



**CENTRE FOR AMBITION**  
(An Institute for Civil Services)

## **BACKGROUND NOVEMBER 2016**

### **AGRICULTURAL MARKETING & FARM FRIENDLY REFORMS INDEX. MAHARASHTRA RANKS FIRST**

A new ranking of states by the NITI Aayog, based on their performance in reforming agriculture marketing, land leasing and forestry on private land, has set the record straight on states' eagerness to transform the farm sector.

- The new rankings come on the back of major central initiatives to integrate the Indian farmer with markets, like an electronic national agriculture market (eNAM) and a new crop insurance scheme, both of which were rolled out this year.

#### **ABOUT THE INDEX:**

According to the 'Agricultural Marketing and Farmer Friendly Reforms Index', a score of 0 implies no reforms while a score of 100 means complete reforms. The index is aimed at helping the States identify and address problems in the farm sector, which suffer from low growth, low farm income and agrarian distress.

- The index takes into account several parameters like states' implementation of the model agricultural marketing Act, joining eNAM, special treatment to fruits and vegetables for marketing and the level of taxes in state-regulated mandis (wholesale markets).
- These indicators reveal the ease of doing agribusiness and opportunities for farmers to benefit from modern trade. The indicators also reflect the levels of competitiveness, efficiency and transparency in agriculture markets.

- The other parameters included in the index are relaxation in restrictions related to lease of farm land to tenant farmers, and the freedom farmers have to fell and transport trees on their own land, which allows them to diversify their incomes.

#### **PERFORMANCE OF VARIOUS STATES:**

- The state of Maharashtra achieved first rank in implementation of various reforms. The state has implemented most of the marketing reforms and it offers best environment for doing agribusiness among all the states and UTs.
- Gujarat ranks second followed by Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.
- Almost two third states could not reach even halfway mark of reforms score.
- Major states like U.P., Punjab, West Bengal, Assam, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and J&K are in this group.
- Bihar and Kerala were not included in the rankings as they revoked their agricultural produce marketing Acts.

### **VIGILANCE AWARENESS COMMENCES ACROSS INDIAN RAILWAYS**

The observance of Vigilance Awareness Week, 2016 has commenced across Indian Railways with a Pledge taking ceremony by Officers and staff.

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### Key facts:

- The Central Vigilance Commission has given the theme of “Public participation in promoting integrity and eradicating Corruption” for the Vigilance Awareness Week this year.
  - This is aimed to reinforce commitment of officials towards bringing about integrity and transparency in all spheres of their activities and to fight corruption with vigour.
  - During this Vigilance Awareness Week, various events will be organized around the theme of anti-corruption by the field units of the Railways.
  - There is a special focus on sensitizing the youth and to achieve this objective through lectures, panel discussions, debates, discussions, plays, essay writing competitions etc..
  - Two “Integrity Pledges” will also be taken on-line by citizens and organisations/corporates to reinforce their commitment for incorruptible governance.
- Their term is 4 years or 65 years, whichever is earlier.
  - It submits its report to the President of India.
  - The Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner can be removed from his office only by order of the President on the ground of proved misbehavior or incapacity after the Supreme Court, on a reference made to it by the President, has, on inquiry, reported that the Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner, as the case may be, ought to be removed.
  - CVC is advisory body.

### GOVERNMENT NOTIFIES REAL ESTATE RULES

Union government has notified Real Estate (Regulation and Development) (General) Rules, 2016.

- Notified by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, the Rules are applicable to the five Union Territories of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep and Chandigarh.

### ABOUT CVC:

It is the apex vigilance institution. It was created via executive resolution (based on the recommendations of Santhanam committee) in 1964 but was conferred with statutory status in 2003.

- Presently, the body consists of central vigilance commissioner along with 2 vigilance commissioners.
- They are appointed by the President of India on the recommendations of a committee consisting of Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha (if there is no LoP then the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha).

### HIGHLIGHTS:

- New rules stipulate real estate developers furnish additional information regarding the ongoing projects besides depositing 70% of unused funds in a separate bank account to ensure their completion.
- Under the new rules, the developers will also be required to refund or pay compensation to the allottees with an interest rate of State Bank of India’s highest marginal cost of lending rate plus 2% within 45 days of the payments becoming due.
- The developers have also been mandated to upload various information about the project including number and type of apartments or plots, garages booked, status of the project with photographs floor-wise, status of

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construction of internal infrastructure and common areas with photos, etc.

- The Rules also provide for compounding of punishment with imprisonment for violation of the orders of Real Estate Appellate Tribunal against payment of 10% of project cost in case of developers and 10% of the cost of property purchased in case of allottees and agents. Compliance with reasons for punishment shall be complied within 30 days of compounding.
  - Under the Rules, adjudicating officers, Real Estate Authorities and Appellate Tribunals shall dispose of complaints within 60 days.
  - Real Estate Regulatory Authorities have been mandated to publish on their websites the information relating to profile and track record of promoters, details of litigations, advertisement and prospectus issued about the project, details of apartments, plots and garages, registered agents and consultants, development plan, financial details of the promoters, status of approvals and projects etc.
  - All states and other union territories are also expected to notify the rules. As per the provisions of the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016, Real Estate Regulatory Authorities are required to be put in place by April 30, 2017 before full Act is brought into effect, the next day.
- In all, 44.9 million (11.8%) people have attended schools earlier, while 65.4 million (17.2%) have never been to a school.
  - There were about 6.57 million disabled people in the age group of 5-19 at Census 2011 in India.
  - The disabled population of 1.75 million (26.7%) has never attended any school, 0.8 million (12.1%) has dropped out of schools in the last decade while 4.02 million people (61.2%) are attending educational institutions.
  - The proportion of disabled persons who never attended any educational institution in 2011, was found to be highest among persons with 'multiple disability' (54.4%), followed by 'mental illness' (50.3%) and 'mental retardation' (41.2%) whereas persons with 'any other disability' (17.7%) show the least percentage.
  - Further, out of 4.02 million disabled persons attending educational institutions, 2.28 million (56.7%) are males and 1.74 million (43.3%) are females.
  - In 2001, about 3.3 million (50.5%) out of 65.3 lakh disabled persons in the same age group reported attending educational institutions. There is an improvement of about 11 percentage points for the disabled persons attending schools in the age group 5-19 during the decade 2001-2011.

### **MORE DIFFERENTLY ABLED ATTEND SCHOOLS THAN BEFORE: CENSUS**

Registrar General of India has released Census 2011 data on Disabled Population in the age-group 5-19 by their Attendance Status in Educational Institutions and type of Disability.

#### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- There are 380.1 million people in the age group of 5-19 years, of which 269.8 million (71%) are attending educational institutions.
- Maximum percentage of disabled persons who attended educational institution earlier is seen in 'movement' (17.7%) followed by

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'mental illness' (15.5%), and least in 'multiple disability' (8.4%).

- Among the major States, Kerala had the best record with 76,394 out of 104,418 such persons attending educational institutions. In Tamil Nadu, 150,883 of disabled persons out of a total of 239,756 persons aged 5-19 were attending such institutions, while in Karnataka, 20,7779 out of 330,781 such persons had access to education institutions.

### **A.P., TELANGANA TOP IN EASE OF DOING BUSINESS**

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in partnership with the World Bank Group, has released results of the Assessment of State Implementation of Business Reforms 2015-16.

- The Assessment studies the extent to which states have implemented DIPP's 340-point Business Reform Action Plan (BRAP) for States/UTs 2015-16, covering the period July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016.
- The BRAP includes recommendations for reforms on 58 regulatory processes, policies, practices or procedures spread across 10 reform areas spanning the lifecycle of a typical business.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The 340 reform areas are broadly under categories including construction permit, environmental and labour registration, obtaining electricity connection, online tax-return filing, inspection reform, access to information and transparency, single window, land availability and commercial dispute resolution. The exercise is aimed at promoting competition among states with a view to improve business climate to attract domestic as well as foreign investments.

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have jointly topped the 2016 all-India State/Union Territory-wise ease of doing business rankings, while last year's topper Gujarat slipped to the third spot.
- This year, four of the seven States with the lowest income levels in India have found a place in the top 10, while all the seven such States had an implementation rate of over 75%.
- These low-income States included Chhattisgarh (fourth rank), Madhya Pradesh (fifth), Jharkhand (seventh) and Rajasthan (eighth).
- Among other major states, Odisha occupied 11th slot, followed by Punjab, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Delhi.

### **10TH INDO-NEPAL JOINT EXERCISE SURYA KIRAN COMMENCES**

- Indo-Nepal Joint Military Exercise Surya Kiran-X has commenced at Army Battle School, Saljhandi, Nepal.
- The Surya Kiran series of Exercises are being conducted annually, alternatively in Nepal and India. Notably in the series of military training exercises undertaken by India with various countries, Surya Kiran series with Nepal is the largest in terms of troop's participation.
- The aim of this exercise is to conduct battalion level joint training with emphasis on Counter Terrorism in mountainous terrain. Aspects of Disaster Management have also been included in the exercise.
- The Joint Battalion Level Exercise will enhance defence co-operation and relations between the two nations. It is an ideal platform for the contingent of both nations to share their experience and gain mutually. The Exercise

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will be yet another step towards taking traditional friendship between the two nations to greater heights.

### RASHTRIYA EKTA DIWAS

- Rashtriya Ekta Diwas was observed on 31<sup>st</sup> October across the nation. It marks the occasion of the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.
- The theme this year is Integration of India.
- The government had last year decided to observe Sardar Patel Jayanti Day as Ekta Diwas. This occasion provides an opportunity to re-affirm the inherent strength and resilience of the nation to withstand the threats to its unity, integrity and security.

### ODF STATUS

The State of Kerala has become the third State overall and the largest State so far to be declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) under the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) (Gramin).

- With this, all 14 districts, 152 blocks, 940 Gram Panchayats and 2117 villages of the State have been declared free from open defecation.
- Freedom from open defecation has been proven to lead to significant health benefits in terms of incidences of water-borne diseases, especially in children, and provide safety and dignity for all, especially women and senior citizens.
- Previously, Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh were declared ODF.

### BACKGROUND:

The Swachh Bharat Mission, launched in October 2014, consists of two sub-missions – the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) (SBM-G), which will be implemented in rural areas, and the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban), which will be implemented in urban areas.

- SBM-G seeks to eliminate open defecation in rural areas by 2019 through improving access to sanitation. It also seeks to generate awareness to motivate communities to adopt sustainable sanitation practices, and encourage the use of appropriate technologies for sanitation.

- SBM-Gramin mainly focuses on ensuring the use of toilets, besides their construction. The States and their implementing agencies will be given incentives for meeting performance standards: reducing open defecation, sustaining their open defecation-free status and improving solid and liquid waste management in rural areas.

- The World Bank will also provide a \$25-million technical assistance for building the capacity of select State governments.

### NEW CBDT CHAIRMAN

**Sushil Chandra** has taken over as the new chairman of the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT).

### ABOUT CBDT:

The Central Board of Direct Taxes is a statutory authority functioning under the Central Board of Revenue Act, 1963.

- It is a part of the Department of Revenue in the Ministry of Finance, Government of India.
- It provides essential inputs for policy and planning of direct taxes in India and is also responsible for administration of the direct tax laws through Income Tax Department.
- It is also India's official Financial Action Task Force unit.
- The CBDT Chairman and Members of CBDT are selected from Indian Revenue Service (IRS) whose members constitute the top management of Income Tax Department.

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## **BENAMI PROPERTY TRANSACTIONS PROHIBITION ACT COMES INTO FORCE**

The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2016, designed to curb black money and passed by parliament in August, has come into effect on November 1.

### **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ACT:**

- The new law amends the 1988 Benami Transactions Act.
- The law provides for up to seven years' imprisonment and fine for those indulging in such transactions.
- The amendments aim to strengthen the Act in terms of legal and administrative procedure.
- The law prohibits recovery of the property held benami from benamdar by the real owner. As per the Act, properties held benami are liable for confiscation by the government, without payment of compensation.
- An appellate mechanism has been provided under the act, in the form of an adjudicating authority and appellate tribunal. According to the government, the four authorities who will conduct inquiries or investigations are the Initiating Officer, Approving Authority, Administrator and Adjudicating Authority.

### **WHAT IS BENAMI TRANSACTION?**

A benami transaction is one where a property is held by one person and the amount for it is paid by another person. Therefore, in a benami transaction, the name of the person who paid the money is not mentioned. Directly or indirectly, the benami transaction is done to benefit the one who pays.

### **What isn't a benami transaction?**

- Property held under the name of spouse or child, for which the amount is being paid through a known source of income.

- A joint property with brother, sister or other relatives for which the amount is paid out of known sources of income.
- Property held by someone in a fiduciary capacity; that is, transaction involving a trustee and a beneficiary.

### **WHAT FALLS UNDER BENAMI TRANSACTION?**

Assets of any kind — movable, immovable, tangible, intangible, any right or interest, or legal documents. As such, even gold or financial securities could qualify to be benami.

### **How it affects the people?**

It is being done to curb on black money. People with unaccounted income will sure have a tough time ahead. As for the general public, it won't be much of an issue if their transactions are legal.

### **After shutting liquor shops, Bihar seeks suggestions on prohibition**

A month after implementing the new stringent Bihar Prohibition and Excise Act 2016, Bihar government has invited the general public to provide feedback and suggestions regarding its provisions.

- The Supreme Court is to shortly hear a petition regarding prohibition in the State and the government is said to have taken this step to avoid any embarrassment.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The State government had implemented the new Bihar Prohibition and Excise Act 2016 from October 2. Many people had termed the legal provisions of the new act as stringent and questioned. Some provisions in the new act were seen as impractical and draconian.

Over 18,000 people have been sent to jail so far for violating prohibition laws since April 5 this year, when prohibition came into effect in the state, and several lakh litres of liquor were seized.

## **ABOUT BIHAR PROHIBITION AND EXCISE ACT, 2016:**

This is a new and more stringent liquor-ban law with provisions such as arrest of all adults in the family if anyone consumes or stores alcohol.

- It aims to ensure that the ban on sale and consumption of alcohol, including Indian-made foreign liquor (IMFL), continues in Bihar.
- Those flouting the ban face up to 10 years in jail, a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh and there is also a provision to confiscate the house or premises where liquor is stored or drunk.
- Though in a rare case, it also prescribes death penalty if people die after consuming hooch.
- Enforcement of the new law, calculated to impose prohibition in a holistic manner, would repeal the previous excise laws in the state.

## **RCEP: MEMBERS WORRIED ABOUT GIVING MORE MARKET ACCESS TO CHINESE GOODS**

The concerns of 15 Asia-Pacific nations including India, over agreeing to give greater market access to Chinese goods without gaining similarly in return, are likely to take centre-stage in the forthcoming ministerial meeting on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

- Trade ministers of 16 countries are slated to meet on November 3-4 at Cebu, Philippines to take forward the FTA negotiations.

## **WHAT IS RCEP?**

RCEP is the proposed mega-regional Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between 16 Asia-Pacific countries including India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the 10-member ASEAN bloc.

## **What are the main concerns?**

Many countries in the RCEP grouping are worried about agreeing to eliminate tariffs altogether, a move that will mainly help China.

Concerns of these RCEP countries also stem from fears of China dumping its excess capacity in several items including steel, as well as highly subsidised items, thereby harming the local industry in the importing countries and distorting trade in the process.

## **What's being proposed by India?**

India could put forward a two-tier proposal on goods that will treat China differently from the remaining RCEP countries. When compared to the treatment for other RCEP nations, this proposal on China will include a larger negative list (goods that will be protected from tariff cuts), and longer time-frame for reducing / eliminating tariffs on the remaining goods.

- This proposal will be different from the initial proposal of a three-tier system with a greater coverage of goods for the ASEAN bloc (with an 80% threshold — that included a combination of percentage of tariff lines and that of total RCEP imports), slightly lesser for Japan & Korea (65% threshold) and the least for China, Australia and New Zealand (42.5% threshold).
- India is of the view that any concessions for opening up goods trade can be finalised only if there are equivalent gains for it in services market access.

## **BACKGROUND:**

The proposed FTA, which aims to open up trade in goods and services as well as liberalise investment policies, will cover a market of over three billion people in these countries — whose total GDP is more than \$17 trillion and account for 40 per cent of world trade.

## **RUSSIA INVITES INDIA TO JOIN FAST REACTOR RESEARCH PROJECT**

Russia has invited India to join in developing nuclear reactors and participate in its fast reactor research project.

### **ABOUT THE PROJECT:**

The multipurpose fast research reactor project, also known as MBIR, is coming up at the International Research Center in Dimitrovgrad, located in the Ulyanovsk region. The purpose of the programme is the creation of a new technological platform for nuclear energy, which will be based on the closed fuel cycle with fast neutron reactors.

- The closed fuel cycle, which involves recycling the nuclear waste as new fuel, in the case of the MBIR project, essentially signifies research on a sodium-cooled Generation 4 fast reactor to design an advanced fast neutron reactor for use in nuclear power plants.
- “MBIR’s design includes three independent loops that can be used to test different coolants like gas, lead, molten salt, among others, and therefore it will be possible to conduct material testing research in those different environments.”

### **WHAT IS A FAST NEUTRON REACTOR?**

A fast neutron reactor, also known simply as a fast reactor, is a type in which nuclear fission chain reaction is sustained by fast neutrons. Such a reactor needs no neutron moderator.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF FAST NEUTRON REACTORS:**

With fast-neutron reactors, it is possible to solve the major ecological problem of reprocessing and deactivation of the accumulated radioactive waste, at the same time providing society much needed energy.

Also, transition to the closed fuel cycle, which is based on the fast neutron reactors, will lead to

the solution of the five key problems — safety, competitiveness, shortage of fuel, reprocessing and refabricating the used nuclear fuel and radioactive waste — as well as in enforcing non-proliferation of fission materials and weapons technologies.

### **Researchers aim to scoop out marine oil spills**

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Thiruvananthapuram have developed a gelator to recover marine oil spills.

### **HOW GELATORS WERE PRODUCED?**

These gelators were produced using glucose as a startling material and after several chemical reactions.

#### **How it works?**

The gelator molecule is partly hydrophobic and partly hydrophilic. While the hydrophilic part helps in self-assembling to form gelator fibres, the hydrophobic part is responsible for its diffusion into the oil layer.

- Since the outer part of the fibre is hydrophobic, oil tends to get into the spongy network made of fibres.
- Once inside the fibre network, oil loses fluidity and becomes a gel. As the self-assembly is strong, the gel maintains its structure and rigidity even under pressure.

### **KEY FACTS:**

- Unlike current methods, the newly developed gelator can recover oil from oil-water mixture and the gelator can be reused several times.
- To achieve better diffusion of the molecule into the oil phase and enhance the oil recovery the hydrophobicity of the molecule needs to be increased. This is done by adding an aromatic/alkyl group at some part of the molecule.

## ONLINE APPLICATIONS FOR HOMES UNDER PM AWAS YOJANA STARTS

In a significant initiative, the Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation has enabled online submission of applications by the urban poor for affordable houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana(Urban).

- In this regard, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed by the Ministry of HUPA and Common Services Centre e-Governance Services India Limited of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

### KEY FACTS:

- About 60,000 located in urban areas will enable online submission of applications from November 3,2016 at a nominal cost of Rs.25/- per application.
- As per the MoU, CSCs will also facilitate printing of the acknowledgement receipt with beneficiary photograph which helps applicants in tracking application status.
- Beneficiaries have to visit the nearest CSC for seeking assistance for seeking benefits of PMAY(Urban) online. In case the beneficiary does not have Aadhar Card, CSCs will enable beneficiaries acquiring them.

### ABOUT PMAY:

The scheme was launched in June 2015 and envisages Housing for All by 2022. It involves building of more than two crore houses in a span of seven years.

- The beneficiaries are poor and people living under EWS and LIG categories in the country.
- The scheme is divided into three phases. In the first phase, a total of 100 cities will be covered from April 2015 to March 2017. In phase two, 200 cities will be covered from April 2017 to March 2019. In the third phase,

the leftover cities will be covered from April 2019 to March 2022.

- The government is providing an interest subsidy of 6.5% on housing loans which can be availed by beneficiaries for 15 years from start of loan date.
- The government will grant Rs 1 lakh to all the beneficiaries of the scheme. In addition, Rs 1.5 lakh will be given to all eligible urban poor who want to construct their houses in urban areas or plan to go for renovation in their existing houses. One can also avail loans under this scheme to build toilets in existing houses.

## CENTRE MOOTS REGISTRY TO VET GEOSPATIAL DATA

The government is developing a national data registry (NDR) that will require all agencies—state, private and academic — that collect and store geospatial data to provide details of the data they store.

### Need for NDR:

The purpose of such a registry is to create a “catalogue” that would “prevent duplication” of data sets and to help users locate the right agencies to source information.

### Key facts:

- The Department of Science and Technology (DST) has been selected as the nodal coordinating agency.
- The registry will be a ‘meta-data’ repository: it will not actually be a source of geospatial data but will only inform about the nature of the data a service provider has.
- The registry will serve as a source of authenticated information.
- This initiative would also act as a clearing house for geospatial applications.

**WAY AHEAD:**

Everyone from restaurant-location-services providers to hospital-location aggregators will have to comply with the directive, and the government may consider bringing in legislation.

**INDIA, PALESTINE SIGN MOU FOR SETTING UP OF TECHNO PARK IN RAMALLAH**

India and Palestine have signed an agreement for setting up of a techno park in Ramallah with an Indian grant of \$12 million.

**BACKGROUND:**

The decision to set up 'Palestine-India Techno Park' was taken during the visit of President Pranab Mukherjee to that country last October.

**KEY FACTS:**

- Once completed, the Technopark will serve as an IT hub in Palestine with complete IT facilities offering a one-stop solution to all IT-related service requirements.
- It will also provide the state-of-the-art technology, hosts IT companies and foreign companies benefiting local business, universities and other institutions.

**Duty drawback facility extended for textiles**

The government has extended duty drawback facility for one year on all textile products to boost exports, and has increased rates in some cases for the benefit of Indian exporters.

**Key facts:**

- The duty drawback has been announced by the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC).
- The duty drawback benefits textile exporters to overcome the barriers they face in exports.
- CBECE revises drawback rates every year on November 1 for one year.

**BACKGROUND:**

Under the revised norms, home textiles attract drawback of 7.5% now as against 7.3% earlier. Similarly, incorporation of blanket and other cotton products in this category will attract drawback rate of 8% now from 7.2% earlier. These drawbacks are aimed at giving a boost to exports of cotton textiles as they will provide adequate neutralization of the incidence of duties and taxes on the export goods and make them more competitive in the international markets.

**FSSAI STRENGTHENS THE FOOD TESTING INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE COUNTRY**

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has rolled out a major scheme for strengthening of Food Testing Infrastructure in the country at an estimated cost of Rs. 482-crore, in the light of the recent observations by Mumbai High Court regarding the urgent need to upgrade Food Testing Laboratories in India.

**Key facts:**

- In this regard, a meeting was recently held by the Empowered Committee constituted for implementing this scheme. Proposals from 7 States/UTs, namely, Goa, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Punjab were considered for strengthening their food Testing infrastructure.
- Two proposals, from Chandigarh (Punjab) and Calicut (Kerala), were approved in principle. The other States were requested to revise and resubmit their proposals according to the scheme guidelines with mentorship support from FSSAI.
- The Committee also approved the proposal for strengthening the Referral Food Laboratory at Central Food Technology Research Institute (CFTRI) through provision of state-of-the-art equipment and facilities.

**BACKGROUND:**

Under this scheme, 45 State/UT Food Testing labs (at least one in each State/UT with a provision of two labs in larger states) and 14 Referral Food Testing labs will be upgraded to enable them to obtain NABL accreditation.

- 62 Mobile Testing labs will also be established across all States/UTs. There are currently 4 Mobile food Testing labs in Punjab, Gujarat, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which will serve as a model for these Mobile Testing labs.
- Capacity building of the Food Testing labs is also an important component of this scheme. In addition, a School Food and Hygiene Programme has been envisaged under which basic Food Testing labs will be set up in 1500 schools/colleges across the country to promote a culture of safe and wholesome food.

**Bidding Guidelines for setting up 1000 MW Wind Power Projects**

Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has issued Guidelines for transparent bidding process for implementation of Scheme for setting up of 1000 MW Wind Power Project connected to inter-state transmission system (ISTS).

