



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

### **Innovate in India (i3)**

In a bid to create a globally competitive biopharmaceutical industry that addresses the country's major concerns around barriers to affordable healthcare, innovate in India (i3) program has been launched.

#### **What you need to know about innovate in India (i3)?**

It is a 250 million USD program of the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and Ministry of Science & Technology **in collaboration with World Bank**. It will be **implemented by Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), a Public Sector Enterprise, set up by DBT**.

It is a **first- of-its-kind mission** that brings together industry and academia to promote entrepreneurship and indigenous manufacturing in the biopharmaceutical sector.

#### **What is it for?**

This Mission aspires to **create an enabling ecosystem to promote entrepreneurship and indigenous manufacturing in the sector**. The programme will specifically focus on the development of new vaccines, bio-therapeutics, diagnostics and medical devices to better address the rising burden of diseases in the country.

It will also bring isolated Centres of excellence together, enhance regional capabilities and strengthen the current bio-clusters network in terms of capacities as well as quantity and quality of output.

#### **Significance of this program:**

- This endeavor will help nurture next- generation technical skills; promote entrepreneurship; and support institutions in adoption of global innovations, technologies, and licensing models.
- It will provide young entrepreneurs the confidence as well as the systemic support to pursue their aspirations in biotechnological innovation, and transform India into a global hub for cutting-edge biotechnology research and development.

### **Mizoram celebrates 31st anniversary of Mizo peace accord**

The 31st anniversary of the signing of the historic Mizo peace accord between the Union government and the erstwhile underground Mizo National Front (MNF) was celebrated on 30<sup>th</sup> June in Mizoram.

- The Mizo Accord was signed on June 30, 1986 ushering in an era of peace after 20 years of violence and disturbance in the state.

#### **What you need to know about Mizo peace accord?**

Under the Accord, the government agreed to grant full statehood to Mizoram, along with its own High Court. A university was proposed. The Accord promised constitutional protection for Mizo religious and social

customs, and laws of the Mizo people. Mizo was notified as an official Indian language. The MNF agreed to break all contact with other insurgent groups in the Northeast.

- The signatories were Laldenga, leader of the movement, R. D. Pradhan, Home Secretary, and Lalkhama, Chief secretary.

## **Petya ransomware**

A new ransomware going by the name Petya has had a major impact on the operations in India. Cyber security experts claim India's critical infrastructure remains vulnerable to such attack even as the country's largest container port – Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) – has been affected, prompting authorities to contain the disruption in emergency mode.

### **What is Petya?**

Petya relies on the same NSA-leaked EternalBlue exploit that was used by WannaCry, but that's only one of its strategies to burrow itself across computers.

- Petya infects computers and locks down their hard drives. It demands a ransom of \$300 (Rs 19,000) in Bitcoins. The email associated with the ransomware has been blocked, so even if victims pay, they won't get their files back.
- Once it infects a computer, Petya waits for 10-60 minutes, and then reboots the computer. It then encrypts the master file table and then overwrites the master boot record with a custom loader. It places a ransom note to explain what users must do to regain control.

### **How is Petya different from Wannacry?**

Unlike Wannacry, Petya does not encrypt individual files, but overwrites the master boot record and encrypts the master file table, thus rendering the system inoperable until the ransom has been paid.

### **What is ransomware?**

A piece of malicious software which takes control of your system and files. Upon taking over, it applies encryption on those files and asks for money for a key that can restore the files. The ransomware often scrambles file names and changes their extension.

### **India gives \$100,000 to UN Tax Fund**

India has contributed \$100,000 to a UN fund to help developing countries actively participate in the discussion of tax issues, becoming **the first country to make the contribution.**

### **What you need to know about the UN Tax Fund?**

The UN Tax Trust Fund aims to support the work of the Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters (the UN Tax Committee).

- Voluntary contributions for the fund have been called for by the UN and the committee since its establishment in 2006.
- The call for contributions was also emphasised in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda adopted at the third International Conference on Financing for Development in 2015.

- Through the fund, the UN expects that more developing countries will draw upon the best practice of other bodies, ensuring that global tax cooperation norms and rules will work more effectively and efficiently for all countries and all stakeholders.

### **What it does?**

The UN Tax Committee, a subsidiary body of the UN Economic and Social Council (ESOSOC), has provided guidance on current issues such as double taxation treaties, transfer pricing (profit shifting) taxation of the extractive industries and taxation of services.

The committee also provides a framework for dialogues with a view to enhance and promote international tax cooperation among national tax authorities, while making recommendations on capacity-building and the provision of technical assistance to developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

### **About Addis Agenda:**

The Addis Agenda provides a global framework to ensure the effective mobilisation of resources at the national and international level for sustainable development. Implementation of the Addis Agenda supports the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the historic and transformational agenda that countries unanimously adopted in 2015.

### **Textiles India:**

- PM Modi recently inaugurated ‘Textiles India 2017’ In Gandhinagar. This is India’s first-ever mega trade event for the textiles sector, showcasing the nation as a global sourcing hub and investment destination for manufacturers world-wide.
- The three-day conference ‘Textiles India 2017’ will see participation from 2,500 international buyers.
- India’s first-ever mega trade event for the textiles sector tomorrow, showcasing the nation as a global sourcing hub and investment destination for manufacturers world-wide.

### **SIERRA ODC building in Coimbatore gets world’s second highest green rating:**

- SIERRA ODC building has been recognised as the world’s second highest ranking Green Building, with a score of 103 out of 110 under LEED certification.
- The building uses 100% renewable energy. Sierra has also installed a 100% water recycling system. It uses the recycled water for watering the fauna that is set up in nearly 25% of the premises. This watering system too is controlled, restricting the flow according to the requirement.
- The Green Building Council Inc. (GBCI) has honoured Sierra with the platinum certificate.

### **UNESCO crowns Sharjah as World Book Capital:**

- Sharjah has been crowned with the prestigious the World Book Capital for 2019 by UNESCO for the quality of its literary and cultural activities and for its efforts to make books accessible to the entire population of the nation.
- The emirate was selected because of its innovative and inclusive application, with a community-focused activity programme containing creative proposals to engage the very large migrant population.

- The accolade is an important addition to Sharjah's existing portfolio of milestones like, Capital of Arab Culture (1998), Capital of Islamic Culture (2014), and Capital of Arab Tourism (2015). The Sharjah is the first in the GCC and third in the Arab world and Middle East, to have received this recognition.
- Sharjah is the 19th city to become World Book Capital.

### **India's First Blood Bank for Cattle to Come up in Odisha:**

- Odisha is all set to become the first state in the country to have a blood bank for the cattle. The first of its kind blood bank would be established at an estimated cost of Rs. 3.25 crore.
- The project will have a 60:40 sharing between the Centre and the state government.
- The cattle farmers will provide blood voluntarily. The blood bank will also go and collect blood from centres. Blood transfusion facility for cattle blood will also be done at the proposed blood bank. This will prevent death of cattle during deliveries and other ailments, he said.
- The storage facility would come in handy for the veterinarians to save lives of the domesticated animals.

### **Times when the Parliament convened for a session at midnight:**

The midnight session of Parliament to launch the goods and services tax (GST) marked a first in India's history. While Parliament was convened for a midnight session several times in the past, all those occasions were celebratory in nature. It's the first time that a session has been convened to mark the implementation of a government policy, the GST.

Midnight sessions in the past:

- August 14-15, 1947: The Constituent Assembly of India met in the Constitution Hall (now the Central Hall of Parliament) on the eve of the country's Independence. It started at 11 p.m. and went on till after midnight.
- August 14-15, 1972: To celebrate the silver jubilee of India's Independence.
- August 9, 1992: To mark 50th anniversary of Quit India Movement.
- August 14-15, 1997: To celebrate the golden jubilee of India's Independence.

### **Sunderbans mangrove cover at risk**

Remote sensing and GIS-enabled data offer definite proof for the first time that the mangrove forest cover in the Sunderbans has been depleting alarmingly. From 1986 to 2012, 124.418 sq. km., or about 5.5% of the mangrove cover, was lost. Variable degrees of erosion was observed in at least 18 islands. The continuation of this process is a serious ecological threat, say experts.

⇒ Noted islands experiencing erosion include Sagar, Gosaba, Dulibhasani, Dalhousie, Bhangaduni and Jambudwip.

### **How climate change and sea level rise has contributed to the phenomenon of losing land, including mangrove forests in the Sundarbans, in the last part of the 21st century?**

In the western part of Sunderban delta, **there is less fresh water flow and sediment supply**. This has led to the starvation of sediment. Besides, **the rate of sea level rise is higher than sediment supply**. This has led to the erosion of Islands.

## **Concern:**

A critical minimal inflow of freshwater is **necessary for the luxuriant growth of mangroves**. When freshwater inflow is missing, there is a change in mangrove succession, and freshwater loving species of mangroves are replaced by salt-water loving ones. The immediate impact of salinity will be on the fishing community, where commercially sought after fish species will be replaced by fish that does not have as much market value.

## **About Sunderbans:**

**The Sundarbans is a natural region in West Bengal and Bangladesh. It is the largest single block of tidal halophytic mangrove forest in the world.**

- The Sundarbans covers approximately 10,000 square kilometres (3,900 sq mi) of which 60% is in Bangladesh with the remainder in India. It is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.

## **Why Bhutan is special to India**

The recent standoff between India and China over Doklam issue has highlighted India's special relationship with Bhutan, which includes military responsibilities towards it

## **Background:**

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) recently attempted to construct a road in the disputed Doklam region unilaterally. However, Bhutan had strongly opposed this.

## **Relationship between India and Bhutan:**

India- Bhutan friendship treaty 2007 has been guiding the bilateral relations between the two countries. Under **the 2007 India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty**, the two sides have agreed to "cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests. Neither Government shall allow the use of its territory for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other."

