check insider trading and other frauds.

Currently, SEBI has the power to only ask for call records, which includes numbers called and the duration of calls made. If the recommendation is implemented, SEBI will be able to listen in on the calls, as well as intercept other forms of electronic communication.

Recommendations of the TK Viswanathan Committee

- The committee says, "Currently there are several methods of electronic communication apart from telephone calls which are fairly widely used..., interception of electronic communication should also be covered in the powers being sought".
- The committee suggested a series of changes in rules on market frauds, insider trading, surveillance and investigations. The regulator should seek direct access instead through an enforcement agency. The powers should be equivalent to those given to other regulatory agencies such as the Central Board of Direct Taxes to deal with economic offences. SEBI should sign a Memorandum of Understanding with enforcement bodies like Income Tax Department, Economic Offences Wing, Reserve Bank of India, Enforcement Directorate and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. It suggested easier regulations for disclosure of trades and it should apply only to promoters, directors and designated persons. The regulations against frauds should also cover all market participants and their employees as well as agents of intermediaries. It recommended on need for brokers to self-certify compliance of algorithms and implementation of 'Model Risk Checks for Algo Trading' It suggested a two-tiered approach for investigation and enforcement, wherein sensitive cases and matters involving large-cap companies should be handled by designated SEBI officials in a fast-track manner, while regular cases shall be handled by other SEBI officials in the normal course. It recommended for the inclusion of definitions for the terms 'Financial Literacy', an important eligibility condition for a compliance officer. It recommended that trading done by an entity in excess of its financial sources should be deemed to be fraudulent, if such trading leads to any manipulation in the price or volume of the security.
- It recommended mandatory whistle-blower policies at listed firms and the companies should maintain details of immediate relatives of designated persons who might deal with price-sensitive information.

- It recommended the inclusion of a new sub-section within the SEBI Act, 1992, that prohibits devices, schemes or artifices employed for manipulating the books of accounts or financial statements of a listed company.
 - The report also made a number of recommendations on insider trading. It suggested the creation of two separate codes of conduct:
 - One would set minimum standards on dealing with insider information by listed companies.
 - The other would set standards for market intermediaries, auditors, accountancy firms, law firms and consultants who are handling price-sensitive information.
- The 'Prohibition of Insider Trading Regulations' may be amended to have these two separate codes.

About SEBI:

The TK Viswanathan Committee recommended amendments to SEBI Act,1992; SEBI (Prohibition of Insider Trading) Regulations, 2015; and SEBI (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices relating to Securities Markets) Regulations, 2003.

Much of the recommendations came in the wake of several high-profile cases being probed by SEBI and other agencies where relatives of senior executives at listed companies have come under scanner.

These cases include those related to ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Axis Bank and Tata Motors where sensitive financial information got leaked over WhatsApp before their formal announcement.

CABINET APPROVES AMENDMENTS IN INSTANT TRIPLE TALAQ BILL

Why in News: The Union cabinet approved an amendment in the yet-to-be-passed instant triple talaq bill, making it permissible for a magistrate to give bail for the offence.

Changes in the triple Talaq Bill- The Cabinet made three amendments to the triple talaq law:

One: provision for bail:

While the proposed law will remain "non-bailable" offence, the accused can approach a magistrate even before the trial to seek bail. Under a non-bailable offence, bail cannot be granted by police at the police station. A provision has been added to allow the magistrate to grant bail 'after hearing the wife'. "But the offence of instant triple talaq under the proposed law remains non-bailable.

- The magistrate would ensure that bail is granted only after the husband agrees to grant compensation to the wife as provided in the bill. The quantum of compensation will be decided by the magistrate, as per the bill.

Two- check misuse:

Another amendment makes it clear that the police would lodge FIR only if approached by the victim (wife), her blood relations or people who become her relatives by virtue of her marriage. This would settle fears that even a neighbour can file FIR as is the cases in any cognisable offence. This would check misuse.

Third- A compoundable offence:

The third amendment makes the offence of instant triple talaq "compoundable". Now, a magistrate can use his powers to settle the dispute between a husband and his wife. Under a compoundable offence, both parties have the liberty of withdrawing the case. However, the jail term for a Muslim man who resorts to triple talaq remains three years and only a magistrate, and not a local police officer, can release the accused on bail. **GUST-2018**

Background:

In December, the Lok Sabha passed the Muslim Women (Protection Bill, 2017), which criminalises the practice of talaq-e-bidda. This came after the Supreme Court on August 22, 2017, struck down triple talaq, calling the Islamic practice unconstitutional.

What did the original Bill include?

If a Muslim man resorts to triple talaq then he will face a jail term of three years, as instant triple talaq will now be considered a non-bailable, cognisable offence.

Opting for triple talaq could also attract fine and the amount would be the magistrate's call who would be hearing the case.

A Muslim wife can also approach a magistrate and ask for subsistence allowance for herself and her minor children.

- A victim of triple talaq can seek the custody of her minor children from the magistrate who will take the final decision on the issue. Only Jammu and Kashmir will be out of the ambit of the proposed law.

What is the concept of Triple Talaq as per Islamic Law?

- Among Muslims, marriage is treated as a social contract and the Muslim Sharia (Islamic Law) provides the ways to terminate marriage in the form talaq.
- The term 'talaq' means 'freeing or undoing the knot', referring to a divorce.
- Triple talaq is basically a process of Divorce wherein the husband pronounces three talaqs upon wife, one in each menstrual cycle, only to ensure that she is not pregnant.

Islamic countries which have already banned the practice of triple talaq:

10 Islamic countries have already banned the practise of instant triple talaq including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Morocco, Tunisia, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan even have penal provisions like jail for one year for husbands who pronounce 'talaq' thrice at once.

DELHI POLICE GETS INDIA'S FIRST ALL-WOMEN SWAT TEAM

Why in News: Delhi Police inducted an all-woman Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team comprising 36 commandos, the first-ever by any police force in India, for anti-terrorist operations. The elite women commandos, hailing from north-eastern states, will be deployed at strategic locations for securing the upcoming Independence Day celebrations.

The 36 women SWAT commandos have undergone a rigorous 15-month training programme that includes basic, commando and advanced honing of skills under the tutelage of National Security Guard trainers.

Important Points:

The all-woman SWAT team was inducted after rigorous training of around 15 months from specialists all across India and abroad. It comprises 36 women commandos from northeastern states (13 members from Assam, 5 from Arunachal Pradesh, 5 from Sikkim, 5 from Manipur, 4 from Meghalaya, 2 from Nagaland and 1 from Mizoram and Tripura each).

- They have undergone training to handle urban situations as well as jungle operations. They are also well-versed in Israeli Krav Maga, an unarmed combat style. Their expertise includes unarmed combat, ambush and counter-ambush and urban operations like building interventions, vehicle intervention and VVIP security.
- They are skilled at using weaponry like MP5 submachine guns and Glock-21 pistols. They will be deployed at strategic locations in Central and South Delhi as well as Red Fort and India Gate during Independence Day and Republic day celebrations.

These commandos will be stationed at strategic locations in central and south Delhi. Amidst intel inputs of women fidayeens planning to target the capital, this all-women unit would helm the security apparatus around Red Fort and India Gate as well. Many of them would be posted in anti-terror vans called Parakram.

The women are trained to handle challenges unique to the capital-like climbing multi-storey buildings or carrying out hostage rescue operations at hotels, buses or metro. The formation of this team is being considered a big achievement as most western countries do not have all-women SWAT teams due to the kind of training required to become one.

12 AUGUST : INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY

Why in News: Since 2000, every Year International Youth Day is celebrated on 12 August to recognise the efforts of the world's youth in enhancing global society and to draw an attention regarding cultural and legal surrounding youngsters. Also, this is the way to promote the ways to engage youngsters in making positive contributions to their communities.

The theme of International Youth Day 2018 is Safe Spaces for Youth and in 2017 was Youth Building peace.

Important Points:

It aims to highlight need of safe spaces where youth can come together, engage in activities related to their diverse needs and interests, participate in decision making processes and freely express themselves. The theme supports 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, emphasizes need for provision of space towards inclusive and sustainable urbanization.

- There is a necessity for the Youth to come together, engage in activities with diverse needs and interests, participate in the decision making process and freely express themselves. But for this youth need safe spaces like civic spaces which enable youth to engage in governance issues; public space to participate in sports and other leisure activities in the community; digital spaces to interact virtually across borders with everyone; well planned physical spaces that can help to accommodate the needs of youth especially suffering from any kind of violence etc.

International Youth Day (IYD)

It was instituted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) by passing resolution 54/120 in December 1999. It was first observed on 12 August, 2000. The day was instituted by UNHA on the recommendation made by the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth held in Lisbon (Portugal) from 8 to 12 August 1998. The first IYD was observed on 12 August, 2000.

Background:

There are currently 1.8 billion young people between ages of 10 and 24 in the world. This is the largest youth population ever and world ins getting younger every day. As per census 2011, there are 364.66 million youngsters in the 10-24 age group in India. They constitute over 30% of the total population. This makes India one of the youngest nations of the world. But 1 in 10 of the world's children live in conflict zones and 24 million of them are out of school. Political instability, limited space for political and civic participation, labour market challenges have led to increasing isolation of youth in societies.

'MISSION TO TOUCH THE SUN,' PARKER

SOLAR PROBE HAS LAUNCHED

Why in News: NASA's Parker Solar Probe will explore the sun's atmosphere in a mission that launched. This is the agency's first mission to the sun and its outermost atmosphere, the corona. The probe successfully launched at 3:31 a.m. from Cape Canaveral, Florida, on a United Launch Alliance Delta IV Heavy rocket, one of the world's most powerful rockets. Although the probe itself is about the size of a car, a powerful rocket is needed to escape Earth's orbit, change direction and reach the sun. The launch window was chosen because the probe will rely on Venus to help it achieve an orbit around the sun.

Important Points:

- Parker Solar Probe, is the world's first-ever mission to touch the Sun. It will perform the closest-ever observations of a star when it travels through the Sun's outer atmosphere - called the corona.
- The car-sized spacecraft will travel directly into the Sun's atmosphere, about four million miles from its surface and more than seven times closer than any spacecraft has come before.

The mission is expected to unlock the mysteries of the star's fiery outer atmosphere and its effects on space weather during its seven-year long journey.

The overall cost of the mission is expected to be around 1.5 billion US dollars.

The solar probe was launched aboard United Launch Alliance Delta IV Heavy rocket.

Just under an hour after the launch, NASA confirmed that the spacecraft had successfully separated and the probe had been released into space.

The spacecraft is expected to fly past Venus in six weeks and make the first contact with the Sun six weeks after that.

In its seven-year mission, Parker Solar Probe will make six more Venus flybys and 24 total passes by the Sun, journeying steadily closer to the Sun until it makes its closest approach at 3.8 million miles.

At this point, the probe will be moving at roughly 430,000 miles per hour, setting the record of being the fastest human-made object ever.

The probe will dip inside the tenuous atmosphere, sampling conditions and getting to just 6.16 million km from the Sun's broiling surface.

It is expected to transmit its first science observations in December 2018.

The mission is named after astrophysicist Eugene Parker, 91, the physicist who first theorised the existence of the solar wind in 1958. It is the first space craft to be named after a living person.

A plaque dedicating the mission to Parker was attached to the spacecraft in May. It includes a quote from the renowned physicist - "Let's see what lies ahead."

It also holds a memory card containing more than 1.1 million names submitted by the public to travel with the spacecraft to the Sun.

What Is the Sun's Corona?

Our Sun is surrounded by a jacket of gases called an atmosphere. The corona is the outermost part of the Sun's atmosphere.

The corona is usually hidden by the bright light of the Sun's surface. That makes it difficult to see without using special instruments. However, the corona can be seen during a total solar eclipse.

Significance:

- The mission's findings will help researchers improve their forecasts of space weather events, which have the potential to damage satellites and harm astronauts on orbit, disrupt radio communications and, at their most severe, overwhelm power grids.

During the first week of its journey, the spacecraft will deploy its high-gain antenna and magnetometer boom.

It will also perform the first of a two-part deployment of its electric field antennas.

Instrument testing will begin in early September and last approximately four weeks, after which the probe will begin its science operations.

The probe carries four instrument suites designed to study magnetic fields, plasma and energetic particles and capture images of the solar wind.

Following are some of the mysteries that the probe aims to solve:

Why the Sun's outer atmosphere - corona is 300 times hotter than its surface, which is thousands of miles below?

What drives the supersonic solar wind - the constant stream of solar material that blows through the entire solar system?

What accelerates solar energetic particles, which can reach a speed of up to more than half the speed of light as they move away from the Sun?

Background

Parker Solar Probe is part of NASA's 'Living with a Star' program to explore aspects of the Sun-Earth system that directly affect life and society. The 'Living with a Star' program is managed by the agency's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, for NASA's Science Mission Directorate in Washington. The spacecraft has been designed and built by APL, which also operates it. The University of California, Berkeley, US Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and Princeton University in New Jersey lead the investigations.

EASE OF LIVING INDEX 2018

Why in News: The Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, Hardeep Singh Puri on August 13, 2018 announced the Top 10 cities rankings on Ease of Living Index 2018. Among the top 116 cities of the country, Kolkata was the only city which refused to participate in the survey. Pune emerged as the top-ranked city in the Ease of Living Index.

Top 10 cities mentioned in the Ease of Living Index

1. Pune
2. Navi Mumbai
3. Greater Mumbai
4. Tirupati
5. Chandigarh
6. Thane
7. Raipur
8. Indore
9. Vijaywada
10. Bhopal

There are 3 cities in the list below:

109. Patna
110. Kohima
111. Rampur

About the Ease of Living Index:

The Ease of Living Index is an initiative of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to help cities assess their liveability in relation to global and national benchmarks and encourage cities to move towards an 'outcome-based' approach to urban planning and management. The survey was planned in June 2017 and was launched in January 2018 by Minister Hardeep Singh Puri with the help of Goa Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar. Ease of Living framework comprises four pillars namely, Institutional, Social, Economic and Physical which are further broken down into 15 categories and 78 indicators. The Ease of Living assessment standards are closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and aim to provide a strong impetus to India's effort for systematic tracking progress of SDGs in the urban areas.

How are these cities ranked?

The easiest cities to live in are measured on a 100-point scale across 78 indicators on the following factors:

- Institutions and governance -- carrying 25 points
- Social infrastructure (education/health) -- carrying 25 points
- Economic factors -- carrying 5 points
- Physical infrastructure -- carrying 45 points

Metropolitan Cities In The Index

- Delhi has been ranked 65 in the Ease of Living Index while Chennai is at 14.
- Reportedly, Kolkata had refused to participate in the survey.

Important Points:

Maharashtra's Pune, Mumbai and Navi Mumbai rounded the top three of Ease of Living Index 2018, while Thane was ranked at the 6th spot.

The national capital New Delhi was placed at a 65th spot.

Tamil Nadu's Chennai was ranked at the 14th place.

The bottom 3 cities in the list are Rampur, Kohima and Patna.

Top 10 cities: Pillar Wise

Rank	Institutional	Social	Economic	Physical
1	Navi Mumbai	Tirupati	Chandigarh	Greater Mumbai
2	Tirupati	Tiruchi-rappalli	Ajmer	Pune
3	Karim Nagar	Navi Mum.	Kota	Thane
4	Hyderabad	Chandigarh	Indore	Chandigarh
5	Bilaspur	Pune	Tiruppur	Raipur
6	Kochi	Greater Mumbai	Itanagar	Tirupati
7	Ahmedabad	Amravati	Pune	Navi Mum.
8	Pune Bhopal	Vijayawada		Ludhiana
9	Vijayawada	Indore	Thane	Bilaspur
10	Vizag	Vasai Virar	Vijaywada	Vizag

RAILWAYS MINISTRY RELEASES

REPORT ON STATION CLEANLINESS

Why in News: Minister of Railways, Coal, Finance & Corporate Affairs, Piyush Goyal on August 13, 2018 released the Third Party Survey Report on Station Cleanliness. The survey was conducted by the Quality Council of India (QCI).