**HIGHLIGHTS:**

- As per Guidelines, the Wind Power Projects will be selected through open and transparent competitive bidding followed by e-reverse auction and the capacity may go higher than 1000 MW, if there is demand from Buying Entities.
- Discoms of non-windy State and UTs and also the bulk consumers of any State/UTs who intend to buy 10 MW or more can buy wind power under the Scheme.
- PTC India Ltd, trading company, will sign Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with wind projects at bid tariff and back-to-back Power Sale Agreement (PSA) with Buying

Entities at a pooled price of the total bids selected. The term of PPA and PSA will be 25 years.

- Bidder can bid for a minimum capacity of 50 MW and maximum up to 250 MW. The selected bidder is required to inject wind power at ISTS interconnection point. Bidder is allowed to install 5% of additional rated capacity that will compensate auxiliary consumption and system losses up to interconnection point.
- Provision relating to pass through of GST impact, part commissioning, efficiency in generation, performance monitoring have also been stipulated in the guidelines.

**BACKGROUND:**

MNRE sanctioned a Scheme for setting up of 1000 MW ISTS connected Wind Power Project in June 2016.

- The objective of the Scheme is to encourage competitiveness through scaling up of project sizes and introduction of efficient and transparent e-bidding and e-auctioning processes.
- It will also facilitate fulfilment of Non-Solar Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO) requirement of non-windy states.
- In order to facilitate transmission of wind power from these windy states to non-windy states provisions have been made in the Tariff Policy to waive the inter-state transmission charges and losses for wind power projects and Ministry of Power has already issued order in this regard.

**ASIAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

The three-day Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was recently inaugurated by PM Modi.

- The conference will adopt the New Delhi Declaration on the closing day which will be a political commitment by 61 participating governments towards preventing and reducing disaster risk reduction.

#### KEY FACTS:

- This is the first AMCDRR after the advent of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), adopted at the third UN World Conference in Sendai, Japan in March, 2015. It will set the direction of Sendai Framework implementation in the region.
- AMCDRR 2016 will focus on collaboration, consultation and partnership with governments and stakeholders to mainstream DRR in the region's development narrative.
- The Conference will adopt the 'Asian Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework' endorsed by the Asian countries.
- It will also consolidate the political commitment of governments towards preventing and reducing risk as well as strengthening resilience in the form of a political declaration.
- Voluntary statements of action of stakeholder groups towards a 'shared responsibility' approach in implementation of the SFDRR would also be adopted.
- 61 countries from Asia and Pacific region with nearly 4,000 delegates, including 1,100 foreign representatives, are participating in the conference.

#### BACKGROUND:

Established in 2005, AMCDRR is a biennial conference jointly organized by different Asian countries and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR). So far, six AMCDRR conferences have been organised. India had also hosted the second AMCDRR in New Delhi in 2007.

#### ABOUT SENDAI FRAMEWORK:

The "Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030" was adopted during the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in Sendai, Japan in March, 2015.

- It is the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda, with seven targets and four priorities for action.
- It was endorsed by the UN General Assembly following the 2015 Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR).
- The Framework is for 15-year. It is a voluntary and non-binding agreement which recognizes that the State has the primary role to reduce disaster risk but that responsibility should be shared with other stakeholders including local government, the private sector and other stakeholders.
- The new Framework is the successor instrument to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters.
- The implementation of the Sendai Framework involves adopting integrated and inclusive institutional measures so as to work towards preventing vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response and recovery and strengthen resilience.

#### COUNCIL FIXES 4-LEVEL GST RATE STRUCTURE

In a step towards realising the Goods and Services Tax, the GST council has finalised a 4-tier tax structure of 5, 12, 18 and 28%, with lower rates for essential items and the highest for luxury and de-merits goods.

- The multiple rates have been fixed on lines of some European countries. The IMF has lauded India for adopting GST saying it would boost economic growth.

**KEY FACTS:**

- Apart from the four fixed GST rates, a cess between 40% and 65% will be imposed on goods like high-end cars, pan masala, aerated drinks and tobacco products.
- The cess on demerit and sin goods ranging between 40 to 65% will create a revenue pool of Rs 5,000 crore to compensate the states for their revenue loss for the first five years of implementation of the GST.
- The cess will be lapsable after the first five years.
- Food grains will have a zero rate to protect people from pressure of inflation.
- The lowest slab of 5% will be for items of common consumption. The bulk of the goods and services including fast-moving consumer goods will be included in two standard rates of 12% and 18%.
- Heavy consumer durables like washing machines and refrigerators will be taxed at 28% with riders. These riders have been set because these goods are purchased by lower middle class too. The new tax would also include a separate central “cess” that will be levied on tobacco products, luxury cars and aerated drinks, charged on top of the 28% tax bracket.
- There has been no decision on a tax rate for gold.
- The standard rate of GST has been fixed at 18%.

**CONCERNS:**

Industry bodies and business leaders have expressed their concerns about the complexity of the final rate structure of the Goods and Services Tax.

- The main issues of concern seem to be the complexity brought on by the multiple rates

and the uncertainty about the additional cess that will be levied on luxury goods and tobacco products.

- Another area of concern is the requirement for multiple registrations in each state for the supply of goods and services.

**WHAT NEXT?**

Next, the Parliament has to pass the tax rates agreed upon by the council.

**SAMPRITI-7:**

- It is a 14-day joint military exercise by Bangladesh and India.
- It is to practise counter-terrorism and disaster-management operations.
- The exercise will be held at Shaheed Salauddin Cantonment in Bangladesh’s Ghatail, Tangail.
- The joint exercise will simulate a scenario where both nations are working together in a counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism environment under the U.N. Charter.
- With this exercise, personnel from both countries would be “familiarised” with each other’s organisational structure and tactical drills.
- The first exercise in this series was held at Jorhat in Assam in 2010.

**JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE:**

- The James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) is the largest space telescope ever built.
- It is an international collaboration between of about 17 countries including NASA, European Space Agency (ESA) and the Canadian Space Agency (CSA).
- When it is launched into space it will be able to peer back in time 3.5 billion years, teaching us more than ever before about the start of the universe.

- The telescope is 100 times more potent than its predecessor, Hubble, and three times larger.
- The telescope is set to go through a series of tests to make sure it can stand up to the conditions during lift off and the frigid conditions of space, ahead of its launch in 2018.
- The main component of the telescope is the primary mirror, which consists of 18 hexagonal mirrors and looks like a giant puzzle piece.
- The telescope will be used to look back to the first galaxies born in the early universe more than 13.5 billion years ago, and observe the sources of stars, exoplanets, and even the moons and planets of our solar system.

### **INDIA, UNISDR SIGN STATEMENT OF COOPERATION ON SENDAI FRAMEWORK**

India and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction have signed a Statement of Cooperation during the ongoing Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) 2016.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- The Statement underlines the guiding principles, objectives and areas of cooperation between India and UNISDR towards the effective implementation and monitoring of the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), which was adopted at the Third World Conference on DRR at Sendai in Japan in March, 2015.
- According to the statement, India will partner with UNISDR to work towards strengthening the capacity of Asian countries in ensuring risk resilient development. It will also facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experiences, and collaborative efforts towards addressing critical regional challenges.
- The cooperation aims to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of the Sendai Framework through Training and capacity

building for Asian countries; promoting international and regional cooperation to reinforce political commitment, facilitate knowledge sharing and strengthen the capacity of UNISDR for monitoring and review of the Sendai Framework.

#### **ABOUT UNISDR:**

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), created in December 1999, is the successor to the secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

- It was established to ensure the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.
- It is part of the United Nations Secretariat and its functions span the social, economic, environmental as well as humanitarian fields.

- UNISDR supports the implementation, follow-up and review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction adopted by the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction on 18 March 2015 in Sendai, Japan.

#### **UNISDR'S VISION IS ANCHORED ON THE FOUR PRIORITIES FOR ACTION SET OUT IN THE SENDAI FRAMEWORK:**

- Understanding disaster risk.
- Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk.
- Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience.
- Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

## GOVT LAUNCHES SCHEME TO PROVIDE FREE HEALTH CHECK-UPS TO PREGNANT WOMEN

With an aim to reduce maternal and infant mortality, the government has rolled out a new scheme to provide fixed-day antenatal care to pregnant women on the ninth of every month.

- The scheme — ‘Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan’ (PMSMA) — will provide free and comprehensive care on the ninth day of every month during the course of the pregnancy, especially to the poor.

### Key facts:

- The scheme is aimed at ensuring that every pregnant woman undergoes essential checkup during pregnancy to avoid unnecessary complication. This is expected to significantly bring down maternal deaths, mainly in rural areas.
- Scheme is applicable to women through their third to sixth month of pregnancy.
- A key feature of the scheme includes services by gynaecology specialists and physicians with support from private sector doctors to supplement the efforts of the government sector.
- Under the scheme, pregnant women will be provided special antenatal check-up in their second or third trimester at government health care facilities. These services include ultrasound, blood and urine tests, in addition to routine antenatal check-up.
- It also invites the private sector to provide free ante-natal services (ANC) on the 9th of every month on a voluntary basis to pregnant women, especially those living in under-served, semi-urban, poor and rural areas.

### BACKGROUND:

In India, one pregnant woman dies every 12 minutes, with 45,000 dying each year. Of them,

less than one in five (19.7%) undergo pre-natal health checks.

- India’s MMR of 167 (167 maternal deaths per 100,000 births) failed to meet its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target of bringing down maternal deaths to under 140 by 2015.
- India’s IMR stands at 40 deaths per 1,000 live births, against an MDG target of 29. Only 15 states and UTs — Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Daman and Diu, Delhi, Lakshadweep, Puducherry, Manipur, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Tripura, Sikkim and Punjab — have achieved an IMR of 29 and under.

### WAY AHEAD:

The government plans to reach out to about three crore women across the country through the scheme. The health ministry has also identified 184 priority districts for greater focus on antenatal care.

### ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY CONSTITUTES FOUR-MEMBER TEAM FOR CONSERVATION OF LOKTAK LAKE

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has constituted a four-member team for conservation and management of Loktak Lake in Manipur.

- The team will visit Loktak Lake and hold discussions with the State government, its concerned agencies and other stakeholders. The consultations will also include people living in the vicinity of the lake.

### THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE TEAM THAT WILL VISIT LOKTAK LAKE ARE:

- To review the implementation of works carried out with financial assistance provided by the Central and State governments so far for the conservation and management of Loktak Lake and suggest further interventions required for conserving the lake in a holistic manner.

- Enumerate the steps required to be initiated for declaring Loktak Lake as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Identify the steps and actions to be taken to increase the tourism potential of Loktak Lake.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Loktak Lake is the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India, and is famous for the phumdis (heterogeneous mass of vegetation, soil, and organic matter at various stages of decomposition) floating over it.

Keibul Lamjao is the only floating national park in the world. It is located near Moirang in Manipur state, India. The Keibul Lamjao National Park is the last natural refuge of the endangered sangai. However, human activity has led to severe pressure on the lake ecosystem.

#### **PETROTECH – 2016:**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently inaugurated India's flagship biennial international oil and gas conference and exhibition, PETROTECH-2016.
- Petrotech is Asia's largest oil and gas event.
- The theme for this event is "Hydrocarbons to fuel the future – Choices and Challenges".
- This global event aims at bringing Energy Ministers, industry leaders, professionals, academicians and domain experts from the energy sector on a common platform.
- The Conference showcases the strengths & potential of Indian Hydrocarbon industry to the world besides providing a vibrant platform for exchange of ideas, sharing of experience, knowledge and technological development across various segments of hydrocarbon industry.
- Petrotech will also include a BRICS Roundtable of Energy Ministers and a Roundtable

discussion involving select CELAC countries of Latin America.

#### **PARIS AGREEMENT:**

- The "Paris Climate Agreement" has come into force on 4th November 2016.
- India ratified the Paris Agreement on 2nd October 2016, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and the Agreement has the support of majority of the countries.
- Till date, 94 Parties have ratified it, of the 197 Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- The Paris Agreement's central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- The Paris Agreement requires all Parties to put forward their best efforts through "nationally determined contributions" (NDCs) and to strengthen these efforts in the years ahead. This includes requirements that all Parties report regularly on their emissions and on their implementation efforts.

#### **DRDO SIGNS MOU WITH IIT DELHI TO ESTABLISH JATC**

Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi to establish a 'Joint Advanced Technology Centre' (JATC).

#### **What will the JATC do?**

The objective for creation of JATC is to undertake and facilitate multi-disciplinary directed basic and applied research in the jointly identified research verticals.

- It will enable Directed, Basic & Applied Research and will engage with premier research institutes through multi-institutional collaboration.
- The researchers will get the opportunity to work in advanced areas of research namely Advanced Materials for Ballistic Protection, Advanced Mathematical Modelling and Simulation, Advanced Electromagnetic Devices and Terahertz Technologies, Smart & Intelligent Textile Technologies, Brain Computer Interface & Brain Machine Intelligence besides Photonic Technologies, Plasmonics and Quantum Photonics, etc.
- The focused research efforts at the centre will lead to realization of indigenous technologies in these critical areas, which will be used for speedy self-reliance.

#### KEY FACTS:

- JATC will be located in the campus of IIT Delhi at the upcoming Science and Technology Park (Mini-Science Park 'MSP').
- As per the MoU, DRDO will support JATC in equipping it with advanced and unique research facilities that will enable the faculty and scholars to conduct advanced research and transform the JATC as Centre of Excellence.
- DRDO scientists and engineers will work with the academic research faculty and scholars in addressing scientific problems to find an innovative solution.
- DRDO will facilitate towards advanced research to utilize technology outcome in the futuristic applications.

#### NEW DELHI DECLARATION, ASIAN REGIONAL PLAN ADOPTED AT AMCDRR 2016

The Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) 2016 recently came to an end with the adoption of the 'New Delhi

Declaration' and the 'Asian Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework'.

#### WHAT IS NEW DELHI DECLARATION?

The 'New Delhi Declaration' is a political statement spelling out the commitment of participating governments towards preventing and reducing disaster risk, and strengthening the resilience of communities, nations and the Asian region.

- Recognising the need to accelerate the implementation of global frameworks, it commits to a people-centred and whole-of-society approach towards Disaster Risk Reduction.
- It also emphasises the need to enhance the capacity of communities and ensure participation of all stakeholder groups towards achieving resilience.

#### WHAT IS ASIAN REGIONAL PLAN?

The 'Asian Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework' focuses on the 'How to' reduce disaster risk at national and local levels. It has arrived at a longer term road map of cooperation and collaboration, spanning the 15-year horizon of the Sendai Framework, as well as a two-year action plan to further disaster risk reduction with specific, actionable activities.

#### RETIRED JUDGES TO WIELD THE GAVEL AGAIN

The Union government has agreed to a resolution passed by the judiciary in the Chief Justices and Chief Ministers Annual Conference 2016 to use the services of retired High Court judges with proven integrity and track record to tackle pendency of cases.

#### BACKGROUND:

Keeping in view the large pendency of civil and criminal cases, especially criminal appeals, where convicts are in jail, the judiciary had requested for enhancing the strength of judges to deal with

the backlog of cases. The resolution had been hanging fire since April.

### CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS:

The provision to use the services of retired judges is open to the Chief Justices of High Courts under Article 224A of the Constitution with the previous consent of the President as an extraordinary measure to tide over case pile-ups.

### WHY THIS IS NECESSARY?

The pendency of cases in the High Court has been stagnant for over three years; 43% of the pendency is of cases of over five years; concentration of 'five years plus' cases in a few High Courts; and stagnant pendency figures of five years plus cases (33.5% in 2015) in district courts. The 24 High Courts face a shortage of nearly 450 judges. Nearly three crore cases are pending in courts across India.

### AERA to hold talks on new airport tariff

The Airport Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) has initiated a process to adopt a hybrid-till approach for calculating airport fees and the regulator is slated to hold talks with airlines and airport operators next week to seek their views.

- In this regard, the regulator has called for a meeting of airlines, airports, International Air Transport Association (IATA), Airports Authority of India (AAI), state governments, consumers' organisation, fuel suppliers, and ground handling companies, among others.

### WHAT IS HYBRID-TILL MODEL?

Under hybrid-till model 30% of airport operator's non-aeronautical revenues would be used to subsidise airport costs.

### IMPLICATIONS:

- This move may marginally increase costs at 13 other major airports (with capacity of more than 15 lakh passengers) such as

Ahmedabad, Calicut, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, among others.

- This move also may revive private developer interest in running airports as the model increases their revenue.

### BACKGROUND:

The National Civil Aviation Policy has called for adopting a hybrid-till model for all airports. So far, single-till model was adopted for determining aeronautical tariffs that can be set by airports, wherein passengers and airlines are charged less. Under the single-till model, both aeronautical and non-aeronautical revenues are taken into account to calculate passenger fee. Apart from its core operations, airports earn income from the non-aeronautical side which includes food and beverages, duty-free shops, advertising, car parking and hotels.

Airlines are in favour of a single-till model as it reduces their charges and passenger fees. Airport costs constitute 10-14% of an airline's operational costs.

### INTERNATIONAL AGROBIODIVERSITY CONGRESS:

- The 1st International Agrobiodiversity Congress – IAC 2016 – has begun at New Delhi.
- It will gather 900 delegates from 60 countries.
- This international Congress will initiate and encourage a dialogue among relevant stakeholders – including farmers – to better understand everyone's role in agrobiodiversity management and the conservation of genetic resources.
- It is co-organized by the Indian Society of Plant Genetic Resources and Bioersity International, a CGIAR Research Center headquartered in Rome, Italy. It received support from many Indian and international organisations engaged in the conservation and use of genetic resources.

- Bioversity International is a global research-for-development organization. Bioversity International delivers scientific evidence, management practices and policy options to use and safeguard agricultural and tree biodiversity to attain sustainable global food and nutrition security.

#### **FIRST WORLD TSUNAMI AWARENESS DAY COMMEMORATED:**

- The recently concluded three-day Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) 2016 commemorated the first World Tsunami Awareness Day to spread awareness on tsunami.
- The observance of the day stressed on the importance of early warning systems and preparedness of communities in order to mitigate damage from the often devastating natural hazard.

#### **INDIAN ELECTED TO UN INTERNATIONAL LAW COMMISSION:**

- Aniruddha Rajput, a young Indian lawyer, has been elected to the UN International Law Commission. He bagged the highest number of votes in the Asia-Pacific group.
- Aniruddha Rajput is among 34 individuals elected by the UN General Assembly as members of the International Law Commission that is tasked with the progressive development of international law and its codification.
- The five-year term of the newly elected members will commence from January 2017.
- The members to the Geneva-based body have been elected from five geographical groupings of Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Caribbean and Western Europe.
- The commission was established by the UNGA in 1947.

#### **9TH INTERNATIONAL REGULATORY COOPERATION FOR HERBAL MEDICINES**

The 9th Annual Meeting of International Regulatory Cooperation for Herbal Medicines (IRCH) has begun at New Delhi.

- The Ministry of AYUSH has organized the meeting. Being an active member of IRCH network since 2007 the Ministry of AYUSH has been represented in IRCH meetings held so far.
- 19 member countries of IRCH with 36 delegates including experts from WHO Headquarters, Geneva are participating in meeting.
- The event would be utilized to show case AYUSH strength to these countries.

#### **ABOUT IRCH:**

International Regulatory Cooperation for Herbal Medicines (IRCH), established in 2006, is a global network of regulatory authorities created by World Health Organization (WHO) responsible for regulation of herbal medicines.

Its mission is to protect and promote public health and safety through improved regulation for herbal medicines.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF IRCH:**

- Globally promote and facilitate the safe use of herbal medicines, through regional initiatives, sharing information and fostering dialogue.
- Facilitate and strengthen cooperation between national regulatory authorities by sharing experience, information and knowledge related to the regulation, quality, safety and efficacy of herbal medicines.
- Further discuss existing requirements and standards to promote the regulation, quality, safety and efficacy of herbal medicines.

- Recommend future activities to WHO related to the quality and safety of herbal medicines.
- Refer issues to the International Conference of Drug Regulatory Authorities and other bodies, where ever needed, for further discussion related to the quality and safety of herbal medicines.

#### **GOALS OF IRCH ARE:**

- Develop a process that addresses and resolves questions related to the regulation and safe use of herbal medicines.
- Establish a communication network that fosters dialogue on the regulation and safe use of herbal medicines among the IRCH members.
- Develop, through WHO, efficient links between National Drug Regulatory Authorities and information focal points among the member countries of IRCH.

#### **INDIA & UK SIGN MOU ON IPRS**

India and UK have signed an MoU to establish bilateral cooperation activities in the field of Intellectual Property.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- The MoU is between the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) and the Intellectual Property Office of the United Kingdom (UKIPO).
- It is intended to promote innovation, creativity and economic growth in both countries.
- It establishes a broad and flexible framework through which both countries can exchange best practices and work together on training programs and technical exchanges to raise awareness on IPRs and better protect intellectual property rights.

#### **THE PRIORITY INITIATIVES UNDER THE MOU INCLUDE:**

- Exchange of best practices, experiences and knowledge on IP awareness among the public, businesses and educational institutions of both countries.
- Collaboration in training programs, exchange of experts, technical exchanges and outreach activities.
- Exchange and dissemination of best practices, experiences and knowledge on IP with the industry, universities, R & D organizations and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) through participation in programs and events.
- Exchange of information and best practices on processes for disposal of applications for patents, trademarks, industrial designs and Geographical Indications, as also the protection, enforcement and use of IP rights.
- Cooperation in the development of automation and implementation of modernization projects, new documentation and information systems in IP and procedures for management of IP.
- Cooperation to understand how Traditional Knowledge is protected; and the exchange of best practices, including traditional knowledge related databases and awareness raising of existing IP systems.

#### **NEW 'SUPER BATTERY' MADE FROM JUNKYARD METAL**

Researchers have developed a new high-performance, grid-scale battery made from metal scrap and common household chemicals.

- The battery, which is no bigger than a pill bottle, could withstand the equivalent of 13 years of daily charging and discharging while retaining 90% of its capacity.

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How was it developed?

1. Researchers soaked metal pieces in a jar with a solution of water and salt or a solution of water and antifreeze.
2. They then applied a voltage to induce a known process called anodisation, which restructures the nanoscopic composition of a metal.
3. That exposes the metal's interior surface and makes it more receptive to storing and releasing energy.
4. Researchers placed a physical barrier between the two pieces of metal and submerged it in an electrolyte solution made from water and potassium hydroxide.
5. When connected by wires to a device that generated a current, such as a solar panel, their contraption worked just like a car battery.

#### BACKGROUND:

For this experiment, scientists drew inspiration from an ancient technology called the 'Baghdad battery', which dates to the first century BC. It consisted of a terracotta pot, a copper sheet and an iron rod along with some trace chemicals that could possibly have been electrolytes.

#### AIRBORNE LASERS TO THROW LIGHT ON RAJGIR'S HISTORY

Archaeologists are planning to deploy high-end scanning lasers on airborne platforms to survey the archaeological evidence, flora and fauna in the ancient Rajgir hills in Bihar, an area associated with Buddha.

As part of the inter-disciplinary Rajgir Archaeological Survey Project (RASP), archaeologists hope to use Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR), which is a remote-sensing technique that uses laser light to sample the surface of the earth.

- RASP is a collaborative project between the society and Nalanda University in coordination with Bihar's Ministry of Art, Culture and Youth.

#### KEY FACTS:

- With its complex of temples and monasteries, Rajgir in Bihar's Nalanda district is one of India's most important tourist places for Buddhist pilgrims.
- The city of Rajgir was the first capital of the Magadha empire. Buddha not only spent many years in Rajgir but also delivered sermons here.
- His teachings were penned at Rajgir and it was also the venue for the first Buddhist Council. The region is also associated with Jainism.
- First Buddhist Council was held under the leadership of Maha Kassapa.

#### SEVENTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES (COP7)

The seventh session of the Conference of the Parties (COP7) has begun in Delhi. It is the first occasion that a COP meeting is being held in India.

- COP7 brings together the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)'s parties – which includes almost every country in the world, as well as regional economic integration organizations like the European Union.

#### ABOUT WHO FCTC:

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is the first global evidence-based public health treaty that recognises the right of all people to the highest standard of health.

- The Treaty was developed by countries in response to the globalization of the tobacco epidemic.