- Under the previous treaty, India was to "guide" Bhutan on foreign and defence policies. The language of the 2007 treaty is meant to respect the sensitivities of Bhutan regarding its sovereignty. But the reality is that the Indian military is virtually responsible for protecting Bhutan from the kind of external threat that the Chinese military poses.
- The Eastern Army Command and the Eastern Air Command both have integrated protection of Bhutan into their role. The Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT), headed by a Major General, plays a critical role in training Bhutanese security personnel.

## **In Telangana, a unique irrigation project**

Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP) of the Telangana government has gained much attention in recent times.

## **Why is it important?**

Claimed to be the costliest irrigation project to be taken up by any State till date with an estimated cost of Rs. 80,500 crore, the project holds the key to the government's promise of providing irrigation facility to one crore acres of land under all projects/tanks. The government has already spent Rs. 10,000 crore on the project, including land acquisition, and has allocated Rs. 7,000 crore in the current budget, besides tying up a Rs. 7,400 crore loan from a consortium of banks. Notwithstanding its share of controversies, particularly related to land

acquisition for the Mallannasagar reservoir, one of the key components of the project for storage of 50 tmc ft water, the project is making swift progress.

### **What's the project?**

The Kaleshwaram project is an off-shoot of **the original Pranahitha-Chevella Lift Irrigation** Scheme taken up by the Congress government in 2007 when Andhra Pradesh was not divided. After the formation of Telangana in 2014, the TRS government redesigned the project on the ground that the original plan had too many environmental obstacles and had very low water storage provision — only about 16.5 tmc ft.

- After conducting a highly advanced Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey for a couple of months, the government separated the original component serving the Adilabad area as the Pranahitha project and renamed the rest as Kaleshwaram by redesigning the head works, storage capacity and the canal system based on the data of availability of water at different locations along the course of the Godavari and its tributaries.
- The Kaleshwaram project has provision for the storage of about 148 tmc ft with plans of utilising 180 tmc ft by lifting at least 2 tmc ft water every day for 90 flood days. The project is designed to irrigate 7,38,851 hectares (over 18.47 lakh acres) uplands in the erstwhile districts of Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Warangal, Medak, Nalgonda and Ranga Reddy.

### **What's unique?**

According to engineers, KLIP has many unique features, including the longest tunnel to carry water in Asia, running up to 81 km, between the Yellampally barrage and the Mallannasagar reservoir. The project would also utilise the highest capacity pumps, up to 139 MW, in the country to lift water.

### **Sharpest laser can help test Einstein's theory**

Scientists have developed the worlds sharpest laser with record-breaking precision that can help make optical atomic clocks more precise as well as test Einsteins theory of relativity.

### **What you need to know?**

Ideally, laser light has only one fixed wavelength or frequency. In practice, the spectrum of most types of lasers can, however, reach from a few kHz to a few MHz in width, which is not good enough for numerous experiments requiring high precision.

- Researchers have now developed a laser with a linewidth of only 10 miliHertz (mHz) — closer to the ideal laser than ever before.

### **Significance of this discovery:**

This precision is useful for various applications such as optical atomic clocks, precision spectroscopy, radioastronomy and for testing the theory of relativity.

### **What is a laser?**

The letters in the word laser stand for **Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation**. A laser is an unusual light source. It is quite different from a light bulb or a flash light. Lasers produce a very narrow beam of light. This type of light is useful for lots of technologies and instruments.

- Lasers produce a **narrow beam of light** in which all of the light waves have very similar wavelengths. The laser's light waves travel together with their peaks all lined up, or in phase. This is why laser beams are very narrow, very bright, and can be focused into a very tiny spot.

### **Integration of oil & gas majors is best avoided**

The idea of an integrated oil major has surfaced again in 2017 even after being rejected twice earlier.

#### **Background:**

The idea first made its appearance during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government in 1998. The proposal was then rejected for encouraging a monopolistic scenario in distribution of essential goods like LPG, petrol, kerosene etc. In 2005, the Krishnamurthy committee formed by the UPA government debunked the idea as it would reduce competition and manpower in the oil and gas sector.

#### **An integrated oil major is good for the following reasons:**

- Better capacity to bear higher risks.
- Avail economies of scale.
- Create more shareholder value.
- Make better investment decisions and be more competent globally.

### **Counter arguments- Why an integrated oil major is not suitable for India?**

- Indian firms are much smaller in size compared with top international oil companies. Also, the Government's track record of consolidating state run firms has not borne good results. Besides, in oil and gas, minimum political interference and liberalisation have proven better in creating more shareholder value compared with integration. Therefore, with oil firms facing such allegations and inefficiencies, giving complete autonomy to one entity can risk the nation's energy security.
- Another concern is employment generation. The sector has seen a continuous decline in manpower since FY11. The Krishnamurthy Committee had earlier deduced that such integration will result in manpower reduction. At a time when the government is struggling with job creation, it will be difficult to justify job losses due to restructuring.

#### **Way ahead:**

Any decision that creates a monopoly in the oil and gas sector must be carefully thought through. An important question here is whether a bigger oil company will help reform the sector. Or, will it create new problems for the Indian people at large?

### **Nine more bird, biodiversity areas in Kerala**

Nine more locations in Kerala have been identified as Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs).

#### **Key facts:**

- The new list was released by the Bombay Natural History Society, a partner of BirdLife International, in its recent publication, Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas in India Priority sites for conservation.
- With the latest addition, Kerala now has 33 IBAs. Kerala IBAs are home to three critically endangered species — Whiterumped Vulture, Indian Vulture, and Red-headed Vulture.
- The newly identified IBAs of Kerala are Achencoil Forest Division; Anamudi Shola National Park; Camel's Hump Mountain, Wayanad; Kurinjimala Wildlife Sanctuary; Malayattoor Reserve Forest; Mankulam Forest Division; Mathikettan Shola National Park; Muthikulam-Siruvani; and Pampadum Shola National Park.

## What are IBAs?

The IBAs are “places of international significance for the conservation of birds and other biodiversity” and are “distinct areas amenable to practical conservation action,” according to BirdLife International.

- Declaring a site as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area does not ensure that the site gets legal protection or becomes inaccessible to people. Instead BirdLife International encourages national and State governments to recognise the areas as sites of vital importance for conservation of wildlife and to empower local community-based conservation initiatives.

## Know about Birdlife international:

BirdLife International (formerly the International Council for Bird Preservation) is a global partnership of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. It is the world’s largest partnership of conservation organisations, with over 120 partner organisations.

- BirdLife International publishes a quarterly magazine, World Birdwatch, which contains recent news and authoritative articles about birds, their habitats, and their conservation around the world.
- BirdLife International is the official Red List authority for birds, for the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

## Van Mahotsav

Van Mahotsav, a week-long festival, is being celebrated in different parts of India. It is usually celebrated between 1 July to 7 July. Programmes like screening of short films and documentaries, seminars and exhibition, painting and poster competitions are organised to mark the occasion.

### About Van Mahotsav:

Van Mahotsav began in 1950, with a tree plantation drive, in which national leaders participated. The festival of tree plantation was started by Dr. K.M. Munshi, the then Union Minister for Agriculture and Food to create enthusiasm among masses for forest conservation and planting trees.

- Van Mahotsav is usually observed in **the first week of July every year** and is celebrated on different days in different parts of India.
- The objective behind celebrating Van Mahotsav is **to keep local people involved in plantation drives and spread environmental awareness.**

## Linking Aadhaar and PAN is not mandatory for all

It has now become mandatory for everyone to link their PAN with Aadhaar with effect from July 1, 2017, as per the income tax laws. However, the government has exempted certain class of individuals from linking these two documents subject to certain conditions.

### **CBDT has notified that Section 139AA of the Income Tax Act is not applicable to the following individuals:**

- Those categorised as Non-resident Indians as per the Income Tax Laws.
- Not a citizen of India.
- Is of age 80 years or more at any time during the tax year.
- Residents of the states of Assam, Meghalaya and Jammu and Kashmir.

However, it should be noted here that the above mentioned categories of Individuals are exempted from the purview of section 139AA i.e. exempted from compulsory linking of PAN and Aadhaar, **only if they do not possess Aadhaar or Aadhaar Enrolment ID.**

### **What is section 139AA is about?**

The newly introduced section 139AA of the Income Tax Act states that every person who has been allotted PAN as on July 1, 2017 and who is eligible to obtain Aadhaar Number shall intimate the same to the tax authorities. The PAN of those who fail to do so will become invalid on a date to be notified later by the department.

### **Background:**

The Aadhaar (Target Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 states that every resident shall be entitled to obtain Aadhaar number by submitting his demographic and biometric information by undergoing the process of enrolment. The Act has also defined the eligibility conditions for Aadhaar.

### **Beijing's Bhutan gambit: Here's how to contain China**

The recent skirmishes with China near the Bhutan border bring home one thing loud and clear: the danger is clear and present. The question is: how do we defuse this, and what options does India have on the table?

### **China's hidden message:**

The recent spate of deliberate incursions seems to have had multiple triggers and multiple desirables. All Chinese actions invariably are multi-causal.

- In conjunction with ongoing provocations by China in the South China Sea, the first message is clearly aimed at the United States to show that China can activate multiple fronts to make Washington's life miserable and bog it down in many theatres of action. More importantly, this also demonstrates that the US's regional allies are security lightweights, and that the benefits they bring are outweighed by the security baggage they lug along.
- The second is aimed at India — the message that any closer proximity with the US comes with consequences, and should those consequences escalate militarily, there is very little that the US can realistically do to help India.
- The third message is also to India — and it has to do with India's furious rejection of the 'One Belt One Road' (Obor) initiative — something President Xi has associated his personal prestige with and the rejection of which he seems to have taken quite personally as well.
- The final message is to Bhutan. To Bhutanese policymakers, it is to demonstrate the limits of Indian help.

### **So, what can India do?**

The response has to be divided in two: the **tactical talking down of China, and the strategic containment of China.**

- The tactical involves appeasing China to some degree and assuaging Xi by pursuing the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Forum for Regional Cooperation vigorously. This enables Xi to portray this initiative as a subset of Obor for the purposes of the 19th Congress of Communist Party of China later

this year, and in so doing 'save face'. India, too, saves face by not joining Obor, while ignoring the domestic messaging in China of BCIM being 'Obor-minus'.