Important Points:

- The Third Party Audit-cum-Survey on station cleanliness covers 407 stations which include 75 stations in 'A1'; and 332 stations in 'A' category stations.
- The rankings depict that in A-1 category stations, two important tourist stations, that is, Jodhpur (1st place) and Jaipur (2nd place) of North Western Railway in Rajasthan have made their mark. Tirupati, which is another important religious station in South Central Railway, is placed at 3rd position in the rankings.

According to IANS report, New Delhi station has been ranked 39th, a position it had held last year too.

In A category stations, Marwar was placed at 1st position, followed by Phulera station at 2nd position. Both the stations are from North Western Railway in Rajasthan. The 3rd place goes to Warangal station of South Central Railway in Telangana.

Among 75 A1 category stations, Gwalior (73rd), Kalyan (74th) and Mathura Junction (75th) were placed at the bottom of the list.

Sasaram Junction (330th), Phaphund (331st) and Shahganj (332nd) were ranked dirtiest among 332 A category stations.

The cleanliness rankings of the stations is not only a reward for the stations that have performed well but also an impetus for further improvement for the ones that didn't make it to the top rankings.

The first survey was conducted by the IRCTC in 2016 by conducting interviews of passengers at the stations on various parameters of cleanliness and rating them on these bases. The second survey in 2017 was conducted by Quality Council of India.

What does the report suggest?

This is the third such audit cum survey which has been conducted by Railways to increase the level of cleanliness by identifying unclean spots/gaps

This survey is done to improve cleanliness standards and also to propel healthy competition among railway stations.

- The survey covered 407 stations which included 75 stations in the A1 category and 332 stations in A category.

Parameters Adopted In The Survey:

- Evaluation of Process of cleanliness in Parking
- Main entry area
- Main platform
- Waiting room
- Passenger feedback
- 24x7 control room was set up and images were geo-tagged to monitor progress

Further, there was a direct observation by QCI assessors of cleanliness in these areas.

Railway Stations In A1 Category:

Jodhpur

Jaipur

Tirupati

Railway Stations In A Category:

Along with Jodhpur, Marwar took the pole position in A category from North Western Railway in the cleanliness ranking

Phulera (a town in Rajasthan) came second in this category

Warangal (a city in Telangana) from South Central Railway zone came third

A1 and A category stations contribute to 80 per cent of the passenger revenue as per IANS report.

Which zone came first in the survey?

North Western Railway (NWR) secured the first rank in the ranking

South Central Railway (SCR) came second

East Coast Railway (ECR) scored the third position in the survey

Third Party Survey by QCI:

This is the third such audit cum survey which has been conducted by Railways to increase level of cleanliness by identifying unclean spots, improve cleanliness standards and propel healthy competition among railway stations.

- The survey was conducted by Quality Council of India (QCI) with the help of their partners.

For the purpose of survey and audit, QCI trained and deployed 160 assessors to ensure quality and consistenc

- QCI deployed 2 persons on each station for 2 days and the Central team consisted for 3 persons for 25 days. Thus, a total of 1628 maydays were deployed.
- A 24x7 control room was set up and images were geo-tagged to monitor progress.
- The parameters adopted for conducting the survey were: Evaluation of Process of cleanliness in parking, main entry area, main platform, waiting room (33.33 percent); direct observation by QCI assessors of cleanliness in these areas (33.33 percent) and passenger feedback (33.33 percent).
- However, any observer on the ground can monitor only a tiny part of the forest. There are only about hundred plots used for research and a few tower sites for long-term monitoring of the Amazon forests. The research team used high-resolution maps derived from the Geoscience Laser Altimeter System aboard the Ice, Cloud, and land Elevation Satellite (ICESat). These data reveal changes in canopy structure, including leaf damage and gaps.
- The researchers found that following drought, fallen trees, defoliation and canopy damage produced a significant loss in canopy height. The most severely impacted region declined an average of about 0.88 metres in the year after the drought, they said. Less severely affected regions of the forest declined less, but all continued to decline steadily throughout the remaining years of the data record.

AMAZON DROUGHTS REDUCING FOREST'S CO2 ABSORPTION: NASA

Why in News: A single season of drought in the Amazon rainforest can reduce its capacity to absorb carbon dioxide for years after the rains return, a NASA study has found. The study, published in the journal Nature, is the first to quantify the long-term legacy of drought in Amazon, the largest tropical forest on Earth.

Important Points:

Researchers from NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in the US, and other institutions used satellite data to map tree damage and mortality caused by a severe drought in 2005.

In years of normal weather, the undisturbed forest can be a natural carbon "sink," absorbing more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than it puts back into it.

However, starting with the drought year of 2005 and running through 2008 - the last year of available data - the Amazon basin lost an average of 270 million metric tonnes per year of carbon, with no sign of regaining its function as a carbon sink.

At about 2.3 million square miles, the Amazon is the largest tropical forest on Earth.

Scientists estimate that it absorbs as much as one-tenth of human fossil fuel emissions during photosynthesis.

If trees eventually survive defoliation, this damages their capacity to absorb carbon while under stress. Observers on the ground also notice that droughts tend to disproportionately kill tall trees first. Without adequate rainfall, these giants can not pump water more than 100 feet up from their roots to their leaves. They die from dehydration and eventually fall to the ground, leaving gaps in the forest canopy far overhead.

72nd INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA

Why in News: India on August 15, 2018 celebrated its 72nd Independence Day by paying tribute to its previous leaders and freedom fighters. The Day witnessed the unfurling of the National flag at Red Fort in Delhi by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. On the eve of 72nd Independence Day, President Ram Nath Kovind addressed the nation and called for creative thinking in governance that enables fast-track development and ensures social harmony.

India gained its independence from British Rule on August 15, 1947.

Important Points:

The three announcements made by the prime minister in the 82-minute speech include:

First, in the year 2022, before the completion of 75 years of independence, India will send Gaganyaan with a human mission in space and it will become the fourth country in the world to do so.

- **Second, women will be given permanent commission equal to men in the armed forces.**
- Last one, Ayushman Bharat Scheme will be started from September 25, in order to give free health cover up to Rs 5 lakh to the, 100 million poor families.
- **India's spacecraft in space - Gaganayan: Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced in his address given by the Red Fort on Independence Day that by year 2022, there will be an Indian in Gaganyan, in space. The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) has expressed its commitment on this announcement of the Prime Minister.**

In his address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "We have dreamed that in the year 2022, on the occasion of completion of independence or before that, any of India's children, whether son or daughter, will go into space. When we will take the Gaganyans, including humans, and when this Gaganyan will go into space and some Indians will take it, then we will become the fourth country in the world to deliver human beings in space".

Permanent Commission for Women in Armed Forces: Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a special commission for women on the occasion of Independence Day, giving them permanent commission in the army. According to the Prime Minister, now women officers appointed through the Short Service Commission in the Indian Armed Forces will be able to get permanent employment by taking the same examination as male equivalent officers.

Till now, only in the Air Force, women are allowed to fly fighter aircraft as a deployment on the battle front. In the Armed Forces, women officers are given permanent commission only in non-warrior branches.

Jan Arogya Yojna: Addressing from the ramparts of the Red Fort, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a big announcement in the health sector for the country. While announcing Jan Swasthya Yojana, the Prime Minister said that the plan will be implemented on September 25, the birth anniversary of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay. The Prime Minister said that this scheme will benefit the 10 crore families of the country, under which treatment facilities upto five lakh rupees will be provided.

- **National Health Security Scheme -Ayushman India.** Health insurance of Rs 5 lakhs will be provided to every family coming under the National Health Protection Scheme (Ayushman India).
- **Before and after hospitalization the scheme has been included in the scheme.**
- **Every member of the family will get benefits under National Health Protection Scheme.**
- **Women, men, children and old people can be beneficiaries of this plan.**
The plan will be completely cashless. Payment will be done by the center and the state government. The central government will bear 60 percent and the state government will spend 40 percent.

How is Independence Day celebrated in India?

Every year, India celebrates Independence Day on 15 August at Red Fort.

The Army, Navy and Air Force march across the fort while school children perform for dignitaries and audience present.

President of India gives a speech every year in order to "Address to the Nation" on the evening of a day before the Independence Day.

The Prime Minister of India hoists the Indian flag on the Red Fort, Delhi.

After the flag hoisting, National Anthem song is sung and twenty-one gun shots are fired to salute and honour the Indian flag and solemn occasion.

The Prime Minister highlights over all the achievements of past year, important social issues and solutions, further development in the country.

Significance of 15 August:

On this day, the UK Parliament passed the Indian Independence Act, 1947 and transferred the legislative sovereignty to the Indian Constituent Assembly.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, hoisted the Indian flag at the Lahori Gate in Red Fort, New Delhi on this day, 71 years ago.

- **Lord Mountbatten insisted to observe August 15 as the Independence Day of India as this day is also celebrated for the victory of British allied force over Japan during World War II.**

'PITCH TO MOVE' FOR STARTUPS

Why in News: NITI Aayog has launched "Pitch to MOVE" - a mobility pitch competition that aims to provide budding entrepreneurs of India a unique opportunity to pitch their business ideas to a distinguished jury. Startups working in the various fields of mobility can pitch their ideas to industry leaders and Venture Capitalists for raising investments. Winners of the event will be felicitated by Hon'ble PM during the Global Mobility Summit.

Objective:

The competition aims to identify and reward the startups offering innovative solutions for shared, connected and environment-friendly mobility.

The objective is to harness the latest disruption for generating employment and growth in the country.

About 'Pitch to MOVE':

The mobility pitch competition is open primarily to startups from various parts of India who are interested in showcasing their business ideas to jury members.

The startups can be from the domain of public mobility, electric vehicles, shared transport, last mile connectivity, passenger transportation, battery technology, automotive IoT, freight & logistics, powertrain/drivetrain, experiential, travel, mobility infrastructure and automotive electronics.

It is being organised by NITI Aayog in collaboration with Invest India and Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) as a part of a series of engaging featured events in the run up to the main summit.

The Global Mobility Summit 2018 is scheduled to be held from September 7-8, 2018 at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi.

The event will involve two rounds:

Round 1: Call for Applications

The applications to participate in the event can be submitted between August 12- 23.

The interested participants can fill out a detailed application about their startup on the website-mobilitypitch.movesummit.in.

- The applications will be screened by experts from the industry and selected candidates will be called for the next round.

Round 2: The Final Pitch

- The second and final round will be held on September 4, 2018 in New Delhi.
- The participants selected in Round 1 will be called to pitch in front of a Jury in New Delhi.
- The participants will be judged on various parameters and finally 3 startups will be chosen as winners.

INDIA'S 1ST GENETIC BANK FOR WILDLIFE

CONSERVATION INAUGURATED

Why in News: Country's first genetic resource bank, which could have far reaching implications in conservation and revival of extinct and endangered species in the near future, was inaugurated at Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology's (CCMB) Laboratory of Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES) facility in Hyderabad, Telanagana.

National Wildlife Genetic Resource Bank and inaugurated by Union Minister for Science and Technology and Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Dr. Harsh Vardhan, the genetic bank will cryopreserve living cell lines, gametes and embryos of endangered wild animal species in India.

About National Wildlife Genetic Resource Bank:

It is equipped with sophisticated equipment to preserve the genetic resources that could be utilised to virtually resurrect an animal species in case it goes extinct.

It will cryopreserve living cell lines, gametes and embryos of endangered wild animal species in India. For cryogenic preservation, researchers at CCMB-LaCONES will use liquid Nitrogen that is cooled down to as low as minus 195 degrees Celsius.

It will aid wild life conservation efforts by taking up artificial reproduction, conducting studies in evolution biology and wildlife medicine. Thus, it will also help in protecting India's biodiversity and environment. So far this bank has collected and preserved genetic resources of 23 species of Indian wild animals.

The CCMB-LaCONES is the only laboratory in India that has developed methods for collection and cryopreservation of semen and oocytes from wildlife and successfully reproducing blackbuck, spotted deer and pigeons. The operating costs for maintaining such a genetic resource bank at CCMB-LaCONES will be around Rs 1 crore a year.

Background:

To develop this facility, CCMB researchers had conducted detailed study of Frozen Zoo, San Diego Zoo, US, which is considered as world's largest and most diverse genetic bank of living cell cultures, oocytes, sperms and embryos of extinct and endangered species. CCMB-LaCONES is only laboratory in India that has developed methods for collection and cryopreservation of semen and oocytes from wild animals and successfully reproducing blackbuck, spotted deer and pigeons. LaCONES has developed universal DNA based marker for identification of wild animals from parts and remains. It also has DNA banking of more than 250 species of mammals, birds and reptiles.

KEY MILESTONES IN ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE'S POLITICAL JOURNEY

Why in News: Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee passed away at 05:05 pm on August 16, 2018 following a prolonged illness at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi. He was 93. Vajpayee was admitted in AIIMS on June 11, 2018.

Vajpayee will be accorded a state funeral at Smriti Sthal, Delhi at 4 pm on August 17, 2018. According to reports, the Urban Development Ministry has allotted approximately 1.5 acres of land for his memorial.

A seven-day national mourning has been announced by the Central Government as a mark of respect for the former Prime Minister. During this period, the national flag will be flown at half-mast throughout India.

Important Points:

Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the first non-Congress Prime Minister to serve a full five-year term. Vajpayee served three terms as the Prime Minister of India. He served the first term in 1996 for just 13 days. During his second term in 1998-1999, he served for 13 months. In his final and third term, he served the nation for full five years from 1999-2004.

AUGUST-2018

Vajpayee was among the founding members of the erstwhile Bharatiya Jana Sangh which he also headed from 1968 to 1972. In 1975, Vajpayee was arrested along with several other opposition leaders during the

Internal Emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of the Indian National Congress party. He was in jail till 1977. Following Janata Party's victory in the 1977 General Elections, he became the Minister of External Affairs in Prime Minister Morarji Desai's cabinet.

The Janata Party was dissolved in 1979 soon after Morarji Desai resigned as the Prime Minister. Following the collapse of the Janata government, Vajpayee restructured the Jana Sangh into the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980. Vajpayee joined many of his Bharatiya Jana Sangh and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh colleagues particularly LK Advani and Bhairon Singh Shekhawat to form the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He became the BJP's first President. Vajpayee served as the Prime Minister of India between 1996 and 2004 in three non-consecutive terms. He served the first term in 1996 for just 13 days. During his second term in 1998-1999, he served for 13 months. In his final and third term, he served the nation for full five years from 1999-2004.

In December 2005, Vajpayee announced his retirement from active politics.

Vajpayee's early political career:

He was quite active in political affairs since his young age. His activism started with Arya Kumar Sabha of Gwalior, the youth wing of the Arya Samaj, of which he became the general secretary in 1944.

He joined the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as a swayamsevak in 1939.

In August 1942, he and his elder brother Prem were arrested for 23 days during the Quit India Movement.

In 1948, the RSS was banned for its alleged role in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

In 1951, he was enrolled to work for the newly formed Bharatiya Jana Sangh, a right-wing political party associated with the RSS. He was appointed as a National Secretary of the party and soon became a follower of party leader Syama Prasad Mukherjee.

In 1954, Vajpayee was with Mukherjee when he went on a fast-unto-death in Kashmir to protest against inferior treatment of non-Kashmiri Indian visitors. It was during the fast that Mukherjee died.

Key happenings during the premierships of Atal Bihari Vajpayee:

Pokhran-II nuclear tests

In May, 1998 India conducted five underground nuclear tests - Pokhran-II, following the Pokhran-I test of 1974. These tests established India as a nuclear weapons power, although it also resulted in the imposition of limited sanctions by the US, UK, Canada and other nations.