- There are currently 180 Parties to the Convention.
- India has been the forerunner in ratification of this public health treaty and was the 7th Country to ratify the Convention in 2004.
- India provided a leadership role in the negotiations of FCTC and was also the Regional Coordinator for the South-East Asia Region.
- India ratified the treaty in February 2004 and is therefore obligated to comply with the treaty provisions and its guidelines to reduce tobacco consumption globally.

#### **ABOUT COP:**

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the Governing Body of the WHO FCTC and is comprised of all Parties to the Convention. It keeps under regular review the implementation of the Convention and takes the decisions necessary to promote its effective implementation, and may also adopt protocols, annexes and amendments to the Convention. The regular sessions of COP are held at two yearly intervals.

#### **Dr APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE 2016 Award:**

- The winners of the Dr APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE 2016 Competition recently received their awards from President, Shri Pranab Mukherjee.
- APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE 2016 competition – is a national competition of original technological ideas and innovations by children up to class 12 or those out of school up to the age of 17 years.
- It is organised by National Innovation Foundation (NIF) every year to promote creativity and originality among children.
- The awards of IGNITE competition are announced every year on October 15th, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam's birthday, which is

celebrated as the Children's Creativity and Innovation Day by NIF.

- Starting in 2008, in the last eight years, 173 awards have been given to 246 children.
- Dr APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE Award is an effort to focus primarily on the creativity of the children and promote inclusive and compassionate thinking among them.

#### **'KEEP BIRTH DATABASE TO CURB FEMALE FOETICIDE'**

The Supreme Court has issued 16 directives to curb sex-selective abortion in the country. These directions aims to ensure immediate and effective implementation of the Pre-conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act and the Rules framed thereunder.

- The Court, expressing concern over the worsening sex ratio in the country, has also said that any discrimination against women was "constitutionally impermissible".

#### **BACKGROUND:**

The court passed the verdict while disposing of a PIL by NGO Voluntary Health Association of Punjab urging it to intervene in the matter in view of decreasing number of girls-boys ratio in the country.

#### **DIRECTIONS:**

- All the States and the Union Territories in India shall maintain a centralised database of civil registration records from all registration units so that information can be made available from the website regarding the number of boys and girls being born.
- The information that shall be displayed on the website shall contain birth information for each District, Municipality, Corporation or Gram Panchayat so that a visual comparison of boys and girls born can be immediately seen.

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- The states and UTs which do not have any incentive schemes for the girl child shall frame the same.
- If there has been violation of any of the provisions of the Act or the Rules, proper action has to be taken by the authorities under the Act so that the legally inapposite acts are immediately curbed. The courts dealing with such complaints shall be fast tracked and the concerned High Courts shall issue appropriate directions.
- Courts dealing with such complaints shall hear these matters in promptitude and submit the quarterly report to the High Court's through the concerned Sessions and District Judge.
- The Chief Justices of all the High Courts should constitute a Committee of three judges to periodically oversee the progress of these cases.
- The judicial officers who are to deal with these cases under the Act shall be periodically imparted training in the Judicial Academies or Training Institutes, as the case may be, so that they can be sensitive and develop the requisite sensitivity as projected in the objects and reasons of the Act and its various provisions and in view of the need of the society.
- The court has also directed the authorities concerned to carry out awareness campaigns on this issue and asked the State Legal Services Authorities to give emphasis on these campaigns.
- The three districts were being declared as "disturbed area" under Section 3 of the AFSPA as "Naga underground factions including NSCN-IM and NSCN-K continue to indulge in extortion, area domination, recruitment of locals and inter-factional rivalry."

#### WHY?

One of the primary reasons cited by the Centre is "extortion and intimidation" by the cadres of National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah), who are "contriving to dominate areas hitherto occupied by NSCN (Khaplang)."

#### BACKGROUND:

The notification has been issued even after the government signed a 'framework agreement' with NSCN-IM in September 2015 to find a final solution to the six-decade-old Naga issue. However, the government defends its move by saying that the ceasefire signed with NSCN-IM is only for Nagaland. It does not include Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur.

#### WHAT IS AFSPA?

AFSPA, enacted in 1958, gives powers to the army and state and central police forces to shoot to kill, search houses and destroy any property that is "likely" to be used by insurgents in areas declared as "disturbed" by the home ministry.

- The Act provides army personnel with safeguards against malicious, vindictive and frivolous prosecution.
- Security forces can "arrest without warrant" a person, who has committed or even "about to commit a cognizable offence" even on "reasonable suspicion".

#### WHICH STATES ARE UNDER AFSPA?

It is in force in Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Manipur (except the Imphal municipal area). In Arunachal Pradesh, only the Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts plus a 20-km

#### CENTRE EXTENDS AFSPA TO CHECK NAGA FACTIONS

The Centre has decided to extend the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in three districts of Arunachal Pradesh. It is being extended in the districts of Tirap, Changlang and Longding, all bordering Assam.

belt bordering Assam come under its purview. And in Meghalaya Afspa is confined to a 20-km area bordering Assam.

### WHAT ARE 'DISTURBED' AREAS?

The state or central government considers those areas as 'disturbed' "by reason of differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities."

### NO CHANGE IN OUR STAND ON INDIA'S NSG ENTRY BID: CHINA

Ahead of NSG meet in Vienna, China has said there is 'no change' in its stand on India's membership bid. The development comes just days after India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and his Chinese counterpart, Yang Jiechi, failed to reach a consensus on the issue.

China has maintained its stand that India's bid will only be considered if rules for entry of non-NPT countries are finalised by the elite group.

### BACKGROUND:

India and Pakistan, which have applied for NSG membership, have not signed the NPT.

### ABOUT NSG

Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is a multinational body concerned with reducing nuclear proliferation by controlling the export and re-transfer of materials that may be applicable to nuclear weapon development and by improving safeguards and protection on existing materials.

- Interestingly, the NSG was set up in 1974 as a reaction to India's nuclear tests to stop what it called the misuse of nuclear material meant for peaceful purposes. Currently, it has 48 members.

### ONCE ADMITTED, AN NSG MEMBER STATE:

- Gets timely information on nuclear matters.
- Contributes by way of information.

- Has confirmed credentials.
- Can act as an instrument of harmonization and coordination.
- Is part of a very transparent process.

### Indo-Japan MOU for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC) and the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India has been approved by the Cabinet.

### KEY FACTS:

- The advancement of academic research in the field of Earth Sciences for the benefit of the peace and human welfare is the prime objective of the MOU.
- The collaboration with JAMSTEC will not only enhance capability in the field of atmospheric and climate research, ocean technology observation and hazard mitigation but also provide much needed exposure and hands-on experience to Indian scientists.
- The cooperation between parties and under Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be pursued primarily through joint survey, cruise and research and development activities, exchange of scientific visits, joint scientific seminars, workshops and meetings or exchange of information and data.

### WATER DETECTED ON METALLIC ASTEROID PSYCHE

Scientists have detected the presence of water on Psyche, the largest metallic asteroid in our solar system and the target of a proposed NASA mission.

### Key facts:

- New observations from the NASA Infrared Telescope Facility in Hawaii show evidence of water or hydroxyl on its surface.

- While the source of these molecules on Psyche remains a mystery, scientists propose a few possible mechanisms for its formation.
- Scientists say, water-rich minerals detected on Psyche may have been delivered by carbonaceous asteroids that impacted Psyche in the distant past.
- The number of electors each state gets is also equal to the number of seats it has in the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- All but two states – Maine and Nebraska – use a winner-takes-all system, so if you win the most votes in a state you take its entire haul of electoral college votes.

### **ABOUT PSYCHE:**

Psyche is about 300 kilometre across and is made of almost pure nickel-iron metal. Located in the asteroid belt, it is thought to be the remnant core of a budding planet that was mostly destroyed by impacts billions of years ago.

### **SHOCK AND AWE WIN FOR DONALD TRUMP**

Republican Donald J. Trump is the 45th President of the United States. Mr. Trump is now the oldest person to be elected President.

- Trump defeated Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton by garnering about 300 votes in the electoral college.
- He did so by winning most of the “swing states,” despite losing the popular vote marginally to Ms. Clinton.

### **HOW THE US ELECTION WORKS?**

All 50 US states and Washington DC have a set number of “electors” in the electoral college – roughly proportionate to the size of each state.

- California, the largest state, has 55 electoral votes, while sparsely-populated Wyoming and tiny Washington DC only get only three each.
- There are 538 electors and to win a majority and become president either candidate needs to accumulate 270 electors – half the total plus one.
- Americans technically vote for electors, not the candidates themselves. The electors are state officials or senior party figures, but they are not usually named on the ballot.

- The key for either party to win the presidential election is to target specific battleground states. There are several swing states that over recent elections have gone both ways. They hold the key to winning the election.

### **WHAT ARE SWING STATES?**

These states are called so because they swing between the Republicans and Democrats depending upon the election season. They do not have any one personal favourite party that they have been holding on to traditionally and have the potential to alter the course of the elections in favour or against either of the parties.

Swing states are largely determined through opinion polls and results of previous elections. In 2016, the states that are being regarded as swing states include, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Florida, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, Minnesota, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, Colorado, and North Carolina. These states can be divided into three categories:

1. First, there are those states which over the years have kept oscillating between the parties. They include Ohio and Florida and these two states are crucial in making the final decision.
2. Then there are those states which have traditionally been Republican but might be swinging in favour of Clinton on account of Trump’s unpopularity.
3. Finally, there are some states which had been won over by Obama from the Republicans in 2008 and 2012 and Clinton would have to hold on to them lest they go back to the Republicans.

## **IMPROVE PORTS, LOGISTICS TO BOOST EXPORTS: WB**

The World Bank has released a report titled 'South Asia's Turn: Policies to Boost Competitiveness and Create the Next Export Powerhouse'.

### **IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS MADE BY THE REPORT:**

- With the right set of productivity-enhancing policies, South Asia, led by India, could more than triple its share in global markets of electronics and motor vehicles and come close to doubling its already significant market share in wearing apparel (excluding textiles and leather) by 2030.
  - In the farm sector, passive and non-targeted subsidies (e.g. water, fertilisers and minimum support price) have encouraged farmers to continue to produce low value crops using low productivity and unsustainable techniques while restrictions on agricultural markets have constrained productive private investments in higher value food products.
  - The electronics sector faces constraints such as underdeveloped clusters and poor trade logistics, while the apparel sector is facing difficulties to import man-made fibre, preventing upgrading and diversification.
  - India remains behind on 'global value chain' capabilities including physical capital, human capital, institutions and logistics.
- In order to enhance the business environment in the sector, the government needs to bring out reforms including reducing subsidies and promoting competition.
  - The government needs to improve target subsidies so that only the poor farmers are benefited because passive and non-targeted subsidies are not encouraging farmers to adopt new technologies and (seed) varieties.
  - The government should also consider gradually reducing tariffs on final cars, as the prevailing high import tariffs on the completely built units are slowing down diffusion of good practices.
  - To become a significant player in electronics, India needs to facilitate the development of clusters (reducing transaction costs and facilitating access to large pools of skilled labour and services) and improve its trade logistics to enable the seamless import and export of hundreds of components.
  - India needs to reform the duty drawback scheme to facilitate the import of fabrics for exports. The current system imposes delays that are unacceptable to global buyers, cutting Indian exporters from the increasingly important manmade fibre segment.

### **Delhi Declaration on Agrobiodiversity Management**

The 1st International Agrobiodiversity Congress was recently held in New Delhi. It was attended by 900 participants from 60 countries.

### **SUGGESTIONS MADE BY THE WORLD BANK IN ITS REPORT:**

It has suggested a set of policy actions in four sectors — agribusiness, apparel, electronics and automotive.

- India must frame policies to reduce farm subsidies and cut import tariffs on cars and take steps to improve ports and logistics to emerge as an export powerhouse.
- Throughout the Congress, delegated discussed various aspects of access, conservation and use of agrobiodiversity.
- Based on these deliberations, the delegates unanimously adopted the declaration at the concluding session.

**HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DECLARATION:**

- It calls upon nations to accord top priority to the agrobiodiversity conservation and their sustainable use towards achieving targets of SDGs relating to poverty alleviation, food and nutritional security, good health, gender equity and partnership.
- It recognises the importance of traditional knowledge on agrobiodiversity of farm men and women, pastoralists and other tribal and rural communities and their central role in its conservation and use for a food and climate resilient world. The declaration, therefore, calls upon countries to develop the necessary funding, legal and institutional mechanism to ensure and facilitate their continued active participation.
- It urges researchers and policy-makers to initiate, strengthen, and promote complementary conservation strategies to conserve and use agrobiodiversity including crop wild relatives in more dynamic way to ensure a continuum between ex situ, in situ and on farm conservation strategies to combat food and nutrition insecurity as well as adverse effects of climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss.
- It invites researchers to employ modern technologies including, but not limited to, genomic, space, computational, and nano-technologies for characterization, evaluation and trait discovery using genetic resources. The aim should be to achieve efficiency, equality, economy and environmental security in agricultural production systems and landscapes.
- It reemphasises the necessity of global exchange of plant, animal, aquatic microbial and insect genetic resources for food and agriculture to meet the ever-growing food and nutritional needs of each country.
- It strongly recommends that the governments and societies put greater emphasis on public awareness and capacity enhancement programs on agrobiodiversity conservation and use.
- It also suggests developing and implementing an agrobiodiversity index to help monitor conservation and use of agrobiodiversity.
- It urges public and private sector partnerships to actively invest in and incentivize the utilization of agrobiodiversity to address malnutrition, increase the resilience and productivity of farms, and enhance ecosystem services leading to equitable benefits and opportunities with particular emphasis on women and youth.
- The UN is also urged to consider declaring soon a 'Year of Agrobiodiversity' to draw worldwide attention and to catalyze urgent action.

**COMPETITION COMMISSION OF INDIA (CCI)  
SELECTED TO HOST ICN 2018 ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE**

Recognising the growing stature of Competition Commission of India (CCI) in the world, International Competition Network (ICN) has accepted the proposal and decided that Competition Commission of India would host the 2018 ICN Annual Conference. This will be held at Delhi in March –April 2018.

- By virtue of this event, CCI has also been inducted as an ex-officio member of the steering group member of the ICN for a period of 3 years.

**ABOUT ICN:**

ICN is an international body comprising 132 members from 120 competition jurisdictions exclusively devoted to international competition enforcement.

- ICN provides competition authorities with a specialised yet informal platform for addressing practical competition concerns,

sharing experiences and adopting international best practices.

- Its members are national competition authorities and NGA (Non-governmental Advisers) which include reputed law firms, eminent persons, and think tanks of international repute.
- The ICN holds an Annual Conference which is hosted by a member competition agency. The last such Conference was hosted by Competition Commission of Singapore in April 2016 and Portuguese Competition Authority is hosting the next conference in May 2017.
- CCI is a member of the ICN since 2003.

#### **ABOUT CCI:**

Competition Commission of India is a body responsible for enforcing The Competition Act, 2002 throughout India and to prevent activities that have an adverse effect on competition in India. It was established on 14 October 2003. It became fully functional in May 2009.

- CCI consists of a Chairperson and 6 Members appointed by the Central Government.
- The duty of the Commission is to eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition, promote and sustain competition, protect the interests of consumers and ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.
- The Commission is also required to give opinion on competition issues on a reference received from a statutory authority established under any law and to undertake competition advocacy, create public awareness and impart training on competition issues.

#### **PROTOCOL AMENDING THE DOUBLE TAXATION AMENDING CONVENTION (DTAC) BETWEEN INDIA AND JAPAN COMES INTO FORCE**

A Protocol amending the Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (DTAC) between India and Japan for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income which was signed on 11th December, 2015 has entered into force on 29th October, 2016 on completion of procedural requirements by both countries.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- The Protocol amending the DTAC aims to promote transparency and cooperation between the two countries.
- The Protocol provides for internationally accepted standards for effective exchange of information on tax matters including bank information and information without domestic tax interest.
- It is further provided that the information received from Japan in respect of a resident of India can be shared with other law enforcement agencies with authorization of the Competent Authority of Japan and vice versa.
- The Protocol provides for exemption of interest income from taxation in the source country with respect to debt-claims insured by the Government/Government owned financial institutions.
- The Protocol also inserts a new article on assistance in collection of taxes. India and Japan shall now lend assistance to each other in the collection of revenue claims.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

The existing Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (DTAC) between India and Japan was earlier signed on 7th March, 1989 and was

notified on 1st March 1990. The DTAC was subsequently amended on 24th February, 2006.

### **GOVERNMENT ROLLS OUT PRADHAN MANTRI YUVA YOJANA FOR ENTREPRENEURS**

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has announced launch of Pradhan Mantri Yuva Yojana to scale up an ecosystem of entrepreneurship for youngsters.

Highlights of the scheme:

- The scheme spans over five years (2016-17 to 2020-21) with a project cost of Rs 499.94 crore.
- It will provide entrepreneurship education and training to over 7 lakh students in 5 years through 3,050 institutes.
- It will also include easy access to information and mentor network, credit, incubator and accelerator and advocacy to create a pathway for the youth.
- The institutes under the PM's Yuva Yojana include 2,200 institutes of higher learning (colleges, universities, and premier institutes), 300 schools, 500 ITIs and 50 entrepreneurship development centres through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).
- MSDE has plans to disburse around Rs 7,000 crore to states to help align them with the Centre's skill development agenda.

### **HEALTHY INDIA INITIATIVE/SWASTHA BHARAT-EK PEHAL:**

- It is a quarterly magazine launched recently by the government.
- It will cater to health related information and will raise awareness about healthy living.
- The magazine will cover different aspect of health: women and child health, elderly health, seasonal ailments, daily nutritional needs, safe

medication practices, home remedies healthy living and many more.

- The magazine will be made available at all the government facilities up to the sub-centre and will be available free of cost.
- The current issue is in Hindi and English and the next version will be available in 13 other languages.

### **NO MORE TENSION:**

- It is stress management mobile application. It helps users to manage stress. It was recently launched by the government.
- The main objective of 'No More Tension' is to provide information to users regarding stress such as, what is stress, effects, symptoms and its management.
- The application allows the user to measure their stress level and learn various techniques like yoga and meditation to reduce stress from their lives.

### **SMART INDIA HACKATHON 2017**

Union HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar recently inaugurated the world's largest digital national building initiative "Smart India Hackathon 2017".

### **KEY FACTS:**

- Through Smart India Hackathon 2017, HRD ministry is keen on reaching out to all technology institutions in India and challenge students to offer innovative solutions to some of the daunting problems faced by our nation.
- The Hackathon will have nearly 500 problem statements in all which will be published on [innovate.mygov.in](http://innovate.mygov.in).
- In this regard, the ministry has unveiled the first set of 250 problem statements received from various ministries that the students will be required to solve during the Hackathon.

**ABOUT SMART INDIA HACKATHON:**

The 'Smart India Hackathon 2017' is a pan-India 36-hour nonstop digital programming competition which will take place in more than 20 centres simultaneously.

- Each participating college can nominate up to three teams, each having six team members, which can belong to different courses or semesters within the same college.
- Each team will need to have at least one female team member, to encourage women coders. Each team will also have the option of choosing up to two mentors, who can be faculty, alumni or any other expert in their circles.
- Each of the participating 25 ministries and government departments will give away prizes to top three teams, so 75 teams will stand a chance to win cash rewards as well as a chance to work with those ministries and departments for up to six months to execute their winning solution.
- For every ministry and department, the first prize will be of Rs.100,000, second prize of Rs.75,000 and third prize of Rs.50,000.
- Some of the ministries and departments participating in the Hackathon include Railways, External Affairs, Defence, Civil Aviation, Indian Space Research Organization, Department of Atomic Energy, etc.
- All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), University Grants Commission (UGC), i4c, MyGov, NASSCOM, Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini and Persistent Systems have joined hands to organize this ambitious 'Smart India Hackathon 2017' under the aegis of Ministry of Human Resource Development.

**WHAT IS IT FOR?**

The Smart India Hackathon 2017 will aim to find digital solutions to problems in the areas of power, education, health, water, finance, agriculture, energy, urban & rural development, aviation & shipping, transport, sanitation, sports, law & justice, skill development & entrepreneurship, defence, textiles, tourism, etc.

The initiative will help institutionalize a model for harnessing the creativity and skills of youth for nation-building.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS INITIATIVE:**

'Smart India Hackathon 2017' will harness creativity & technical expertise of over 30 lakh students from technology institutes in remotest parts of India, to spark several institute-level hackathons countrywide and help build a funnel for 'Startup India, Standup India' campaign.

Besides its potential to be the inflection point for impacting campaigns such as Digital India, Skill India, Make in India, Startup India and Standup India, the Smart India Hackathon can also set an example for the world on how youth power can help find digital solutions to legacy problems within a matter of hours.

**HIGH LEVEL MEETING OF INTERIOR MINISTERS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION**

High Level Meeting of Interior Ministers of the Indian Ocean Region to Counter Drug Trafficking was recently held in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

- The high-level meeting in Colombo was attended by 18 littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region which included seven Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Interior/Home Affairs.
- The meeting was also attended by seven international organizations/partner agencies and UN agencies engaged in counter-narcotics initiatives in the region.

(31)

- The delegates resolved to work towards making the Indian Ocean a “Drug Free Zone”.

### **COLOMBO DECLARATION:**

The meeting concluded with the adoption of the Colombo declaration.

- The declaration states that narcotic drug trafficking in the Indian Ocean poses a threat to peace and security in the region and its possible link to organized crime and funding of terrorism.
- It stresses upon the need for coastal states to cooperate more closely on enforcing maritime law, sharing information, and providing mutual legal assistance, including the expansion and development of communication through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC’s) Indian Ocean Prosecutors Network.
- The declaration also called on the littoral states of the Indian Ocean to meet on an annual basis within the framework of the Southern Route Partnership (SRP) of Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime (IOFMC) to assess and report on the drug trafficking threat in the Indian Ocean and develop a coordinated approach to counter such threats.

### **CHINA LAUNCHES PULSAR TEST SATELLITE**

China has launched a satellite into space to detect signs of pulsars, which are very high density stars formed by neutrons.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- The X-ray pulsar navigation satellite, weighing more than 200 kilogrammes, was launched from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in the country’s northwest.
- It was carried by a Long March-11 rocket, the 239th flight mission by a Long March carrier rocket series.

- The satellite operates in a Sun-synchronous orbit and will conduct in-orbit experiments using pulsar detectors to demonstrate new technologies.

- While in orbit, the satellite will undergo tests on its detector functions and space environment adaptability.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS LAUNCH:**

The X-ray pulsar navigation will help reduce the spacecraft’s reliance on ground-based navigation methods and is expected to lead to autonomous spacecraft navigation in the future.

### **INDIA SLAMS WORLD BANK PROCESS ON INDUS TREATY**

India has taken strong exception to the World Bank’s “inexplicable” decision to set up a Court of Arbitration and appoint a Neutral Expert to go into Pakistan’s complaint against it over Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects in Jammu and Kashmir.

- The Neutral Expert has been asked to go into Pakistan’s complaint against India on the Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects in Jammu and Kashmir.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

While India had asked for a neutral expert to be appointed over Pakistan’s objections to the Kishenganga and Ratle dam projects first, Pakistan appealed directly for a Court of Arbitration (CoA) to be set up as it claims India has violated the 1960 Indus Water treaty.

#### **WHAT’S THE ISSUE?**

Kishenganga is a tributary of the river Jhelum and the project is coming up in Bandipora.

- Pakistan argues that the project cannot be built in a way that will divert the river tributary. Its case was rejected by a Court of Arbitration in 2013.

- The project is almost complete and was to be commissioned this month.
- Pakistan also has objections on the Ratle project on the river Chenab in Doda district; it wants the water storage capacity to be reduced drastically, saying that the project will reduce the river flow into Pakistan.

### WHAT INDIA SAYS?

Surprised at the World Bank's decision to appoint a Neutral Expert, as sought by the Indian government and at the same time establish a Court of Arbitration as wanted by Pakistan, India says proceeding with both the steps simultaneously "legally untenable".

Also, India has made it clear that it cannot be party to actions which are not in accordance with the Indus Waters Treaty. The government has said that it will examine further options and take steps accordingly.

### BACKGROUND:

Under the Indus Waters Treaty, signed between India and Pakistan and also the World Bank in 1960, the World Bank has a specified role in the process of resolution of differences and disputes.