- The strategic containment borrows from a US Cold War template. The closest point between the US and the Soviet Union was in the Bering Straits, where the two were separated by a mere 90 km. Yet, the US kept the Soviet Union bogged down in Europe, seldom — if at all — paying attention to the straits. In the Indian iteration, India needs to turn the South China Sea into the Fulda Gap and the Himalayas into the Bering Straits. India's fear has always been 'What if China does the same in the Indian Ocean'? This is where our policymakers have a clear decision to make and cannot afford to dither.

### **'Rukmini' keeps eye on dancing 'dragon' at sea**

With China increasing its naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region amid the ongoing Sikkim stand-off, the Indian Navy is keeping an eye on the 'dragon' with the help of its 'eye in the sky', Gsat-7 also called Rukmini, the Navy's own dedicated military satellite that was launched in September 2013.

### **What you need to know about Rukmini?**

- It has helped the Navy monitor the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as it has a **nearly 2,000 nautical mile 'footprint'**.
- The multi-band communication-cum surveillance satellite, which is operating from the geo-stationary orbit (at 36,000km altitude), provides real-time inputs to naval warships, submarines and maritime aircraft and networking capabilities to its naval assets on the high seas.
- With the help of the shore-based operational centres, 'Rukmini' (also called INSAT-4F) has not only helped the Navy keep an eye on both Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal but also helped the force increase its communication and surveillance capabilities from Persian Gulf to Malacca Strait, which together is equivalent to almost 70% of the IOR.
- Rukmini, which provides wide range of service spectrum from low bit rate voice to high bit rate data communication, has given the Navy an integrated platform and helped it overcome the limitation of 'line of sight' (the straight path of signal when unobstructed by the horizon). With the help of this 'eye in the sky', the Army, too, gets vital inputs about over-the-land movements.

### **Centre may partially lift AFSPA**

The Centre is considering partial removal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The Home Ministry has asked the States for their views on AFSPA withdrawal and said that it was open to reviewing the stringent law in other States like 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".

### **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."

### **How is a region declared ‘disturbed’?**

Section (3) of the Afspa empowers the governor of the state or Union territory to issue an official notification in The Gazette of India, following which the Centre has the authority to send in armed forces for civilian aid. Once declared ‘disturbed’, the region has to maintain status quo for a minimum of three months, according to The Disturbed Areas (Special Courts) Act, 1976.

### **AFSPA in force:**

Currently, it is effective in the whole of Nagaland, Assam, Manipur (excluding the seven Assembly constituencies of Imphal). In Arunachal Pradesh, it is in force in 16 police stations and in Tirap, Longding and Changlang districts bordering Assam. Tripura withdrew AFSPA in 2015. It is not in force in Meghalaya (except 20 kilometre area along Assam border) and Mizoram.

### **Drug-resistant TB higher among children than expected: report**

While detection of tuberculosis (TB) in children remains a challenge, it has now emerged that Multi-Drug Resistant (MDR) TB is higher among children than expected. This has been described as a “worrying trend” by the Union Health Ministry.

- As many as 5,500 of over 76,000 children tested in nine cities have been diagnosed with TB. 9% of these paediatric TB cases have been diagnosed to have MDR TB.

### **What is MDR TB?**

Multi-Drug Resistant TB (MDR TB) is a specific form of TB that does not respond to “ordinary” TB treatment. As a result it is difficult to treat and needs specialised treatment.

### **What Causes MDR TB?**

MDR TB is caused by the development of TB bacteria, which have become resistant to ordinary TB drugs. This occurs due to various reasons, including:

- As a result of inadequate or irregular management of “ordinary” TB – either by using inappropriate drug combinations or by using single drugs for “ordinary” TB.
- Being exposed to MDR TB by someone already infected, you can develop the same type of MDR TB.
- Persons not completing their routine TB treatment and having to restart on various occasions can also develop MDR TB. They are known as ‘defaulters’.

### **Delhi Dialogue 9:**

- The 9th edition of the Delhi Dialogue was recently held in New Delhi. The Delhi Dialogue is an annual event to discuss politico-security, economic and socio-cultural engagement between ASEAN and India. It has been held annually since 2009.
- The theme for Delhi Dialogue 9 is “ASEAN-India Relations: Charting the Course for the Next 25 Years”.
- Delhi Dialogue is a conference in which policymakers converge to discuss a range of issues relating to India-Asean relations.
- The Delhi Dialogue is being organised by the MEA in collaboration with the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci), and other bodies of the Asean countries.

## **MERIT app**

The government has launched the **‘MERIT app (Merit Order Despatch of Electricity for Rejuvenation of Income and Transparency)’** and the e-bidding portal for providing e-Bidding solution to States to select Independent Power Producers (IPPs) for procurement of power by transferring their domestic coal under the scheme of flexibility in utilization of domestic coal.

### **Key facts:**

- The web portal and mobile app for Merit Order Despatch of Electricity (MERIT) have been developed in association with POSOCO.
- The app displays extensive array of information regarding the merit order such as daily state-wise marginal variable costs of all generators, daily source-wise power purchases of respective states/UTs with source-wise fixed and variable costs, energy volumes and purchase prices.
- The app also gives information regarding reasons for deviation from merit order such as must run conditions, transmission constraints etc.
- The app and the web portal would result in optimum utilization of Coal which would save the consumer close to Rs. 20,000 crores five years down the line.

### **The advantages of MERIT app are as follows:**

- Empowerment of the Consumer and participative governance.
- Transparent information dissemination pertaining to marginal variable cost and source wise purchase of electricity.
- Promotes economy and efficiency in operations.
- Helps understand the utility portfolio and its complexity.
- Optimization of the power procurement costs.
- Facilitates renewable integration and handling of the variability and uncertainty of renewables.
- Indication of supply side reliability and adequacy.
- The flexibility in utilization of domestic coal scheme envisages transferring coal to more efficient IPPs generating stations, leading to lower generation costs and ultimately lesser cost of electricity for the consumers.

### **Background:**

The **merit order stack is a common approach to the problem of minimizing the sum of generators’ operating costs while honoring the operational constraints of the available generation to supply the demand in a secure and reliable manner.** The Tariff Policy, 2016 provides that the States/DISCOMs shall follow merit order for procurement of power and there should be uniformity in merit order mechanism. The adherence to merit order optimizes the power procurement cost and benefits both utility and ultimate consumer.

### **PM’s gifts to PM Benjamin Netanyahu**

The Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented Prime Minister of Israel Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu replicas of 2 sets of relics from Kerala that are regarded as key artifacts in the long Jewish history in India.

### **What you need to know about these artefacts?**

They comprise two different sets of copper plates that are believed to have been inscribed in 9-10th century C.E.

- The first set of copper plates is a cherished relic for the Cochini Jews in India. It is regarded as **a charter describing the grant of hereditary royal privileges and prerogatives by the Hindu King, Cheraman Perumal (often identified as Bhaskara Ravi Varma) to the Jewish leader Joseph Rabban**. According to traditional Jewish accounts, Joseph Rabban was later crowned as the Prince of Shingli, a place in or equated with Cranganore. Cranganore is where Jews enjoyed religious and cultural autonomy for centuries, before they moved to Cochin and other places in Malabar. Local Jews once placed in each coffin a handful of earth from Shingli/Cranganore that was remembered as a holy place & a “second Jerusalem”. The replica of these plates was made possible with the cooperation of the Paradesi Synagogue in Mattancherry, Kochi.
- The second set of copper plates is believed to be **the earliest documentation of the history of Jewish trade with India**. These plates describe the grant of land and tax privileges by the local Hindu ruler to a church and oversight of trade in Kollam to West Asian and Indian trading associations. West Asian association included Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, as also a group of Jews who signed in Judeo-Persian and possibly also in Arabic and Pahlavi (Middle Persian). The plates bear their signatures that appear to have been cut into the plates by a local workman unfamiliar with the script. The replica of these plates was made possible with the cooperation of Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in Thiruvalla, Kerala.

### **BRICS ‘Beijing Declaration On Education’ Adopted For More Academic Cooperation**

BRICS ministers of education and assigned representatives have adopted ‘Beijing Declaration on Education’ in a recently held 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of BRICS Ministers of education at Beijing.

#### **About Beijing Declaration on Education:**

- According to the declaration, members states – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – are committed to **the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4)-Education 2030 which aims to** “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all” that was set within The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- The declaration reiterated support for **the BRICS Network University (NU)** to collaborate in the fields of education, research and innovation. It also encouraged universities to participate in the BRICS University League.
- With the Beijing declaration, BRICS member states also decided to increase cultural cooperation through language education and multilingualism to promote mutual understanding of the history and culture of BRICS member states and to undertake initiatives to promote professionalization of academics in higher education through the BRICS Network University as a focus of future education development.
- The declaration emphasises to encourage more teachers and educational administrators to learn from experience of other countries in improving teacher quality and performance, and promoting the development of education through international exchanges.
- It was also decided to strengthen cooperation in the field of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), share ideas and experiences in the development of vocational educators, and develop projects that are of common interests to BRICS Member States.
- The declaration also encouraged to expand the number of scholarship opportunities to students across BRICS Member States.

#### **Parliamentary secretaries’ appointment set aside**

The Punjab and Haryana High Court have set aside the appointment of four MLAs as chief parliamentary secretaries. However, the court, on the request of the Haryana government, put a stay on the implementation of the decision for three weeks.

#### **What’s the issue?**

Four MLAs were appointed as chief parliamentary secretaries in the Haryana government in July 2015. A petition was filed challenging the appointments.

- The petition contended that under the constitution there was no provision for the post of chief parliamentary secretaries and their appointment. Besides being unconstitutional, it was a burden on the State exchequer and the taxpayer.
- The State government contested the plea saying that chief parliamentary secretaries were appointed to assist Ministers in public interest in view of their varied duties.