Kargil War

The 73-day Kargil War, fought during May - July 1999, had started with the reports that intruders from Pakistan had come deep inside Indian Territory in strategic positions that overlooked the only road link between Srinagar and Leh.

In response, the Indian armed forces launched Operation Vijay, mobilising almost 200000 troops. On July 14, 1999, the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee declared Operation Vijay a success. On July 26, 1999, the Indian Army successfully took back control of posts stationed at strategic positions.

Terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament

On December 13, 2001, a group of masked armed men with fake IDs stormed the Indian Parliament building in Delhi.

The terrorists managed to kill several security guards, but the building was sealed off swiftly and security forces cornered and killed the men, who were later proven to be Pakistan nationals. The terrorist attack was thought to be conducted by Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorists.

Prime Minister Vajpayee ordered the mobilisation of India's military forces and over 500000 army personnel were stationed along the international boundary bordering Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Kashmir.

Gujarat violence

On February 27, 2002, the Sabarmati Express train was attacked at Godhra by a Muslim mob. The Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya were killed in the attack. Lasting for over a month, the riots claimed the lives of more than 1000 people, mostly Muslims.

Vajpayee officially condemned the violence; however, later he made controversial remarks: "Wherever there are Muslims, they do not want to live in peace with others. Instead of living peacefully, they want to propagate their religion by creating terror in the minds of others."

Vajpayee was accused of doing nothing to stop the violence. He later admitted his mistake in underestimating the violence and not doing enough to stop it.

About Vajpayee:

Vajpayee was born on December 25, 1924 in Gwalior. He did his schooling from the Saraswati Shishu Mandir, Gorkhi, Bara, Gwalior and graduated from Gwalior's Victoria College (now Laxmi Bai College). He completed his post-graduation with an M.A. in Political Science from DAV College, Kanpur. He also worked for the newspapers of Deendayal Upadhyaya, Rashtradharm (a Hindi monthly), Panchjanya (a Hindi weekly) and the dailies 'Swadesh' and 'Veer Arjun'. He never married and has remained a bachelor his entire life.

Awards bestowed upon him

Padma Vibhushan in 1992

Lokmanya Tilak Award in 1994 by Government of India

Best Parliamentarian Award in 1994.

Bharat Ratna Pandit Govind Vallabh Pant Award in 1994

Bharat Ratna award in 2015

Apart from being active in politics, Atal Bihari Vajpayee was famous for his writing style. Some of his penned Autobiographies are:

Atal Bihari Vaj mem tina dasaka (1992)

Pradhanamantri Atala Bihari Vajapeyi, chune hue bhashana

- Values, vision & verses of Vajpayee: India's man of destiny
- India's foreign policy: New dimensions
- Assam problem: Repression no solution

2018 GLOBAL LIVEABILITY INDEX

Why in News: Austria's capital city ended Melbourne's record 7-year run atop the Economist Intelligence Unit's annual index, titled "The Global Liveability Report 2018" released by Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). The ranking considers 30 qualitative and quantitative factors to rank 140 cities in order of best living conditions. It is first time that European city has topped rankings of EIU annual survey.

Important Points:

10 most liveable cities' list includes Vienna, Austria (rank: 1st, with total score of 99.1), Melbourne, Australia (2nd, 98.4); Osaka, Japan (3rd, 97.7); Calgary, Canada (4th, 97.5); Sydney, Australia (5th, 97.4); Vancouver, Canada (6th, 97.3); Toronto, Canada (7th, 97.2); Tokyo, Japan (8th, 97.2); Copenhagen, Denmark (9th, 96.8); and Adelaide, Australia (96.6).

Three Canadian cities made it into top 10 viz. Vancouver, Toronto and Calgary. No Indian cities were ranked in the top ten or bottom ten of this edition of index. New Delhi had figured at 112th and Mumbai 117th position in list. South Asian cities were also ranked low in

The 10 least liveable cities are Dakar, Senegal (131st); Algiers, Algeria (132nd); Douala, Cameroon (133rd); Tripoli, Libya (134th); Harare, Zimbabwe (135th); Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (136th); Karachi, Pakistan (137th); Lagos, Nigeria (138th); Dhaka, Bangladesh (139th) and Damascus, Syria (140th).

Global Liveability Index

Global Liveability Index released by EIU compares world cities with each other in terms of security, affordability, education, healthcare, its urban lifestyle and infrastructure. It scores 140 major cities of the world on scale ranging from 0 (least liveable city) to 100 (most liveable city) based on these above parameters.

The ten most liveable cities in 2018

1. Vienna, Austria
2. Melbourne, Australia
3. Osaka, Japan
4. Calgary, Canada
5. Sydney, Australia
6. Vancouver, Canada

7. Tokyo, Japan
8. Toronto, Canada
9. Copenhagen, Denmark
10. Adelaide, Australia

The ten least liveable cities 2018

1. Damascus, Syria
2. Dhaka, Bangladesh
3. Lagos, Nigeria
4. Karachi, Pakistan
5. Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea
6. Harare, Zimbabwe
7. Tripoli, Libya
8. Douala, Cameroon
9. Algiers, Algeria
10. Dakar, Senegal

11th WORLD HINDI CONFERENCE

Why in News: The 11th World Hindi Conference, an event aimed at expanding the reach of the Hindi language at a global level, will begin in Mauritius from 18th to 20th August. Mauritius Prime Minister Praveen Kumar Jagannath will inaugurate the conference in Port Louis. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and other ministers are also reaching Port Louis to attend the event. This year the theme of the conference is "Hindi World and Indian Culture".

Important Points:

The conference provided common platform to several Hindi scholars, writers and laureates from different parts of the world to contribute language.

It was attended by delegates from India and various countries of the world.

They deliberated on eight subtopics on Hindi World and Indian Culture. It was for first time of the conference, representatives from all 29 states and Union Territories of Delhi, Chandigarh and Puducherry attended the conference.

Background

World Hindi Conference was started in 1975 to make Hindi language a medium of service and knowledge and enable it to move forward with time. Since then, ten such Conferences have been held in different parts of world. The 1st World Hindi Conference was held from 10 to 12 January 1975 in Nagpur, Maharashtra and was inaugurated by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. To commemorate this event, every year 10th January is being observed as World Hindi Day. The 10 edition of World Hindi Conference was held in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh (India) in 2015 with the theme of Hindi Jagat-Vistar and Sambhavnaye.

18TH EDITION OF ASIAN GAMES TO BEGIN IN JAKARTA, INDONESIA

Why in News: The Asian Games - which are organised by the Olympic Council of Asia every four years - are the second largest multi-sport event in the world, behind only the Olympic Games. While usually the Asian Games are held only in one city, this time around the Asian Games will see events happening in Indonesian capital Jakarta and the country's oldest city, Palembang. While Jakarta will host most of the events, sports like shooting and tennis will be played in Palembang. The first Asian Games were held in India in 1951.

Important Points:

The 18th edition of Asian Games is scheduled to be held in Jakarta, Indonesia from August 18 to September 2, 2018.

The games will take place simultaneously in Jakarta, capital of Indonesia and Palembang, capital of the province of South Sumatra, so as to accommodate all branches of sports.

- The event is expected to witness participation from around 11,000 athletes from 45 countries in 40 sports and 67 disciplines consisting of 28 Olympic sports, 4 new Olympic sports and 8 non-Olympic sports.

Some of the events, including Handball and Football, began last week.

For the first time, eSports, a form of competition using video games, and canoe polo will be contested as demonstration sports.

The Indian contingent at the games will be led by Javelin Thrower Neeraj Chopra, who will be India's flag-bearer at the glittering opening ceremony.

Around 570 Indian athletes are expected to compete for top honours across 36 sports, which will take place in Jakarta as well as in Palembang.

Renowned Indonesian singers like Anggun, Raisa and Tulus and a total of 4,000 dancers are expected to perform at the ceremony.

About Asian Games

The Asian Games, also known as Asiad, is a continental multi-sport event held every four years between athletes from all over Asia.

Since 1982, the Games have been organised by the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA). Prior to that, the Games were regulated by the Asian Games Federation (AGF).

- The AGF regulated the very first Asian Games, which were held in New Delhi, India in 1951 until the 1978 Games, till the federation's breakup.

The Games are the second largest multi-sport event after the Olympic Games.

Overall, nine nations have hosted the Asian Games and forty-six nations have participated in it, including Israel, which was excluded from the Games after their last participation in 1974.

- The last edition of the Games was hosted by Incheon, South Korea from 19 September to 4 October 2014. The current edition was originally scheduled to be hosted by Vietnam in Hanoi, however, the country withdrew its bid, based on economic considerations.
- Following Vietnam's withdrawal, Indonesia offered to hold the 18th Asian Games. This will be the second time that Indonesia hosts the Asian Games. The first one was held in Jakarta in 1962. This will be the first time that the Asian Games will be held in two cities - Jakarta and Palembang.

2018 Asian Games logo and mascot

The logo for the 18th Asian Games is a colorful circle taken from the shape of the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium and named the Energy of Asia, depicting the strengthening spirit of the Games, participated by multicultural nations shining for all the world to see.

The three mascots of the Games include - Bhin Bhin, Atung and Kaka.

The mascots represent three aspects of the competitive games- Strategy, Speed and Strength.

Bhin Bhin depicts the image of the Cendrawasih or Bird of Paradise, which is mainly found in Papua, Atung is a Bawean Deer, the symbol of speed and Kaka is a Rhino representing strength.

Each mascot wears special attire inspired by the traditional textiles from Papua, Jakarta and Palembang.

WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY 2018

Why in News: The World Humanitarian Day was observed across the world on August 19, 2018 to pay tribute to workers who risk their lives in humanitarian services and to gather support for people affected by crises around the world.

2018 World Humanitarian Day campaign: #NotATarget

Important Points:

The 2018 World Humanitarian Day aims to draw attention towards the millions of civilians affected by armed conflict every day. Millions of innocent civilians are forced to flee or hide due to conflicts and wars around the world.

- The observance of the day provides opportunity to celebrate spirit that inspires humanitarian work around globe. It pays tribute to aid workers who risk their lives in humanitarian service and also to rally support for people affected by crisis around the world.
- Countless families are displaced from their homes, children are taken out from schools and communities are torn apart and the world is not doing enough to stop their suffering.
- Even health and aid workers, who risk their lives every single day to serve and care for people, are being targeted. This year's campaign demands the world leaders to do everything in their power to protect all civilians in conflict.

Background

The World Humanitarian Day was instituted by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) by passing a resolution A/63/L.49 in 2008. The resolution was sponsored by Sweden and was passed by UNGA on Strengthening of Coordination of Emergency Assistance of the UN. The day marks death of then Special Representative of Secretary-General to Iraq, Sérgio Vieira de Mello and 21 of his colleagues who were killed in bombing of the UN Headquarters in Baghdad on August 19, 2003. Since 2009, this day is observed annually by humanitarian community to ensure safety and security of humanitarian aid workers and for the survival, well-being and dignity of people affected by crisis.

FAST MELTING ARCTIC ICE MAY HIT INDIAN MONSOON: STUDY

Why in News: The polar Arctic zone, which has been melting for much of the last two centuries, shows an accelerated pace after 1970, a new paper published by scientists at the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR) at Goa. The Centre also said that faster melting of Arctic ice can have adverse implications for Indian monsoon rain. The scientists hope that the study will help in further understanding of the global climate and particularly India's south-west monsoon as they hinge on the rate of melting of polar ice caps.

The research led by Manish Tiwari and Vikash Kumar have reconstructed the warming of the Arctic over the last two centuries - a period encompassing 1810-2010 - by examining the organic productivity from sediment samples from an Arctic fjord known as Kongsfjorden in Svalbard - a remote archipelago in the Arctic Ocean near the north pole.

Important Points:

- Cascading effects of these changes in the Arctic region are projected to significantly alter the state and the balance of the earth's climate system.
- To help track past changes, the scientists studied the sediments for the presence of organic carbon and other signatures of past environmental changes preserved in the sediments deposited on the fjord floor.

Increasing glacial meltwater in the Arctic reduced the availability of light and thus reduced productivity resulting in a lower presence of organic carbon.

The results revealed that the Arctic has witnessed consistent periods of warming over the last two centuries except for the period around 1840 and 1900, where glacial melting was at its lowest. The Arctic warming has been gradually increasing from 1840 onwards while the trend increased after 1900, particularly accelerating after 1970.

Besides sea level rise, the NCAOR has also found that warming at the poles and glacier melting is affecting India's weather patterns, in particular, the South West Monsoon.

An earlier study by the NCAOR have found a direct physical link between the warming climate and the monsoon. The increased melting of Arctic glaciers affected the difference between land and sea temperature, resulting in higher intensity of the monsoon rain.

About National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research:

The National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR) is an Indian research and development institution, situated in Vasco, Goa. In July 2018 it has been renamed as THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR POLAR AND OCEAN RESEARCH. It is an autonomous Institution of the Department of Ocean Development (DOD), Government of India which is responsible for administering the Indian Antarctic Programme and maintains the Indian government's Antarctic Research Station, Maitri. NCAOR was established on 25 May 1998, with Dr PC Pandey as its founding director.

NCAOR is known for its participation in global experiments, hosting of international conferences and in the leadership of international committees concerned with Antarctic science. At present, NCAOR is an agency working under Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India since 2006, by the notification of the President of India.

NCAOR complex is a home to a special low-temperature laboratory and is setting up a National Antarctic Data Centre and a Polar Museum.

ANTI-TANK GUIDED MISSILE 'HELINA' SUCCESSFULLY TEST FIRED AT POKHRAN RANGE

Why in News: Indigenously developed Helicopter launched Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM) 'HELINA' was successfully flight tested from Army Helicopter in the ranges of Pokhran. The test was conducted by the DRDO and the Indian Army.

The missile was tested for the full range of its weapon system. During the test, the 'HELINA' weapon system released smoothly from the launch platform and was successful in tracking the target all through its course and hit the target with high precision.

All the parameters were monitored by the telemetry stations, tracking systems and the Helicopters.

HELINA:

HELINA is helicopter launched version known of NAG ATGM, designed and developed indigenously for Indian Army under integrated guided missile development programme (IGMDP). It is manufactured by India's sole missile producer, state-owned Bharat Dynamics Limited. HELINA is one of the most advanced Anti-Tank Weapons in the world. It works on "fire and forget" principle and operates in Lock on Before Launch mode. It has operational range of 7-10km (after air-launched). It is equipped with highly advanced Imaging Infrared Radar (IIR) seeker along with integrated avionics. This technology is possessed by very few nations. It also possesses advanced passive homing guidance system. It has been designed mainly to destroy modern main battle tanks and other heavily armoured targets.

Flight test of guided bombs - Smart Anti-Airfield Weapons:

- Apart from conducting the flight test of HELINA Missile, the DRDO, along with Indian Air Force (IAF) and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), conducted the flight test of indigenously designed and developed guided bombs 'Smart Anti Airfield Weapon' (SAAW). The SAAW guided bombs were successfully flight tested from IAF aircraft at Chandan range in Rajasthan. The weapon system was integrated with live warhead and destroyed the targets with high precision. SAAW is capable of destroying variety of ground targets using precision navigation. The weapon has undergone eight developmental trials till date and performance of system for different ranges under multiple launch conditions has been demonstrated.

PANINI LANGUAGE LAB INAUGURATED IN MAURITIUS

Why in News: Panini language laboratory was recently inaugurated at Mahatma Gandhi institute in Mauritius to promote reading and writing Hindi amongst young and its further development. It was launched by External Affairs minister Sushma Swaraj on the sidelines of 11th World Hindi Conference held in Mauritius.