### SYL LAND BILL UNWARRANTED, SAYS COURT

The Supreme Court, referring to its 2006 Mullaperiyar dam judgment, has held that a State Assembly "cannot through legislation do an act in conflict with the judgment of the highest court which has attained finality".

- The court declared that Punjab reneged on its promise to share the waters of rivers Ravi and Beas with neighbouring States like Haryana by unilaterally enacting the controversial Punjab Termination of Water Agreements Act of 2004.

### BACKGROUND:

The court gave its opinion on a Presidential Reference made to it 12 years ago, on July 22,

2004, questioning the constitutional validity of the Act.

### WHAT ELSE HAS THE COURT SAID?

The court termed the enactment of the Punjab Sutlej Yamuna Link Canal Land (Transfer of Proprietary Rights) Bill in 2016 by the government as "unwarranted developments" when the Presidential Reference was still pending in the apex court.

### CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING THE BILL:

The 2016 Bill, which is yet to receive the assent of the Governor, planned to give back to the farmers over 5000 acres acquired for the canal. Haryana argues the Bill would negate the Supreme Court's 2004 decree calling for unhindered construction of the canal which will give Haryana its share of water.

### THE SUTLEJ YAMUNA LINK (SYL) CANAL AND THE CONTROVERSY OVER IT:

The creation of Haryana from the old (undivided) Punjab in 1966 threw up the problem of giving Haryana its share of river waters. Punjab was opposed to sharing waters of the Ravi and Beas with Haryana, citing riparian principles, and arguing that it had no water to spare.

- However, Centre, in 1976, issued a notification allocating to Haryana 3.5 million acre feet (MAF) out of undivided Punjab's 7.2 MAF.
- To enable Haryana to use its share of the waters of the Sutlej and its tributary Beas, a canal linking the Sutlej with the Yamuna, cutting across the state, was planned. In April, 1982, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ceremonially dug the ground at Kapoori village in Patiala district for the construction of the 214-km Sutlej-Yamuna Link (or SYL) canal, 122 km of which was to be in Punjab, and 92 km in Haryana.
- A tripartite agreement was also negotiated between Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan in this regard.

- However, following the protests in Punjab, the Punjab Assembly passed The Punjab Termination of Agreements Act, 2004, terminating its water-sharing agreements, and thus jeopardising the construction of SYL in Punjab.

### **NSDA SIGNS MOU WITH BRITISH COUNCIL TO COLLABORATE FOR JOINT RESEARCH IN SKILLS SECTOR**

National Skill Development Agency and The British Council have signed a MoU to collaborate for undertaking joint research projects in the area of skill development.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- This collaboration comes as a part of strengthening the overall research mechanism in skill development space and to encourage research collaborations with various national and international organizations.
- Under this partnership, The British Council and the National Skill Research Division (NSRD), a research division under the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) will work closely with each other to build research collaborations between the UK and India over a period of three years in the skilling domain.
- The partnership aims to promote knowledge exchange and research collaborations between UK and India in the skills space and to strengthen capacity of research organisations in both the countries so as to be able to work in collaborative research environments in the Sector.
- The topic for the joint research study in first year of collaboration is “Future Skills” that will focus on, understanding labour market trends and identifying future employment in India in selected manufacturing and service sectors in view of changing technology.

- This kind of collaboration is in alignment with the overall mandate of the recently established National Skill Research Division that will serve as a think tank on research related to skill development and evolve as a credible research organization in skills space at the national level.

#### **ABOUT NSDA:**

The National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

- It coordinates and harmonizes the skill development efforts of the Indian government and the private sector to achieve the skilling targets of the 12th Plan document and beyond.
- It plays a pivotal role in bridging the social, regional, gender and economic divide by ensuring that the skilling needs of the disadvantaged and marginalized groups like SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities, women and differently-abled persons are taken care of through the various skill development programmes and also by taking affirmative actions as part of advocacy.
- The NSDA’s role is also to anchor the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and facilitate the setting up of professional certifying bodies in addition to the existing ones.

### **CENTRE UNVEILS STEPS TO BOOST CYBER SECURITY**

In an attempt to strengthen cyber security in India, the government has announced a slew of measures.

#### **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MEASURES ANNOUNCED:**

- All organisations having a significant IT infrastructure will need to appoint cyber security officers.

- Efforts are being made to strengthen Cert-IN, the governments' cyber security arm. The government has approved 26 new posts.
- State Certs are being planned by Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala and Jharkhand. Also, three sectoral Certs in power sector — generation, transmission and distribution, have been set up, in addition to the banking one.

## ABOUT CERT-IN:

### WHAT IS IT?

CERT-In (the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team) is a government-mandated information technology (IT) security organization. CERT-In was created by the Indian Department of Information Technology in 2004 and operates under the auspices of that department.

CERT organizations throughout the world are independent entities, although there may be coordinated activities among groups. The first CERT group was formed in the United States at Carnegie Mellon University.

### IT'S PURPOSE:

- The purpose of CERT-In is to respond to computer security incidents, report on vulnerabilities and promote effective IT security practices throughout the country.
- According to the provisions of the Information Technology Amendment Act 2008, CERT-In is responsible for overseeing administration of the Act.

## INDIA SIGNS LANDMARK CIVIL NUCLEAR DEAL WITH JAPAN

India has signed a historic civilian nuclear deal with Japan during the annual bilateral summit held recently in Tokyo.

## BACKGROUND:

The nuclear deal had been under negotiation for six years and was firmed up during the 2015 visit of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to India when the principles of the agreement were frozen. However, the final seal on the text had to wait legislative clearance from Japan, which has 13 civil nuclear agreements with countries such as France and the U.S.

## KEY FACTS:

- India is the first non-member of the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) to have signed such a deal with Japan. The deal will help India access Japan's nuclear market.
- The deal includes the option that Japan can give a year's notice before terminating it in case India breaks the nuclear testing moratorium that it had extended to the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 2008.
- The deal is significant as it will help guarantee Japan's continued support to India's civil nuclear programme.
- The deal will bring Japan into the Indian nuclear market where France and Russia have already have a strong presence.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS AGREEMENT:

The completion of the nuclear deal comes as the NSG is meeting in Vienna to discuss, among other issues, if non-NPT (nuclear non-proliferation Treaty) countries like India can enter this exclusive grouping. The India-Japan deal, according to experts, will have an impact.

## NO JAIL TERM FOR CELEBRITIES ENDORSING PRODUCTS IN MISLEADING ADS: GOM

A panel of ministers has approved imposing a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh and a one year ban on celebrities who endorse products making unrealistic claims for the first offence, but has dropped the controversial proposal for a jail term.

- A high-level Group of Ministers (GoM) was assigned to look into the issue. The GoM has deliberated on the issue and agreed to do away with the provision for imprisonment of celebrities, arguing that such provisions do not exist in any country.

### BACKGROUND:

The Consumer Protection Bill, 2015, which seeks to replace the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, by inserting tough measures for the protection of consumer rights and providing strict punishment to violators, was presented in Parliament in 2015.

- It was referred to a Standing Committee, which gave a report suggesting measures like making celebrities accountable for the brands they endorse, and called for severe penalties such as jail term for celebrities endorsing the brands, publishers and broadcasters of misleading advertisements and manufacturers of such products.
- The panel had recommended that for first-time offence, the offender celebrities may be penalised with either a fine of Rs 10 lakh or imprisonment up to two years or both. For second-time offences, it had suggested a fine of Rs 50 lakh and imprisonment of five years.

### WHAT HAS THE GOM SAID?

The GoM has decided that instead of jailing the endorsers, they should be fined Rs 10 lakh and slapped a ban of one year for the first offence, and fined Rs 50 lakh and banned for up to three years for the second offence.

### ABOUT THE ISSUE:

The issue of accountability of celebrities as brand endorsers came into the spotlight after the ban on Nestle India Ltd's Maggi Noodles. The ban was subsequently lifted. Actors like Amitabh Bachchan, Madhuri Dixit and Preity Zinta had endorsed the product.

Cricketer M S Dhoni quit as brand ambassador of realty firm Amrapali following protests by

residents who had invested in flats. Some other celebrities, too, faced public ire for endorsing brands that did not meet expectations.

### KEN-BETWA PROJECT HANGS ON FOREST NOD

The Forest Advisory Committee has withheld its nod to the Ken-Betwa river-interlinking project. The committee tasked with giving the project forest clearance has deferred it at least until January.

### BACKGROUND:

The Rs. 9,000-crore Ken-Betwa river-interlinking project will partly submerge the Panna tiger reserve. The Forest Advisory Committee's clearance is required for this diversion of forest land. The project requires separate wildlife, forest and environment clearances.

### ABOUT THE PROJECT:

The Ken and Betwa rivers in the states of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Madhya Pradesh (MP) are to be linked under an historic agreement that marks the first such project in India's ambitious and controversial national river-linking project.

- The project envisages construction of a dam across river Ken in Chhatarpur district in Madhya Pradesh to irrigate 6.35 lakh hectare area of land, drinking water purposes and generation of 78 MW hydropower.
- The project comprises two powerhouse of 2×30 MW and 3×6 MW each, two tunnels of 1.9 km long upper level, 1.1 km long tunnel lower level and a 221 km long Ken-Betwa link canal, proposed on the left bank of the river.
- The project will provide irrigation facilities for 6,35,661 hectares of land in Panna, Chhatarpur, Tikamgarh districts in Madhya Pradesh, and Banda, Mahoba and Jhansi districts in Uttar Pradesh.
- The project was first mooted in the early 1980s but was actively taken up by the NDA government under Prime Minister Atal Bihari

Vajpayee. It was then challenged in the Supreme Court, which finally gave the nod in 2013.

### WHY IS IT BEING OPPOSED?

Proponents of the project say that the proposed Daudhan dam and the 2.5 km canal — the key structures of the project — that will transfer surplus water from the Uttar Pradesh section of the Ken to the Betwa in Madhya Pradesh are critical to irrigate nearly 7,00,000 hectares in drought-ravaged Bundelkhand.

But, opponents also say such a dam will submerge at least 4,000 hectares of Madhya Pradesh's Panna tiger reserve, whose tigers were almost lost to poaching in 2009 and have only recently been partially replenished. They also allege that most districts in Madhya Pradesh will not actually get the promised water. There are vultures in the region, whose nests will be threatened by the height of the dam.

### INDIA STILL LOSING FIGHT AGAINST CHILD PNEUMONIA, DIARRHOEA EPIDEMICS

World Pneumonia Day 2016 was observed on November 12. 2016 Theme: "Keep the Promise, Stop Pneumonia Now".

#### REPORT ON PNEUMONIA:

On this day, the Pneumonia and Diarrhoea Progress Report was published by the International Vaccine Access Center (IVAC.)

#### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT:

- The report puts India at the top of the list of 15 nations, as it did last year, and the years before. India had a total of 2,96,279 deaths from pneumonia and diarrhea.
- The report also notes that India is among the 12 nations that have improved their Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Pneumonia and Diarrhoea (GAPPD) score this year.

- Nearly 15 years after the introduction of the pneumococcal conjugate vaccines in 2000, five countries among those with the highest pneumonia burden — India, Indonesia, Chad, China and Somalia — are still not using the vaccine in their routine immunisation programmes, the report noted.
- In addition to thinking of vaccines, the report points out other simple proven interventions in order to prevent these deaths, including antibiotics, exclusive breastfeeding, and access to treatment and care.
- Also urging nations to go beyond business as usual, the report chronicles innovations that help speed up the process and better chase the goal of cutting down the number of preventable child deaths.

### WHAT HAS INDIA BEEN DOING IN THIS REGARD?

India recently announced a partial introduction of the vaccine in five states (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh) from 2017. India introduced rotavirus vaccines in four States in 2015.

### SC SETS UP PANEL ON NIGHT SHELTERS

The Supreme Court has asked the government to respond on the lackadaisical attitude shown by authorities in providing sufficient number of night shelters to the poor and homeless in the towns and cities of northern States despite the availability of funds.

### COMMITTEE TO VERIFY THE AVAILABILITY:

The court has also directed that a committee headed by former Delhi High Court judge Justice Kailash Gambhir be constituted to verify the availability of night shelters, including if they are in compliance with the operational guidelines under the NULM and to inquire into the reasons for slow progress in setting up shelter homes by the States/Union Territories. The committee has been given four months to submit its report.

**TERMS OF REFERENCE:**

- The committee shall inquire about non-utilisation and/or diversion/misutilisation of funds allocated for the scheme for providing shelters to the urban homeless.
- The committee shall issue suitable recommendations to the States to ensure that at least temporary shelters are provided for the homeless in urban areas to protect them during winter season. The State governments shall ensure compliance with the recommendations along the time frame indicated by the committee.

**BACKGROUND:**

Destitute in urban areas continue to suffer without shelters. In spite of the availability of funds and a clear mechanism through which to disburse them, there is unsatisfactory state of affairs on the ground. Poor continue to shiver in the winter cold as welfare measures like the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) scheme continue to remain a distant dream.

**PM INAUGURATES INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION ON SUGARCANE VALUE CHAIN VISION 2025 SUGAR – AT PUNE**

PM Modi recently inaugurated the International Conference and Exhibition on Sugarcane Value Chain Vision 2025 Sugar – at Pune.

**Key facts:**

- Vasantdada Sugar Institute (VSI) has organized the conference.
- There was an exhibition showcasing various technological developments in sugar industry and live demonstrations of sugarcane crop showing various advance technologies and practices in cultivation.
- Eminent international and national speakers delivered lectures on significantly different important aspects of sugarcane value chain.

- The conference was attended by around 1500 delegates.

**ABOUT VSI:**

VSI is an autonomous body established in 1975 by cane growers of co-operative sugar mills in Maharashtra with support of State and Central government.

**IN HYDERABAD, A COUP IN A COOP**

In what is the first evidence of multidrug resistance in poultry sold in Indian markets, researchers in Hyderabad have isolated a bacterium in chicken that may well be the source of transmission of the drug-resistant pathogen to humans. This is the first data on prevalence and isolation of H. pullorum in India.

**KEY FACTS:**

- The pathogen, called Helicobacter pullorum, was found in broiler and free-range chickens, which — besides being untreatable — could also be cancer-causing.
- pullorum is commonly found in the liver and gut of poultry birds and is believed to co-evolve with its natural host.
- Infected chicken, when consumed, are known to cause gastrointestinal infections in humans.

**CONCERNS:**

The greatest concern of news of resistance is H. pullorum's ability to cause cancer. It is known to produce a cancer-causing agent called cytolethal distending toxin, which is the main concern. This toxin damages the DNA and interferes with the cell cycle. Since this bacterium also infects the liver, it increases the risk of cancer in the organ.

Cooking the Indian way — at temperatures higher than 60° Celsius — kills H. pullorum. However, eating uncooked or undercooked dishes like pickled chicken carries risk of infection.

## **U.K., FRANCE BACK UNSC PERMANENT SEAT FOR INDIA**

India's bid for a permanent seat in a reformed U.N. Security Council has received a strong support from many U.N. member-states, including the U.K. and France.

### **BACKGROUND:**

More than 50 speakers shared their suggestions and concerns over reform of the 15-nation UNSC during a General Assembly session held recently. Among the large number of nations supporting a permanent seat for India and other emerging powers like Brazil and Germany were two veto-wielding permanent members of the Council, the United Kingdom and France.

### **INDIA AND THE UNSC:**

India, since long time, has been demanding expansion of UNSC and its inclusion as permanent member in it.

- The U.S. is supporting India's claim for a permanent UNSC seat, but it has been calling for consensus before reforms can move ahead.
- Pakistan is opposed to India, while China has been ambiguous in its approach though not openly opposed to reforms.
- Russia has also clarified that it is open to supporting India's bid for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

### **WHY INDIA SHOULD BE GIVEN A PERMANENT SEAT IN THE COUNCIL?**

- India was among the founding members of United Nations.
- It is the second largest and a one of the largest constant contributor of troops to United Nations Peacekeeping missions.
- India has over 8,500 peacekeepers in the field, more than twice as many as the UN's five big powers combined.

- It has been a member of UNSC for 7 terms and a member of G-77 and G-4, so permanent membership is a logical extension.

## **Chinese ship opens new trade route via Gwadar port in Pakistan**

A new international trade route in Southwest Pakistan has been opened up by a Chinese ship exporting goods to the Middle East and Africa. With this, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has become a reality. This route that is being developed by the Chinese in Pakistan is expected to make huge amount of economic gains for the country.

### **WHAT IS CPEC?**

The CPEC is one of the most important projects of the 'one belt, one road' project initiated by China that aims to connect the Asian economic giant with Europe and Africa, thereby making the country a bigger player in world economic affairs.

- Consisting of a number of road, rail and pipeline ventures, the CPEC connects Xinjiang in Northwestern region of China with Pakistan's Gwadar port on the Arabian sea, going over the Pakistan occupied Kashmir territory of Gilgit-Baltistan and the disputed region of Balochistan.
- Reportedly, the port at Gwadar will have the capacity to manage 19 million tons of crude oil which will be directly transferred to China.
- As a multi-million dollar project, the CPEC is reported to have brought Pakistan twice the amount of foreign investments the country received since 2008.

### **HOW DOES IT BENEFIT PAKISTAN?**

For Pakistan, the Chinese investment in the southwestern region of the country is a game-changer for the economy, especially considering the fact that despite the high concentration of mineral resources in the region it has remained the poorest district.

The \$46 billion promised by China will be used in generating close to 17,000 megawatts of electricity at a cost of \$34 billion through coal, nuclear and other renewable energy projects. The rest of the money would be utilised in building up transport infrastructure.

### **WORLD LIKELY TO CROSS 1.2°C GLOBAL WARMING LEVEL THIS YEAR**

According to a preliminary assessment provided by the World Meteorological Organisation in its Status of the Global Climate in 2016 report, the world is likely to cross 1.2° C of global warming above pre-industrial levels in 2016. This comes dangerously close to breaching the 1.5° C warming levels advised as an ambitious target to stay safe from the worst impacts of climate change.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

The Paris Agreement last year had adopted 2°C as the absolute threshold for staying within safe global warming levels. However, 1.5°C was advised as an ambitious target, especially bearing in mind the fate of small island countries such as Haiti or Maldives that are threatened with submergence due to sea-level rise and extreme weather events.

Global temperatures for January to September 2016 have been about 0.88°C (1.58°F) above the average (14°C) for the 1961-1990 reference period, which WMO uses as a baseline.

#### **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT:**

- The report warned 2016 will be the hottest year on record, with global temperatures even higher than what 2015 experienced.
- While the extra heat from the powerful El Niño event has disappeared, the heat from global warming will continue.
- In parts of Arctic Russia, temperatures were 6°C to 7°C above the long-term average. Many other Arctic and sub-Arctic regions in Russia,

Alaska and northwest Canada were at least 3°C above average.

- Because of climate change, the occurrence and impact of extreme events has also risen. 'Once in a generation' heatwaves and flooding are becoming more regular. Sea level rise has increased exposure to storm surges associated with tropical cyclones.

#### **THE WMO REPORT ALSO OUTLINED THE MAJOR WEATHER EVENTS ASSOCIATED WITH INCREASING GLOBAL WARMING LEVELS IN 2016:**

- In total, there have been 78 tropical cyclones globally in 2016 as of October 31, close to the long-term average.
- The most significant, in terms of casualties, was Hurricane Matthew affecting Haiti and parts of the U.S. Typhoon Lionrock caused destructive flooding and heavy casualties in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Cyclone Winston was the most severe tropical storm on record to affect Fiji.
- The Yangtze basin in China had its most significant summer floods since 1999. Sri Lanka experienced flooding and landslides in mid-May.
- Above-normal seasonal rainfall in the Sahel led to significant flooding in the Niger River basin, with the river reaching its highest levels in about 50 years in Mali.
- There were a number of major heat waves and droughts experienced during 2015-2016. The year started with an extreme heat wave in southern Africa, exacerbated by the ongoing drought.
- The report also mentions Phalodi in Rajasthan, India which set a new record for heat in India recording 51.0°C on May 19.

## 'KOHINOOR REPRESENTS SENTIMENTS OF PEOPLE'

The Centre recently told the Supreme Court that the Kohinoor diamond, though a "symbol of victory" for the British Empire, represented the "sentiments of the people of India."

### KEY FACTS:

- The affidavit filed by the Centre said India's credentials regarding the ownership of the Kohinoor diamond was based on historical evidence and could not be doubted. The affidavit was filed by the Ministry of Culture.
- The affidavit has an open-ended conclusion, saying the government was "continuing to explore ways for a satisfactory resolution" over the diamond with the U.K.
- The affidavit was perused by a Bench led by Chief Justice of India T.S. Thakur recently on a petition filed by the All India Human Rights and Social Front against the High Commissioner of the U.K.

### BACKGROUND:

The centre, in April 2016, had told Supreme Court that the Kohinoor diamond was neither "forcibly taken nor stolen" by British rulers, but given as a "gift" to East India Company by rulers of Punjab. Therefore, India should not stake claim to Kohinoor because other countries may start pressing India for return of their items. The government had clarified that the diamond was given by the successors of Maharaja Ranjit Singh to East India Company in 1849 as compensation for helping them in the Sikh wars.

### ABOUT THE ISSUE:

The return of Kohinoor diamond to India has been a long-standing demand, with many claiming that the diamond was taken forcibly. The fight to get back the diamond has been ongoing since India's independence.

- The Indian government, believing the gem was rightfully theirs, made the first demand for the return of the Kohinoor diamond soon after independence. A second request followed in 1953, the year of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Each time, the British government refuted the claims, saying that ownership was non-negotiable.

- In 2000, several members of the Indian Parliament signed a letter calling for the diamond to be given back to India, claiming it was taken illegally. British officials said that a variety of claims meant it was impossible to establish the gem's original owner.

### WHO OWNS THE DIAMOND, ANYWAY?

It is not just India that is claiming ownership of the diamond; the list includes Pakistan and Afghanistan, too.

#### Key facts:

- The diamond belonged to the Sikh Ruler, Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
- It has been in British possession for more than 150 years.
- It is now priced at 100 million euros.

### WAY AHEAD:

Though both India and the U.K. were signatories to the UNESCO Convention on Means of Prohibiting and Preventing Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, a restitution of Kohinoor would require a "special agreement" between both countries.

### SPECIAL COMMITTEE FOR INTER-LINKING OF RIVERS

The Union Cabinet has approved constitution of 'special committee for inter-linking of rivers' in compliance with a Supreme Court order.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS MOVE:**

- This move will help in monitoring of the precious Inter-linking of River Projects to be carried out under National Perspective Plan 1980 of Government of India.
- The Status-cum-Progress Report of Special Committee for Inter-linking of Rivers will be submitted bi-annually for information of Cabinet. This will facilitate faster and appropriate decisions in the interest of the country as expeditiously as possible.

**BACKGROUND:**

The apex court of India had given the go ahead for the controversial inter-linking river project, seeking to transfer water from surplus to water deficit areas in the country. In its final judgement in 2012, the court had expressed the “pious hope of speedy implementation” to bring the project to a success.

- The court had also directed the Centre to constitute a ‘special committee’ forthwith for inter-linking of rivers for the benefit of the entire nation.
- The project, in the pipeline since 1980, has been touted by the Centre as one solution to a number of problems: making water available for irrigating 35 million hectares; enabling full use of existing irrigation projects; generating power to the tune of 34,000 MW with added benefits, including flood control.

**HUNAR HAAT**

It was recently inaugurated at New Delhi. The exhibition is aimed at promoting and supporting artisans from Minority communities and providing them domestic as well as international market for display and sell their products.

**KEY FACTS:**

- It is being organised for the first time at India International Trade Fair (2016). Union

minority affairs ministry has organized the market.

- The market provides artisans from minority communities a chance to display their products and skills at an international platform.
- The special feature of this unique market is that besides providing free of cost stalls to artisans and craftsmen, the Union minority affairs ministry will also make arrangements for their transport and will help in their daily expenses so that these expert artisans can reach Delhi easily and display their arts and skills at an international platform.
- Over 184 master artisans will showcase their traditional art at this special crafts bazaar.

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN INDIA AND ADB**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India have signed a \$500 million loan to build a 9.8 km long road bridge across the Ganges River.