### **Who is a parliamentary secretary?**

A Parliament Secretary is similar to a Minister of State who assists a Minister in his or her duties.

### **Constitutional provisions:**

Experts argue that the post of parliamentary secretary is in contradiction to Article 164 (1A) of the Constitution which provides for limiting the number of Ministers in the State Cabinets to 15% of the total number of members of the State Legislative Assembly. But, the number of Cabinet Ministers in Delhi cannot exceed 10% of the total 70 seats — that is seven — as per Article 239AA of Constitution.

### **Selection of ECs must be transparent, SC tells Centre**

The Supreme Court has posed several pointed questions to the Centre regarding the lack of proper procedure for appointment of Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners. The issue came up to the court based on a petition seeking a direction to the Centre to constitute a “neutral and independent selection committee” to recommend names for the post of Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners.

### **Background:**

The plea alleged that the Centre’s practice in appointing the member of Election Commission was discriminatory and violative of law, which obligate executive/legislature to make law for ensuring a fair, just and transparent selection process for election commission.

It also argued that the practice of appointing the member to the Election Commission without making law for a fair, just and transparent process of selection by constituting an independent and neutral collegium/selection committee to recommend the name, is in violation of Article 14 and 324(2) of the Constitution of India and is in vogue continuously since adoption of the Constitution.

### **Important observations made by the court:**

- Accepting the fact that outstanding people who maintained neutrality have been appointed so far, the court said there was a lack of procedure which parliament was ought to have laid down.
- The court asked why parliament could not enact law to install an independent collegium for selecting ECs as that would be a legitimate expectation to maintain neutrality free from executive’s clutches.

### **What are the demands?**

- The plea has sought a direction to Centre “to make law for ensuring a fair, just and transparent process of selection by constituting a neutral and independent collegium/ selection committee to recommend the name for the appointment of member to the election commission.”
- It also sought direction to the Centre for constituting “an interim neutral and independent collegium/selection committee to recommend the names for the appointment on the vacant post of members to the Election Commission”.

### **Current practice:**

Currently, the Prime Minister and his council of ministers decide who will be election commissioner. On their advise, the President then appoints the commissioner.

### **Maitree 2017:**

- A 14-day joint military training exercise between India and Thailand started in Himachal Pradesh. The aim of this exercise is to build and promote closer relations while exchanging skills and experiences between the two armies.
- Exercise Maitree 2017 is a continuation of a series of joint exercises between the Indian Army and the Royal Thailand Army. The previous edition of the exercise was held at Krabi in Thailand in 2016.

### **TERI ranked second among world's climate think tanks:**

- International Centre for Climate Governance (ICCG), an international body which focuses on climate policies, has ranked The Energy Resources Institute (TERI) among the top think tanks in the world.
- TERI was ranked under the category '2016 Top Climate Think Tanks in the Rest of the World–Absolute Global Rankings' during ICCG's 23rd annual conference of the European Association of Environmental and Resource Economists (EAERE) in Athens in Greece.
- The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) is a leading think tank dedicated to conducting research for sustainable development of India and the Global South. TERI was established in 1974 as an information centre on energy issues. However, over the following decades, it made a mark as a research institute, whose policy and technology solutions transformed people's lives and the environment.

### **Nasr:**

Pakistan has successfully test-fired short-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile 'Nasr'. 'Nasr' is a high-precision weapon system with the ability to be deployed quickly. It has a range of 60-70 Km.

### **JIGYASA" – Student-Scientist connect programme**

Jigyasa, a **student- scientist connect programme** has officially been launched in Delhi.

### **About JIGYASA:**

Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), has joined hands with Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) to implement this programme. **The focus is on connecting school students and scientists so as to extend student's classroom learning with that of a very well planned research laboratory based learning.**

- The "JIGYASA" would inculcate the culture of inquisitiveness on one hand and scientific temper on the other, amongst the school students and their teachers.
- The Programme is expected to connect 1151 Kendriya Vidyalayas with 38 National Laboratories of CSIR targeting 100,000 students and nearly 1000 teachers annually.
- The program will also enable the students and teachers to practically live the theoretical concepts taught in science by visiting CSIR laboratories and by participating in mini-science projects.

### **The model of engagement includes:**

- Student Residential Programmes.

- Scientists as Teachers and Teachers as Scientists.
- Lab specific activities / Onsite Experiments.
- Visits of Scientists to Schools/Outreach Programmes.
- Science and Maths Clubs.
- Popular Lecture Series/ demonstration programme at Schools.
- Student Apprenticeship Programmes.
- Science Exhibitions.
- Projects of National Children's Science Congress.
- Teacher Workshops.
- Tinkering Laboratories.

### **India declares itself free from Bird Flu**

India has declared itself free from Bird Flu (highly pathogenic **Avian Influenza – H5N1 and H5N8**) and notified it to the World Organisation for Animal Health. The move will help it resume export of poultry products to the countries which had banned trade in such items early this year.

### **Know about World Organization for Animal Health:**

The World Organisation for Animal Health is recognised as a **reference body by the World Trade Organization**. It has 181 countries as its members. This global body keeps tab on animal health issues and advises countries on best practices to be followed during such outbreaks.

This organisation **also supports countries to help them control animal diseases that cause livestock losses and pose a risk to public health**. Under its norms, ban can be lifted after 90 days of surveillance.

### **Avian influenza or Bird flu:**

Avian influenza, commonly called bird flu, is an infectious viral disease of birds with a tendency of causing large-scale outbreaks of serious disease. Although most influenza viruses do not infect humans, A(H5N1) and A(H7N9) have caused serious infections in people.

### **India's New, Tough Anti-Hijacking Law Comes Into Force**

India's new law that ramps up punishment for hijacking and prescribes death penalty for hijackers who cause loss of life in an aircraft or on ground has come into force. Parliament cleared the law in 2016 but it hadn't come into force so far because the government hadn't framed the rules.

### **Highlights of the new Anti- Hijacking law:**

- The new Anti-Hijacking Act replaces a 1982-vintage law that parliament was felt was far too weak and narrow.
- The new law has expanded the definition of a hijacking and covers offences against an aircraft or personnel even when it is on ground. Any attack on an aircraft when it is being prepared for a flight to 24 hours after it has landed will be considered under laws that deal with hijack. This is to include the possibility of a silent attack with biological weapons, the impact of which could be felt even a day later.
- Following the amendments, the perpetrators of hijacking would now be punishable with death penalty where such an act results in the death of "any person". Besides broadening the definition of hijacking, it also provides for an enhanced punishment to the perpetrators.
- It also includes several acts within the definition of hijacking including making a threat, attempts or abetment to commit the offence. Those organises or directs others to commit such offence will also be considered to have committed the offence of hijacking.

- The new law mandates the central government to confer powers of investigation, arrest and prosecution on any officer of the central government or National Investigation Agency (NIA).

### **No-detention policy to go from 2018**

The government has decided to do away with the no-detention policy for students from the next academic session.

#### **What necessitated this move?**

The decision was taken following representation from most of the States as they said the standard of education had deteriorated because of the policy.

#### **What the law says?**

Under the Right to Education Act, 2009, no child admitted to a school will be held back in any class or expelled till the completion of elementary education covering Classes 1 to 8.

#### **What is no detention policy?**

According to this provision “no child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class”. This translates into automatic promotions to the next class every year until Class VII. Instead of exams, schools are supposed to hold **Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluations (CCE)** for every child.

#### **What experts say?**

The provision had attracted criticism with several states and schools complaining that it compromised on academic rigour and learning levels and quality at schools.

- The TSR Subramanian committee for formulation of the National Policy on Education has also suggested that ‘no detention’ policy should be discontinued after Class V. It had recommended restoration of detention provision, remedial coaching and two extra chances to each student such to move to a higher class.
- A sub-committee of the Central Advisory Board of Education also studied the issue closely and recommended a provisional detention clause at Classes V and VIII. In 2013, a parliamentary panel had also asked the ministry to ‘rethink’ on its “policy of automatic promotion up to Class VIII”.

### **GST may dampen gold demand: WGC**

A hike in taxes on gold sales in India could pressure short-term demand from the world’s No.2 consumer of the metal, the World Gold Council (WGC) said in a report.

#### **Background:**

As part of a new nationwide sales tax regime that kicked in on July 1, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on gold has jumped to 3% from 1.2% previously.

#### **Important observations made by the WGC:**

- Faltering appetite in a country where gold is used in everything from investment to wedding gifts could drag further on global prices, already trading near their lowest level in 7-weeks.
- In the short-term at least, the new tax may pose challenges for the industry. Small-scale artisans and retailers with varying degrees of tax compliance may struggle to adapt.
- A government move to ban cash transactions more than ₹200,000 (\$3,090) from April 1 could also hurt gold demand in rural areas where farmers often purchase the metal using cash.

### **About World Gold Council:**

The World Gold Council is the market development organisation for the gold industry. It works across all parts of the industry, from gold mining to investment, and their aim is to stimulate and sustain demand for gold.

- The World Gold Council is an association whose members comprise the world's leading gold mining companies. It helps to support its members to mine in a responsible way and developed the Conflict Free Gold Standard.
- Headquartered in the UK, they have offices in India, China, Singapore, Japan and the United States.

### **SC questions EC reluctance to use VVPAT**

The Supreme Court has questioned the Election Commission on its reluctance to use voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) units with electronic voting machines for the Gujarat Assembly polls in 2017, warning the poll panel against making excuses and compelling the court to force its hand.

### **Background:**

This was based on a petition appealing against a Gujarat High Court order dismissing a plea to direct the commission to implement the VVPAT voting mechanism in the Gujarat polls or otherwise use ballot papers to ensure a transparent, free and fair election.

### **What is VVPAT?**

VVPAT stands for Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail. VVPAT system maintains a physical trail of all votes cast. Small slips of paper records the details of the vote. The Election Commission (EC) first introduced VVPAT in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

### **How is it related to EVMs?**

When a vote is cast on the electronic voting machine, a small paper slip bearing the name and symbol of the candidate is generated. This paper appears for about 10 seconds. The slip will then automatically fall in a sealed safe box, attached to the EVM, thus maintaining a physical paper trail of all the votes cast.