About Panini language laboratory:

Panini language lab aims to promote reading and writing Hindi amongst young generation and its further development. It will serve as medium to generate more interest in learning Hindi amongst youngsters thereby strengthening language. It has been established in Mauritius with support from Indian External Affairs Ministry.

The lab has 35 computers and equipments along with advanced software of various Indian languages installed by Indian IT professionals to aid students of junior, middle and high schools to imbibe new techniques of language learning and getting them acquainted with four language mantras-hearing, pronunciation, reading and writing through easy and scientific ways.

2018 Three-language policy:

- The first recommendation for a three-language policy was made by the University Education Commission in 1948-49, which did not find the requirement to study three languages to be an extravagance, citing the precedents of the Netherlands and Switzerland. While accepting that Hindi was itself a minority language, and had no superiority over others such as Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Marathi, Bengali, Urdu and Gujarati all of which had a longer history and greater body of literature, the commission still foresaw Hindi as eventually replacing English as the means by which every province may participate in Federal functions. The Education Commission of 1965-66 recommended a modified or graduated three-language formula. Following some debate, the original three-language formula was adopted by the India Parliament in 1968. The 1986 National Policy on Education reiterated the 1968 formula.

EXPERT PANEL REVIEWING FOOD LABELLING STANDARDS: FSSAI

Why in News: Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has constituted three-member committee to look into draft food labelling and display regulations-Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations 2018. The committee will be headed by B Sesikeran, former director of National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) and comprises of current NIN director Hemalatha and AIIMS' endocrinologist Nikhil Tandon.

Important Points:

FSSAI had released draft Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations 2018 in April 2018. It had proposed mandatory red-label marking on such packaged food products which are high in fat, sugar and salt contents.

The front-of-the-pack red label mark was aimed to make consumers more aware about healthy and unhealthy food products. But, Union Health Ministry had put on hold on the draft regulations, after industry stakeholders had expressed concerns, citing that it may have an adverse impact on evolving packaged food industry. So address their concerns, FSSAI has decided to set up committee of experts with health and nutrition background to look into the draft regulations.

UGUST-2018

- India can learn from best practices from the other countries such as Denmark, Norway and Singapore on labelling and trans-fat regulations. Consultation process started by FSSAI is seen as an attempt to begin dialogue among stakeholders on proposed draft labelling regulations.
- Moreover, recently, several companies had pledged to FSSAI's Eat Right Movement and have made voluntary commitments to reduce salt, sugar and fat in their products. FSSAI in future is likely to push more and more companies to make similar voluntary commitments.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI):

FSSAI has been established under Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 which consolidates various acts & orders that have hitherto handled food related issues in various Ministries and Departments. FSSAI has been created for laying down science based standards for articles of food and to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.

INSURANCE REGULATOR ORDERS FIRMS TO INCLUDE MENTAL HEALTH IN MEDICAL POLICIES

Why in News: In a step towards reducing myths and stigma associated with mental illness, the insurance regulator asked insurers to cover mental illness under medical insurance policy, treating it at par with physical illness.

In a circular, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority asked insurers to make provision for medical insurance for treatment of mental illness from immediate effect. Insurers today exclude mental illness from medical policies. However, globally companies cover mental illness after initial waiting period of two-three years.

Important Points:

- Healthcare Act, 2017 which came into force from May 29 has made it mandatory to provide "for medical insurance for treatment of mental illness on the same basis as is available for treatment of physical illness".

- But to date, none of India's 33 insurers has introduced a product that covers ailments such as depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder, even though such covers are commonplace in many countries.
- IRDAI has issued order stating that,"All insurance companies are hereby directed to comply with the...provisions of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 with immediate effect."
- The change has been long overdue. This is being seen as a progressive step. This will ensure a life of dignity to those who have mental health issues. It will create awareness, acceptance, and inclusion of mental illness as any other physical ailment.

Present scenario:

Mental health conditions have always been in the list of exclusions of health insurance policies. The only exceptions to this have been the coverage of development conditions such as autism and Down's syndrome by the National Health Insurance Scheme, and a few private schemes like Star Health Insurance's cover for autistic children.

What is mental illness?

As per the Mental Healthcare Act, mental illness means a substantial disorder of thinking, mood, perception, orientation or memory that grossly impairs judgement, behaviour, capacity to recognise reality or ability to meet the ordinary demands of life. It also includes mental conditions associated with the abuse of alcohol and drugs, but does not include mental retardation which is a condition of arrested or incomplete development of mind of a person. The Act further states that every person with mental illness will be treated as equal to persons with physical illness when it comes to healthcare, including health insurance.

About Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) in India:

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) is a national agency run by the Government of India. IRDA is based in Hyderabad and was formed by an act of Indian Parliament called as IRDA Act of 1999. Considering some of the emerging requirements of the Indian insurance industry, IRDA was amended in 2002. As stated in the act mission of IRDA is "to protect the interests of the policyholders, to regulate, promote and ensure orderly growth of the insurance industry and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto." Indian insurance industry is regulated by the terms and conditions of the IRDA.

Indian law has certain expectations from the IRDA to perform in the Indian insurance industry. IRDA should protect the interest of policyholders by ensuring fair treatment by the insurance companies. The growth of insurance companies in a speedy and orderly manner should be taken care by the IRDA. It should monitor and implement quality competence and fair dealing of the insurance companies in the industry. IRDA should make sure that the insurers are providing precise and correct information about the products offered by them for the insurance customers. IRDA should also ensure speedy settlement of genuine claims of the policyholders and prevent malpractices in the process of claims settlement.

INDIA BANS PETCOKE IMPORT, BUT ALLOWS USE IN SELECT INDUSTRIES

Why in News: Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) under Ministry of Commerce and Industry has banned import of petcoke for use as fuel. But it has allowed its import of only for use as feedstock in some select industries such as cement, lime kiln, calcium carbide and gasification industries. These industries were earlier affected by petcoke-related policy flip-flops, which began after Supreme Court judgment (October 2017) banning use its in and around New Delhi to curb pollution.

Important Points:

As the world's largest consumer of pet coke, India imports over half its annual pet coke consumption of about 27 million tonnes, mainly from the United States. Local producers include Indian Oil Corp, Reliance Industries and Bharat Petroleum Corp.

India is the world's biggest consumer of petroleum coke, which is a dark solid carbon material that emits 11% more greenhouse gases than coal. Usage of pet coke, a dirtier alternative to coal, in the energy-hungry country has come under scrutiny due to rising pollution levels in major cities.

The petcoke burned in factories and plants is contributing to dangerously filthy air in India, which already has many of the world's most polluted cities. It contains 17 times more sulfur than the limit set for coal, and a staggering 1,380 times more than for diesel.

-2018Petcoke (Petroleum coke):

It is one of the many industrial by products produced during oil refining. It is categorized as bottom of the barrel fuel as it is residual waste material which is obtained after refining coal to extract lighter fuels like petrol. It is used as a source of energy and carbon for various industrial applications. It is abundantly used in India in several manufacturing industries such as cement, steel and textile as it is significantly cheaper than coal, has high calorific value and is easier to transport and store. There are two kinds of pet coke produced viz. Fuel grade pet coke (80%) and calcined pet coke (20%) during oil refining.

Environment and Health Hazards of Pet Coke:

Petcoke is much more potent pollutant than coal and causes greater harm to the environment and health. It contains whopping 74,000 PPM of sulphur content which is released into atmosphere as emissions which is much higher than vehicular emissions. It is also source of fine dust, which can get through filtering process of human airway and lodge in lungs which can cause serious health problems. Apart from sulphur, petcoke also releases cocktail of other toxic gases after burning such as nitrous oxide, mercury, arsenic, chromium, nickel, hydrogen chloride and greenhouse gases (GHG) which contribute to global warming.

Need for regulation:

The country has seen a dramatic increase in sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide emissions in recent years, concentrated in areas where power plants and steel factories are clustered. Those pollutants are converted into microscopic particles that lodge deep in the lungs and enter the bloodstream, causing breathing and heart problems.

Petcoke, critics say, is making a bad situation worse across India. About 1.1 million Indians die prematurely as a result of outdoor air pollution every year, according to the Health Effects Institute, a nonprofit funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and industry.

ICOMOS LAUNCHES INITIATIVE TO SAVE CULTURAL HERITAGE DAMAGED

Why in News: The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) has launched an initiative to assess the damage to the rich cultural and built heritage in flood-devastated Kerala and set up an emergency response platform. ICOMOS is global monument conservation body.

About Kerala Heritage Rescue Initiative:

The initiative aims at setting up platform for emergency response to cultural heritage damaged by the floods in Kerala. It also has set Facebook page to collect information on the damage to buildings, museum collections, cultural artefacts, libraries, archives, and even intangible heritage.

Under this initiative, ICOMOS will assess damage and risks to rich tangible, intangible, movable and immovable heritage that has been adversely affected by floods, including monuments, historic buildings, museum collections and artefacts of important significance. It will also create heritage response team and train its members to undertake damage assessment and emergency measures.

ICOMOS has also approached International Centre for Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) to partner in post-disaster work. ICCROM based in Rome (Italy) is inter-governmental organisation dedicated to preservation of cultural heritage worldwide through training, information, research, cooperation and advocacy programmes.

About International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS):

ICOMOS is global monument conservation body (non-government organisation) dedicated to promoting the application of theory, methodology and scientific techniques for conservation of architectural and archaeological heritage across the world. It is also advisory body to UNESCO for cultural heritage, in particular for implementation of World Heritage Convention. It was founded in 1965 in Warsaw (Poland) as a result of the Venice Charter of 1964. It is headquartered in Paris, France.



Background:

- Kerala is endowed with natural beauty and is home to number of iconic forts, palaces and other heritage buildings, which attract huge number of tourists every year. It is facing its worst floods in nearly century due to heavy rainfall that has left 223 dead and forced over 10 lakh people out of their homes. The Central Government has declared this calamity of 'severe nature'.
- Note: Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction calls for cultural heritage and its protection to help in building resilience and enhance ability of the affected population to participate in its own recovery.

How does the law define a disaster?

As per the Disaster Management Act, 2005, "disaster" means a catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence in any area, arising from natural or man-made causes, or by accident or negligence which results in substantial loss of life or human suffering or damage to, and destruction of, property, or damage to, or degradation of, environment, and is of such a nature or magnitude as to be beyond the coping capacity of the community of the affected area.

A natural disaster includes earthquake, flood, landslide, cyclone, tsunami, urban flood, heatwave; a man-made disaster can be nuclear, biological and chemical.

How can any of these be classified as a national disaster?

There is no provision, executive or legal, to declare a natural calamity as a national calamity. The existing guidelines of State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF)/ National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF), do not contemplate declaring a disaster as a 'National Calamity'."

How, then, does the government classify disasters/calamities?

- The 10th Finance Commission (1995-2000) examined a proposal that a disaster be termed "a national calamity of rarest severity" if it affects one-third of the population of a state.

- The panel did not define a "calamity of rare severity" but stated that a calamity of rare severity would necessarily have to be adjudged on a case-to-case basis taking into account, inter-alia, the intensity and magnitude of the calamity, level of assistance needed, the capacity of the state to tackle the problem, the alternatives and flexibility available within the plans to provide succour and relief, etc.
The flash floods in Uttarakhand and Cyclone Hudhud were later classified as calamities of "severe nature".

How is the funding decided?

As per the National Policy on Disaster Management, 2009, the National Crisis Management Committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary deals with major crises that have serious or national ramifications.

For calamities of severe nature, inter-ministerial central teams are deputed to the affected states for assessment of damage and relief assistance required.

An inter-ministerial group, headed by the Union Home Secretary, studies the assessment and recommends the quantum of assistance from the NDRF/National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF).

Based on this, a high-level committee comprising the Finance Minister as chairman and the Home Minister, Agriculture Minister, and Planning Commission Deputy Chairman as members approves the central assistance.

CHINA RESPONSIBLE FOR OVER A THIRD OF CYBER ATTACKS ON OFFICIAL INDIAN SITES : CERT-IN

Why in News: A report sent to the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) and other security agencies by a department under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has said that the maximum number of cyber attacks on official Indian websites are from China, US and Russia. It has also flagged the possibility of "malicious actors from Pakistan using German and Canadian cyberspace for intruding into Indian cyberspace and carrying out malicious activities".

The report, prepared by the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), which comes under the ministry, analysed cyber attacks from April-June 2018.

Important Points:

- Indian institutions attacked by these malicious activities on cyberspace include Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), National Informatics Centre (NIC), Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), Railways, Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS) and some banks like Punjab National Bank (PNB), Oriental Bank of Commerce (OBC), State Bank of India (SBI) and state data centres, particularly in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. CERT-In has advised to take appropriate preventive action.

China continues to intrude Indian cyberspace in significant way as cyber-attacks originating from China account for largest 35% of total number of cyber-attacks on official Indian websites followed by US (17%), Russia (15%), Pakistan (9%), Canada (7%) and Germany (5%).

Pakistan malicious actors from Pakistan are possibly using German and Canadian cyberspace for intruding into Indian cyberspace and carrying out malicious activities. They are targeting by sending spear phishing emails with malware attachments. Phishing attacks are usually in form of email from trusted source where they ask for personal details such as bank details personal details, passwords.

About Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In):

The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) is nodal agency for information technology (cyber) security under aegis of Department of Information Technology, Ministry of Electronics and IT. It was established in 2004. Its mandate is to protect Indian cyberspace and software infrastructure against destructive and hacking activities. It also responds to computer security incidents, report on vulnerabilities and promote effective IT security practices throughout country. It also issue guidelines, vulnerability notes, advisories and whitepapers regarding to information security practices, prevention.

NCRB TO TRACK COMPLAINTS ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Why in News: Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has designated National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) as nodal authority to curb online child pornography, sexual violence and rape videos. It was decided by high-level meeting to discuss recommendations on ways to curb "sexual violence" videos involving women and children.

Important Points:

NCRB is only a crime record agency. The powers were delegated to NCRB under section 79 of Information Technology Act, 2000 to perform the functions under clause (b) of sub-section (3) of section 79 of IT Act, 2000 and to notify the instance as per the order issued.

It was decided in the meeting that the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) would be the designated nodal agency for monitoring the complaints received on a government portal that records child pornography and sexual violence videos.

The NCRB would coordinate with service providers such as Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp and ask them to block malicious videos and contents.

Bureau is implementing & monitoring agency for implementation of Crime & Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS), a Mission Mode Project under the National e-Governance Plan of Government of India. The project aims at creating a comprehensive and integrated system for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of policing in the country.

NCRB also imparts training in Information Technology (IT) and Finger Print Science for Indian Police Officers as well Foreign Police officers. Central finger print bureau is under the administrative control of NCRB.

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

NCRB is nodal agency under Home Ministry for authentic source of data on crime on various parameters including accidents, suicides from across all the states of the country and prisons for policy matters and research. It was established on 11 March 1986 as the central police organisation. It is headquartered in New Delhi.

It is implementing and monitoring agency of Crime & Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS), a Mission Mode Project under National e-Governance Plan of Government. It also imparts training in Information Technology (IT) and Finger Print Science for Indian Police Officers as well Foreign Police officers. It publishes 4 annual publications on Crime, Prison Statistics, Accidental Deaths & Suicides and Finger Prints. These publications serve as principal reference points on crime statistics.

Important publications:

NCRB publishes 4 annual publications on Crime, Accidental Deaths & Suicides, Prison Statistics and Finger Prints. These publications serve as principal reference points on crime statistics not only police officers but also for criminologists, researchers, media and policy makers not only in India but abroad well.

Background:

In 2015, as many as 34,651 cases of rape were registered. The number increased to 38,947 in 2016. Overall crimes against women rose from 3,29,243 in 2015 to 3,38,954 in 2016, according to the NCRB data.

A majority of cases categorised as crimes against women were reported under "cruelty by husband or his relatives" (32.6 per cent), followed by "assault on woman with intent to outrage her modesty" (25 per cent), "kidnapping and abduction of women" (19 per cent) and "rape" (11.5 per cent).