**KEY FACTS:**

- The bridge aims to improve transport connectivity between North and South Bihar and acts as a better link between the State Capital, Patna, and the surrounding areas.
- This will be India’s longest river bridge and is expected to benefit over 9 million people.
- The bridge will be a boon for the inhabitants of Raghapur Diara river island who will gain year-round road access. Currently, the 250,000 inhabitants of the island rely on boats and a seasonal pontoon bridge as their only links to Patna.
- The bridge, using state-of-the-art engineering techniques, will be the first of its kind in India. The height and length have been designed to minimize impacts on the river itself and to ensure the bridge will be able to withstand

climate-related stresses such as a rise in the water level.

- Along with ADB's loan and \$900,000 in technical assistance to improve bridge operation and management, the state government of Bihar will provide support equivalent to \$215 million. The project is expected to be completed by the end of December 2020.

### **HAND-IN-HAND 2016**

It is a joint military exercise between India and China which recently began in Pune. India has organised this joint military exercise.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- The exercise is aimed at sharing the expertise in drills and practices while tackling insurgency and terrorism and thereby promote healthy military-to-military relations between India and China.
- This is the sixth such joint exercise being organised between the two countries. First such exercise was held in China at Kunming of Yunnan province in 2007.
- Forming part of different levels of the military-to-military engagement across the entire spectrum of operations, this exercise will enrich the two contingents in further honing basic military skills.
- The first phase of the exercise consists of familiarisation with weapons and equipment. Thereafter, the second phase consists of basic training that includes combat conditioning, firing of personal weapon, support weapon and practice of drills like establishment of covert observation post, house clearing, cordon & search and humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

### **'272 PRODUCTS REGISTERED AS GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION SO FAR'**

As many as 272 products such as Sangli raisins, Banaras metal repousse craft and Beed custard apple have been registered as geographical indications since September 2003, according to a government data.

- During this fiscal so far, 11 products have been registered as GI from states including Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. In 2015-16, 26 items got GI status.

#### **WHAT GI TAG?**

GI status is an indication that identifies goods as produced from a particular area, which has special quality or reputation attributable to its geographical origin.

#### **GI REGISTRATION CONFERS:**

- Legal protection to the products.
- Prevents unauthorised use of a GI by others.
- Helps consumers get quality products of desired traits.
- Promotes economic prosperity of producers of goods by enhancing demand in national and international markets.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- The GI tag is an indication which is definite to a geographical territory. It is used for agricultural, natural and manufactured goods.
- India's Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act 1999, has come into force with effect from September 15, 2003.
- For a product to get GI tag, the goods need to be produced or processed or prepared in that region. It is also essential that the product has special quality or reputation.

- Under the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, geographical indications are covered as an element of intellectual property rights (IPRs).
- They are also covered under the WTO's Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement.
- The famous goods which carry this tag include Basmati rice, Darjeeling Tea, Chanderi Fabric, Mysore Silk, Kullu Shawl, Kangra Tea, Thanjavur Paintings, Allahabad Surkha, Farrukhabad Prints, Lucknow Zardozi and Kashmir Walnut Wood Carving.

### **PUNE RESEARCHERS FABRICATE A FLEXIBLE NANOGENERATOR FOR WEARABLE ELECTRONICS**

Researchers have produced a wearable electronics that uses a portable nanogenerator which generates electric power when pressure or twist is applied.

- The nanogenerator, fabricated by researchers, produced 14 volts when thumb pressure was applied.

#### **HOW WAS THIS PRODUCED?**

To produce the nanogenerator, researchers electrospun a piezoelectric polymer [P(VDF-TrFE)] directly onto a flexible, conducting carbon cloth. The carbon cloth was produced by the researchers by heating a piece of cotton cloth at 800 degree C for several hours in an inert atmosphere.

- To improve the piezo voltage of the polymer fibres, the researchers coated the fibres with a stronger, inorganic ferroelectric material (BaTiO<sub>3</sub>) paste. The nanoparticles from the coating helps fill the gaps between the polymer nanofibres and increase the piezoelectric property.
- In addition, the ferroelectric material was also incorporated into the polymer to further enhance the piezoelectric property. This was

done right when the polymer was electrospun.

- The coated polymer was covered by another piece of flexible carbon cloth before the device was sealed. The carbon cloth on either side of the device acted as two electrodes. The carbon cloth too contributes to the enhanced piezo voltage generated by the nanogenerator through its peculiar morphology as a substrate.

#### **HOW IT OPERATES?**

The cloth has a surface microstructure which produces good bonding between the cloth (electrode) and the active layer. The bonding will be poor in the case of a metal layer. Due to the roughness of the cloth surface, when you press or flex the device the applied force is transmitted along different directions of the piezoelectric active layer. And this improves the piezoelectric property of the nanogenerator. If the electrode were a flat metallic surface then the force applied would be transmitted in only one direction.

When thumb pressure was applied on the polymer alone 2-3 volt was produced. In the case of the polymer with BaTiO<sub>3</sub> coating, the piezo voltage generated was 7-8 volt. But 14 volt was produced when BaTiO<sub>3</sub> was incorporated into the polymer and also coated on the fibre surface.

#### **SETTING UP OF INDUSTRY DRIVEN SRTMI**

Ministry of Steel is planning to set up an Industry driven institutional mechanism namely Steel Research & Technology Mission of India (SRTMI), to facilitate joint collaborative research projects in the iron & steel sector in India.

- The conceptualization of SRTMI was done by a high level task force set up by the Ministry of Steel.

## THE SALIENT FEATURES OF SRTMI ARE AS UNDER: ABOUT TAPAS 201:

- SRTMI is an industry driven initiative which will be setup as a Registered Society wherein Ministry of Steel is a facilitator.
- SRTMI will be governed and administered by a Governing Body comprising the steel CEOs, Domain Experts and a representative of Ministry of Steel.
- The executive functioning of SRTMI will be carried out by the Director, SRTMI, who will be assisted by a suitable/appropriate supporting structure.
- Initial corpus for setting up of SRTMI is Rs. 200 crore of which 50% is to be provided by Ministry of Steel and the balance by the participating steel companies.
- Thereafter, the centre will run on yearly contributions from the steel companies based on their turnover of the previous year.

### BACKGROUND:

Indian Steel Sector's contribution to overall Gross Domestic Product of the country is nearly 2% during 2015-16.

The total exposure of steel industry is about Rs. 3.13 lakh crore out of which Gross Non Performing Assets is about Rs. 1.15 lakh crore. This works out to 36.94% of total loan outstanding as on March, 2016.

### SUCCESSFUL MAIDEN FLIGHT OF RUSTOM - II

Heralding a new era in the indigenous development of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), DRDO has successfully carried out the maiden flight of TAPAS 201 (RUSTOM - II), a Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) UAV.

- The flight accomplished the main objectives of proving the flying platform, such as take-off, bank, level flight and landing etc.

TAPAS 201, the MALE UAV has been designed and developed by Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE), the Bangalore-based premier lab of DRDO with HAL-BEL as the production partners.

- It is also the first R&D prototype UAV which has undergone certification and qualification for the first flight from the Center for Military Airworthiness & Certification (CEMILAC) and Directorate General of Aeronautical Quality Assurance (DGAQA).

- TAPAS 201 is being developed to carry out the Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) roles for the three Armed Forces with an endurance of 24 hours.

- It is capable to carry different combinations of payloads like Medium Range Electro Optic (MREO), Long Range Electro Optic (LREO), Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), Electronic Intelligence (ELINT), Communication Intelligence (COMINT) and Situational Awareness Payloads (SAP) to perform missions during day and night.

- Defence Electronics Application Laboratory (DEAL) of DRDO has developed the data link for the UAV.

### NHRC WRITES TO CENTRE OVER FOREIGN FUNDING FOR NGOS

Concerned about the rights of human rights defenders, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued a notice to the Union Home Ministry on the government's alleged "draconian approach" in renewing the foreign funding approval for NGOs.

### BACKGROUND:

The Home Ministry had recently cancelled the FCRA licences of thousands of NGOs over not applying for renewal in time.

**WHAT HAS THE NHRC SAID?**

The NHRC said that the government's approach towards renewing Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) licences for the NGOs that defend human rights had been brought to its notice.

NHRC also observed that prima facie, it appears that the FCRA licence non-renewal is neither legal nor objective, and thereby impinging on the rights of the human rights defenders, both in access to funding, including foreign funding.

**WAY AHEAD:**

Taking suo-motu cognisance, the NHRC has directed the Home Secretary to provide details of the NGOs of human rights defenders whose licences had been cancelled, the number of such NGOs, the reason for nonrenewal and the amount of foreign funds received in the past three years.

The Commission directed the government to provide the information in six weeks so that it can start hearing the matter and look at "whether the review of the law [FCRA] can be recommended".

**ABOUT NHRC:**

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India is an autonomous public body constituted on 12 October 1993 under the Protection of Human Rights Ordinance of 28 September 1993. It was given a statutory basis by the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 (TPHRA).

- The NHRC is the national human rights institution, responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights, defined by the Act as "rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants".

**COMPOSITION:**

- It consists of a Chairman and 4 members. Chairman should be a retired Chief Justice of India. Members should be either sitting or retired judges of the Supreme Court or a serving or retired Chief Justice of a High Court and 2 persons having practical knowledge in this field.
- Ex officio members are the chairmen of National Commission for Scheduled Caste, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, National Commission for Minorities and National Commission for Women.

**OTHER DETAILS:**

**APPOINTMENT:** The chairman and members are appointed on the recommendation of a 6 member committee consisting of Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, leaders of opposition in both the houses of parliament and Union Home Minister.

**TERM:** Term of the chairman and members is 5 years or 70 years whichever is earlier. After retirement they are not eligible for further reappointment.

**REMOVAL:** President has to refer the matter to Supreme Court and if after enquiry Supreme Court holds it right then they can be removed by the President.

**PLEA AGAINST USE OF WORD 'DALIT' BY MEDIA, HC SEEKS CENTRE'S REPLY**

The Delhi High Court has sought the response of the Centre on a plea seeking a direction to restrain media houses from using the word 'Dalit' in news articles, alleging it creates "inequality" in society.

- The court has issued a notice to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and asked it to take instruction on whether there is any law to prohibit the use of the word by media houses.

**BACKGROUND:**

A plea has been filed in the High Court seeking a direction to restrain media houses from using the word 'Dalit' in news articles, alleging it creates "inequality" in society. The petitioner has also sought a direction to the Press Council of India to restrain all print and electronic media from using the word 'Dalit'.

**PETITIONER'S ARGUMENTS:**

The petitioner says: "The legislature has made provisions to ensure no one may create any kind of hatred or animosity between the different communities or religions in India". Aggrieved by the excessive use of the words 'Dalit' and 'upper caste', the plea alleged that despite a law and guidelines in place, the media houses keep on raising the issue of 'Dalit' atrocities unnecessarily.

**APEX COURT REFUSES TO LIFT BAN ON JALLIKATTU**

Questioning the need to tame a domestic animal like the bull, the Supreme Court has dismissed a plea by Tamil Nadu to review a 2014 apex court judgment banning jallikattu.

**IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS MADE BY THE COURT:**

The event had nothing to do with the exercise of the fundamental right of religious freedom and runs counter to the concept of welfare of the animal, which is the basic foundation of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1960.

**TAMIL NADU'S ARGUMENT:**

The State has countered that the event was defined as an act of "taming" of bulls under the Tamil Nadu Regulation of Jallikattu Act of 2009 and did not amount to cruelty.

**BACKGROUND:**

Tamil Nadu has been arguing that Jallikattu – the mostly southern bull-racing sport – should be permitted as it showcases a cultural tradition that has been part of the custom and culture of people of the state for 5,000 years.

- The Supreme Court already banned Jallikattu once, in May 2014. At the time it said bulls could not be used as performing animals, either for Jallikattu or for bullock-cart races. However, in January, the Centre allowed the 'sport' in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.
- Days after the Centre allowed it, in January, the Supreme Court put Jallikattu on hold. It issued notices to the Centre and other states asking them to file their responses in four weeks, to petitions challenging the central government's notification allowing Jallikattu and bullock-cart races.

**JALLIKATTU:**

Jallikattu is a bull taming sport played in Tamil Nadu as a part of Pongal celebrations on Mattu Pongal day. It is a Tamil tradition called 'Yeru thazhuvatha' in Sangam literature (meaning, to embrace bulls), popular amongst warriors during the Tamil classical period.

- Jallikattu is based on the concept of "flight or fight". All castes participate in the event. The majority of jallikattu bulls belong to the pulikulam breed of cattle.

**SOON, SEARCH ENGINES TO BLANK SEX SELECTION ADS**

The Supreme Court has directed the Central government to constitute a nodal agency to monitor and trigger search engines to crack down on online pre-natal sex determination advertisements.

**KEY FACTS:**

- The court has ordered that the nodal agency should receive complaints about illegal online advertisements under the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act of 1994.
- It should communicate the tip-offs to online search engines like Google, Yahoo and Microsoft, which would delete these advertisements within 36 hours of getting the information.
- This interim arrangement would continue till it took a final decision on the continued existence of online sex selection ads.

**BACKGROUND:**

The court was hearing a petition filed in 2008 in the background of increasing instances of female foeticide. The petition contended that pre-natal sex determination tests continue with impunity despite being made illegal in 1994.

PCPNDT law prohibits pre-natal sex determination. The PCPNDT Act was brought in to stop female foeticide and arrest the declining sex ratio in India. Under this Act, gender selection is prohibited.

**ABOUT PCPNDT ACT:**

The Pre-conception & Pre-natal Diagnostics Techniques (PC & PNDT) Act, 1994 was enacted in response to the decline in Sex ratio in India, which deteriorated from 972 in 1901 to 927 in 1991.

- The main purpose of enacting the act is to ban the use of sex selection techniques before or after conception and prevent the misuse of prenatal diagnostic technique for sex selective abortion.
- Offences under this act include conducting or helping in the conduct of prenatal diagnostic technique in the unregistered units, sex selection on a man or woman, conducting

PND test for any purpose other than the one mentioned in the act, sale, distribution, supply, renting etc. of any ultra sound machine or any other equipment capable of detecting sex of the foetus.

**KEY FEATURES OF THE ACT:**

- The Act provides for the prohibition of sex selection, before or after conception.
- It regulates the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques, like ultrasound and amniocentesis by allowing them their use only to detect few cases.
- No laboratory or centre or clinic will conduct any test including ultrasonography for the purpose of determining the sex of the foetus.
- No person, including the one who is conducting the procedure as per the law, will communicate the sex of the foetus to the pregnant woman or her relatives by words, signs or any other method.
- Any person who puts an advertisement for pre-natal and pre-conception sex determination facilities in the form of a notice, circular, label, wrapper or any document, or advertises through interior or other media in electronic or print form or engages in any visible representation made by means of hoarding, wall painting, signal, light, sound, smoke or gas, can be imprisoned for up to three years and fined Rs. 10,000.
- The Act mandates compulsory registration of all diagnostic laboratories, all genetic counselling centres, genetic laboratories, genetic clinics and ultrasound clinics.

**AMENDMENT**

Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 (PNDT), was amended in 2003 to The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition Of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT Act) to improve the

regulation of the technology used in sex selection. The Act was amended to bring the technique of pre conception sex selection and ultrasound technique within the ambit of the act. The amendment also empowered the central supervisory board and state level supervisory board was constituted. In 1988, the State of Maharashtra became the first in the country to ban pre-natal sex determination through enacting the Maharashtra Regulation of Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act.

### International Conference on Brucellosis 2016

International Research Conference on Brucellosis was recently inaugurated in New Delhi.

- On the sidelines, the centre also launched programme of “Brucella Free Villages” for implementation on pilot scale in 50 villages covering 10 states.
- This programme will be supported by guidelines and standard operating practices along with an IT enabled application.

### KEY FACTS:

- The three day International Conference on Brucellosis is being organized by the Department of Biotechnology in collaboration with Indian Council for Agriculture Research.
- The conference is result of DBT’s network programme on Brucellosis launched in 2012 to address this epidemiology and for development of new generation of vaccines and diagnostic kits.
- The Conference provides a technical platform for scientist and experts from all over the world.
- Participants from 26 countries include USA, Belgium, Germany, Nigeria, Argentina, Spain and Turkey.
- The three days deliberations would address various issues on Brucellosis covering broad and interdisciplinary field of “One Health”

concept revolving around Brucella Pathogenesis & Host-pathogen interaction; Human Brucellosis; Epidemiology and Control; Brucella research in India; Canine and Wildlife Brucellosis; Diagnostic methods; and Vaccines & Immunology.

### ABOUT BRUCELLOSIS:

Brucellosis is a dreadful disease caused by the genus of the **bacteria known as Brucella** infecting various species of Brucella cows, buffalos, sheep, goats, deer, pigs, dogs and other animals as well as humans. The disease causes economic losses of about Rs. 28000.00 Crores. **Brucellosis is endemic in India.**

### SPREAD OF THE DISEASE:

- Human become infected by coming in contact with animals or animal product like meat and milk contaminated with these bacteria.
- Dairy man, veterinarians, butchers and other animal handlers are exposed to high risk of brucellosis infection.

### SYMPTOMS:

- In humans brucellosis can cause range of symptoms that are similar to the flu and may include fever, sweats, headache, back pain and physical weakness.
- Severe infections of the central nervous system or lining of the heart may also occur.

### DIAGNOSIS:

Quite often brucellosis is diagnosed after ruling out all other fevers such as those caused by malaria, typhoid, dengue etc. Therefore, the disease is under reported and many medical professionals are not even aware of the problem.

## **BHUTAN BLOCKS INDIA'S AMBITIOUS SUB-REGIONAL ROAD CONNECTIVITY PLAN**

An ambitious road connectivity plan involving Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) has hit a roadblock with the upper house of Bhutan parliament deciding against ratifying the motor vehicle pact.

### **WHY?**

A large cross-section of people in Bhutan, including lawmakers, have expressed concerns over the environmental impact of allowing large number of vehicles enter the country after it ratifies the pact.

### **HOW WILL THIS IMPACT THE AGREEMENT?**

The BBIN agreement – signed in Bhutan's capital Thimpu in July – will become operational only when all the four countries ratify it. India, Bangladesh and Nepal have already ratified the pact.

This might also derail the entire plan as any restrictions which are beyond the reasonable won't be accepted by the other member countries.

### **BACKGROUND:**

This is the second time that the Indian government's sub-regional road connectivity plan has hit a hurdle. Earlier, Pakistan scuppered the Saarc motor vehicle agreement by refusing to come on board.

India then decided to tap its eastern neighbours to boost regional connectivity. Bypassing Pakistan, India moved to have an agreement with Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan to remove restrictions on vehicular movement in the subcontinent.

### **ABOUT THE AGREEMENT:**

The Union Cabinet had approved a proposal to sign the SAARC MVA during the SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in November 2014. The SAARC

declaration at the Kathmandu Summit in November 2014 also encouraged Member States to initiate regional and sub-regional measures to enhance connectivity.

- Accordingly, it was considered appropriate that a sub-regional Motor Vehicle Agreement among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) may be pursued.
- The pact will allow seamless movement of passenger and cargo vehicles among the four countries.
- Under the agreement, the “contracting parties” will allow cargo vehicles for inter-country cargo, including third country cargo and passenger vehicles or personal vehicles, to ply in the territory of another country “subject to the terms of the agreement”. All vehicles, however, will require a permit for plying through the other country.

### **HOW WILL THIS HELP INDIA?**

India is in a bilateral motor vehicle agreement with Nepal and Bangladesh, but a multilateral pact would go a long way in boosting trade in the region.

### **NOT A PIPE DREAM: GOVT TO SET UP NATIONAL GAS HUB**

The government is planning to come up with a national gas hub, which would be a trading platform for gas at market-determined price. A final form of this Indian benchmark will be ready within a year.

### **WHAT IS A GAS HUB?**

A gas hub is a physical point where several gas pipelines come together or intersect. It is a trading place for gas at market determined prices.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The ministry of petroleum and natural gas is working towards setting up a common gas hub after the government introduced a new gas

pricing formula in 2014. This gas price is applicable for six months wherein the average prices of US-based Henry Hub, the UK-based National Balancing Point, Canada's Alberta Gas and Russian gas gets reflected.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS MOVE:**

If the idea gets cleared, India will also have a gas-trading place similar to international hubs such as the US' Henry Hub and the UK's National Balancing Point. While Henry Hub is a physical point where several gas pipelines come together, National Balancing Point is a virtual trading point.

#### **PRESENT SCENARIO:**

At present, the Indian domestic natural gas price is calculated on a half-yearly basis, based on a weighted average of Henry Hub, National Balancing Point, Russian gas and Canada's Alberta Gas.

#### **HOW IT OPERATES?**

A gas hub works exactly like a stock exchange does. There are buyers and sellers, and prices are determined by market forces. Gas is thus freely traded.

This is a huge positive for upstream companies in India as prices will be market-driven. Moreover, it seems like the domestic natural gas pricing will be uniform with the move.

#### **STUDENT STARTUP POLICY**

President Pranab Mukherjee recently launched the National Student Startup Policy.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- The National Student Startup Policy, formulated by AICTE, aims to create 100,000 technology based student start-ups and a million employment opportunities within the next 10 years.
- The policy plans on achieving this by developing an ideal entrepreneurial ecosystem and promoting strong inter-

institutional partnerships among technical institutions.

- It emphasizes the much-desired need for an appropriate startup policy to propel the youth of India through and beyond the 21st century.

#### **INDIA IS 'NON-COMMITTAL' ON MARKET ECONOMY TAG FOR CHINA**

Indian government has indicated that it is not inclined to automatically grant the coveted 'Market Economy Status' (MES) to China this December under World Trade Organisation (WTO) norm.

#### **WHY?**

According to India, granting MES to China will severely curb the ability of nations including India to impose anti-dumping duties on "unfairly priced" Chinese imports.

With this, India has taken sides with the U.S. and European Union in stating that unlike in 'market economies' where prices of items are market determined (based on demand & supply conditions), there is still a significant government influence in the Chinese market.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Citing the provisions in the 'Protocol on the accession of China to the WTO' in 2001, Beijing has said WTO member countries must fulfil their promise to deem China a 'market economy' from December 2016.

#### **WHAT IS A NON-MARKET ECONOMY?**

A "non-market economy" is any foreign country that does not operate on market principles of cost or pricing structures. When this is the case, sales by the exporting country do not reflect fair value.

#### **FASTEST SUPERCOMPUTER:**

- For the eighth consecutive year, China has retained the top spot in the list of the world's fastest supercomputers for its 'Sunway

(51)

TaihuLight' which can perform 93 million billion calculations per second.

- This was announced in the latest edition of the semiannual Top 500 list of supercomputers released recently.
- TaihuLight, the massive supercomputer, built entirely using processors designed and made in China has been crowned as the world's fastest.
- TaihuLight made its appearance in June, replacing the former champion, Tianhe-2, also a Chinese system but built based on Intel chips.

#### **WOMEN COMMANDOS BY CRPF:**

- For the first time, CRPF has deployed a team of women commandos in anti-Naxal operations in Jharkhand.
- The 135 women belonging to the 232 battalion's Delta company are currently undertaking operations under the close supervision of CRPF's 133 battalion in Naxal-infested forests on the outskirts of Ranchi near Khoonti area.

#### **UD MINISTRY BEGINS APPROVAL OF LONG TERM INVESTMENT PLANS**

Seeking to ensure timely implementation of basic urban infrastructure projects and achieve mission targets by 2019-20, the Ministry of Urban Development, in a paradigm shift has begun approving investments in water supply, sewerage networks etc., for the next three financial years under Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT).

- In this regard, an Inter-Ministerial Apex Committee of AMRUT recently approved investments of Rs.5,815 cr during 2017-20 in the States of Gujrat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Bihar and Tripura.

- With this, total investment approved in water supply, sewerage and other components under AMRUT has gone up to Rs.51,505 cr.

#### **ABOUT AMRUT:**

AMRUT is the new avatar of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). It adopts a project approach to ensure basic infrastructure services relating to water supply, sewerage, storm-water drains, transportation and development of green spaces and parks with special provision for meeting the needs of children.