### **SC gives government six months to show results of PM's crop insurance scheme**

Observing that the issue of rising farmer suicides cannot be dealt with 'overnight', the Supreme Court has said the long-term strategy adopted by the Central government in this regard needs time for implementation and to show effective results. Therefore, the Supreme Court has given the central government six months time to demonstrate **the gains of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana** on the ground level.

### **Background:**

Expressing concern over the suicides, the SC had early this year asked the government to come up with a concrete road map to eliminate the reasons for the agrarian crisis. A PIL had sought the top court's intervention in Gujarat where between 2003 and 2012, 692 farmers had allegedly committed suicide. The PIL is seeking compensation to the families of the debt-ridden farmers who had committed suicide because of serious financial difficulties.

- The PIL filed in 2013 had originally dealt with farmer suicides only in Gujarat where, according to the plea, 692 farmers had committed suicide between 2003 and 2012. But in January this year, the Supreme Court expanded the ambit of the petition to cover the whole country.
- Incidents of debt-ridden farmers committing suicides have seen a rise. Several state governments have written off loans as farmers battle mounting debts, failing crops and crashing prices. According to the NCRB's 2014 report, 5,650 farmers had committed suicides in that year. Maharashtra reported the highest suicides at 2,568 followed by Telangana with 898 and Madhya Pradesh with 826.

#### **Efforts by government in this regard:**

- The government informed the court that various schemes have covered about 40% farmers so far and the government will ensure that it reached at least half of India's farmers by 2018-19. The court recorded that out of total 5.34 crore, 12 crore farmers were covered under the government schemes.
- Efforts are also being taken at multiple levels to ensure protection to farmers. Almost 30% farm land has been covered under the crop insurance scheme and the figure will substantially rise by the end of 2018.
- The government has also acknowledged that there were deficiencies in making the schemes fully operational.

#### **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana:**

The scheme aims to reduce the premium rates to be paid by the farmers so as to enable more farmers avail insurance cover against crop loss on account of natural calamities.

- Under the scheme, farmers will have to pay a uniform premium of 2% for all kharif crops and 1.5% for all rabi crops. For annual commercial and horticultural crops, farmers will have to pay a premium of 5%. The remaining share of the premium, as in previous schemes, will continue to be borne equally by the Centre and the respective state governments.
- Under PMFBY, there will be no upper limit on government subsidy and even if balance premium is 90%, it will be borne by the government. Earlier, there was a provision of capping the premium rate which resulted in low claims being paid to farmers. This capping was done to limit government outgo on the premium subsidy. This capping has now been removed and farmers will get claim against full sum insured without any reduction.
- Under the scheme, the use of technology will be encouraged to a great extent. Smart phones will be used to capture and upload data of crop cutting to reduce the delays in claim payment to farmers. Remote sensing will be used to reduce the number of crop cutting experiments.
- The new Crop Insurance Scheme will also seek to address a long standing demand of farmers and provide farm level assessment for localised calamities including hailstorms, unseasonal rains, landslides and inundation.

#### **Mauritius keeps tax treaty with India outside purview of MLI**

Mauritius has notified 23 of its tax treaties for modification by OECD's Multilateral Instrument (MLI) to implement tax treaty-related measures to prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS). However, it has

kept its double taxation avoidance treaty with India out of the purview of the global agreement that seeks to prevent companies from avoiding taxes.

- The move to exclude India is expected to address the concerns of overriding impact of MLI on the revised tax treaty between India and Mauritius.

#### **Implications of this move:**

- Mauritius' move to keep the bilateral tax treaty with India outside the covered agreements for MLI would mean that the terms of MLI would not apply to any transaction entered between tax residents of India and Mauritius.
- This also indicates that the tax treaty related BEPS measures will not impact investments in India routed through Mauritius, particularly the grandfathering of investments provided through the amendment to the bilateral tax treaty in May 2016.

#### **Know about MLI:**

The multilateral instrument (MLI) is a legal instrument designed to prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) by multinational enterprises.

- BEPS refers to tax avoidance strategies that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules to artificially shift profits to low or no-tax locations.
- The MLI allows jurisdictions to transpose results from the OECD/G20 BEPS project, including minimum standards to implement in tax treaties, to prevent treaty abuse and “treaty shopping”, into their existing networks of bilateral tax treaties in a quick and efficient manner.
- It was developed through inclusive negotiations involving more than 100 countries and jurisdictions, under a mandate delivered by G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors at their February 2015 meeting.
- **The OECD is the depository of the MLI** and is supporting Governments in the process of signature, ratification and implementation.

#### **Garib Nawaz Skill Development Centres:**

- The government is planning to establish Garib Nawaz Skill Development Centres in 100 districts of the country.
- These centres will effectively ensure employment oriented skill development of youth belonging to Minority communities.
- In next six months, Garib Nawaz Skill Development Centres, providing job oriented skill training in various fields, will be established in Hyderabad, Noida, Lucknow, Jaipur, Nagpur, Aurangabad, Bhopal, Indore etc.

#### **India slips to be 4th largest investor into UK:**

India has slipped by one spot to become the fourth-largest foreign investor into the UK. India shares the fourth spot with Australia and New Zealand, which also set up 127 projects collectively. The US remains on the top, investing in 577 projects in the UK, with China (including Hong Kong) remaining in second place with 160 projects.

#### **National ST Commission to take action on video films of Jaravas on YouTube**

Taking suo-moto cognizance of objectionable video films and pictures of protected Jarava and other tribal communities of Andaman Islands on YouTube social media platform, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribe (NCST) has initiated action on it.

- The commission has decided to take up the matter with Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Tribal Affairs and Chief Secretary of A&N Island for removal of these objectionable video films from YouTube and initiate action on those who uploaded these video clips on social media platform.

### **Laws protecting these tribes:**

As per provisions of **Andaman and Nicobar Island (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956 (PAT)**, the Andamanese, Jarawas, Onges, Sentinelese, Nicobarese and Shom Pens have been identified as “aboriginal tribes”.

- The PAT contains the provisions of protection of these communities from the outside interference.
- Penalty provisions for promoting tourism through advertisement relating to aboriginal tribes has also been made in the year 2012.
- Whoever enters these areas in contravention of the notification under section 7 (which prohibits entry into reserve areas) for taking photographs or making videos shall be punishable with imprisonment up to three years.
- Besides, Section 3 (i) (r) of the Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities Act) also accords protection.

### **About NCST:**

NCST was established by amending Article 338 and inserting a new Article 338A in the Constitution through the Constitution (89th Amendment) Act, 2003. By this amendment, the erstwhile National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was replaced by two separate Commissions namely- (i) the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), and (ii) the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST).

- The term of office of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and each member is three years from the date of assumption of charge. The Chairperson has been given the rank of Union Cabinet Minister and the Vice-Chairperson that of a Minister of State and other Members have the ranks of a Secretary to the Government of India.
- NCST is empowered to investigate and monitor matters relating to safeguards provided for STs under the Constitution or under other laws or under Govt. order. The Commission is also authorized to inquire into specific complaints relating to rights and safeguards of STs and to participate and advise in the Planning Process relating to socio-economic development of STs and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union and States.
- The commission submits its report to the President annually on the working of safeguards and measures required for effective implementation of Programmes/ Schemes relating to welfare and socio-economic development of STs.

### **NSG organises first International Aviation Security seminar**

NSG has organised the first International Aviation Security seminar. National Security Guard (NSG) has organised the seminar, with the aim of bringing all major stakeholders under one roof and facilitate them sharing views/opinion, discussions, brain storming with the matters concerning Aviation Security.

### **About NSG:**

It is a security force of India constituted “for combating terrorist activities with a view to protect States against internal disturbances“.

- It was set up in 1984 as a Federal Contingency Deployment Force to tackle all facets of terrorism in the country.
- It is under the authority Ministry of Home Affairs.
- The force is a unique combination of personnel on deputation from Indian Army and Central Armed Police Forces.

- The two components of NSG are **the Special Action Group (SAG)**, which consists entirely of Indian Army personnel; and **the Special Ranger Groups (SRG)**, which comprises personnel drawn from Central Armed Police Forces and State Police Forces.
- The chief of the force designated as a Director General is an officer from the Indian Police Service.

### **First Maize Based Mega Food Park in Kapurthala, Punjab**

The foundation stone for First Maize based Mega Food Park was recently laid in Kapurthala, Punjab. **Kapurthala has been declared as a Dark Zone district** where slow desertification is happening because of overexploitation of water due to cash crops. Establishment of this Mega Food Park will result in the development of this Dark Zone which includes Job opportunities, Environmental Conservation.

### **Significance of Maize based Mega food park:**

Maize is an amazing cereal and is an alternate to Jhona (paddy) and Kanak (wheat). Maize is rich in protein, provides nutritional requirements that India needs and Maize consumes much lesser water and could contain the problem of further water depletion.

- Maize Based Mega Food Park is the first major and serious step in the history of India for containing the desertification problem of Punjab and would make farmers turn to maize cultivation which need less water for more production.
- Maize is being used by different industries for seed, starch, brewery, food additives, sweeteners etc and it is also a basic raw material to thousands of industrial products like oil, proteins, pharmaceutical, cosmetics, beverages, film, textile, gum, value added foods, paper industries, bio-ethanol etc.

### **About Mega Food Parks:**

To give a major boost to the food processing sector by adding value and reducing food wastage at each stage of the supply chain with particular focus on perishables, Ministry of Food Processing Industries is implementing Mega Food Park Scheme in the country.

The Scheme of Mega Food Park aims at providing a mechanism to link agricultural production to the market by bringing together farmers, processors and retailers so as to ensure maximizing value addition, minimizing wastages, increasing farmers' income and creating employment opportunities particularly in rural sector.