The highest number of rapes have been reported from Madhya Pradesh (4,882), followed by Uttar Pradesh (4,816) and Maharashtra (4,189) in 2016, according to the NCRB data.

IRAN UNVEILS FIRST DOMESTIC FIGHTER JET

Why in News: Iran has unveiled first domestically manufactured fighter jet nicknamed Kowsar. It was unveiled at defence show held in the capital city of Tehran.

Kowsar

- It is fourth-generation fighter with advanced avionics and multi-purpose radar. It was 100% indigenously made in Iran. Its name Kowsar means river in paradise in Islam and also title of chapter in Koran. It is dual-cockpit, single engine jet with single tail fin.

- It resembles US-made F-5F Tiger (first flew in 1974), which is variant of 1950s-era US Northrop F-5 fighter that is a long-time mainstay of Iranian Air Force. It can be used for short aerial support missions. It is equipped with systems that promote precision targeting.

Background:

Iran's functional air force has been limited to perhaps as few as few dozen strike aircraft either Russian or ageing US models including F-5s that were acquired before 1979 Iranian revolution. Iran has unveiled several new fighter jets in last few years. In 2013, it had unveiled domestically built fighter jet Qahar-313, which was compared to US F-22 and F-35.

PUNJAB CABINET APPROVES LIFE IMPRISONMENT FOR SACRILEGE OF RELIGIOUS TEXT

Why in News: The Punjab Cabinet approved amendments to the Indian Penal Code (IPC) as well as the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) to make sacrilege of religious texts punishable with life imprisonment. The government has taken a major step towards curbing such incidents and maintaining communal harmony in the state.

Important Points:

The Cabinet has approved insertion of section 295AA to the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to provide that - whoever causes injury, damage or sacrilege to Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Srimad Bhagwad Geeta, Holy Quran and Holy Bible with the intention to hurt the religious feelings of the people, shall be punished with imprisonment for life.

The Cabinet has okayed the withdrawal of the Code of Criminal Procedure (Punjab Amendment) Bill, 2016 and the Indian Penal Code (Punjab Amendment) Bill, 2016, passed in the 12th Session of 14th Vidhan Sabha, 2016.

It has given its nod to the introduction of 'The Code of Criminal Procedure (Punjab Amendment) Bill, 2018 and the Indian Penal Code (Punjab Amendment) Bill, 2018, in the ensuing session of Punjab Vidhan Sabha.

- Cabinet also gave its approval to several significant bills including the one that would allow for reservation of Schedule Caste (SC) employees in promotions.

- Our Cabinet has given its nod to several important Bills for enactment in the ensuing Vidhan Sabha session, including SC employee's reservation in promotions and constitution of Punjab State Higher Education Council.
- In June this year, the Supreme Court had allowed the Centre to provide reservation in promotion for employees of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe community as per law, till the issue is cleared off by a constitution bench. In compliance with the order passed by the Supreme Court on May 17 and June 5 on special writ petition, Bihar Government on July 22 announced reservation for Schedule Caste/ Schedule Tribe personnel in its services.

RELIANCE INDUSTRIES' M-CAP HITS RS 8 TRILLION-MARK

Why in News: Reliance Industries (RIL) became the first Indian company to cross Rs 8 trillion in market capitalisation. The stock gained 1.9 per cent to close at Rs 1,270, valuing the Mukesh Ambani-led firm at Rs 8.05 trillion (\$115 billion at current exchange rate of Rs 70.11 for a dollar).

Important Points:

The RIL stock gained as much as 2.03 per cent on BSE platform before finishing 1.78 per cent higher at Rs 1268.75. The company's market capitalisation (m-cap) stood at Rs 8,04,089.32 crore.

Shares of RIL have rallied 34 per cent from their recent low of Rs 945 on June 28 amid big-bang announcements during its annual general meeting (AGM) in early July. During the same period, the benchmark BSE Sensex gained 9.5 per cent.

Tata group flagship Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) also is nearing the same milestone. Currently, the technology giant is valued at Rs 7.8 trillion (\$111 billion), 2.6 per cent away from the Rs 8-trillion mark.

The oil-to-telecom conglomerate added the latest Rs 1 trillion in market cap in just 23 trading sessions. RIL had first crossed Rs 7-trillion market cap on July

20. It took 181 trading days to move from Rs 6 trillion to Rs 7 trillion market cap. Currently, RIL's market value accounts for 5 per cent of India's total market cap. So far this year, shares of RIL have gained 38 per cent, compared to 12 per cent gain in the Sensex. The company has seen its market cap increasing by Rs

2.21 trillion this year.

- Both RIL and TCS now account for nearly a tenth of the country's market value.
- In the past two months, RIL has also seen huge buying from global exchange-traded funds (ETFs). RIL now has tenth-most weightage in the MSCI Emerging Markets Index, which is widely followed by global funds.

HUSBAND'S FAMILY SHOULD NOT BE INVOLVED IN MARITAL CASES

Why in News: The relatives of a husband should not be roped in cases of matrimonial disputes and dowry deaths unless specific instances of their involvement in the crime are made out, the Supreme Court.

A Bench of Justices SA Bobde and L Nageswara Rao also cautioned the courts to be careful in proceeding against "distant relatives" of the husband in such cases.

Important Points:

The bench said that the courts should be careful in proceeding against the distant relatives of the husband in crimes pertaining to matrimonial disputes and dowry deaths.

It said that the relatives of the husband should not be roped in on the basis of omnibus allegations unless specific instances of their involvement in the crime are made out.

The bench said that after considering the charge sheets filed in the matter, the court was of the view that a prima facie case was not made out against maternal uncles of the man for alleged charges of subjecting a married woman to cruelty, criminal conspiracy, cheating and kidnapping.

The bench observed that criminal proceedings are not normally interdicted by the court at the interlocutory stage unless there is an abuse of process of a court. However, it stated that at the same time, the court does not hesitate to interfere to secure the ends of justice.

Background:

The top court's ruling while it was hearing a plea filed by the maternal uncles of a man challenging a Hyderabad High Court's January 2016 verdict dismissing their petition for quashing criminal proceedings against them in a matrimonial dispute case.

- The complainant in the case had filed a complaint with the police alleging harassment by her husband and his family members, including his maternal uncles and also claimed that her son was kidnapped by her husband.
- The maternal uncles of the man had approached the Hyderabad high court seeking to squash the proceedings against them in the case but their plea was dismissed. They had later approached the apex court challenging the high court's verdict.

After the high court's order, charge sheets were filed by the police alleging that there was a marital discord between the concerned couple and maternal uncles of the husband were supporting him, who was physically and mentally torturing his wife.

While ruling on the matter, the apex court said that except the fact that the uncles supported the husband who was harassing his wife, nothing else indicated their involvement in the crime mentioned.

WESTERN GHATS : ON GADGIL KASTURIRANGAN REPORTS

Why in News: The catastrophic monsoon floods in Kerala and parts of Karnataka have revived the debate on whether political expediency trumped science. Seven years ago, the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel issued recommendations for the preservation of the fragile western peninsular region.

About Western Ghats:

The Western Ghats is an extensive region spanning over six States, 44 districts and 142 taluks. It is the home of many endangered plants and animals. Western Ghats host India's richest wilderness in 13 national parks and several sanctuaries. Recognised by UNESCO as one of the world's eight most important biodiversity hotspots, these forested hills are also sourcing to numerous rivers, including the Godavari, Krishna and Cauvery.

- The Western Ghats acts as a huge water tank supplying water to six states. Now there are many leakages and there is a water shortage. All the rivers are running dry now. And wherever there is water, it is highly polluted. The Western Ghats needs high attention in the sustainability aspect of whole India and especially South India. Ministry of Environment of Forest of India set up in March 2010 an expert panel (Gadgil commission) to find a strategy for conserving these Ghats. The State governments that are mainly responsible for the Western Ghats - Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Goa and Maharashtra - must go back to the drawing table with the reports of both the Gadgil Committee and the Kasturirangan Committee.

Madhav Gadgil Committee Report on the Western Ghats:

Gadgil Commission, an environmental research commission is named after its chairman Madhav Gadgil. The commission is formally known as Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP). The commission submitted the report to the Government of India on 31 August 2011.

Gadgil Committee Recommendations:

Gadgil committee had eminent ecologists and their report too reflected that. The report was labelled favourable to environment and environmentalists and not development (or illegal mining). Remember, there is a never-ending debate between environment and development; it's tough to balance both without compromising the other. Anyway, let's come back to Gadgil Report highlights.

1. The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) designated the entire hill range as an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA).
2. The panel, in its report, has classified the 142 taluks in the Western Ghats boundary into Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ) 1, 2 and 3.
3. ESZ-1 being of high priority, almost all developmental activities (mining, thermal power plants etc) were restricted in it.
4. Gadgil report recommended that "no new dams based on large-scale storage be permitted in Ecologically Sensitive Zone 1. Since both the Athirappilly of Kerala and Gundia of Karnataka hydel project sites fall in Ecologically Sensitive Zone 1, these projects should not be accorded environmental clearance," it said.
5. Gadgil Committee report specifies that the present system of governance of the environment should be changed. It asked for a bottom to top approach (right from Gram sabhas) rather than a top to bottom approach. It also asked for decentralization and more powers to local authorities.
6. The commission recommended constitution of a Western Ghats Ecology Authority (WGEA), as a statutory authority under the Ministry of Environment and Forests, with the powers under Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Kasturirangan committee on the Western Ghats

As said earlier, the Kasturirangan committee was constituted to examine the WGEEP report. The committee is often called HLWG - it denotes the 10 member high-level working group (HLWG), headed by Kasturirangan.

Kasturirangan committee Report Recom-mendations:

Instead of the total area of Western Ghats, only 37% (i.e. 60,000 sq. km.) of the total area be brought under ESA under Kasturirangan report.

A complete ban on mining, quarrying and sand mining in ESA.

Distinguished between cultural (58% occupied in the Western Ghats by it like human settlements, agricultural fields and plantations) and natural landscape (90% of it should come under ESA according to the committee).

Current mining areas in the ESA should be phased out within the next five years, or at the time of expiry of mining lease, whichever is earlier.

No thermal power be allowed and hydropower projects are allowed only after detailed study.

Red industries i.e. which are highly polluting be strictly banned in these areas.

Kasturirangan report on the Western Ghats has made several pro-farmer recommendations, including the exclusion of inhabited regions and plantations from the purview of ecologically sensitive areas (ESAs).

- The Kasturirangan report had said 123 villages fall under the ESA purview.

Comparison of Gadgil Report and Kasturirangan Report:

- Whenever we study environment, the evergreen topic of debate is between environment and development. It is tough to achieve a perfect balance. The same happened with both these reports.
- If Gadgil report laid too much importance to the environment, Kasturirangan report was biased towards development. Kasturirangan report was criticized by many as that it provided loopholes for mining, which if allowed would turn detrimental to the environment, in long-term will affect development too. Kasturirangan report got the tag as anti-environmental soon after its release. But this report was tagged anti-development too by many who fear that their livelihood and interests will be affected.

Gadgil's Western Ghats (Western Ghats landscape across 1,29,037 sq km.) is smaller than that of Kasturirangan's (Western Ghats landscape, according to Kasturirangan is 1,64,280 sq km). Gadgil report marked out 60 percent of the Western Ghats as the highest-priority Ecologically Sensitive Zone (ESZ -1).

Kasturirangan report marks only 37 percent area (but considers wider Western Ghat boundaries) as ESA. Gadgil's report proposed to declare this entire landscape as ESA, creating three ESZs within it. He prescribed that the existing sanctuaries and ESZ-1 would together cover 60 percent of this landscape. The 25 percent lowest priority areas would be marked as ESZ-3 to allow all developmental activities with precautions. The remaining 15 percent area would become ESZ-2. For example, while no mining would be allowed within ESZ- 1, existing mines could continue in ESZ-2 with a moratorium on new licences. In ESZ-3, new mines could come up.

The Kasturirangan panel, on the other hand, adopted the criteria followed by the Western Ghats Development Programme of the Planning Commission and identified 188 talukas as its Western Ghats landscape, which worked out to 1,64,280 sq km. He marked 37 percent of this stretch as ESA where hazardous industries, thermal plants or mines would not be allowed. In effect, the restriction level of Kasturirangan's ESA corresponds to that of Gadgil's ESZ-1.

- Now, according to the Gadgil report, the ESZ-1 areas add up to approximately 77,000 sq km (60 percent of 1,29,037 sq km). Kasturirangan's ESA, on the other hand, accounts for around 60,000 sq km (37 percent of 1,64,280 sq km). That is a reduction of 17,000 sq km in the top priority segment

Background:

At issue in the Western Ghats - spread over 1,29,037 sq km according to the WGEEP estimate and 1,64,280 sq km as per the Kasturirangan panel - is the calculation of what constitutes the sensitive core and what activities can be carried out there. The entire system is globally acknowledged as a biodiversity hotspot. But population estimates for the sensitive zones vary greatly, based on interpretations of the ESZs. In Kerala, for instance, one expert assessment says 39 lakh households are in the ESZs outlined by the WGEEP, but the figure drops sharply to four lakh households for a smaller area of zones identified by the Kasturirangan panel.

BONDI: WORLD BANK LAUNCHES WORLD'S FIRST BLOCKCHAIN BOND

Why in News: The World Bank launched bond-i (blockchain operated new debt instrument), the world's first bond to be created, allocated, transferred and managed through its life cycle using distributed ledger technology. The two-year bond raised A\$110 million, marking the first time that investors have supported the World Bank's development activities in a transaction that is fully managed using the blockchain technology. Bond-i is an acronym standing for Blockchain Offered New Debt Instrument and also refers to tourist famous Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia. Funds raised from this bond will go towards sustainable development initiatives.

Bond-i

Bond-i is Ethereum blockchain bond denominated in Australian dollars, making it Kangaroo bond (referring to foreign bonds issued in Australia in local currency). World Bank had chosen Commonwealth Bank of Australia (largest bank in Australia) was chosen as sole arranger for this bond.

- The bond has two-year maturity and had raised Australian \$100 million (US\$73.16 million) after its issuance. It was issued and distributed on blockchain platform that runs on an on private Ethereum network managed and operated by CBA and World Bank. Funds raised through it will go towards endeavours tied to World Bank's Reconstruction and Development division for sustainable development initiatives.

Background

World Bank has often been at forefront of financial innovation. It had issued the first globally traded and settled bond in 1989 as well the first electronic bond in 2000. The launch of blockchain operated bond is of part of World Bank's broader strategic focus to harness potential of latest technologies. It had established Blockchain Innovation Lab in June 2017 to understand impact of blockchain and other disruptive technologies and harness their potential applications.

Blockchain Technology

Blockchain is decentralized incorruptible digital ledger for storing data across peer-to-peer network. It decentralizes information without it being copied. Information is held on blockchain through shared database which can be accessed on real-time basis. This database is not stored on physical servers but on cloud, which makes it easy to store unlimited data.

Blockchain technology is not controlled by any single entity and has no single point of failure. It is transparent and incorruptible. It is kind of self-auditing ecosystem of digital value and blockchain network automatically checks every transaction that happens in it.

The most popular application of technology so far has been cryptocurrency. But it is not limited to, financial transactions and can be also used in smart contracts, supply chain management logistics, sharing economy, crowdfunding, governance, file storage and date management and Internet of Things (IoT).

OPENING CEREMONY EXERCISE SCO PEACE MISSION 2018

Why in News: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Peace Mission 2018 was held in Chebarkul, Russia. Military contingents of the all eight SCO member nations (China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, India and Pakistan) participated in this exercise. The exercise was aimed at enhancing cooperation between member states to deal with growing threat of terrorism and extremism. It was for first time since independence, India and Pakistan simultaneously took part military exercise, though armies of two rival neighbouring countries had earlier worked together in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions.