- Under this mission, 10% of the budget allocation will be given to states and union territories as incentive based on the achievement of reforms during the previous year.
- AMRUT will be implemented in 500 locations with a population of one lakh and above. It would cover some cities situated on stems of main rivers, a few state capitals and important cities located in hilly areas, islands and tourist areas.
- Under this mission, states get the flexibility of designing schemes based on the needs of identified cities and in their execution and monitoring. States will only submit state annual action Plans to the centre for broad concurrence based on which funds will be released. But, in a significant departure from JNNURM, the central government will not appraise individual projects.
- Central assistance will be to the extent of 50% of project cost for cities and towns with a population of up to 10 lakhs and one-third of the project cost for those with a population of above 10 lakhs.
- Under the mission, states will transfer funds to urban local bodies within 7 days of transfer by central government and no diversion of funds to be made failing which penal interest

would be charged besides taking other adverse action by the centre.

### **REVISED DTAA AGREEMENT SIGNED BETWEEN INDIA AND CYPRUS**

A revised Agreement between India and Cyprus for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal evasion (DTAA) with respect to taxes on income, along with its Protocol, was recently signed in Nicosia. The agreement will replace the existing DTAA that was signed by two countries in June 1994.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- New DTAA provides for source based taxation of capital gains arising from alienation of shares, instead of residence based taxation provided under the existing DTAA. However, a grandfathering clause has been provided for investments made prior to 1st April, 2017, in respect of which capital gains would continue to be taxed in the country of which taxpayer is a resident.
- The new Agreement provides for Assistance between the two countries for collection of taxes and also updates the provisions related to Exchange of Information to accepted international standards, which will enable exchange of banking information and allow the use of such information for purposes other than taxation with the prior approval of the Competent Authorities of the country providing the information.
- The new Agreement expands the scope of 'permanent establishment' and reduces the tax rate on royalty in the country from which payments are made to 10% from the existing rate of 15%, in line with the tax rate under Indian tax laws.
- It also updates the text of other provisions in accordance with the international standards and consistent policy of India in respect of tax treaties.

### **INDIA AND UK SIGN THREE BILATERAL ADVANCE PRICING AGREEMENTS**

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has signed three Bilateral Advance Pricing Agreements (APAs) with UK taking the total number of APAs signed [both- bilateral and unilateral] so far to 111.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

These Agreements are a result of the understanding reached with the Competent Authority of United Kingdom (UK) some time ago. The Competent Authorities of India and UK had earlier exchanged mutual agreements amongst them under the Mutual Agreement Procedure (MAP) Article of the India-UK Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (DTAC).

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- The newly signed Agreements cover international transactions in the nature of payment of intra-group service charges and pertain to the telecom industry. They also have a roll-back provision.
- With this, India and UK have concluded 5 bilateral APAs and some more would be concluded in the near future. The total number of bilateral APAs concluded so far by the CBDT is 7.

#### **ABOUT APA PROGRAMME:**

The Advance Pricing Agreement (APA) Programme was introduced by the Finance Act, 2012 with a view to provide a predictable and non-adversarial tax regime and to reduce the litigation in the Indian transfer pricing arena. An APA can be entered into for a maximum of 5 years at a time.

Rollback of APAs was announced in the Budget in July 2014 to provide certainty on the pricing of international transactions for 4 prior years (rollback years) preceding the first year from which APA is to be applicable.

## NAVY INDUCTS FOUR INDIGENOUSLY DEVELOPED SONARS SYSTEMS

Navy has formally inducted four types of indigenously developed sonars that will boost its underwater surveillance capability.

- The systems have been designed and developed by NPOL, a Kochi based laboratory of DRDO.
- With the induction of these four systems, the underwater surveillance capability of the Indian Navy will get a boost, besides providing a fillip to the quest for self-reliance in this critical area of technology.

### THE NEWLY INDUCTED SYSTEMS INCLUDE:

#### **Abhay – compact hull mounted sonar for shallow water crafts.**

Abhay is an advanced active-cum-passive integrated sonar system designed and developed for the smaller platforms such as shallow water crafts and coastal surveillance/patrol vessels. It is capable of detecting, localizing, classifying and tracking sub-surface and surface targets in both its active and passive modes of operation. Indian Navy has proposed to induct this SONAR on three of the Abhay class ships.

#### **Humsa UG – upgrade for the Humsa sonar system.**

Humsa -UG is designed for upgrading the existing Humsa sonar system. This system is proposed to be installed on seven ships of three different classes of ships.

#### **AIDSS – Advanced Indigenous Distress sonar system for submarines.**

AIDSS is an Emergency Sound Signaling Device which is used to indicate that a submarine is in distress and enable quick rescue and salvage. It is a life-saving alarm system designed to transmit sonar signals of a pre-designated frequency and pulse shape in an emergency situation from a submarine for long period, so as to attract the

attention of passive sonars of ships or submarines in the vicinity and all types of standard rescue vessels in operation. It is also provided with a transponder capability.

#### **NACS – Near-field Acoustic Characterisation System.**

It determines the in-situ performance of the SONAR systems, which are used to find the frequency-dependent 3-D transmission and reception characteristics of the SONAR. It is also used to measure the magnitude and phase characteristics of the SONAR transmission and reception electronics and the transducers.

#### **KHEHAR MADE NALSA EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN**

The Union government has announced that Jagdish Singh Khehar, a judge of the Supreme Court, will be the new Executive Chairman of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA). He succeeds Anil R. Dave.

#### **ABOUT NALSA:**

NALSA has been constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, to provide free legal services to weaker sections of society.

- The aim is to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reasons of economic or other disabilities.

#### **IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS PERFORMED BY NALSA:**

- NALSA organises Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes.
- NALSA identifies specific categories of the marginalised and excluded groups and formulates various schemes for the implementation of preventive and strategic legal service programmes.
- Services provided by the agency include free legal aid in civil and criminal matters for the poor and marginalised people who cannot

afford the services of a lawyer in any court or tribunal.

- Free legal services include provision of aid and advice to beneficiaries to access the benefits under the welfare statutes and schemes and to ensure access to justice in any other manner.

### QUAMI EKTA WEEK:

- With a view to foster and reinforce the spirit of Communal Harmony, National Integration and pride in vibrant, composite culture and nationhood, the “Quami Ekta Week” (National Integration Week) is being observed all over the country for one week.
- The observation of the ‘Quami Ekta Week’ will help to highlight the inherent strength and resilience of our nation to withstand actual and potential threats to the eclectic and secular fabric of our country, and nurture a spirit of communal harmony in its widest sense.
- This occasion also provides an opportunity to reaffirm age old traditions and faith in the values of tolerance, co-existence and brotherhood in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society.

### SCIENTISTS TWEAK PHOTOSYNTHESIS TO UP CROP YIELD

Scientists have successfully tweaked the process of photosynthesis to make it more efficient and increase plant productivity by raising the level of three proteins involved in the process. Researchers used tobacco plants for this experiment as they can be easily modified.

### HOW THIS WAS MADE POSSIBLE?

To enhance crop yield, the scientists first had to overcome plants’ natural defense systems. When a plant finds itself taking in more sunlight than it can handle, its cells initiate a process to deal with all this excess light energy. This process, known as non-photochemical quenching of chlorophyll

fluorescence (NPQ), enables the plant to release excess light energy as heat so it doesn’t get burned. When the sun moves through the sky and shade covers the plants again, NPQ slows down. But this takes awhile, and during the time that NPQ is relaxing, photosynthesis remains slow.

- But, scientists found a way to tweak the genes associated with NPQ in *Nicotiana tabacum* (tobacco) plants so they would relax, or halt, NPQ much more quickly once they’re no longer in the hot sun. The changes resulted in increased production of three proteins involved in slowing down the NPQ process.
- Researchers suggested that boosting levels of three proteins might speed up the recovery process. To test this concept, they inserted a “cassette” of the three genes — taken from the model plant *Arabidopsis* — into tobacco. The researchers grew seedlings from multiple experiments.
- A fluorescence imaging technique allowed the team to determine which of the transformed plants recovered more quickly upon transfer to shade. The researchers selected the three best performers and tested them in several field plots alongside plots of the unchanged tobacco.
- Two of the modified plant lines consistently showed 20% higher productivity and the third was 14 higher than the unaltered tobacco plants.

### RBI proposes ‘Islamic window’ in banks

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed the opening of “Islamic window” in conventional banks for “gradual” introduction of Sharia-compliant or interest-free banking in the country.

- In this regard, both the Centre and the RBI have been exploring the possibility of introduction of Islamic banking for a while now to ensure financial inclusion of those sections of society that remain excluded due to religious reasons.

## WHAT IS ISLAMIC BANKING?

Islamic or Sharia banking is a finance system based on the principles of not charging interest. The charging of interest is prohibited under Islam.

## WAY AHEAD

Initially, a few simple products similar to conventional banking products may be considered for introduction through the Islamic window of conventional banks after necessary notification by the government. Introduction of full-fledged Islamic banking with profit-loss sharing complex products may be considered at a later stage on the basis of experience gained in course of time.

## PM LAUNCHES "HOUSING FOR ALL" IN RURAL AREAS

Prime Minister Shri Narendra has formally launched "Housing for All" in rural areas under which the Government proposes to provide an environmentally safe and secure pucca house to every rural household by 2022.

About the scheme:

Named the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (Gramin), in its first phase the target is to complete one crore houses by March 2019.

- The unit cost for these houses has been significantly increased and now through convergence a minimum support of nearly Rs. 1.5 lakh to Rs. 1.6 lakh to a household is available. There is also a provision of Bank loan upto Rs. 70,000/-, if the beneficiary so desires.
- The selection of beneficiaries has been through a completely transparent process using the Socio Economic Census 2011 data and validating it through the Gram Sabha.
- PMAY-G is also a major step forward in bringing together Skill India, Digital India, Make In India, IT/DBT Aadhaar platform and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY).

- The programme provides for skilling 5 lakh Rural Masons by 2019 and allows over 200 different housing designs across the country based on a detailed study of housing typologies, environmental hazards and the households' requirements.
- A large scale use of local materials is envisaged along with a complete home with cooking space, electricity provision, LPG, toilet and bathing area, drinking water etc through convergence.
- The programme targets the poor households and uses ICT and space technology to further confirm correct selection of beneficiaries and progress of work. The entire payments are through IT/DBT mode with Aadhaar linked Bank accounts with consent, to ensure complete transparency and accountability.
- There is a provision for orientation of beneficiaries. A 45 days on site hands-on skill training of Rural Masons helps poor households to move up the skilling ladder.

## NASA WEATHER SATELLITE PROMISES 'HUGE LEAP' IN FORECASTS

NASA has successfully launched for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) the first in a series of highly advanced geostationary weather satellites. The satellite is known as Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite-R (GOES-R).

### KEY FACTS:

- After it reaches its final designated orbit in the next two weeks, GOES-R will be renamed GOES-16.
- The new satellite will become operational within a year, after undergoing a checkout and validation of its six new instruments, including the first operational lightning mapper in geostationary orbit.
- GOES-R will strengthen NOAA's ability to issue life-saving forecasts and warnings and is

aimed at make the United States an even stronger, more resilient weather-ready nation.

- Forecasters will use the lightning mapper to hone in on storms that represent the greatest threats. The satellite's primary instrument, the Advanced Baseline Imager, will provide images of Earth's weather, oceans and environment with 16 different spectral bands, including two visible channels, four near-infrared channels, and 10 infrared channels.
- Improved space weather sensors on GOES-R will monitor the sun and relay crucial information to forecasters so they can issue space weather alerts and warnings.
- In all, data from GOES-R will result in 34 new or improved meteorological, solar and space weather products.
- Beyond weather forecasting, GOES-R also will be part of the Search and Rescue Satellite Aided Tracking (SARSAT) System, an international satellite-based search and rescue network operated by NOAA. The satellite is carrying a special transponder that can detect distress signals from emergency beacons.
- There are four satellites in the GOES-R series: -R, -S, -T and -U, which will extend NOAA's geostationary coverage through 2036.

### **CHINA LAUNCHES WORLD'S LONGEST QUANTUM COMMUNICATION LINE**

China has launched a 712-km quantum communication line, stated to be the world's longest secure telecommunications network, which boasts of ultra-high security making it impossible to wiretap, intercept or crack the information transmitted through them.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- The new quantum communication line links Hefei, capital of Anhui province, to Shanghai,

the country's financial hub. It is part of a 2,000-km quantum communication line connecting Beijing and Shanghai. The 712-km line has 11 stations and it took three years of construction.

- The Beijing-Shanghai quantum communication line will be connected to the Micius satellite through the line's station in Beijing, enabling the space-to-Earth quantum communication network. In August, China successfully launched the world's first quantum satellite. It was nicknamed "Micius" after a fifth century BC Chinese philosopher and scientist.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF QUANTUM COMMUNICATIONS:**

Quantum communication lines boasts ultra-high security. It is impossible to wiretap, intercept or crack the information transmitted through them.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Quantum communication boasts ultra-high security as a quantum photon can neither be separated nor duplicated. It is hence impossible to wiretap, intercept or crack the information transmitted through it. Quantum communications technology is nearly impossible to hack because any interference to transmission of information destroys it.

### **GUIDED MISSILE DESTROYER INS CHENNAI JOINS THE INDIAN NAVY**

INS Chennai, a P 15A Guided Missile Destroyer, has been commissioned into the Indian Navy. This marks the formal induction into the Navy of the third and the last of the three 'Kolkata' class destroyers.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- The vessel is indigenously designed by the Indian Navy's in-house organisation, Directorate of Naval Design and constructed by Mazagon Dock Limited, Mumbai.

- Following her formal induction, INS Chennai will be placed under the operational and administrative control of the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command. In due course, the ship will be assigned to the Western Fleet and would be base-ported at Mumbai.
- The ship measures 163m in length, 17.4m in breadth with a displacement of 7500 tonnes and can rightfully be regarded as one of the most potent warships to have been constructed in India.
- The ship is propelled by four powerful Gas Turbines, in a Combined Gas and Gas (COGAG) configuration, capable of achieving speeds in excess of 30 knots.
- The ship has enhanced stealth features resulting in a reduced Radar Cross Section (RCS) achieved through efficient shaping of hull, full beam superstructure design, plated masts and use of radar transparent materials on exposed decks.
- INS Chennai is packed with contemporary and sophisticated 'state of the art' weapons and sensors such as Surface to Surface Missile and Surface to Air Missiles. The ship is fitted with a modern Surveillance Radar which provides target data to the gunnery weapon systems of the ship.
- The ship's Anti Submarine Warfare capabilities are provided by the indigenously developed Rocket Launchers and Torpedo Launchers. The ship is equipped to fight under Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) warfare conditions.
- A unique feature of this ship is the high level of indigenisation incorporated in the production, accentuating our national objective of 'Make in India'.
- Some of the major indigenised equipment / system onboard INS Chennai include Combat Management System, Rocket Launcher,

Torpedo Tube Launcher, Automated Power Management System, Foldable Hangar Doors, Helo Traversing system, Auxiliary Control System and the Bow mounted SONAR.

## **INDIA BECOMES ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF CERN, GENEVA**

India and European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) have signed an agreement making India an Associate Member State of CERN. This follows CERN Council's adoption of the resolution to this effect in September 2016.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The participation of Indian scientists in CERN dates back to early 1960s, which has become much stronger and closer for the last quarter of a century with the support of Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and Department of Science and Technology (DST). In 1991, DAE had signed a formal agreement with CERN, which continues till today.

In recognition of most significant contributions, in 2003, India was awarded the Observer status of CERN, and subsequently invited to join CERN as an Associate Member. Last year, the Indian Cabinet gave its approval following which the CERN Council has accepted India as an Associate member.

### **HOW THIS MEMBERSHIP HELPS INDIA?**

- As an Associate Member of CERN, India will be a part of the huge scientific and technological endeavor. The India-CERN association as a whole is interdisciplinary in nature and the involvement of physicists, electronics hardware and software engineers will pave the path for overall knowledge development in the best possible way.
- Becoming Associate Member of CERN will enhance participation of young scientists and engineers in various CERN projects and bring back knowledge for deployment in the domestic programmes.

- It will also open opportunities for Indian industries to participate directly in the CERN project.
- Through the Teachers programme, teachers teaching in the higher secondary schools would also be able to participate in the programme and pass on the knowledge and quest for high-end science to their students, thereby encouraging large number of students to pursue their career in science.

#### **ABOUT CERN:**

CERN is the world's largest nuclear and particle physics laboratory, where scientists and engineers are probing the fundamental structure of the Universe by using the most sophisticated scientific instruments and advanced computing systems. CERN is based in Geneva on the French-Swiss border. Presently CERN has 22 member states, four associate member states, and the observer status is given to four states and three International Organizations.

#### **IF SAARC FAILS, THERE'S BIMSTEC: INDIA WARNS PAKISTAN**

India has sent out a clear message to Pakistan, warning it that South Asian nations would find other ways to cooperate on regional initiatives if it continues to block initiatives under the SAARC banner. In this regard, foreign Secretary S Jaishankar has presented a snapshot of what a 'SAARC without Pakistan' could achieve.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

The future of SAARC has been increasingly questioned after the cancellation of the summit that was scheduled to be held in Islamabad. The Summit had been cancelled in the heightened tensions following the terrorist attack on a military camp in Jammu and Kashmir's Uri. Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Sri Lanka too had pulled out of the Islamabad summit, citing an unfavourable atmosphere due to an escalation of terrorist activities.

The continuing tensions between India and Pakistan have given rise to doubts over whether the consensus needed for a SAARC Summit will be reached in the near future. This in turn has led to the idea of a regional grouping without Pakistan being mentioned with increasing frequency in the discourses of South Asian countries.

#### **ABOUT SAARC:**

#### **WHAT IS SAARC?**

SAARC stands for South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. It is a geopolitical cooperation maintained for mutual benefits between eight south Asian nations: India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Maldives.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- SAARC Summits are held annually. There have been, however, times when the summits skipped a year.
- The diplomatic summits can only take place when all the members of SAARC are present.
- SAARC Secretariat is based in Kathmandu. It is responsible for monitoring the activities of the cooperation.
- Apart from its members, SAARC has nine countries with observer status: Australia, China, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, Myanmar, South Korea, the United States, the European Union. It is in permanent diplomatic relations with the United Nation as well.

#### **SACK 70-YEAR-OLD CRICKET BOSSES, SAYS LODHA PANEL**

Tightening the leash on the powerful and the political among the administrators in the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and its member State associations, the R.M. Lodha-led Supreme Court Committee has reiterated before the apex court its recommendation to remove office-bearers who are over 70 years old,

government ministers and those who have already served at the Board's helm for nine years.

- In its third report filed in the court, the committee said the Supreme Court had upheld its recommendations in a July 18, 2016, judgment, and the time had come to implement them so that work on reforming the Board could go ahead.
- The panel also sought the disqualification of BCCI office-bearers who are not Indian citizens, those who hold any office or post in a sports or athletic association or federation apart from cricket, those declared insolvent or of unsound mind and administrators charged with a crime.

### BACKGROUND:

The recommendations are the latest development in the stand-off between the Supreme Court and the BCCI over reforms that span the entire breadth of cricket administration in the country.

- The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and its affiliate state associations have resisted some of the reforms recommended by the Lodha committee, and had received sharp rebukes from the Supreme Court for this. The Court had also criticised the constitution of the BCCI, saying it was unsuited to bring any level of transparency.
- The three-member Lodha Committee, led by former Chief Justice of India RM Lodha, had been appointed by the Supreme Court in 2015, to recommend reforms to the Board of Control for Cricket in India and all its affiliated state-level cricket associations.

### IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY LODHA PANEL:

- One state, one cricket body: One association of each state will be a full member and have right to vote. One unit should represent one state.

- CEO-run organisation: Committee also suggested the restructuring of the BCCI's administrative set-up, proposing the position of a CEO accountable to a nine-member apex council. An apex council for the BCCI comprising 9 members, of which 5 should be elected, 2 should be representatives of players association, and one woman. CEO to be assisted by 6 professional managers and the team of CEO and managers will be accountable to the apex council.

- Under RTI: To ensure transparency in its functioning, the panel has said that it is important to bring the body under the purview of the Right to Information Act.

- Ethics officer: The committee recommended the institution of the office of an Ethics Officer, who would be responsible for resolving issues related to the conflict of interest. Ethics officer would be a former High Court judge.

- Electoral officer: The committee has also suggested the appointment of an Electoral Officer to conduct the Board elections. The electoral officer would oversee the entire election process relating to the office-bearers namely, preparation of voters list, publication, dispute about eligibility of the office-bearers

- Ombudsman: The panel has also proposed an Ombudsman for dealing with internal conflicts. Ombudsman can take cognisance of complaints suo moto, or received complaint or referred complaint by the apex council.

- Among the most sensational recommendation by Lodha panel was the suggestion to legalize betting. The panel felt that the move would help curb corruption in the game and recommended that except for players and officials, people should be allowed to place bets on registered sites.

- The Panel also suggested that the grants given to state associations be properly monitored.

- It has also suggested that a person cannot be a BCCI office-bearer and a state association office-bearer at the same time.

### **INDIA'S PUBLIC HEALTH CARE TO GET A NEW BOOST**

Boosting the capacity of Indian healthcare industry further, UNSW Australia and Medvarsity – Apollo Hospital Group's e-learning venture, have come together. A fully online, new Master of Public Health (International) programme has been tailored by the university specifically for Indian students. UNSW public health degree launched in India will strengthen our capacity to respond to major health challenges.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- The new degree, aimed at doctors and other health professionals, will be delivered and awarded by UNSW, along with an internship at an Apollo health site.
- Indian students will join fellow health professionals from Australia and around the world in a virtual global classroom, learning essential public health theory and skills.
- Since it is a flexible online programme, busy clinicians will not have to take a sabbatical to enhance their knowledge and skills. Instead, these professionals can keep working as they achieve this degree that too without expense of actually living in Australia.
- Not only this, the students enrolled in this programme will also have access to advanced learning tools and technology with a fully comparable experience to face-to-face learning.
- With the introduction of this programme, Indian students will be able to apply for jobs with global organisations like the World Health Organization and UNESCO.

### **PRITHVI-II MISSILES SUCCESSFULLY TEST-FIRED**

Two Prithvi-II missiles were recently successfully test-fired from the launch complex-III of the Integrated Test Range near Balasore in Odisha. The Strategic Forces Command (SFC) fired the missiles from a road-mobile launcher.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- Prithvi-II is a short-range surface-to-surface missile.
- Inducted into India's armed forces in 2003, Prithvi II is the first missile to be developed by DRDO under India's prestigious IGMDP (Integrated Guided Missile Development Program).
- The twin-engine Prithvi-II is 8.56 metre in length, 1.1 metre in width and weighs 4,600 kg. It has the ability to dodge enemy missiles.
- The missile, capable of reaching targets 350 km away, can carry a 500-kg nuclear warhead.
- The battlefield missile has a flight duration of 483 seconds and a peak altitude of 43.5km. Also, Prithvi is India's first indigenously-built ballistic missile.
- Prithvi-II has been designed to operate with both liquid and solid fuels and is capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear payloads.

### **HIV/AIDS BILL TO BE TABLED IN RS DURING WINTER SESSION**

In a move to grant stronger protection to the country's HIV community, the government plans to introduce the HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Control) Bill in Rajya Sabha during the ongoing winter session. The bill seeks to end discrimination and ensure equality for people living with HIV.

- The bill, which was approved by the Cabinet last month, seeks to bring legal accountability to prohibit discrimination against the HIV community and instead promotes equality while accessing healthcare, acquiring jobs, renting houses or in educational institutions in the public and private sectors.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

There are approximately 21 lakh persons estimated to be living with HIV in India and the percentage of patients receiving antiretroviral therapy treatment currently stands at a mere 25.82% as against the global percentage of 41%.

Key provisions in the bill:

#### **PROVISIONS RELATED TO THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS:**

Under the Bill, central and state governments are obliged to provide for anti-retroviral therapy (ART) and management of opportunistic infections (infections that take advantage of weakness in the immune system and occur frequently). The bill also prohibits specific acts of discrimination by the state, or any other person, against HIV-positive people, or those living with such people.

#### **PROVISIONS RELATED TO DISCRIMINATION:**

The Bill lays down penal provisions for any discrimination practised against a person with HIV/AIDS and breach of confidentiality. The protection mandated in the Bill extends to the fields of employment, healthcare services, educational services, public facilities, property rights, holding public office, and insurance. It also provides for confidentiality of HIV-related information and makes it necessary to get informed consent for undertaking HIV tests, medical treatment and research.