### **Mode of operation:**

- The Scheme has a cluster based approach based on a hub and spokes model. It includes creation of infrastructure for primary processing and storage near the farm in the form of Primary Processing Centres (PPCs) and Collection Centres (CCs) and common facilities and enabling infrastructure at Central Processing Centre (CPC).
- The PPCs are meant for functioning as a link between the producers and processors for supply of raw material to the Central Processing Centres.
- CPC has need based core processing facilities and basic enabling infrastructure to be used by the food processing units setup at the CPC. The minimum area required for a CPC is 50 acres.
- The scheme is demand-driven and would facilitate food processing units to meet environmental, safety and social standards.

### **Scheme for IPR Awareness – Creative India; Innovative India**

Taking forward the National Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy 2016, a 'Scheme for IPR Awareness – Creative India; Innovative India' has been launched by Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) under the aegis of the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion.

### **Key facts:**

- The Scheme aims at raising IPR awareness amongst students, youth, authors, artists, budding inventors and professionals to inspire them to create, innovate and protect their creations and inventions across India including Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3 cities as well as rural areas in the next 3 years.
- The Scheme will conduct over 4000 IPR awareness workshops/seminars in academic institutions (schools and colleges) and the industry ,including MSMEs and Startups, as also IP training and sensitization programmes for enforcement agencies and the judiciary.
- Workshops will cover all vital IP topics including international filing procedures, promotion of Geographical Indications and highlighting the ill effects of piracy and counterfeiting.

### **SEBI to move against non-compliant firms**

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has initiated action against non-compliant “Exclusively Listed Companies (ELCs) on Dissemination Board (DB),” and its directors and promoters.

### **Non- compliant firms:**

These are companies which were earlier listed on regional stock exchanges (RSEs) that have been de-recognised by the regulator. Such companies were allowed to be part of the national exchanges through a dissemination board but were directed to submit a plan of action for listing or providing an exit option to shareholders.

### **What’s the issue?**

These firms were supposed to submit their plan of action. The deadline to submit the plan of action was extended until June 30. As per SEBI, of the 2,000 companies listed on dissemination board as on June 30, there are 536 entities that are traceable and yet not submitted a plan of action.

### **SEBI’s powers to punish non- compliant firms:**

SEBI can bar such promoters and companies from accessing the securities market for a period of 10 years apart from freezing the shares held by promoters and directors. The regulator can even attach the bank accounts and other assets of promoters and directors to compensate the investors.

### **Background:**

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is the regulator for the securities market in India. It was established in the year 1988 and given statutory powers on 12 April 1992 through the SEBI Act, 1992.

### **Important functions performed by SEBI:**

- Approve by-laws of stock exchanges.
- Require the stock exchange to amend their by-laws.
- Inspect the books of accounts and call for periodical returns from recognized stock exchanges.
- Inspect the books of accounts of financial intermediaries.
- Compel certain companies to list their shares in one or more stock exchanges.
- Register brokers.

### **Centre eases pre-merger filing norms**

In a move that is likely to boost mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in the country, the Centre has done away with the thirty-day time period to submit before the Competition Commission of India (CCI) an application for pre-merger clearance.

- As per the latest notification, every person or enterprise who is a party to a combination is exempted from giving notice within thirty days. This new provision (exemption from the 30-day time period) will be valid for five years starting June 29, 2017.
- The notification means that parties can make a CCI application at any time in course of an acquisition but cannot effect or close an acquisition before obtaining the CCI's approval.

### **Background:**

The earlier norms had specified that an application to obtain the CCI's prior approval for an acquisition, merger or amalgamation had to be filed within thirty days of: board approval of the proposed merger or amalgamation by each of the respective parties; execution of any agreement or other document of a binding nature conveying a decision to acquire shares, control, voting rights or assets; execution of any document by the acquiring enterprise conveying a decision to acquire shares, control, voting rights or assets, in case the acquisition is without the consent of the enterprise being acquired; or date of the public announcement under India's takeover regulations applicable to acquisitions of listed entities.

### **Significance of this move:**

- It will give parties the liberty and flexibility to decide at what stage they want to make the CCI filing, depending on the deal parameters and commercial terms.
- Besides, this will specifically benefit large, multi-jurisdiction transactions where parties may be burdened with regulatory requirements in several jurisdictions and, therefore, need more time to assess the Indian law implications and prepare a comprehensive CCI application.

### **G20 Summit**

12<sup>th</sup> G20 Summit was recently held at the German city of Hamburg.

- The **theme chosen for this year's G20 Summit is "Shaping an Inter-connected World"**.
- Issues like free and open trade, migration, sustainable development and global stability came up during the discussions.

### **Action agenda at G20 to counter terrorism:**

India's PM presented an 11-point action agenda for counter-terrorism at the summit. The agenda includes:

- Deterrent action against nations supporting terrorism must be made compulsory, such nations should be barred from G20.
- G20 nations must exchange lists of suspected terrorists and their supporters.
- Legal processes such extradition should be simplified and expedited.
- Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism should be adopted soon.
- UNSC resolutions and other international processes should be effectively implemented.
- G20 nations should give emphasis to de-radicalisation programmes and exchange best practices.
- Terror financing should be curtailed by means of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and other means.
- Weapons and Explosive Action Task Force (WEATF) should be constituted on lines of FATF so that source of weapons to the terrorists is stopped.
- G20 nations should cooperate in cyber security, with a focus on terrorist activities.
- National Security Advisors on Counter Terrorism mechanism should be constituted.

## **G20:**

The 'Group of Twenty' is made up of 19 countries and the European Union. The countries are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the UK and the US.

The G20, with its ministerial-level beginnings in 1999, first met for a summit in 2008 in Washington to discuss ways to achieve balanced and sustainable world economic growth.

## **RBI considering setting up a Public Credit Registry**

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may consider setting up a Public Credit Registry (PCR), which will be an extensive database of credit information for India that is accessible to all stakeholders.

### **What is a PCR:**

Generally, a PCR is managed by a public authority like the central bank or the banking supervisor, and reporting of loan details to the PCR by lenders and/or borrowers is mandated by law. The contractual terms and outcomes covered and the threshold above which the contracts are to be reported vary in different jurisdictions, but the idea is to capture all relevant information in one large database on the borrower, in particular, the borrower's entire set of borrowing contracts and outcomes.

### **Advantages of having a PCR:**

A PCR, if put in place will help in credit assessment and pricing by banks; risk-based, dynamic and countercyclical provisioning at banks; supervision and early intervention by regulators; understanding if transmission of monetary policy is working.

### **How exactly a public credit registry can help in India?**

- Firstly, it is required to improve the credit culture in our country. It has been demonstrated in the 'Doing Business 2017' report that credit information systems impart transparency in the credit market, following which access to credit improves and delinquencies decrease. At present, several Indian banks burdened with mounting NPAs appear less confident in taking credit decisions. A transparent public credit registry would help the bankers to rely on objective data for making credit decisions and also enable them to defend their actions with market evidence when subjected to scrutiny.
- Secondly, large borrowers get a preference in credit markets due to their existing credentials in the public space. They have established credit history, brand value, and supply of collateral. In contrast, small and marginal aspirants, start-ups, new entrepreneurs, and small businesses in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector are disadvantaged as they lack many of those desired qualifications for credit. Transparency of credit information would serve as a "reputational collateral" for such borrowers. This would not only help promote financial inclusion, but also reward the good borrowers thereby imparting credit discipline.
- Thirdly, public credit registers in many countries have gone beyond the credit relationship of borrowing entities with financial institutions. They tap other transactional data of borrowers including payments to utilities like power and telecom for retail customers and trade credit data for businesses.
- Finally, public credit registry can have a profound impact for regulatory purposes. In its absence, only fragmented images are available of credit behaviour and indebtedness. PCR will help in getting to a complete picture that is necessary for supervisors and policy makers to assess credit risk of the entire system.

### **SC stays HC verdict on Ganga status**

The Supreme Court has stayed the Uttarakhand High Court order according the status of “living human entity” to Ganga and Yamuna rivers.

- The order came on a plea by the Uttarakhand government against the March 20 ruling of the high court. The petition said the high court verdict raised several legal questions and administrative issues.

### **Uttarakhand HC’s order:**

The order issued in exercise of parens patrie (authority regarded as legal protector of citizens who are unable to protect themselves) jurisdiction said “the rivers Ganga and Yamuna, all their tributaries, streams, every natural water flowing with flow continuously or intermittently of these rivers, are declared as juristic/legal persons/living entities having the status of a legal person with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a living person in order to preserve and conserve river Ganga and Yamuna”.

It also declared the Director of the Namami Gange project, the Chief Secretary of Uttarakhand and the Advocate General of the state “loco parents” — the human faces to protect, conserve and preserve the rivers and their tributaries. These officers were bound to uphold the status of the rivers Ganges and Yamuna and also to promote the health and well-being of these rivers.

### **Concerns:**

The order had put the state government in a quandary. Since the rivers flow through several states, only the Centre could frame rules for their management. The ruling also raised questions like whether the victim of a flood in the rivers can sue the state for damages and also about whether the state and its officers will be liable in case of pollution in the rivers in another state through which it flows.

### **UNESCO puts Hebron on endangered heritage list, outraging Israel:**

The U.N. cultural agency has declared the old city in the West Bank town of Hebron as a Palestinian world heritage site, a decision that outraged Israeli officials who say the move negated the deep Jewish ties to the biblical town and its ancient shrine.

The move was the latest chapter in Israel’s contentious relationship with UNESCO, an agency it accuses of being an anti-Israeli tool that makes decisions out of political considerations.

About Hebron:

- Hebron is part of the West Bank, a territory captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war. The international community considers it to be occupied.
- Palestinians claim the West Bank is an integral part of a future independent state, a position that is widely backed internationally. Israel says the territory’s fate, along with other core issues like security, should be resolved in negotiations.
- Both Jews and Muslims revere the same site in Hebron as the traditional burial place of the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs — Jews call it the Tomb of the Patriarchs, while for Muslims it is the Ibrahim Mosque.