Important Points:

The exercise provided opportunity to armed forces of SCO nations to train in counter terrorism operations in urban scenario in multinational and joint environment. The scope of exercise included professional interaction, mutual understanding of drills and procedures, establishment of joint command and control structures and elimination of terrorist threat in urban counter terrorist scenario. It also helped to strengthen mutual confidence, interoperability and enable sharing of best practices among armed forces of the SCO nations.

Around 3,000 soldiers from eight SCO member countries took part in the exercise. Russian Army was had major participation with 1700 personnel followed by China with 700, India with 200 personnel (167 Indian Army personnel including four women officers and 33 personnel from Indian Air Force). Pakistan contingent comprised of 110 members

Note: The SCO Peace Mission Exercise takes place every two years. The previous editions of this exercise were mainly limited to Central Asian nations. But due to the entry of India and Pakistan (in June 2017), SCO's counter-terrorism mission now has been expanded to South Asia.

About SCO:

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, also known as the Shanghai Pact, is a Eurasian political, economic, and military organisation which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Apart from Uzbekistan, the other five countries have been a part of the Shanghai 5 since 1996. The cooperation was renamed to Shanghai Cooperation Organisation after Uzbekistan joined the organisation in 2001.

New members: India and Pakistan joined SCO as full members in June 2017 in Astana, Kazakhstan. The SCO's main goals are: strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture, as well as in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, and other areas; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.

SPICEJET FLIES INDIA'S FIRST BIOFUEL FLIGHT

Why in News: India's first flight using biofuel will fly from Dehradun (capital of Uttarakhand) to Delhi. The first ever biofuel test flight was conducted by SpiceJet on its turboprop Q-400 plane. With this India will join elite club of nations who have operated flight on alternative energy source like biofuel. Developed countries like Canada, Australia and US have already conducted these test flights. India will be first developing nation to experiment biofuel test flight.

Important Points:

SpiceJet operated first such biofuel flight from Dehradun to Delhi using alternative environment friendly fuel for 10 minutes over Dehradun. Based on the result of test flight, second flight took off later to Delhi.

The objective this biofuel flight is to make air travel economical and bring some respite to airlines reeling under high fuel price through use of alternate fuel. Moreover, use of biofuel has the potential to reduce aviation carbon emissions by up to 80%.

- According to recent data from International Air Transport Association (IATA), recent rising aviation fuel costs in India has eroded aviation sector's profitability.

Global Scenario:

The world's first dedicated biofuel flight (by Dreamliner Boeing 787-9) was flown for first time from Los Angeles (US) to Melbourne (Australia) in January 2018 by Australian carrier Qantas. The fuel for this 15-hour flight was blended one and was 10% derived from industrial type of mustard seed. In 2011, Alaska Airlines had operated some flights using biofuel made of 50% used cooking oil. Air carrier KLM also had operated few biofuel flights between New York and Amsterdam in 2013.

Background:

Biofuel is produced from vegetable oils, recycled grease, algae and animal fat. It is cleaner, environmental friendly fuel that can be used as alternative in place of fossil fuels. To reduce its dependence on fossil fuels and its imports, India is trying to promote biofuels. Ministry of New and Renewable Energy recently on August 10, 2018 (World Biofuel Day 2018) had released National Policy on Biofuels 2018. Under it, Government plans to triple ethanol production over the next four years. It also has set target of 20% blending of ethanol in petrol by 2030.

WHAT IS ARTICLE 35A?

Why in News: The Supreme Court is set to hear a fresh petition seeking the scrapping of Article 35A in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), three weeks after the case was adjourned. It has managed to create widespread legal and political controversy, despite it not even finding a mention in the regular sequential text of the Constitution.

Article 35A

- Article 35A lays down that only permanent residents of J&K shall own immovable property in the state, or get government jobs or scholarships. It empowers the state for bestowing special rights and privileges to the people.

- Article 35A has been protecting the culture of indigenous people of J&K and Ladakh, and their rights to own the land in the state.

How did it come about?

Article 35A was incorporated into the Constitution in 1954 by an order of the then President Rajendra Prasad on the advice of the Jawaharlal Nehru Cabinet.

The controversial Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order of 1954 followed the 1952 Delhi Agreement entered into between Nehru and the then Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir Sheikh Abdullah, which extended Indian citizenship to the 'State subjects' of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Presidential Order was issued under Article 370 (1) (d) of the Constitution. This provision allows the President to make certain "exceptions and modifications" to the Constitution for the benefit of 'State subjects' of Jammu and Kashmir.

So Article 35A was added to the Constitution as a testimony of the special consideration the Indian government accorded to the 'permanent residents' of Jammu and Kashmir.

Need for review:

The 'classification' created by Article 35A has to be tested on the principle of equality as it treats non-permanent residents of J&K as 'second-class' citizens. Such persons are not eligible for employment under the State government and are also debarred from contesting elections. Meritorious students are denied scholarships and they cannot even seek redress in any court of law.

The major sufferers are women who marry outside J&K. Though they retain their Permanent Resident Certificate, their children cannot be permanent residents. This restricts their basic right of inheritance. Further, the issues of refugees who migrated to J&K during Partition are still not treated as 'State subjects' under the J&K Constitution.

Way ahead:

This matter requires the active participation of all stakeholders. It is necessary to give confidence to the residents of J&K that any alteration in status quo will not take away their rights but will boost J&K's prosperity as it will open doors for more investment, resulting in new opportunities. Article 35A, which was incorporated about six decades ago, now requires a relook, especially given that J&K is now a well-established democratic State.

NETA APP

Why in News: Termed by former President Pranab Mukherjee as a "milestone" in making Indian democracy "more participative", an app called 'Neta' was launched, to allow voters to rate and review their political representatives. The National Electoral Transformation (NETA) mobile application to rate Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs).

'Neta - Leaders' Report Card' App, the brainchild of 27-year-old entrepreneur Pratham Mittal, is a platform where voters can review and rate their elected representatives and hold them accountable as well.

Important Points:

To order to rate the representatives, the app requires a combination of mediums like the app itself, IVR calls, SMS and even offline activation. After downloading the app, one needs to put the pin number of the area that concerns a particular users and it shows a list of politicians from different parties who contested the last Lok Sabha elections.

The app connects the users' profile with their constituency and present them the trending political discussions of the area.

One can vote for a particular politician or skip this step to go ahead and use the other features of the app.

The app also provides new leaders with an opportunity to showcase their popularity and catch the attention of political parties.

The users of the app can also see which politician is ahead of others in terms of votes.

Inspired by the United States' approval system, the app is also being viewed as an instrument to determine voter sentiment across constituencies in the country.

It is available on Andriod and iOS platforms and on web in 16 languages to cater to a diverse user profile.

- Over 1.5 crore verified voters have already rated or reviewed local leaders across 543 parliamentary constituencies and 4,120 Assembly constituencies on the app, within eight months.
- The App was first used during the February 2018 bypolls in Rajasthan's Ajmer and Alwar constituencies, and later, it was used in Karnataka ahead of the Assembly Elections in May 2018.

COMMITTEE ON REVIEW OF PENAL PROVISIONS OF COMPANY ACT 2013

Why in News: The Committee constituted by Government of India in July 2018 to review the existing framework dealing with offences under the Companies Act, 2013 and related matters and make recommendations to promote better corporate compliance. The report was presented to the Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs, Shri Arun Jaitley by Secretary, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Shri Injeti Srinivas, who chaired the committee.

The Committee undertook a detailed analysis of all penal provisions, which were then broken down into eight categories based on the nature of offences. The Committee recommended that the existing rigour of the law should continue for serious offences, covering six categories, whereas for lapses that are essentially technical or procedural in nature, mainly falling under two categories may be shifted to in-house adjudication process. The Committee observed that this would serve the twin purposes promoting of ease of doing business and better corporate compliance. It would also reduce the number of prosecutions filed in the Special Courts, which would, in turn, facilitate speedier disposal of serious offences and bring serious offenders to book. The cross-cutting liability under section 447, which deals with corporate fraud, would continue to apply wherever fraud is found.

The report, inter alia, makes recommendations for de-clogging the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) through significant reduction in compounding cases before the Tribunal. In addition, the report also touches upon certain essential elements related to corporate governance such as declaration of commencement of business, maintenance of a registered office, protection of depositors' interests, registration and management of charges, declaration of significant beneficial ownership, and independence of independent directors.

The main recommendations of the Committee are as follows:

- (i) Restructuring of Corporate Offences to relieve Special Courts from adjudicating routine offences:
 - (a) re-categorization of 16 out of the 81 compoundable offences by shifting them from the jurisdiction of special courts to an in-house E-adjudication framework wherein defaults would be subject to levy of penalty by the authorised adjudicating officer (Registrar of Companies);
 - (b) remaining 65 compoundable offences to continue under the jurisdiction of special courts due to their potential misuse;
 - (c) similarly, status quo recommended in respect of all non-compoundable offences, which relate to serious corporate offences;
 - (c) instituting a transparent online platform for E-adjudication and E-publication of orders; and
 - (d) necessitating a concomitant order for making good the default at the time of levying penalty, to achieve better compliance.
- (ii) De-clogging the NCLT by:
 - (a) enlarging the jurisdiction of the Regional Director with enhanced pecuniary limits for compounding of offences under section 441 of the Companies Act 2013 (the Act);
 - (b) vesting in the Central Government the power to approve the alteration in the financial year of a company under section 2(41); and conversion of public companies into private companies under section 14 of the Act.
- (iii) Recommendations related to corporate compliance and corporate governance:
 - (a) re-introduction of declaration of commencement of business provision to better tackle the menace of 'shell companies';
 - (b) greater disclosures with respect to public deposits, particularly in respect of transactions exempted from the definition of public deposits under section 76 of the Act to prevent abuse and harming of public interest;
 - (c) huge reduction in time-limit for filing documents related to creation, modification and satisfaction of charges and stringent penal provisions for non-reporting;

- (d) once a company obtains restrictions under section 90(7) relating to significant beneficial ownership, in respect of shares whose ownership remains undetermined, such shares should be transferred to the Investor Education and Protection Fund if rightful owner does not claim ownership within a year of such restrictions;
- (e) non-maintenance of registered office to trigger de-registration process;
- (f) holding of directorships beyond permissible limits to trigger disqualification of such directors; and
- (g) imposition of a cap on independent director's remuneration in terms of percentage of income in order to prevent any material pecuniary relationship, which could impair his independence on the board of the company.

ODISHA TO GET LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Why in News: Odisha is all set to get a Legislative Council like several other States in the country. A proposal in this regard was approved at a Cabinet meeting presided over by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. A resolution will be brought in the monsoon session of the Assembly beginning September 4 for formation of the Odisha Legislative Council, State Parliamentary Affairs Minister Bikram Keshari Arukha told press persons after the Cabinet meeting. The Minister said that the proposed Council will have 49 members, which is one-third of the 147-member State Assembly.

Important Points:

The State will have to spend ₹35 crore annually for the Council, the members of which will get salary and allowance as given to the members of the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Arukha said.

The Odisha government had set up a committee in 2015 to study the Legislative Councils in other States and recommend for establishment of one in the State. The committee visited four States-- Bihar, Telangana, Maharashtra and Karnataka -- for the purpose. It had submitted its report to the Chief Minister on August 3 this year.

About Legislative Council:

Legislative Council or Vidhan Parishad is the upper house in bicameral legislatures in some states of India. While most states have unicameral legislature with only legislative assembly, currently, seven states viz. Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh have legislative council. Further, Parliament has also cleared formation of Legislative Council Rajasthan and Assam.

- **Strength of the Legislative Council:** Total Number of the Legislative Council should not exceed the 1/3rd of the total number of members of the Legislative assembly, but it should not be less than 40 (Article 171). However, Jammu & Kashmir is an exception to this where the upper house has strength of 36 only. This is because; J & K assembly is created as per the J & K constitution and Part VI is not applicable to Jammu & Kashmir.

Representatives in the Legislative Council: In legislative Council, there are 5 different categories of representation.

1/3rd of the total membership is elected by the electorates consisting of the members of the self Governing bodies in the state such as Municipalities, District Boards etc.

1/3rd members are elected by the members of the Legislative assembly of the State

1/12th members are elected by an electorate of University Graduates.

1/12th members are elected by the electorate consisting of the secondary school teachers (3 year experience)

1/6th members nominated by the Governor on the basis of their special knowledge / practical experience in literature, art, science, cooperative movement or social service.

For the first 4 categories mentioned above, the election is held in accordance with the system of proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote and secret ballot method. The above representation can be changed by parliament of India by law.

Eligibility to become a Member of Legislative Council (MLC)

To be eligible for membership of the Legislative council, a person

- Must be citizen of India
- Must have completed the age of 30 years
- Must possess such other qualifications as prescribed by the parliament by law.

The member should not hold the office of the profit. Should not be of unsound mind and should not be an undischarged insolvent.

Analysis:

A second House of legislature is considered important for two reasons: one, to act as a check on hasty actions by the popularly elected House and, two, to ensure that individuals who might not be cut out for the rough-and-tumble of direct elections too are able to contribute to the legislative process.

Opposition to the idea of Legislative Councils is centred on three broad arguments. One, they can be used to park leaders who have not been able to win an election. Two, they can be used to delay progressive legislation. Three, they would strain state finances.

Opinion in the Constituent Assembly was divided on the question of having a Legislative Council. The idea was backed on the above grounds; it was also suggested that having a second chamber would allow for more debate and sharing of work between the Houses.

M.P. SEEKS REVIVAL OF CHEETAH REINTRODUCTION PROJECT

Why in News: Madhya Pradesh forest department has written to National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to revive its Cheetah Reintroduction Project to reintroduce Cheetahs in Nauradehi sanctuary located in Sagar district of state. The ambitious project was conceived in 2009 but had hit roadblock for want of funds.

Important Points:

- Cheetah, fastest land animal was declared extinct in India in 1952. India's last spotted Asiatic cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*) had died in Chhattisgarh in 1947.

- This species was hunted into extinction by British colonial officers and Indian royalty. According to earlier action plan, around 20 cheetahs were to be translocated to Nauradehi from Namibia in Africa.
- Namibia Cheetah Conservation Fund had then showed its willingness to donate felines to India. However, State was not ready to finance plan contending that it was the Centre's project.
- The cheetah is also the world's fastest land mammal, an icon of nature. With great speed and dexterity, the cheetah is known for being an excellent hunter, its kills feeding many other animals in its ecosystem-ensuring that multiple species survive.

The reintroduction of cheetahs will help restore India's open forests and grassland ecosystems, which have been suffering. Having cheetahs will result in greater biodiversity, and biodiversity is the hallmark of healthy ecosystems.

India is also home to the world's largest free-roaming populations of livestock. Bringing back the cheetah will focus attention on pastoralism, and in doing so, help restore India's natural heritage.

Background:

In 2011, NTCA, a statutory body under Union Environment Ministry had committed Rs.50 crore to State for this project. Dehradun based Wildlife Institute of India (WII) also had prepared Rs. 260 crore Cheetah Re-introduction Project in 2012. It was estimated that Rs. 25 crore to Rs. 30 crore will be needed to build enclosure with huge boundary walls in area of 150 sq km for introduction and protection of Cheetahs in Nauradehi before releasing them in wild. Nauradehi sanctuary was found to be most suitable area for reintroduction of Cheetahs as its forests are not very dense to restrict fast movement of Cheetahs and also has abundant prey base.

About NTCA:

The National Tiger Conservation Authority is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change constituted under enabling provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 2006, for strengthening tiger conservation, as per powers and functions assigned to it under the said Act.

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority has been fulfilling its mandate within the ambit of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for strengthening tiger conservation in the country by retaining an oversight through advisories/normative guidelines, based on appraisal of tiger status, ongoing conservation initiatives and recommendations of specially constituted Committees.