#### **PROVISIONS RELATED TO OMBUDSMAN:**

The bill also provides for an ombudsman. According to the provisions of the Bill, an ombudsman shall be appointed by each state

government to inquire into complaints related to the violation of the Act and the provision of health care services. The ombudsman shall submit a report to the state government every six months stating the number and nature of complaints received, the actions taken and orders passed.

#### **PROVISIONS RELATED TO GUARDIANSHIP:**

Provisions related to guardianship are also specified. A person between the age of 12 to 18 years who has sufficient maturity in understanding and managing the affairs of his HIV or AIDS affected family shall be competent to act as a guardian of another sibling below 18 years of age. The guardianship will apply in matters relating to admission to educational establishments, operating bank accounts, managing property, care and treatment, amongst others.

#### **ROLE OF COURTS:**

Cases relating to HIV positive persons shall be disposed off by the court on a priority basis. In any legal proceeding, if an HIV infected or affected person is a party, the court may pass orders that the proceedings be conducted (a) by suppressing the identity of the person, (b) in camera, and (c) to restrain any person from publishing information that discloses the identity of the applicant.

When passing any order with regard to a maintenance application filed by an HIV infected or affected person, the court shall take into account the medical expenses incurred by the applicant.

#### **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE BY BSE:**

- BSE has introduced a data analytics-based solution that relies on artificial intelligence to track news related to listed companies on digital media using social media.
- The objective of the tool is to detect and mitigate potential risks of market manipulation and rumours, and to reduce

information asymmetry arising from it on digital media platforms.

- It would provide accurate information involving listed companies and the BSE through the exchange website for the benefit of investors. The solution employs an advanced level combination of statistical modeling and big data analytics.

### 'SMOG COULD RETURN'

According to experts, the heavy blanket of smog that enveloped Delhi for days after Diwali could return soon as the constant sources of pollution have remained largely the same.

Various factors responsible for this:

- Drops in wind speeds and cooler temperatures in the weeks ahead could provide a favourable setting for smog to develop and stick around.
- Burning of agricultural residue in neighbouring States could add to the problem. The government is yet to look at a long-term plan to prevent the practice.
- Other sources of pollution, including industries, power plants and vehicles, have also remained largely untouched.
- In the wake of smog in early November, the government put in place some emergency measures. But action against sources of pollution has been minimal.

### BACKGROUND:

The government had remained slow to act on this matter. Hence, the judiciary took up the monitoring of air pollution. The Supreme Court has also asked the Centre and the NCR governments to come up with action plans.

### AGNI-I MISSILE TEST-FIRED

The strategic missile, Agni-I, was recently test-fired from the Wheeler Island, off Damra village on the Odisha coast. The Strategic Forces Command (SFC) fired the missile positioned on a massive truck called a road-mobile launcher.

- Agni-I is a 12 tonne, 15 metre long, 700km range missile.
- It has a specialised navigation system called Ring Laser Gyro- INS to ensure high degree of accuracy to hit the target.
- It is a single stage missile that is powered by solid propellants and can carry a nuclear warhead of 1000kg.
- Agni-I can be fired from both road and rail mobile launchers at short notice.
- The DRDO has designed and developed the series of Agni missiles.

### A RELOOK AT DEFENCE BLACKLIST

The Defence Ministry is all set to review cases of blacklisted firms as it prepares a new list of such entities following the new policy unveiled by it which is a mixture of heavy fines and graded banning.

- The review will include about a dozen firms that came under blanket blacklisting in the previous regime, a move which the forces were unhappy about as it proved detrimental to their modernisation plans.

### BACKGROUND:

Recently, the defence acquisition council chaired by the defence Minister gave its nod for a new policy on dealing with arms companies guilty of corruption.

### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE NEW POLICY:

- Under its new liberalised blacklisting policy for arms companies, India will now be open to doing business even with a banned firm if

there is no alternative available to its weapon system or equipment in the market.

- This can be done on the grounds of national security, operational military readiness and export obligations, after the vice-chief of the Service concerned, the chief of the integrated defence staff or the additional secretary (defence production) signs a certificate to that effect and gets permission from the “competent authority”, who is the Defence Minister.
- Another key element of the new policy is that unlike the blanket ban of 10 years, the government has said that ban on serious defaulters will be for minimum five years. The policy does not mention the maximum time period for ban.
- The policy will have a graded system of punishment to deal with agents of the arms companies and weed out corrupt practices seen intrinsic to procurement of arms and ammunitions.
- The new approach to blacklisting is aimed at removing major obstacles in the way of military modernisation.

### **CENTRE PLANS CROP INSURANCE SCHEME FOR SMALL TEA GROWERS**

The Centre is planning to roll out a crop insurance scheme for small tea growers. Initially, a pilot will be run in three regions in Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu for one crop-cycle spread over two years commencing 2016-17.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- The Tea Board would be the nodal agency for the scheme and the cost will be shared between the Centre, the state governments and the growers in the ratio of 75:15:10. However, the growers would have to pick up the state government’s tab in case the government declines to contribute its share.

- The scheme aims to protect growers from anticipated losses in revenue caused by drop in international/domestic prices, yield loss due to adverse weather or pest attacks or any other reason beyond human control.
- During the pilot period, the scheme would benefit small growers, covering about 44,223.6 hectares of plantation area. Large growers can also join the scheme, but will have to pay the entire premium.
- The three regions where the scheme is proposed to be run as a pilot are Golaghat (Assam), Jalpaiguri (West Bengal) and Coonoor (Tamil Nadu) for the crop cycle of March to November for two consecutive years.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

The small tea growers, who are now an emerging force in the Indian tea industry (accounting for more than 35% of the production), have suffered crop damage due to hail storms, excess rainfall and pest attacks. There has been a massive crop loss ranging between 30 and 50% due to these factors.

#### **‘INDIA’S WEALTH RISES, AS DOES DISPARITY’**

According to a report on Global Wealth by Credit Suisse, the total quantum of wealth is rising in India but so is the disparity between those who have wealth and those deprived of it.

#### **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT:**

- While wealth has been rising in India, growth is uneven. About 96% of the adult population remains at the base of the wealth pyramid with wealth below \$10,000, and a small fraction of the adult population (0.3%) has net worth of more than \$100,000.
- Wealth in India is dominated by property and other real estate that make up 86% of its estimated household assets.

- Wealth in India in local currency terms increased 5.1% in 2016 but due to adverse currency exchange movements, India's household wealth fell by 0.8% to \$3 trillion in dollar terms.
- The annual growth of wealth per adult in rupees has averaged 6 per cent between 2000 and 2016.
- The number of millionaires in India is at 1.78 lakh with \$973 billion in wealth. Among these, ultra high-networth individuals increased by 5.2% to 2,260, including 1,040 with more than \$100 million.
- The number of millionaires is projected to increase by 9.5% in the next five years to 2.8 lakh in 2021. Meanwhile, personal debts are estimated to be 9% of gross assets in India, much lower than in most developed countries.
- It brings together the tourism business fraternity and entrepreneurs from the eight North Eastern States and West Bengal. The event has been planned and scheduled to facilitate interaction between buyers, sellers, media, Government agencies and other stakeholders.
- Buyer and Media delegates from around the world and from different regions of the country are participating in the Mart and will engage in one-to-one meetings with sellers from the North East Region. This will enable the tourism product suppliers from the region to reach out to international and domestic buyers, with the objective of promoting tourism to the region.
- The International Tourism Marts are organised in the North Eastern States on rotation basis. The earlier editions of this mart have been held in Guwahati, Tawang, Shillong and Gangtok.

#### **GLOBAL SCENARIO:**

Globally, the overall growth in wealth remained limited in 2016, continuing the trend that emerged in 2013 and contrasting sharply with the double-digit growth rates witnessed before the global financial crisis of 2008.

- The total global wealth in 2016 edged up by 1.4% or \$3.5 trillion to a total of \$256 trillion, a rise in line with the increase in the world's adult population.

#### **5TH INTERNATIONAL TOURISM MART:**

- The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, in association with the North Eastern States and West Bengal is organising the "International Tourism Mart" in Imphal, Manipur from 23rd – 25th November, 2016.
- This is the 5th International Tourism Mart. It is an annual event organised in the North Eastern region with the objective of highlighting the tourism potential of the region in the domestic and international markets.

- The highlight of this 5th International Tourism Mart 2016 is that it is being organised during the Sangai Festival. The Sangai festival is an annual major cultural festival organised by State Government of Manipur every year from November 21 to 30.

#### **VICE-CHAIRMAN OF DDA DESIGNATED AS REAL ESTATE REGULATORY AUTHORITY FOR DELHI**

Vice-Chairman of Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has been designated as Regulatory Authority for National Capital Territory of Delhi under the Real Estate (Regulation & Development) Act, 2016.

- Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India, the competent authority in respect of Delhi under the Act, has issued a notification in this regard.

**BACKGROUND:**

Section 20 of the Real Estate Regulation Act empowers the appropriate Government to designate any officer as Regulatory Authority till a full fledged Regulatory Authority is established for the purposes of the Act which include grievance redressal in respect of projects registered with such authorities.

Registration of real projects will begin only after notification of Section 3 of the Real Estate Act by the Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation which will be done in due course. The full Act is to come into force from May 1st next year.

**HIRD PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION BETWEEN INDIA AND NEW ZEALAND FOR THE AVOIDANCE OF DOUBLE TAXATION**

The Union Cabinet has approved the ratification and entry into force of the third Protocol to the Convention between India and New Zealand for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income (Convention). The Protocol was signed on 26th October, 2016.

**KEY FACTS:**

- The Protocol will stimulate the flow of exchange of information between India and New Zealand for tax purposes which will help curb tax evasion and tax avoidance.
- It will also enable assistance in collection of tax revenue claims between both countries.
- Article 26 on 'Exchange of Information' of the existing Convention has been replaced with a new Article in the Protocol which is in line with the international standard for exchange of information.
- A new Article on 'Assistance on Collection of Taxes' has been added in the Protocol.
- The Protocol shall enter into force on the date of notification of completion of the

procedures required by the respective laws of the two countries for entry into force of the Protocol.

**BACKGROUND:**

The Central Government is authorized under section 90 of the Income Tax Act, 1961 to enter into an Agreement with a foreign country or specified territory for exchange of information and recovery of income tax for the prevention of evasion or avoidance of income-tax chargeable under the Income-tax Act, 1961.

**CONVENTION BETWEEN INDIA AND NEW ZEALAND:**

The Convention came into force on 3rd December, 1986. The Convention was amended in 1997 through a First Protocol and in 2000 through a Second Protocol. Subsequently, India proposed to further amend the Convention through a Third Protocol to update the Exchange of Information Article as per the international standard and to insert an Article on Assistance in the Collection of taxes.

Accordingly, negotiations were entered into with New Zealand and agreement was reached on both the Articles of the Third Protocol.

**CABINET APPROVES NEW MERCHANT SHIPPING BILL**

The Cabinet has approved a new Merchant Shipping Bill by repealing the 58-year old law, a move that will promote ease of doing business, transparency and effective delivery of services.

- The Merchant Shipping Bill, 2016, is a revamped version of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958. It provides for repealing of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, as well as the Coasting Vessels Act, 1838.

**WHAT WAS THE NEED FOR NEW LAW?**

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, had become a bulky piece of legislation over the years as a result of various amendments carried out in the Act from time to time. It was amended 17 times between 1966 and 2014, resulting in an increase in the number of sections to over 560. These provisions have been meticulously shortened to 280 sections in the Bill.

**HIGHLIGHTS OF THE NEW BILL:**

- Provisions of the Bill are aimed at simplifying the law governing merchant shipping in India.
- In the new bill, certain redundant provisions will be dispensed with and the remaining provisions will stand consolidated and simplified so as to promote ease of doing business, transparency and effective delivery of services.
- The significant reforms that will follow enactment of the Bill include augmentation of Indian tonnage promotion/ development of coastal shipping in India, introduction of welfare measures for seafarers and registration of certain residuary category of vessels not covered under any statute.
- Also, the Coasting Vessels Act, 1838, an archaic legislation of the British era providing for registration of non-mechanically propelled vessels to a limited jurisdiction of Saurashtra and Kutch, is proposed to be repealed since provisions have been introduced in the Merchant Shipping Bill 2016 for registration of all vessels for the whole of India.

**Apex court slams Centre over Lokpal**

The Supreme Court has pulled up the Centre over the delay in appointment of an Ombudsman or Lokpal, saying it should not allow the law to become a “dead letter”.

**BACKGROUND:**

The appointment of the anti-corruption ombudsman has been hanging in balance since the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 which received Presidential assent on January 1, 2014 on the ground that the legislation provides that the Leader of Opposition (LoP) has to be in selection committee, but there is no Leader of Opposition in the present Lok Sabha.

The legislation has also been not amended to bring in the leader of the largest opposition party in the selection panel.

**WHAT'S THE ISSUE?**

The hiring of the Lokpal is held up on a technicality. The 2013 law stipulated the selection panel will be headed by the prime minister and will include the leader of the opposition, the speaker of the Lok Sabha, the chief justice of India and an eminent jurist.

- But the present Lok Sabha does not have a leader of the opposition. So, the government moved an amendment to the law to enable the leader of the single largest party to be part of the selection committee.
- However, the opposition called for closer scrutiny of some other provisions the government included in the amendment. The tweaked bill then went to a parliamentary committee which gave its suggestions last year. The government is yet to make a decision on this.

**WHAT HAS THE COURT SAID?**

Referring to the key pre-requisite that LoP has to be there in Lokpal selection panel, the court has said the Leader of Opposition is “dispensable” and things can proceed even without LoP who can be replaced by the leader of the largest opposition party in the committee.

The Supreme Court has also expressed disappointment when the Centre said the amendment to replace LoP with the leader of the

largest opposition party in the proposed selection committee of Lokpal is pending with Parliament and asking it to clear would amount to “judicial legislation”.

### LOP IN LOK SABHA:

As per the provision, the largest opposition party has to have a certain number of MPs in Lok Sabha to claim the post of LoP. In Lok Sabha, the largest opposition party – Congress has only 45 members and lacks the requisite 10% of total 545 seats.

### WHAT THE LAW SAYS?

The law provides the selection of chairperson and members of Lokpal shall be through a selection panel consisting of the Prime Minister, Lok Sabha Speaker, LoP in Lok Sabha, Chief Justice of India or a sitting SC judge nominated by the CJI, an eminent jurist to be nominated by President of India on the basis of recommendations of first four members of selection committee.

### HIMALAYAN PROJECTS FACE FLOOD RISK

According to an analysis of Himalayan glaciers and their possible future impact on livelihoods in States adjoining the region, potential hydro power projects in the Himalayan region would need to factor in chances of increased floods from the formation of new lakes and the expansion of existing ones due to melting glaciers.

- The results are part of a modelling study by Swiss researchers on the impact of climate change in the Himalayas.

### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STUDY:

- 441 hydro-power projects spanning India, Nepal, Pakistan and China, that is, 66% of constructed and potential hydro power projects, are on possible Glacier Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF) tracks, which means they could be gorged with extra water from melting glaciers.

- Almost a third of these hydro power projects could experience GLOF discharges well above what these dams account for.
- Therefore if hydro-power projects were to be situated close to these glaciers, they would have to account for higher water flows. They might need extra design or safety features.
- There is a paucity of data regarding the health of Himalayan glaciers, and depending on their location within the Himalayan range, there were varying rates of glacial melt.

### INDIAN SCENARIO:

In the Beas basin, six lakes in 1989 had increased to 33 in 2011, and in the Parvati Valley catchment area, there was an increase from 12 lakes (in 1989) to 77 lakes (in 2014). Most of the Himachal Pradesh lakes were relatively small or with a capacity of a million cubic metres, and only a few of them had a capacity larger than 10 million cubic metres of water.

The findings come even as researchers note that global warming could cause glaciers to melt rapidly, which is already evident in an increase in the number of glacier-fed lakes in Himachal.

### SEBI eases rules for angel funds

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has liberalised norms for angel funds to invest in early-stage entities as part of its attempts to facilitate fund-raising for start-ups.

### KEY FACTS:

- In this regard, SEBI has decided to amend the SEBI (Alternative Investment Funds) Regulations, 2012.
- The regulator has increased the upper limit for number of angel investors from forty nine to two hundred.

- Angel Funds will also be allowed to invest in start-ups incorporated within five years instead of the earlier norm of three years.
- The requirements of minimum investment amount by an angel fund in any venture capital undertaking has been reduced from Rs.50 lakh to Rs.25 lakh.
- The lock-in requirements of investment made by angel funds in the venture capital undertaking has been reduced from three years to one year.
- Such funds have also been allowed to invest in overseas venture capital undertakings up to 25 per cent of their investible corpus in line with other Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs).

#### **BENEFITS:**

This move will greatly benefit start-ups looking for raising venture funding not just for the money but for the other value addition that raising money from a venture capital firm brings such as direction and mentorship from seasoned investors.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Angel investor is an investor who provides financial backing for small startups or entrepreneurs. Angel investors are usually found among an entrepreneur's family and friends. The capital they provide can be a one-time injection of seed money or ongoing support to carry the company through difficult times.

#### **NOTES BAN TO SIGNIFICANTLY DISRUPT ECONOMIC ACTIVITY: MOODY'S**

In a report titled 'Indian Credit — Demonetisation Is Beneficial for Indian Government and Banks; Implementation Challenges Will Disrupt Economic Activity', Moody's has said the move to ban old Rs 500/1000 notes is affecting all sectors of the economy to various extent, with banks being the key beneficiaries.

#### **IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS MADE BY THE REPORT:**

- Demonetisation will significantly disrupt economic activity and lead to weaker growth in near-term, though in the long run it can boost tax revenues and translate into faster fiscal consolidation.
  - There will be a loss of wealth for individuals and corporates with unreported income, as some will choose not to deposit funds back into the formal financial system to avoid disclosing the sources of these funds.
  - In the immediate period, demonetisation would significantly disrupt economic activity, resulting in temporarily weaker consumption and GDP growth.
  - Households and businesses will experience liquidity shortages as cash is taken out of the system, with a daily limit on the amount in old notes that can be exchanged into new notes.
  - Corporates will see economic activity decline, with lower sales volumes and cash flows, with those directly exposed to retail sales most affected.
  - However, greater formalisation of economic and financial activity would ultimately help broaden the tax base and expand usage of the financial system, which would be credit positive.
- #### **IMPACT ON BANKS:**
- Banks would benefit significantly from a move towards digital payments, given their role as intermediaries for such transactions. Rising bank deposits could lower lending rates, a positive for the banks.
  - In the nearer term, however, the asset quality will deteriorate for banks and non-bank finance companies, as the economic disruption will significantly impact the ability of borrowers to repay loans, in particular for

the loans against property, commercial vehicles and micro finance sectors.

- A prolonged disruption could also have a more significant impact on asset quality, as both corporate and small-and medium-sized enterprise customers have a limited ability to withstand a sustained period of economic weakness.

#### **IMPETUS TO DIGITAL ECONOMY:**

- In the medium term, the impact on businesses will depend on how quickly liquidity returns to the system and transaction flows are restored. The government could prevent the same amount of cash returning into the system, in an effort to increase the use of non-cash transactions and digital payments.
- This would improve the overall operating environment for doing business in India — by improving the ease and speed at which payments reach manufacturers and reducing corruption — but would prolong the economic disruption.
- However, consumption in India is still largely cash-driven, and a move towards digital payments would require a likely gradual change in consumer habits.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

On November 8, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced demonetisation of 500 and 1,000 rupee notes, thereby withdrawing 86% or Rs 14 lakh crore worth currency from circulation.

#### **YUDHVIR SINGH MALIK NEW NHAI CHAIRMAN**

Yudhvir Singh Malik has been appointed as new Chairman of National Highways Authority of India (NHAI).

Yudhvir Singh Malik

#### **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 70,000 km of National Highways in India. It is a nodal agency of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

- The NHAI was created through the promulgation of the National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988. In February 1995, the Authority was formally made an autonomous body.
- It is responsible for the development, maintenance, management and operation of National Highways.

#### **UPGRADED JAGUAR DARIN III AIRCRAFT RECEIVES IOC**

In a significant milestone for the country's military aviation sector, the upgraded Jaguar DARIN III twin-seat aircraft has received Initial Operation Clearance (IOC).

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- DARIN III aircraft is an upgraded DARIN I Standard Jaguar. It was done by HAL.
- The total design and development covering system requirement capture, specification preparation, software, hardware, electrical and mechanical design and development were carried out indigenously at HAL's Mission and Combat System Research and Design Centre (MCSRDC).
- Besides HAL, certification agencies, trial team of ASTE and other agencies were involved in the upgrade programme.
- The upgrade incorporates new state-of-the-art avionics architecture including the Open System Architecture Mission Computer (OSAMC), Fire Control Radar, Solid State Digital Video Recording System (SSDVRS), Autopilot

with Alt Select & HNAV and Identification of Friend or Foe (IFF) and more.

### **GOVT ASKS NABARD TO DISBURSE RS 21,000 CRORE TO FARMERS**

Government has allowed NABARD to disburse Rs 21,000 crore to cash-starved farmers, helping them sow winter crops like wheat ahead of the sowing season. The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) will disburse the money to farm cooperatives for onward payments to farmers.

#### **WHY THIS WAS NECESSARY?**

The move is aimed at easing liquidity crisis facing farmers who were left with very little cash to buy seeds and fertilizers for winter crops due to restrictions placed on bank withdrawals post demonetisation.

The government's demonetisation move, which swept away 86% of currency in circulation, has badly hit farmers leaving them without cash just ahead of the sowing season. This has also threatened crop production in a year that came after two successive years of drought. More than 40% small and marginal farmers get crop loans from cooperative institutions.

#### **WAY AHEAD:**

The sanction of Rs 21,000 crore to the district central cooperative banks (DCCBs) will enable them to pass on or grant funds to the primary agriculture cooperatives. This will then help in meeting crop loan requirements of farmers in Rabi season. This will help in smooth flow of credit for farmers to enable them to undertake rabi requirements.

#### **NABARD:**

It is an apex development and specialized bank established on 12 July 1982 by an act by the parliament of India. Its main focus is to uplift rural India by increasing the credit flow for elevation of agriculture & rural non farm sector.

- It was established based on the recommendations of the Committee set up by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) under the chairmanship of Shri B. sivaraman.

- It replaced the Agricultural Credit Department (ACD) and Rural Planning and Credit Cell (RPCC) of Reserve Bank of India, and Agricultural Refinance and Development Corporation (ARDC).

- It has been accredited with "matters concerning policy, planning and operations in the field of credit for agriculture and other economic activities in rural areas in India".

- NABARD is active in developing financial inclusion policy and is a member of the Alliance for Financial Inclusion.

#### **THE BANK HAS BEEN GIVEN CERTAIN ROLES AS FOLLOWS:**

- It Serves as an apex financing agency for the institutions providing investment and production credit for promoting the various developmental activities in rural areas

- It takes measures towards institution building for improving absorptive capacity of the credit delivery system, including monitoring, formulation of rehabilitation schemes, restructuring of credit institutions, training of personnel, etc.

- Co-ordinates the rural financing activities of all institutions engaged in developmental work at the field level and maintains liaison with Government of India, State Governments, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and other national level institutions concerned with policy formulation

- It Undertakes monitoring and evaluation of projects refinanced by it.

- NABARD refinances the financial institutions which finances the rural sector.

- It regulates the institution which provides financial help to the rural economy.
- It provides training facilities to the institutions working the field of rural upliftment.
- It regulates the cooperative banks and the RRB's, and manages talent acquisition through IBPS CWE.
- NABARD is also known for its 'SHG Bank Linkage Programme' which encourages India's banks to lend to SHGs.

### **CHINA SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHES FOURTH DATA SATELLITE**

China has successfully launched its fourth data satellite to achieve global network operation that will provide data relay, measurement and control services for its manned spacecraft.

Key facts:

- The satellite, Tianlian I-04, was launched on a Long March-3C carrier rocket from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in southwest Sichuan province. The launch marked the 241st mission of China's Long March series of rockets.
- Developed by the China Academy of Space Technology under the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation, the satellite will join its three predecessors to achieve global network operation.
- The network is expected to provide data relay, measurement and control services for China's manned spacecraft, space labs and space stations, according to the centre.
- The network will also offer data relay services for the country's medium- and low-Earth orbiting resources satellites, as well as measurement and control support for spacecraft launches.
- China launched its first data relay satellite, the Tianlian I-01, in April 2008. The second

satellite was launched in July 2011, and the third was launched in July 2012.