### **President unveils online education portal Swayam**

President of India Shri Pranab Mukherjee recently launched the SWAYAM, the portal that takes high quality education to the doorstep of everyone and the SWAYAM Prabha – the 32 DTH channels operationalised for telecasting high quality educational content free of charge using the GSAT-15 satellite transponders.

### **What you need to know about Swayam?**

With the launch of SWAYAM, India has become one of the few countries in the World which has **its own online interactive learning platform that provides, not only video lectures, reading material but also assignments/quizzes that could end up in securing credits after completing the assessment system.**

- More than 400 Courses are available on SWAYAM covering all the engineering and non-engineering subjects at undergraduate and post-graduate levels.
- The UGC has already issued Regulation that allows transfer of credits earned through the courses done through SWAYAM into the academic record of the students.
- It is now possible for the students and others to take courses of the prestigious IITs or IIMs without formally studying there.
- The platform has been **constructed by Microsoft** with totally indigenous efforts.

### **What you need to know about Swayam Prabha?**

The SWAYAM Prabha channels are available **for free for anyone who has a set top box to receive either DD Free Dish or DishTV.** These channels transmit 4 hours of fresh content every day, and contain lectures from the best teachers in the Country. There is no monthly charge for viewing these channels. These channels include the IIT-PAL channels which were intended to help students taking the prestigious JEE examination, taught by the IIT faculty.

### **World Petroleum Congress at Istanbul, Turkey**

**The 22nd World Petroleum Congress (WPC) International Conference has begun at Istanbul, Turkey.** India is also taking part in the conference.

### **What you need to know about WPC conference?**

**The tri-annual WPC Conference is widely recognized as the `Olympics` of the oil and gas industry.**

- It attracts Ministers, CEOs of Oil and Gas MNCs, experts and academics from the hydrocarbon sectors and provides an ideal forum to showcase potential of countries' hydrocarbon sector.
- It also provides a platform to interact with policy makers, technologists, scientists, planners and management experts.

### **New drugs needed against hard-to-treat gonorrhoea: UN**

Antibiotic resistance is making gonorrhoea harder and sometimes even impossible to treat, according to a new warning from the World Health Organization (WHO). Therefore, a new drug may be urgently needed to treat the disease.

#### **Background:**

Nearly 80 million people are infected with the disease every year. Among these, doctors are finding more and more cases of infection untreatable by all known antibiotics.

### **What you need to know about Gonorrhoea?**

Gonorrhoea, also called "**the clap**", is a disease caused by bacteria. Untreated, it can cause painful pelvic inflammation in women, and infertility in both genders. In extreme cases, the bacteria can spread in the blood to cause life-threatening infections in other parts of the body.

Symptoms of infection include painful urination and abnormal discharge, but many will experience no symptoms at all.

### **What's the concern?**

Gonorrhoea resistance to penicillin and tetracycline, a common broad-spectrum antibiotic, first emerged in the 1970s in Asia, spreading to the rest of the world during the early 1980s, according to the WHO.

- Resistance to the next level antibiotic, ciprofloxacin, developed in the mid-2000s. A third generation of drugs called cephalosporins — orally-administered cefixime and injectable ceftriaxone — then came into use.
- But resistance to cefixime — and more rarely to ceftriaxone — has now been reported in more than 50 countries. These are so-called multi-drug resistant (MDR) strains.

### **How bacteria become resistant?**

Bacteria can become resistant to drugs when people take incorrect doses of antibiotics. Resistant strains can also be contracted directly from animals, water and air, or other people. When the most common antibiotics fail to work, more expensive types must be tried, resulting in longer illness and treatment.

### **G-20 leaders propose Hamburg Action Plan at summit conclusion**

The two-day G-20 summit that took place in Germany's Hamburg city ended with the leaders proposing the **Hamburg Action Plan** to address major global challenges, including climate change, harnessing digitalisation, and to contribute to prosperity and well-being.

### **Highlights of the action plan:**

- The leaders pledged to progress towards their joint objective in the G20, which is strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth. They resolved to tackle common challenges to the global community, including terrorism, displacement, poverty, hunger and health threats, job creation, climate change, energy security, and inequality including gender inequality, as a basis for sustainable development and stability.
- In order to improving sustainable livelihoods, the G-20 leaders collectively committed to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions through, among others, increased innovation on sustainable and clean energies and energy efficiency, and work towards low greenhouse-gas emission energy systems.
- The Leaders of the other G-20 members also agreed that the Paris Agreement is irreversible reiterated the importance of fulfilling the UNFCCC commitment by developed countries in providing means of implementation including financial resources to assist developing countries with respect to both mitigation and adaptation actions in line with Paris outcomes.
- The leaders stressed on the importance of harnessing the benefits of globalisation, reaffirm the importance of transparency for predictable and mutually beneficial trade relations, harness digitalisation to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- The leaders underlined to boost employment by improving sustainable global supply chains, which have been recognised as an important source of job creation and balanced economic growth.
- The leaders resolved to make a resilient global financial system in agreed international standards, to support sustainable growth.
- The G-20 leaders also called for safeguarding against health crises and strengthening health systems. The leaders called on the United Nations to keep global health high on the political agenda and strive for cooperative action to strengthen health systems worldwide, including through developing the health workforce.
- The leaders also stressed on combatting Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR), which is a growing threat to public health and economic growth.

### **India ranks 23rd in second Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) 2017**

The UN telecommunications agency, **International Telecommunication Union (ITU)**, recently released its second edition of the **Global Cybersecurity Index (CGI)** which ranks countries of the world depending on their national policy against cybercrime — which ascertains their cybersecurity commitment.

### **What you need to know about the Global Cybersecurity index?**

The Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) is a multi-stakeholder initiative to measure the commitment of countries to cybersecurity. Cybersecurity has a wide field of application that cuts across many industries and sectors. Each country's level of development will therefore be analyzed within five categories: Legal Measures, Technical Measures, Organizational Measures, Capacity Building and Cooperation.

### **Performance of India:**

The index has placed **India at a high 23rd position**. India is ranked 23rd on the index with a score of 0.683 and has been listed in the **“maturing” category**. Maturing category refers to 77 countries that have developed complex commitments to cyber security and engage in cyber security programmes and initiatives.

### **Way ahead:**

The findings show that there is “space for further improvement in cooperation” at all levels. The report advocates for encouraging governments to consider national policies that take into account cybersecurity and encourage private citizens to make smart decisions online.

### **122 countries adopt global treaty banning nuclear weapons**

A global treaty banning nuclear weapons was recently adopted at the United Nations. The treaty was adopted by a vote of 122 in favour with one country — NATO member The Netherlands voting against —while Singapore abstained.

### **Key facts:**

- Led by Austria, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa and New Zealand, 141 countries joined in drafting the treaty that they hope will increase pressure on nuclear states to take disarmament more seriously.
- The treaty prohibits a full range of nuclear-weapon related activities, such as undertaking to develop, test, produce, manufacture, acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, as well as the use or threat of use of these weapons.
- None of the nine countries that possess nuclear weapons — the United States, Russia, Britain, China, France, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel — took part in the negotiations or the vote.
- Even Japan — the only country to have suffered atomic attacks, in 1945 — boycotted the talks as did most NATO countries.

### **Why is it being opposed?**

Nuclear powers argue their arsenals serve as a deterrent against a nuclear attack and say they remain committed to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). They said a purported ban on nuclear weapons that does not address the security concerns which continue to make nuclear deterrence necessary cannot result in the elimination of a single nuclear weapon and will not enhance any country's security, nor international peace and security.

### **“Programme 17 for 17”:**

- It is a 17 point action plan for 2017 – for building digital campuses and high quality education.

- The action plan covers measures like universal adoption of digital education, digital financial transactions in the campuses from the current academic year.
- It was adopted at the end of the recently concluded National Convention of Vice Chancellors of all Universities in the Country, and Heads of IISc/IITs/IIMs/NITs/IITs.

### **Ahmedabad gets World Heritage City tag:**

The 606-year-old walled city of Ahmedabad, which was founded by **Sultan Ahmed Shah**, has become **India's first World Heritage City**. The World Heritage Committee (WHC) of UNESCO announced this. Ahmedabad is recognized the city as the cradle of India's non-violent freedom struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi.

- The decision was taken during the ongoing 41st session of the World Heritage Committee in the Polish city of Krakow, which acknowledged the preservation efforts made by the city in keeping its historical fabric intact.
- The city's historic characteristics include densely-packed traditional houses ('pols') in gated traditional streets ('puras') with features such as bird feeders, public wells and religious institutions.
- The Walled City of Ahmedabad will now join the likes of Paris, Cairo, and Edinburgh. Of the 287 World Heritage Cities across the globe, only two were hitherto on the Indian subcontinent: Bhaktapur in Nepal and Galle in Sri Lanka. The Unesco tag will add immense brand value to the city and boost tourism.

### **Saint Mother Teresa's blue-bordered sari an Intellectual Property:**

The famous blue-bordered sari of Mother Teresa, who has been canonised as Saint Teresa of Calcutta by the Vatican, has been recognised as an Intellectual Property of the Missionaries of Charity. The Trade Marks Registry, Government of India, has granted the registration of the trade mark for that pattern of blue border of sari.

### **India to join new global foreign exchange committee**

India will soon get a seat on **the Global Foreign Exchange Committee (GFXC)**, a newly-constituted forum of central bankers and experts working towards promotion of a robust and transparent forex market.

- The newly expanded and formalised GFXC, which will meet regularly, replaces a similar but more informal organisation of eight foreign exchange committees — namely those from Australia, Canada, Euro area, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, UK and the US.
- The GFXC will also now include representatives from existing, or soon to be established, foreign exchange committees or similar structures in Brazil, China, India, Korea, Mexico, South Africa, Sweden and Switzerland.

### **About GFXC:**

The Global Foreign Exchange Committee (GFXC) was established in May 2017 as a forum bringing together central banks and private sector participants with the aim to promote a robust, liquid, open, and appropriately transparent foreign exchange market in which a diverse set of participants, supported by resilient infrastructure, are able to confidently and effectively transact at competitive prices that reflect available information and in a manner that conforms to acceptable standards of behaviour.