G20 MEMBER NATIONS TO PROMOTE POLICIES THAT BRIDGES ALL FORMS OF DIGITAL DIVIDE

Why in News: At the G20 Digital Economy Ministerial Meeting in Salta, in the north-west of Argentina, G20 ministers and senior officials issued a declaration that reflects the G20's commitment towards promoting "policies and actions that catalyze digital transformations. The Digital Economy Ministerial Meeting, held on 23-24 August, was attended by 33 heads of delegation- Ministers, senior officials and representatives from invited countries and international organizations, like EU, UNCTAD, ITU etc.

Argentina has selected the theme, 'Building consensus for fair and sustainable development,' for the 2018 G20 Leaders' Summit, and has identified three key issues for the agenda: the future of work, infrastructure for development, and a sustainable food future.

Important Points:

The meeting was attended by 33 heads of delegation- ministers, senior officials and representatives from invited countries and international organizations like EU, UNCTAD, ITU etc. India was represented by Union Minister for Electronics and IT & Law and Justice Ravi Shankar Prasad.

The participating delegates deliberated upon efforts to create conditions that help governments, private sector and civil society maximize benefits and confront challenges posed by technological progress. The other focus areas which were also deliberated included digital inclusion in particular gender divide, digital government, digital infrastructure and measuring digital economy.

- Participating G20 member nations agreed to promote policies that will contribute to bridging all forms of digital divide with special attention to digital gender divide. They also agreed to promote digital government and digital infrastructure, strengthen digital skills of workforce, deepen analysis towards digital economy measurement and to share experiences and lesson learned.

Digital Economy Task Force:

- The Digital Economy Task Force (DETF) was established under the 2017 German presidency, based on the decision adopted in Hangzhou in 2016 under the Chinese Presidency.

In Antalya, under the Turkish presidency in 2015, G20 leaders recognized the modern period as a critical era of digital transformation, influenced by the advent of new technologies as key elements for economic development.

What is Digital economy?

The digital economy refers to a broad range of activities which include: the use of knowledge and information as factors in production, information networks as a platform for action, and how the information and communication technology (ICT) sector spurs economic growth.

Challenges to digital economy:

Important challenges include providing high-speed internet for all by 2025, creating inclusive growth and new jobs through digital trade, promoting lifelong digital learning, and closing the gender gap.

G20

Group of Twenty (G20) is premier forum for international economic cooperation and decision-making. It is a forum for governments and central bank governors from 20 major economies to focus on economic issues and other important development challenges.

The G20 comprises of total 19 countries plus European Union (EU), representing 85% of global GDP, 80% of international trade, 65% of world's population. Its members include Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, India, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Turkey, South Africa, UK, US and EU.

- It was started in 1999 as meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors in the aftermath of the South-east Asian (Tiger economies) financial crisis. It was established for studying, reviewing, and promoting high-level discussion of policy issues pertaining to the promotion of international financial stability.
- In 2008, the first G20 Leaders' Summit was held in Washington DC, US. Prior to this, it was merely forum for meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors. The group has played key role in responding to the global financial crisis.

Global Impact:

Collectively, G20 members represent all inhabited continents, 85% of global economic output, two-thirds of the world's population, and 75% of international trade.

G20 policy-making is enriched by the participation of key international organizations regularly invited to G20 meetings, guest countries invited at the president's discretion, and engagement groups composed of different sectors civil society.

ESA SATELLITE TO IMPROVE WEATHER FORECAST LAUNCHED

Why in News: The European Space Agency (ESA) has successfully launched Aeolus satellite that will measure winds around the globe and help improve weather forecasting. The Earth Explorer Aeolus satellite was launched into polar orbit on a Vega rocket from Europe's Spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana.

Important Points:

Many aspects of our lives are influenced by the weather. It goes without saying that accurate forecasts are important for commercial undertakings such as farming, fishing, construction and transport - and in general make it easier to plan the days ahead.

In extreme circumstances, knowing what the weather will bring can also help save lives and protect property. Although weather forecasts have advanced considerably in recent years, meteorologists urgently need reliable wind-profile data to improve accuracy further.

- Aeolus wind mission will demonstrate that measuring global wind-profiles from space, using laser technology, can meet this requirement.

Aeolus satellite:

- Aeolus is the first satellite mission to acquire profiles of Earth's wind on a global scale. These near-realtime observations will improve the accuracy of numerical weather and climate prediction and advance our understanding of tropical dynamics and processes relevant to climate variability.
- Aeolus is the fifth in the family of ESA's Earth Explorer missions, which address key scientific challenges identified by the science community and demonstrate breakthrough technology in observing techniques.

Named after Aeolus, who in Greek mythology was appointed 'keeper of the winds' by the Gods, this novel mission will not only provide much-needed data to improve the quality of weather forecasts, but also contribute to long-term climate research. The Aeolus satellite carries just one large instrument - a Doppler wind lidar called Aladin that will probe the lowermost 30 km of the atmosphere to measure the winds sweeping around our planet.

About European Space Agency (ESA):

The European Space Agency (ESA) is Europe's gateway to space. Its mission is to shape the development of Europe's space capability and ensure that investment in space continues to deliver benefits to the citizens of Europe and the world.

ESA is an international organisation with 22 Member States. By coordinating the financial and intellectual resources of its members, it can undertake programmes and activities far beyond the scope of any single European country.

GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES REGULATIONS FOR DRONES

Why in News: The government has announced the Drone Regulations 1.0. These regulations will enable the safe, commercial usage of drones starting December 1, 2018. They are intended to enable visual line-of-sight daytime-only and a maximum of 400 ft altitude operations.

Categories:

As per the regulation, there are 5 categories of RPAS categorized by weight, namely nano, micro, small, medium and large.

Important Points:

- All RPAS or drones, except nano and those owned by NTRO, ARC and Central Intelligence Agencies, will be registered and issued with the Unique Identification Number (UIN).
- The Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit (UAOP) will be required for drone operators except for nano drones operating below 50 ft.; micro drones operating below 200 ft; and those owned by NTRO, ARC and Central Intelligence Agencies.

The mandatory equipment required for operation of drones except nano category are GNSS (GPS); Return-To-Home (RTH); Anti-collision light; ID-Plate; Flight controller with flight data logging capability; and ID and SIM/ No-Permission No Take off (NPNT).

Drones will operate within visual line of sight (VLoS), during day time only, and up to maximum 400 feet altitude.

For flying in controlled Airspace, filing of flight plan and obtaining Air Defence Clearance (ADC) /Flight Information Centre (FIC) number shall be necessary.

The regulations specify minimum manufacturing standards and training requirements of drones of small and above categories.

The regulation defines "No Drone Zones" around airports; near international border, Vijay Chowk in Delhi; State Secretariat Complex in State Capitals, strategic locations/vital and military installations; etc.

The government has prepared an all-digital process for registering and operating drones in India. The operations of drones will be enabled through Digital Sky Platform.

The Digital Sky Platform is the first-of-its-kind national Unmanned Traffic Management (UTM) platform that implements "No Permission, No Takeoff" (NPNT).

Users will be required to do a one-time registration of their drones, pilots and owners.

For every flight, users will be required to ask for permission to fly on a mobile app. This requirement is exempted for the nano category of drones. Once the user puts forward his request to fly, an automated process permits or denies the request instantly.

- To prevent unauthorised flights and to ensure public safety, any drone without a digital permit to fly will simply not be able to takeoff.

- The UTM operates as a traffic regulator in the drone airspace and coordinates closely with the defense and civilian Air Traffic Controllers (ATCs) to ensure that drones remain on the approved flight paths.

The enforcement actions are:

- Suspension or cancellation of UIN/ UAOP in case of violation of regulatory provisions
 - Actions will be undertaken as per relevant Sections of the Aircraft Act 1934, or Aircraft Rules, or any statutory provisions
- Penalties will be enforced as per applicable India Penal Code Sections 287, 336, 337, 338, or any relevant section.

What next?

Going forward, the Drone Task Force will provide draft recommendations for Drone Regulations 2.0. These regulations will examine, inter alia, the following issues:

Certification of safe and controlled operation of drone hardware and software.

Air space management through automated operations linked into overall airspace management framework.

Beyond visual-line-of-sight operations.

Contribution to establishing global standards.

Suggestions for modifications of existing CARs and/ or new CARs.

Way ahead:

Flying drones safely in India will require research and development to understand how they can be best used in India's unique landscape. Such R&D occurs best in a market-oriented environment, which will not happen unless civilian drone use is permitted. Building profitable companies around drone use can be complicated when the core business model is illegal.

INDIAN RAILWAYS UNVEILS NEW SMART COACH

Why in News: The Indian Railways unveiled its state-of-the-art coach manufactured at the Modern Coach Factory, Raebareli. These smart coaches have several new features that will help in enhancing the safety and security of passengers. Ministry of Railways is now focussing on predictive maintenance instead of preventive maintenance. An additional cost of all equipment will be approximately

Rs 12-14 lakhs which can be recovered in a year or so, the ministry said. A pilot project is being launched to turn out minimum 100 more smart coaches to gain experience and validate.

Important Points:

- A smart device is anything that's connected to other mechanisms or networks through Bluetooth, NFC, Wi-Fi, Li-Fi, 3G etc and can operate on its own or by interacting with other devices.

In the case of the smart coach, there's a central processing unit that connects over a GSM network. The OBCMS is officially called the Passenger Information and Coach Computing Unit, or 'PICCU', an industrial grade computer that monitors two aspects, coach maintenance and the passenger interface.

Coach maintenance entails relaying information about the train's health back to PICCU using a vibration-based self-powered harvesting sensor that's placed on the axle box. The sensor is capable of predicting hard spots and defects on the railway track, the wheels of the train and the bearings.

Using that information, the Indian Railways can plan for maintenance accordingly to optimise their resources on a 'need-basis' rather being premature or once something already goes wrong. And since the railway tracks are also monitored, the probability of line failures should decrease.

The same goes for sensors fitted into the train's air conditioning (AC) system, that will relay information about the AC condition with alerts for when repairs are required. In addition, the Water Level Indicator (WLI) technology will let PICCU know if the water level drops below sufficient levels.

For passengers, there's an integrated information system that informs them of the train's location, the expected time of arrival and how fast the train is going. The Indian Railways already has the RailYatri app that tries to do that same thing, but currently lacks the accuracy to pull it off.

More importantly, there are at least 6 CCTV cameras on board the coach to implement more stringent security measures. It's not only about the security of passengers but also monitoring the behaviour and actions of the railway staff on-board.

- That being said, in case of an emergency, a talkback system has been integrated so that passengers and the train guard can communicate directly. It's also useful in cases where direct assistance may not be feasible, and instructions can be relayed over the network.

PETROLEUM MINISTER LAUNCHES ONLINE PORTAL FOR COMMON CARRIER CAPACITY BOOKING

Why in News: The Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas launched an online portal to enable easy, efficient and transparent booking of common carrier capacity for natural gas transmission services under GAIL's pipelines. The portal will be the first step to facilitate gas trading on a hub or exchange-traded platform in India.

Important Points:

The online portal is the first-of-its-kind in the natural gas sector of the country. It will provide gas consumers the facility to register pipeline capacity bookings online.

It aims to continue the practice of serving on first come-first served basis.

The portal is a transparent, market-friendly component in the gas trading system.

It will act as a milestone in the expansion of gas marketing, without human interface, through digital means.

It will enable the new entities to utilise GAIL's infrastructure in procuring the gas in a cost-effective manner.

Thus, it will help GAIL raise the standards of consumer experience for third-party access to natural gas pipelines to consumers in India.

Background:

The policy reforms in the last 4 years have helped in increasing the production and import of gas multi-fold in the country. There has been an increased focus on clean fuel and for the same gas import contracts have been renegotiated, bio-CNG is being promoted and PNG supplies are expected to soon reach new geographical areas. Gas is a price sensitive commodity and hence, it is essential that its marketing is done in a transparent manner. GAIL has been providing third party access to pipelines since 2004 and over 100 consumers, small and big, are routinely being serviced for the last few years.

4th BIMSTEC SUMMIT

Why in News: The 4th BIMSTEC Summit began in Kathmandu, Nepal. The two-day Summit will be held during August 30-31, 2018 with the main focus on countering terrorism, enhancing regional connectivity and boosting trade.

Theme 2018 : 'Towards a Peaceful, Prosperous and Sustainable Bay of Bengal Region'. The theme will help shape a collective response to the common aspirations and challenges by the member countries.

Important Points:

The meeting recommended for a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the establishment of the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnections to further cooperation in energy sector among the member states.

India laid emphasis on its sincere commitment to work with the BIMSTEC member states to make the region safer, stronger and prosperous.

The foreign secretaries of the BIMSTEC member countries met on August 29, 2018 for the 19th Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) of the BIMSTEC and reviewed the progress achieved so far in the areas of cooperation.

The foreign secretaries discussed as to how cooperation between the member states could be made more effective and business-like.

They considered a number of reports of various mechanisms related to customs cooperation, connectivity, technology, counter terrorism and transnational crimes, agriculture, poverty alleviation and public health.

Several measures were deliberated in the meeting, including exploring the possibility of establishing BIMSTEC Development Fund, rationalisation of areas of cooperation, and identification of core prioritised areas.

About Bay of Bengal Initiatives for Multi-Sectoral, Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC):

- BIMSTEC is the sub-regional group of seven countries in South Asia and South East Asia lying in littoral and adjacent areas of Bay of Bengal constituting contiguous regional unity. It was established on 6 June 1997 through Bangkok Declaration. It is headquartered in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

- Member countries: India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka from South Asia and Myanmar, Thailand from South East Asia. They are collectively home to around 1.5 billion people which constitute around 22% of global population.

BIMSTEC's prime objectives: Technological and economic cooperation among south Asian and south East Asian countries along the coast of the Bay of Bengal. BIMSTEC is sector-driven cooperative organization, starting with six sector including trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism and fisheries. In 2008, it was expanded to embrace eight more sectors including agriculture, public health, poverty alleviation, counter-terrorism, environment, culture, people to people contact and climate change.

Myanmar was included later and the group was renamed BIMSTEC.

The name was changed to BIMSTEC with the admission of Nepal and Bhutan at the 6th Ministerial meeting in Thailand in February 2004.

The first BIMSTEC summit was held in Thailand in 1997; second was held in 2008 in India; and the third was held in 2014 in Myanmar.

Nepal is the current Chair of the BIMSTEC. Nepal assumed the chairmanship in 2014.

The grouping accounts for 22 percent of the global population, and has a combined GDP of USD 2.8 trillion.

GOOGLE UNVEILS NEW PLATFORM NAMED 'NAVLEKHA' FOR INDIAN PUBLISHERS

Why in News: Google announced Project Navlekha at its 4th edition of Google for India Event held in New Delhi. Project Navlekha has been launched to enable Indian publishers of regional languages to publish their content online, without facing the trouble of selling printed copies.

The official website of Navlekha can be easily interpreted by users. Users can also obtain help from experts to set up their publication website.

Important Points:

- Search engine giant Google has unveiled Project Navlekha to make online content relevant for more Indian users especially in local languages. India is important market for Google as it is second largest population of internet users in the world. At present, amount of online content in Indian languages is only 1% of what is available in English.

Navlekha is word derived from Sanskrit meaning "a new way to write." This project aims to bring 135,000 local language publishers online by making web hosting smooth and simple.

It will allow local publishers who do not have websites to make their offline content fit for online publishing in less than a minute.

It also comprises tool that uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) to allow publishers to simply scan documents or PDFs and create instant web pages on the platform. No expert digital knowledge is required in the process. Under Navlekha project, Google will help these publishers to receive training and support and a branded page domain for the first three years.