### **AIRTEL LAUNCHES INDIA'S FIRST PAYMENTS BANK**

Airtel Payments Bank Ltd has become the first payments bank to start operations, offering services in Rajasthan in a limited scale.

Key facts:

- The pilot will run at 10,000 Airtel retail outlets where basic banking services will be provided. Customers will be offered an interest rate of 7.25% on deposits in savings account, higher than the 4-6% commercial banks are offering.
- Bank accounts can be opened by customers without documents using Aadhaar based e-KYC. The subscriber's mobile number would function as a bank account number and transfer from Airtel to Airtel phone numbers would be free.
- The retail outlets, which will act as banking points, will offer account opening services, cash deposit and withdrawal facilities.
- As a payments bank it cannot perform lending activities, except while giving loans to its employees on approval of the board. The bank can, however, accept deposits of as much as Rs1 lakh.
- The bank was the first applicant to receive the final licence from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in April. Kotak Mahindra Bank holds 19.9% in the Airtel Payments Bank.

### **BACKGROUND:**

In August last year, the central bank had given in-principle approval to 11 applicants to set up payments bank by February 2017. Out of the 11 applicants, Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Co., Tech Mahindra Ltd and billionaire Dilip Shanghvi have already given up their approvals.

According to RBI guidelines issued in November 2014, a payments bank will maintain cash reserve ratio with the central bank. Apart from it, they will be required to invest minimum 75% of their deposits in statutory liquidity ratio eligible government securities with maturity up to one year and hold maximum 25% in current and time deposits with other scheduled commercial banks for operational purposes and liquidity management.

#### **International Press Freedom Award:**

- Indian journalist Malini Subramaniam has been conferred with the International Press Freedom Award for her reporting from the Naxal-infested Bastar area. She is one of the four journalists felicitated by the annual award for their commitment to a free press.
- International Press Freedom Awards honor journalists or their publications around the world who show courage in defending press freedom despite facing attacks, threats, or imprisonment.
- Established in 1991, the awards are administered by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), an independent, non-governmental organization based in New York City. In addition to recognizing individuals, the organization seeks to focus local and international media coverage on countries where violations of press freedom are particularly serious.

#### **NITI AAYOG LEADS INITIATIVE TO CONVERT 100% GOVERNMENT – CITIZEN TRANSACTIONS TO THE DIGITAL PLATFORM**

The Government of India has constituted a Committee of Officers to enable 100% conversion of Government – Citizen Transactions to the digital platform. This is seen as a transformative attempt to weed out black money and corruption from public life. The committee is headed by NITI Aayog CEO Mr. Amitabh Kant.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

- The aim of the committee is to identify various digital payment systems appropriate to different sectors of the economy and coordinate efforts to make them accessible and user-friendly.
- The Committee will identify and operationalize in the earliest possible time frame user-friendly digital payment options in all sectors of the economy. This is integral part of the Governments strategy to transform India into a cashless economy.
- The committee will also identify and access infrastructural and bottlenecks affecting the access and utility of digital payment options.
- To achieve expeditious movement into the cashless, digital payments economy across all States and sectors, it will engage regularly with Central Ministries, regulators, State governments, district administration, local bodies, trade and industry associations etc. to promote rapid adoption of digital payment systems.
- The committee aims to establish and monitor an implementation framework with strict timelines to ensure that nearly 80% of the transaction in India moves to the digital-only platform.
- The committee will also attempt to estimate costs involved in various digital payments options and oversee implementation of measures to make such transaction between Government and Citizens cheaper than cash transaction.
- An action plan on advocacy, awareness and handholding efforts among public, micro enterprises and other stakeholders will also be implemented by the committee.
- In this regard, the committee will organize training and capacity building of various states/UTs, Ministries/Departments of the

Government of India, representatives of States/UTs, Trade and Industry Bodies as well as other stakeholders.

### **APPAREL & GARMENT MAKING CENTRE AT IMPHAL, MANIPUR**

An Apparel & Garment Making Centre will shortly be inaugurated at Imphal, Manipur. The Centre at Imphal has been constructed under the North-East Region Textile Promotion Scheme (NERTPS).

Key facts:

- The project has been completed by the Manipur Handlooms and Handicrafts Development Corporation (MHHDC).
- The capacity building through this centre will include skill development, Market linkages and Management Support including Design Services.
- The Manipur State Government has allocated land admeasuring approximately 1.5 acres at Lamboikongnangkhang, Imphal, Manipur for this centre.

### **ABOUT NERTPS:**

The scheme was launched by the Union Textile Ministry. Under this intervention, each state now has one centre with three units having approximately 100 machines each.

- The project is fully funded by the Ministry with an estimated cost of Rs. 18.18 crores for one Apparel Center in each state.
- The central assistance is towards construction of physical infrastructure, machinery for the units and towards capacity building of workers for a period of 3 years.

### **M/O CULTURE RELEASES COMMEMORATIVE & CIRCULATION COIN ON 500TH ANNIVERSARY OF SHRI CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU'S COMING TO VRINDAVAN**

Ministry of Culture has released a Commemorative Non-Circulation Coin of ₹ 500

and a Circulation Coin of ₹ 10 as part of year-long celebrations of commemoration of "500th Anniversary of Shri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's Coming to Vrindavan".

- Government of India is commemorating the 500th anniversary of Shri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's Coming to Vrindavan by organizing various programmes and Exhibitions on Shri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's life and teachings in association with Vrindavan Research Institute and ISKCON.

### **WHO IS KRISHNA CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU?**

Shri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is a famous Hindi Saint and social reformer. He was a distinguished promoter for the Vaishnava School of Bhakti Yoga.

- The Bhakti movement initiated by him strove to eradicate the evils of caste and feudal systems of medieval India. He propagated the worship of Shri Krishna and popularized the chanting of "Hare Krishna Mantra" to all without any discrimination.
- In the year 1515, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu visited Vrindavan, with the objective of locating the lost holy places associated with Lord Krishna's transcendent pastimes.
- It is believed that through his intuitive powers, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was able to locate all the places associated with Lord Sri Krishna and restore the pristine purity of the religious practices of the yore.

### **AIRSEWA PORTAL**

Airsewa portal was recently launched by the Ministry of Civil Aviation. It is an initiative of the Ministry to offer people a convenient and hassle-free air travel experience.

**KEY FACTS:**

- It will be operated through an interactive web portal as well as through a mobile app for both android and iOS platforms.
- The portal will include a mechanism for grievance redressal, backoffice operations for grievance handling, flight status/schedule information, airport Information and FAQs.
- Users will have an option to check the flight status and schedule between any of airports. Flights can be searched on the basis of flight number or for all flights to a particular airport.
- Airport Information will display basic weather information and connecting flight details from the airport. Airport information will include basic details and contact information regarding airport services like wheel Chair, transport/parking, rest and relax, Wifi services etc.

**GRIEVANCE REDRESS:**

With the launch of AirSewa, passengers will be able to register their grievances through the mobile app or a web portal.

- The users will also have the facility to upload voice or video along with an elaborate description of their issues. They will be given a unique reference number for each of their reported grievances which would also be communicated through an email as well as an SMS.
- The Users can track the status and response to these grievances through the mobile application as well as the web application based on the reference number provided. Once the grievance is closed the user has an option to provide his feedback and rate the overall experience and satisfaction.

**RAILWAYS TO INTRODUCE 'TRI-NETRA' TO CHECK COLLISIONS**

Railways may soon get an advanced system, called "Tri-Netra", on its trains which will help reduce train accidents by keeping a record of the track maintenance and will also provide better visibility during foggy days. A proposal in this regard has already been initiated.

**WHAT IS TRI-NETRA?**

Tri-Netra stands for - "terrain imaging for diesel drivers infrared, enhanced optical and radar assisted system". The system provides a locomotive pilot a clear view of up to one kilometre on a straight track, even during inclement weather. This helps in maintaining high speed in poor visibility and avoid delay in arrivals.

**HOW IT OPERATES?**

TRI-NETRA system is made up of high-resolution optical video camera, high sensitivity infra-red video camera and additionally a radar-based terrain mapping system. These three components of the system act as three eyes (Tri-Netra) of the Locomotive Pilot.

TRI-NETRA is designed to "see" the terrain ahead of the running locomotive during inclement weather by combining the images captured by the three sub-systems and to create a composite video image which shall be displayed in front of the Loco Pilot on a computer monitor.

**SIGNIFICANCE:**

During fog, heavy rain and also during night, the locomotive pilots face serious challenges in looking out ahead to spot any obstruction on the track such as vehicles which get stuck while crossing the track or trees or boulders which have fallen across the track etc. Because of the heavy momentum of the running train, the train driver has to always adjust the speed of the train such that he or she can stop the train on visually seeing the obstruction. In fair weather and in daytime, this is not a problem since train driver has a clear

view of the track ahead. But in poor visibility, he has to reduce the speed suitably so that the brakes can be applied in time to stop the train without hitting the obstructions.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The concept of TRI-NETRA was developed by Development Cell under the guidance of Member Mechanical, Railway Board while brainstorming on how to use the technology employed by fighter aircrafts to see through clouds and operate in pitch darkness and the technology used by naval ships in mapping the ocean floor and navigating in the night.

### **DGPs/IGPs Conference-2016:**

- The 51st post-Independence DGPs/IGPs Conference-2016 was recently inaugurated by the Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh at Hyderabad.
- The Conference would deliberate on various security-related issues confronting the nation, and to come out with ways and means to tackle them.

### **CONSTITUTION DAY 2016:**

- The Constitution Day in India, also known as Samvidhan Divas, is celebrated on 26th of November every year to spread the importance of the constitution and thoughts and ideas of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar.
- On this day in 1949, the Constituent Assembly of India adopted the Constitution of India, which went into effect on 26 January 1950.
- The Government of India declared 26 November as Constitution Day in honour of Dr.B.R. Ambedkar who is known as the Father of Constitution of India.
- The day is celebrated to value and preserve the rich heritage of composite culture and to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform.

- Constitution Day will work as a catalyst and the day will also promote to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life and to have compassion for living creatures.

### **ALL INDIA CONFERENCE OF CAT**

Two-day All India Conference of CAT was recently held in Delhi. The Conference was inaugurated by Shri Justice T. S. Thakur, Chief Justice of India.

- The Judges of Supreme Court of India, Judges of High Court, Government officials and Advocates attended the conference.
- The Conference is held to discuss and deliberate upon the problems faced by the institution and to bring improvement in the judicial/administrative system so as to achieve higher disposal in the shortest possible time.

### **ABOUT CAT:**

The Central Administrative Tribunal was established by an Act of Parliament namely Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985 as sequel to the 42nd amendment of the Constitution of India inserting Article 323 A.

### **FUNCTIONS OF THE TRIBUNAL:**

- The tribunal adjudicates disputes and complaints with respect to Recruitment and Conditions of Service of the persons appointed to the Public Services and Posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or any State or of any other Local Authorities within the territory of India or under the control of the Government of India.
- Apart from above the Tribunal also has the jurisdiction on the employees of 208 Public Sector Undertakings/ Organizations notified by the Government.

**KEY FACTS:**

- The Principal seat of Central Administrative Tribunal is at New Delhi and it has 16 Outlying Benches scattered all over the Country.
- The Tribunal is headed by the Chairman and 65 Members, 33 from Judicial (including Chairman) and 33 from the Administrative stream.
- The Chairman is normally a retired Chief Justice of a High Court.

**E-PASHUHAAT**

e-pashuhaat portal was recently launched to connect farmers and breeders of bovine animals. The portal was launched on the occasion of birth anniversary of the father of India's White Revolution Verghese Kurien and National Milk Day.

**KEY FACTS:**

- The Centre through the portal will provide all details at a single platform, including availability of bovine germplasm.
- It will be a platform for sell of bovines, including information on semen, embryos and live animals with all the agencies and stakeholders in the country.
- The portal would make the farmers aware of availability of quality disease free bovine germplasm with different agencies in the country.
- Animal fodder varieties, its volume and price information is also available in this portal. Farmers willing to purchase bovine animals can also avail the information of animal transport facilities in this e-pashu haat portal.
- Since there is no authentic organised market for animals, the portal is likely to help fill in the vacuum.
- The portal will also connect the farmers with the milk cooperatives in the country.

**BACKGROUND:**

India has the largest bovine population in the world. India accounts for 14% of the world cattle population, while share for buffalo alone is 53%. The indigenous varieties are endowed with quality of heat tolerance, resistance to diseases and survive with little inputs.

**RBI INTRODUCES INCREMENTAL CRR TO MANAGE EXCESS LIQUIDITY**

The Reserve Bank of India has increased the cash reserve requirement (CRR) for incremental deposits between September 16 and November 11 to 100%. The move is estimated to suck out around Rs 3.24 lakh crore excess liquidity from the system.

**WHY SUCH MOVE?**

One of the main reasons for the RBI move is the rising amount of excess funds that banks were keeping with RBI through its reverse repo window. With the withdrawal of the legal tender status of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 denomination bank notes beginning November 9, there has been a surge in deposits relative to the expansion in bank credit, leading to large excess liquidity in the system.

- As per RBI data, total deposits rose from Rs 97 lakh crore in the September 16 fortnight to Rs 101.1 lakh crore in the November 11 fortnight.
- The new move is intended to absorb a part of the surplus liquidity arising from the return of specified bank notes to the banking system, while leaving adequate liquidity with banks to meet the credit needs of the productive sectors of the economy.

**IMPLICATIONS OF THIS MOVE:**

The RBI move will require all excess deposits that banks in India are getting because of the demonetisation move, is to be kept with the central bank for which the banks will not earn any interest. Banks will pay interest rate of 4%

to depositors, but will earn nothing from RBI on the incremental deposits. So far, the banks which were keeping those extra funds with the RBI, were earning interest at up to 6.24% yearly rate.

The RBI measure could also lead to a rise in interest rates through sharp spike in yields.\

### WHAT NEXT?

RBI said the incremental CRR is intended to be a temporary measure within its liquidity management framework to drain excess liquidity in the system and shall be reviewed on December 9 or even earlier.

### WHO SETTLES INDIA, EU MEDICINE DISPUTE

In a significant victory for the global access to medicines campaign, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has dropped the term 'counterfeit' and retained 'falsified' to describe medicines of inferior quality.

### BACKGROUND:

The terms were being used interchangeably to confiscated Indian made generic drugs exported to other countries by showing that they were in violation of intellectual property.

### WHAT HAS THE WHO SAID?

Settling a long standing dispute between India and the European Union (EU), WHO clarified that 'counterfeit'— will now be used by member States with respect to protection of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).

### WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

The European Union Free Trade Agreement (EU FTA) had reached a deadlock after affordable, safe-to-use generic drugs made in India were confiscated as 'illegal' and 'counterfeit.' Nearly 20 shipments of generic drugs, including basic antibiotics and anti-retrovirals, were detained while in transit from India to several developing countries via Europe between 2008 and 2009, derailing the free trade agreement negotiations.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS DECISION:

This decision by the WHO settles a long-standing battle about labelling of drugs. For far too long, genuine generic medicines have been labelled as counterfeit. The confusion had taken away the much needed attention from the substandard medicines — which is a bigger public health problem for developing countries. Additionally, big pharmaceutical companies were using the term 'counterfeit' to describe generic medicines and disrupting trade of generic medicines.

### CONCERNS:

Under international law, — the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) — the definition of counterfeit is clearly targeted at one particular area: wilful infringement of trademark on a commercial scale.

But, in reality, campaigns and legislation against counterfeit drugs often have nothing to do with concerns about drug quality. Major U.S. and European pharmaceutical companies have a vested interest in limiting competition from generic drugs, and are using increased enforcement of intellectual property laws as a tool to clamp down on the legitimate trade in high-quality generic medicines between developing countries.

### 13TH WORLD ROBOT OLYMPIAD COMMENCES:

- The 13th World Robot Olympiad is being held in India.
- It is jointly organized by National Council of Science Museums (NCSM) under the aegis of Ministry of Culture and India STEM Foundation (ISF).
- The theme for this year's event is 'Rap the Scrap'.
- Over 2000 students from 51 countries are participating in this international championship and will showcase innovative

solutions using robotics technology to reduce, manage and recycle waste.

- The competition is being held for students in the 9-25 years age group in the following four categories – Regular category (Elementary, Junior High, Senior High), WRO Football, Open category and Advanced Robotics Challenge.

#### **National Milk Day:**

- November 26 was observed as National Milk across the country Day to mark the birth anniversary of Father of the White Revolution Dr. Verghese Kurien.
- The idea of observing National Milk Day was first mooted by Indian Dairy Association in 2014 on the lines of World Milk Day observed on June 1 under the aegis of UN Food and Agriculture Organization. The first NMD was observed on 26 November 2014 by all Indian dairy sector majors including National Dairy Development Board, Indian Dairy Association along with state level milk federations.
- Verghese Kurien had dedicated his entire life for a cooperative movement which boosted the production of milk in India. Dr Kurien was an Indian social entrepreneur known as the 'Father of the White Revolution' for launching Operation flood — the world's largest agricultural development programme.
- Known as the 'milkman of India', Dr Kurien was the founder-Chairman of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) from 1965 to 1998, Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd (GCMMF) from 1973 to 2006 and the Institute of Rural Management (IRMA) from 1979 to 2006, which are owned and managed by farmers and run by professionals.
- India ranks first in milk production, accounting for 18.5 % of world production, achieving an annual output of 146.3 million tonnes during 2014-15 as compared to

137.69 million tonnes during 2013-14 recording a growth of 6.26 %. Whereas, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has reported a 3.1 % increase in world milk production in 2014.

- The per capita availability of milk in India has increased from 176 grams per day in 1990-91 to 322 grams per day by 2014-15. It is more than the world average of 294 grams per day during 2013.

#### **New Pakistan Army Chief:**

- Pakistan's Prime Minister has picked Lieutenant General Qamar Javed Bajwa to replace outgoing army chief Raheel Sharif.

#### **LIEUTENANT GENERAL QAMAR JAVED BAJWA**

- The army chief is arguably the most powerful person in Pakistan, with the military having ruled the country for more than half its 69-year history since independence from Britain.

#### **MODERN RFID ACCESS CONTROL SYSTEM INTRODUCED AT PARADIP PORT**

Paradip Port has introduced the modern Radio-frequency identification (*RFID*) Access Control System for controlling and tracking the entry and exit of vehicular as well as human traffic into and out of its prohibited area. The implementation of the system was done as per the directives of the Ministry of Shipping.

#### **PARADIP PORT**

- Paradip Port is the first among all Major Ports to have successfully implemented the RFID Access Control System adding yet another distinction to its string of achievements.

#### **BENEFITS:**

The new RFID system is inherently accompanied with enhanced Maritime Security features. Faster and efficient movement of traffic across the gates leading to reduction in congestion, simplified online payment procedure, availability of real-time

information on number of different types of vehicles, equipment, port user personnel inside the prohibited area, availability of entry and exit details of a particular person, vehicle inclusive of the gate no. instantly through which the traffic moved, are some of the added advantages of the new system. Retrieval of data pertaining to the entire period of time is also another advantage of the system.

### WHAT IS RFID TAGGING?

RFID tagging is an ID system that uses small radio frequency identification devices for identification and tracking purposes. An RFID tagging system includes the tag itself, a read/write device, and a host system application for data collection, processing, and transmission. An RFID tag (sometimes called an RFID transponder) consists of a chip, some memory and an antenna.

RFID tags that contain their own power source are known as active tags. Those without a power source are known as passive tags. A passive tag is briefly activated by the radio frequency (RF) scan of the reader.

### INCOME-TAX AMENDMENT BILL TABLED IN LS

The Government has sought to bring to tax all unaccounted money that was flowing into the banking system following the demonetisation announcement on November 8. In this regard, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has introduced a Bill in Lok Sabha.

- The Taxation Laws (Second Amendment) Bill, 2016 proposes to amend Section 115BBE of the Income Tax Act to provide for a punitive tax, surcharge and penalty on unexplained credit, investment, cash and other assets.

### KEY FACTS:

- Against current provision of 30% flat tax rate plus surcharge and cesss, a steep 60% tax will be levied on unaccounted income together with 25% surcharge of tax (15% of such income). So total incidence of tax will be

75% with no expense, deductions or set-off allowed.

- Also, the assessing officer can levy an additional 10% penalty, taking the total tax incidence to 85%.
- The current provisions for penalty in cases of search and seizure are proposed to be amended to provide for a penalty of 30% of income if it is admitted, returns filed and taxes paid. In all other cases, 60% will be the penalty.
- Currently, the penalty is 10% of the income, if the income is admitted, returned and taxes are paid. Penalty is at 60% in all other cases.

### PRADHAN MANTRI GARIB KALYAN YOJANA, 2016' (PMGKY):

An alternative Scheme namely, 'Taxation and Investment Regime for Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, 2016' (PMGKY) has been proposed in the Bill.

- Under this, besides 50% tax, surcharge and penalty, a quarter of the declared income will be to be deposited in interest free deposit scheme for four years.
- The scheme enables people with undisclosed income to come clean. However, they would have to fork out a tax of 30% and penalty of 10%. A surcharge in the form of cess of 33% will have to be paid on the tax.
- In addition to tax, surcharge and penalty, the declarant will have to deposit 25% of undisclosed income in a deposit scheme to be notified by the Centre in consultation with the RBI.
- This amount is proposed to be utilised for programmes of irrigation, housing, toilets, infrastructure, primary education, primary health, livelihood etc, so that there is justice and equality.

- A 75% tax and 10% penalty in case Income Tax authorities detect undisclosed wealth deposited post demonetisation has also been proposed.
- The current provisions of penalty on under-reporting of income at 50% of the tax, and misreporting (200% of tax) will remain and no changes are being made to them.

### 50 YEARS OF ESTABLISHMENT OF UNCITRAL

India is hosting the golden jubilee celebrations of United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).

- The event is being hosted by the UNCITRAL National Coordination Committee India (UNCCI) and the UNCITRAL Regional Centre for Asia and the Pacific, with the support of the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

### ABOUT UNCITRAL:

UNCITRAL was established by the UN General Assembly in 1966 to promote the progressive harmonisation and unification of international trade law.

- It is the core legal body of the United Nations system in the field of international trade law.
- It also aims to modernize and harmonize rules on international business.
- The Commission comprises 60 member States elected by the United Nations General Assembly for a term of six years. Membership is structured to ensure representation of the world's various geographic regions and its principal economic and legal systems.
- India is a founding member of UNCITRAL. India is only one of eight countries which have been a member of UNCITRAL since its inception. Last year, it was re-elected for a term of six years (2016-2022).

### 'BITCOIN ADOPTION IN INDIA SEES SURGE'

Unocoin, an Indian bitcoin start-up, has unveiled a new app for Apple's mobile operating system iOS and Google's Android platform. According to the firm, the app will allow consumers to buy, sell, send, receive and store bitcoins, all in one place, from any remote device.

- Unocoin said the implementation is timely because bitcoin adoption is rapidly ascending in India, coupled with the government's decision to demonetise Rs.500 and Rs.1,000 notes.
- With this, Unocoin has become the first company in the country to offer a full-featured mobile bitcoin app. This includes 24/7 access to real-time bitcoin market prices and instantaneous trading transactions.

### WHAT IS BITCOIN?

Bitcoin is a digital currency that is not supported by any country's government or central bank. Also known as crypto-currency, it can be traded for services or goods with sellers who accept bitcoins as payment.

### WAY AHEAD:

Experts say the demand for bitcoins will increase as there are more than one billion Indians using mobile phones. More than 300 million Indians use their phones regularly for accessing the Internet. This trend is expected to go up by 56% per year, according to Unocoin.

### CMS PANEL TO STUDY DEMONETIZATION EFFECT:

- Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has been nominated by the Central Government to head the sub-committee of Chief Ministers of five States constituted to study the situation arising out of the demonetization of big notes.

- The committee would study various aspects after demonetization and how it has affected different sections of the people.
- The committee, after an indepth study of the situation and also after holding parleys with the banking institutions, is expected to submit its report to the Centre for taking required steps.

**India's first digital village:**

- Akodara has earned the tag of India's first digital village that uses a cashless system for payments of goods and services.
- Akodara is a tiny village around 90 km away from Ahmedabad, located in Sabarkantha district of Gujarat.
- The village was adopted by ICICI Bank in 2015 and made cashless by adopting digital technology.