About Google:

The Google company was officially launched in 1998 by Larry Page and Sergey Brin to market Google Search, which has become the most widely used web-based search engine. Page and Brin, students at Stanford University in California, developed a search algorithm - at first known as "BackRub" - in 1996. The search engine soon proved successful and the expanding company moved several times, finally settling at Mountain View in 2003. This marked a phase of rapid growth, with the company making its initial public offering in 2004 and quickly becoming one of the world's largest media companies.

HORIZON 2020

Why in News: Union Government and European Union (EU) have collaborated for research programme named Horizon 2020 to develop Next Generation Influenza Vaccine to protect citizens across the globe. For this research programme, India's Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and EU have committed Euro 15 million (Rs. 240 crore).

01 Important Points:

- The EU and the Indian government's Department of Biotechnology have committed 15 million Euros each to fund this joint project.
- The aim is to advance the efficacy, safety, duration of immunity, and reactivity against an increased breadth of influenza strains. The joint effort also aims to develop cost-effective and affordable influenza vaccine rapidly without compromising quality.
- There will be multi-disciplinary approach involving stakeholders who can represent any part of the chain from lab to market.

Eligibility:

The projects require minimum three applicants from Europe (three different EU member states) or countries associated to the EU programme Horizon 2020) and minimum three applicants from India.

The projects are also 'Open to the World' and thus applicants from other countries can join the EU-India consortia.

Significance:

Improved influenza vaccines would help the international community to better prepare in the event of an influenza pandemic.

The outcome of the project is expected to contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) to ensure health and well-being for all and boost the Indian National Health Mission.

This joint call is another demonstration of the increased cooperation between the EU and India as committed by the leaders during the Summit in October 2017. In engaging jointly on this topic, India and the EU are contributing to an important global public health challenge.

Horizon 2020 research project:

Under this project, cost-effective and affordable influenza vaccine will be developed. It aims at advancing the efficacy, safety, duration of immunity, and reactivity against an increased breadth of influenza strains. Rs. 240 crore fund has been earmarked for research and innovation actions under this project.

- The vaccine will be developed by EU-India consortia by bringing together multi-disciplinary stakeholders who represent any part of chain from lab to market. It will comprise minimum of three applicants from Europe (three different EU member states) or countries associated to EU programme Horizon 2020 and minimum three applicants from India. Other countries are also free to join this EU-India consortia.

CABINET APPROVES SIGNING OF AIR SERVICES AGREEMENT BETWEEN INDIA AND MOROCCO

Why in News: The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the revised air services agreement to be signed between India and Morocco. After the new Air Services Agreement comes into force, the existing Air Services Agreement of December, 2004 shall stand superseded.

Benefits:

The Air Services Agreement signifies an important landmark in the civil aviation relations between India and Morocco and has the potential to spur greater trade, investment, tourism and cultural exchanges between the two countries. It will provide enabling environment for enhanced and seamless connectivity while providing commercial opportunities to the carriers of both the sides ensuring greater safety and security.

Details:

Major features of the Agreement include:

- I. Multiple designation of Airlines by each party;
- II. The designated Airline of each party can enter into cooperative marketing arrangements with the designated carriers of same party, other party and that of a third party;
- III. This agreement allows designated airlines of either countries to establish offices in the territory of other country for the promotion and sale of air services;
- IV. The designated airlines of the both countries can operate any number of services to/from the six points specified in the Route Schedule to the ASA viz. Indian designated carriers can operate any number of services to/from Casablanca, Rabat, Marrakesh, Agadir, Tangier and Fez in Morocco and similarly the designated carriers of Morocco can operate any number of services to/from New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

- V. Air Services Agreement also has the provisions relating to Revocation or Suspension of Operating Authorization, Principles governing operations of agreed services, commercial opportunities, safety and security related clause etc. that have been incorporated in line of Indian Model ASA.

Background:

Keeping in view of the growth in the civil aviation sector and also with a view to modernize and improve seamless air connectivity between the two sovereign nations, the existing Air Services Agreement between India and Morocco has been updated.

The existing Air Services Agreement between India and Morocco was signed in year 2004 and does not have the updated clauses on Safety, Security, Designation of Airlines, Commercial Activities, Tariffs etc. Besides, the provisions of Cooperative Marketing Arrangements which enable both sides to establish the code share on each other flights and also on the flights of 3rd country carriers are also not available in the present Air Services Agreement.

RAILWAYS TIES UP WITH GAIL TO USE

NATURAL GAS IN PRODUCTION UNITS

Why in News: Indian Railways signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with GAIL (India) Limited to provide infrastructure facilities for supply of Natural Gas to Indian Railways Workshops, Production Units and Depots.

The MoU was signed by Chetram, CAO of the Indian Railway Organization for Alternate Fuels (IROAF) on and Gajendra Singh, Director (Marketing) of GAIL (India) Limited.

Important Points:

This MoU is an in-principle agreement between GAIL and Indian Railways for creation of infrastructure and supply of CNG, LNG and PNG for both industrial and domestic purposes.

The MoU aims to replace industrial gases like Dissolved Acetylene, LPG, BMCG and Furnace Oil, High Speed Diesel (HSD) oil with environment friendly Natural Gas.

- Out of 54 workshops and production units, 23 workshops have been identified in the first phase for replacement of Industrial Gases with Natural Gas.

- All 23 workshops will start using Natural Gas by December 31, 2018, and all 54 workshops and production units will be covered by June 30, 2019.
- All railway establishments, including base kitchens of IRCTC, all guest houses and hostels and Railway divisions will start using Natural Gas by June 30, 2019.

In domestic segment, about 1100 houses have been provided with D-PNG supply in Railway colony of Bhubaneswar.

Importance:

Besides the huge benefits to the environment by reducing harmful greenhouse emissions, the replacement of industrial gases and furnace oils with Natural Gas also results in cost benefits with potential for huge savings.

The use of Natural Gas will replace about 844027 cubic meter of Acetylene, 2354425 Kg of LPG and 140991 Kg of BMCG and 5500 KL of HSD/Furnace oil worth Rs 70 crore per annum.

Replacement by Natural Gases is likely to result into a saving of about Rs 20 crore per annum to Indian Railways.

Background:

Matunga workshop and Kota Workshop:

The pilot project at Matunga workshop and Kota Workshop has already been commissioned and supply of Natural Gas has commenced.

The Carriage Repair Work Shop at Matunga has begun using CNG in place of Dissolved Acetylene/LPG and expected savings is Rs 20 lakhs per annum. Similarly, the use of Natural Gas has commenced in Kota Workshop of West Central Railways, where the expected saving is Rs 21 Lakh per annum.

Rail Wheel Factory, Bengaluru:

The use of CNG has been taken up by Rail Wheel Factory, Bengaluru and natural gas is being used in lieu of HSD in the Draw Furnace of Wheel Shop and all the three furnaces of Axle Shop, leading to a saving of 410 KL of HSD oil per month which amounts to an annual saving of Rs 8-10 Crores at RWF itself, besides, reducing the CO2 emission about by 28%.

O-SMART SCHEME

Why in News: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for the umbrella scheme "Ocean Services, Technology, Observations, Resources Modelling and Science (O-SMART)", for implementation during the period from 2017-18 to 2019-20 at an overall cost of Rs.1623 crore.

Important Points:

- The scheme encompasses a total of 16 sub-projects addressing ocean development activities such as Services, Technology, Resources, Observations and Science.

The services rendered under the O-SMART will provide economic benefits to a number of user communities in the coastal and ocean sectors, namely, fisheries, offshore industry, coastal states, Defence, Shipping, Ports etc.

Impact:

The services rendered under the O-SMART will provide economic benefits to a number of user communities in the coastal and ocean sectors, namely, fisheries, offshore industry, coastal states, Defence, Shipping, Ports etc. Currently, five lakhs fishermen community are receiving this information daily through mobile which includes allocation of fish potential and local weather conditions in the coastal waters. This will help in reducing the search time for fishermen resulting savings in the fuel cost. Implementation of O-SMART will help in addressing issues relating to Sustainable Development Goal-14, which aims to conserve use of oceans, marine resources for sustainable development. This scheme (O-SMART) also provide necessary scientific and technological background required for implementation of various aspects of Blue Economy.

The State of Art Early Warning Systems established under the O-SMART Scheme will help in effectively dealing with ocean disasters like Tsunami, storm surges.

- The technologies being developed under this Scheme will help in harnessing the vast ocean resources of both living and non-living resources from the seas around India.

Details:

- Recognizing the importance of implementing schemes of highly multi-disciplinary in the ocean sector of national interests and international commitments, the ministry is proposing to continue the existing schemes in a focused way as a part of umbrella scheme of (O-SMART). As the resources on land are not adequate enough to meet the future demands, India is also embarking on blue economy for effective and efficient use of the vast ocean resources in a sustainable way, which would require a great deal of information on ocean science, development of technology and providing services. Further, the coastal research and marine biodiversity activities are important to be continued also in the context of achieving United Nations Sustainable Development Goal-14 to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. This has been envisaged under the (O-SMART)scheme. The ocean advisory services and technologies being rendered and developed under the scheme play a pivotal role in the development activities over dozen sectors, working in the marine environment including the coastal states of India, contributing significantly to the GDP. Besides, the state-of-the art early warning systems setup for oceanic disasters viz., Tsunami, storm surges, are also providing round the clock services for India and countries of the Indian Ocean, which have been recognized by UNESCO.

The important deliverables during the next 2 years envisage include (i) strengthening of Ocean Observations and Modelling (ii) Strengthening of Ocean Services for Fishermen (iii) setting up Marine Coastal Observatories for monitoring marine pollution in 2018 (iv) setting up Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion Plant (OTEC) in Kavaratti (v) acquisition of 2 Coastal Research Vessels for Coastal research (vi) Continuation of Ocean Survey and Exploration of Minerals and Living Resources (vii) Technology Development for Deep Ocean Mining-Deep Mining System and Manned Submersibles and (ix) setting up Six Desalination Plants in Lakshadweep

Background:

- In accordance of the Ocean Policy Statement enacted in November 1982, the Ministry has been implementing a number of multi-disciplinary projects in the field of ocean development primarily to (i) provide a suite of Ocean Information services, (ii) develop technology for sustainable harnessing the ocean resources, (iii) promote front-ranking research and (iv) conduct ocean scientific ocean surveys.

RBI ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18

Why in News: The RBI, in its annual report, has highlighted that it has rationalised regulations to facilitate better cross-border flows in FY18. It is apparent that the central bank was worried about the country's balance of payment as signs of stress in external conditions were beginning to appear in 2017-18.

Important Points:

The report elaborates on the measures taken to encourage foreign fund inflows to the debt market, and to increase inflows through external commercial borrowings (ECBs) of Indian companies. Data, however, show that the changes are not too effective. While there was a short-term impact of the RBI's moves with regard to debt inflows, ECB outflows continued in FY18, despite the rule changes.

The central bank reviewed the rules governing FPI investments in debt securities in FY18 to provide them more room to invest, increase the options available to them, and to make it easier to manage tenor and duration. Caps on FPI investments at the category level were tweaked slightly. For instance, FPIs were allowed to hold up to 5.5 per cent of total G-Secs outstanding, 2 per cent of SDLs and 9 per cent of corporate bonds.

The more significant change was increasing the cap on total FPI investments in G-Secs and other central government securities from 20 per cent to 30 per cent of outstanding stock. Another important change was removing the restriction on investing in securities with less than three-year residual maturity.

- Limits in corporate bonds were also rationalised by discontinuing the various sub-categories and prescribing a single limit for FPI investment in all types of corporate bonds.

- These changes appear to have had a short-term impact of attracting more debt fund flows to the country in FY18. While there was net outflow from Indian debt amounting to ₹7,292 crore in FY17, the flows reversed with inflow of ₹1,19,036 crore in FY18. The impact of these tweaks are, however, not sustainable. For, there has been outflow from Indian debt instruments amounting to ₹35,673 crore so far in FY19. This could be due to the RBI adopting a more hawkish stance in its monetary policy, rupee weakness and rising treasury yields in the US. The RBI has also been clearly worried about the outflow of funds raised through ECBs. While \$1,570 million flowed into the country through ECBs in 2014-15, there were outflows of \$4,529 million and \$6,102 million in FY16 and FY17.

The central bank has, therefore, tried to plug this outflow by allowing overseas branches or subsidiaries of Indian banks to refinance ECBs of highly-rated (AAA) corporates as well as Navratna and Maharatna public sector undertakings.

The cost of ECB loans was capped at 450 basis points over the six-month \$ Libor for ECBs raised in foreign currencies. The prevailing yield of the Government of India securities of corresponding maturity was the cap for rupee ECBs. Housing finance companies, port trusts and companies engaged in maintenance, repair and overhaul, and freight forwarding, were also allowed to raise ECBs.

Decline in ECB

As a result of the RBI measures, outflow of funds raised through ECBs declined to \$183 million in FY18. But the point to note is that short-term trade credit is spiking sharply, almost doubling in FY18 to \$13.9 billion. This figure will need a close watch as rising global interest rates and weak rupee will make debt servicing a challenge.

PANEL SUBMITS REPORT ON MOB LYNCHING TO GOM

Why in News: A month after the Centre set up a high-powered four-member committee to examine, and to deliberate on the need for a separate law to curb lynching and mob violence, the panel, headed by Union home secretary Rajiv Gauba has submitted its report to the Group of Ministers (GoM).

The committee was tasked to look into the incidents of mob violence and lynchings and submit recommendations on ways to tackle the challenge within four weeks of its formation. Though, the panel remained tight-lipped on the recommendations made.

The Committee:

- Besides home Secretary Rajiv Gauba, the committee will also include the secretary of justice, secretary of legal affairs, secretary of the legislative department and secretary of social justice and empowerment.

A Group of Ministers (GoM), headed by home minister Rajnath Singh, will now examine the recommendations of this panel.

On board are Union ministers Sushma Swaraj, Nitin Gadkari, Ravi Shankar Prasad and Thawar Chand Gehlot who will submit a final report to Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Technology:

This comes days after IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad met WhatsApp CEO Chris Daniels in New Delhi and directed the messaging platform to comply with Indian laws and establish a corporate entity in the country.

The concerned minister had also sought the appointment of a grievance officer in India and development of technology solutions to combat the spread of violent or fake messages on the widely used social platform.

Drafting New Legislation

Last month, the apex court had directed the Centre to draft a new legislation to effectively deal with incidents of mob lynching.

- The Supreme Court had directed the Centre and state governments to take preventive measures to control the spread of fake messages on social media platforms, after a series of mob lynching incidents took place.

About Mob Lynching:

Lynching is a premeditated extrajudicial killing by a group. It is most often used to characterize informal public executions by a mob in order to punish an alleged transgressor, or to intimidate a group.

Important Points:

Over 30 people have been killed in mob lynchings in 2018 alone, and there appears to be no end in sight. Alwar, Singrauli, Dhule, Assam, Bangalore, Ahmedabad - the list goes on, across the country.

Even as things stand, lynchings are illegal, and anyone involved in them has committed a criminal offence. The "reasons" behind the killings - child-lifting rumours, cattle-smuggling - that's all irrelevant. It doesn't matter even if the mob was right - no matter who the victims were, nobody can take the law into their own hands.

- The crime of murder (Section 302, Indian Penal Code), read with common intention (Section 34) or conspiracy (Section 120B), can be used to charge the entire mob, not just whoever lands the fatal blow. If the victim doesn't die, you could use charges of rioting, unlawful assembly or attempt to murder. All of these charges apply even if the mob didn't originally intend to kill the victim. Take the death of Akbar Khan in Alwar, for example. The police didn't take him to a hospital for three hours, despite knowing what had happened to him. At other times, they just stand by and let things happen, like in the Hapur lynching.

As for the USA - they went from a place termed by Mark Twain as the United States of Lyncherdom, to no longer having this problem, without any special law to deal with it - so a special law is not a necessity.



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