The committee **has been set up under the guidance of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS)**, an international financial organisation owned by 60 member central banks, representing countries from around the world.

### **The objectives of the GFXC are:**

- To promote collaboration and communication among the local foreign exchange committees (FXCs) and non-GFEX jurisdictions with significant FX markets;
- To exchange views on trends and developments in global FX markets, including on the structure and functioning of those markets, drawing on information gathered at the various FXCs; and
- To promote, maintain and update on a regular basis the FX Global Code (the Code) and to consider good practices regarding effective mechanisms to support adherence.

### **Sri Lanka bans bottom-trawling**

Sri Lanka has banned the destructive fishing practice of bottom-trawling in their waters, making violators liable for a fine of LKR 50,000 (approximately ₹20,000) and face two years imprisonment. In this regard, an Amendment to the country's Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act was passed unanimously, in effect declaring the fishing method an offence.

#### **Why the ban?**

Bottom trawling is a destructive fishing practice which affects the marine ecosystem. The practice, which involves trawlers dragging weighted nets along the sea floor, is known to cause great depletion of fishery resources, and curbing it is in the interest of sustainable fishing.

#### **Concerns raised by Tamil Nadu:**

The development could directly impact a section of fishermen from Tamil Nadu, who engage in bottom-trawling and have often been found trespassing into Sri Lanka's territorial waters.

### **New sites get UNESCO heritage tag**

The United Nations' cultural agency has added 22 heritage treasures to its list of World Heritage sites. The additions come as the agency meets in Poland for an 11-day session to nominate new locations in need of protection and reviews the status and well-being of existing designated sites.

- The UNESCO designation, which recognizes the outstanding universal values of the sites, is meant to draw attention to them and the need to preserve them.

#### **New additions:**

The UNESCO World Heritage List Committee designated Britain's Lake District, the Baden-Wuerttemberg caves in Germany, and the modernist architecture in Asmara — the capital city of Eritrea — to the roster of places with special recognition.

- Among the other new sites on the UNESCO list are: the underground mines in Tarnowskie Gory in Poland, the historic city of Yazd, in Iran; Japan's sacred and restricted-access island of Okinoshima, and Los Alerces National Park in Argentina.
- Also added were Turkey's 3rd century B.C. Aphrodisias temple and the Valongo Wharf Archeological Site in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

#### **UNESCO world heritage site:**

A UNESCO World Heritage Site is a place that is listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as of special cultural or physical significance.

- The list is maintained by the international World Heritage Programme administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 UNESCO member states which are elected by the General Assembly.
- Each World Heritage Site remains part of the legal territory of the state wherein the site is located and UNESCO considers it in the interest of the international community to preserve each site.

### **Committee formed to study legalities for separate State flag**

The Karnataka State government has constituted a nine-member committee headed by Principal Secretary, Department of Kannada and Culture, to study and submit a report to the government on the possibility of “designing a separate flag for Karnataka and providing it a statutory standing.”

#### **Background:**

Recently, some activists had urged the government to design a separate flag for Kannada ‘naadu’ and accord statutory standing for that.

#### **Are states permitted to have their own flags?**

In S.R. Bommai v/s Union of India (Supreme Court 1994) case, the Supreme Court has declared that federalism is a basic feature of the Constitution and States are supreme in their sphere. This being the Constitutional position, there is no prohibition in the Constitution for the State to have its own flag. However, the manner in which the State flag is hoisted should not dishonour the national flag. It has to be always below the national flag. The national flag code specifically authorises use of other flags subject to the regulation by the court. So, State flag is not unauthorised.

#### **MoHUA is the new name for urban development & housing ministry:**

The government has merged the urban development and housing and urban poverty alleviation ministries. Now this will be known as Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA). The merger would help ensure cohesiveness in formulating policies related to urban issues and cut the flab in bureaucracy. With this merger, the government now has 51 ministries.

#### **Malabar 2017:**

- Navies of India, US and the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force have begun Malabar naval exercise 2017, aimed at achieving deeper military ties between the three nations. It is the 21st edition of the Malabar exercise.
- It is the fourth consecutive year Japan’s Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF) has taken part in the Malabar Exercise, conducted annually by the US and India in the Bay of Bengal since 1992.
- The exercise, conducted ashore and at-sea, would include professional exchanges on carrier strike group operations, maritime patrol and reconnaissance operations, surface and anti-submarine warfare. Medical operations, damage control, explosive ordinance disposal, helicopter operations and anti-submarine warfare would also take place.

#### **IROAF wins Golden Peacock Award for Eco Innovation for the year 2017:**

Indian Railways Organization for Alternate Fuel (IROAF) has won **the Golden Peacock Award for Eco Innovation for the year 2017 for Eco-Innovation** for substitution of fossil fuels (Diesel) by environment friendly CNG in DEMU passenger train services. Use of CNG in Train Sets for passenger transportation has been done for the first time in the world.

- **Golden Peacock Awards**, instituted by the Institute Of Directors (IOD), India in 1991, are now regarded as a benchmark of Corporate Excellence worldwide. Golden Peacock awards have become a hallmark of excellence, both locally & globally. Based on internationally recognised criteria, the credibility of these awards lies in the transparency depth & impartiality of the assessment process.

- **IROAF** is a unique organization in the Government space which was established by Ministry of Railways to explore new environment friendly fuels/ renewable energy and eco- friendly technologies like substitution of diesel with CNG/LNG in train sets, replacing acetylene/LPG by CNG/LNG for metal cutting in Railway Workshops, proliferating and promoting use of Bio-Diesel in Railway Locomotives etc.
- The organization is a premier single window agency of Indian Railways to work as a knowledge base and explore and prove out new fuels and technologies for Indian Railways with a view to being down Indian Railways fuel bill and at the same time achieve a shift towards greener fuels / renewable energy sources for a sustainable future.

### **Aaykar Setu:**

It is an app launched by the CBDT that allows entities track TDS, pay taxes and apply for permanent account number (PAN). It will also help people link their 12-digit biometric identifier Aadhaar with PAN card. ‘Aaykar Setu’ literally means taxpayer’s bridge.

### **SC stays cattle sale rules across nation**

The Supreme Court has stayed centre’s May 26<sup>th</sup> notification banning the sale of cattle in livestock markets for slaughter and religious sacrifices. The order came after the centre accepted that public outcry and objections from the states about the law’s impact on livelihoods made it realise that the rules need tweaking.

- The court was taking up a bunch of petitions challenging the amendments to the rules framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

### **What’s the issue?**

The centre, on May 26<sup>th</sup>, notified **the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Market) Rules, 2017**. The notification banned **the sale of cattle in livestock market for slaughter and religious sacrifices**. This had dismayed cattle traders, butchers and beef eaters. Farmers were also hit as they were also barred from selling non-milch and ageing cattle thus being deprived of their traditional incomes. Various states too opposed the notification saying that it would impact the livelihoods of many.

- The validity of the rules was challenged in various high courts and the SC. The Madurai bench of Madras HC had stayed the rules.

### **Way ahead:**

The centre has acknowledged that the law needs some tweaking keeping in mind the concerns raised by various stakeholders. It has also clarified that tweaking does not mean repeal. It would shortly come out with necessary amendments.

### **Earth facing sixth mass extinction**

The sixth mass extinction of life on Earth is unfolding more quickly than feared, scientists have warned. Scientists call this as a case of biological annihilation occurring globally.

- Globally, the mass die-off — deemed to be the sixth in the last half-billion years — is the worst since three-quarters of life on the Earth, including the non-avian dinosaurs, were wiped out 66 million years ago by a giant meteor impact. On an average, two vertebrate species disappear every year.

### **Supporting data:**

- More than 30% of animals with a backbone — fish, birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals — are declining in both range and population.
- The mammal species that were monitored have lost at least a third of their original habitat. 40% of them — including rhinos, orangutans, gorillas and many big cats — are surviving on 20% or less of the land they once roamed. The loss of biodiversity has recently accelerated.
- Several species of mammals that were relatively safe one or two decades ago are now endangered, including cheetahs, lions and giraffes. There are as few as 20,000 lions left in the wild, less than 7,000 cheetahs, 500 to 1,000 giant pandas, and about 250 Sumatran rhinoceros.
- Tropical regions have seen the highest number of declining species. In South and Southeast Asia, large-bodied species of mammals have lost more than four-fifths of their historical ranges.
- While fewer species are disappearing in temperate zones, the percentage is just as high or higher. As many as half of the number of animals that once shared our planet are no longer here, a loss described as “a massive erosion of the greatest biological diversity in the history of Earth”.

### **Factors behind the loss?**

The main drivers of wildlife decline are habitat loss, overconsumption, pollution, invasive species, disease, as well as poaching in the case of tigers, elephants, rhinos and other large animals prized for their body parts. Climate change is poised to become a major threat in the coming decades.

### **5 States, a UT sign pact with Centre on e-Marketplace**

In a spirit of cooperative federalism, 5 States and a Union Territory (UT) have formally adopted the Centre’s initiative called the Government e-Marketplace (GeM).

- The States and the UT that signed an MoU with the Centre include Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Telangana, Puducherry and Arunachal Pradesh.

### **What you need to know about GeM?**

It aims to ensure that public procurement of goods and services in India worth more than Rs. 5 lakh crore annually is carried out through the online platform for transparency and to eliminate corruption.

- It aims to transform the way in which procurement of goods and services is done by the Government Ministries/Departments, PSUs, autonomous bodies etc.
- DGS&D with technical support of NeGD (MeitY) has developed GeM portal for procurement of both Products & Services.
- GeM is a completely paperless, cashless and system driven e-market place that enables procurement of common use goods and services with minimal human interface.

### **U.S. may tighten rules for foreign students**

US is planning to tighten rules for foreign students. A proposal is under consideration by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

- The proposal is part of an ongoing review of the immigration policy to ensure that it “promotes the national interest, enhances national security and public safety and ensures the integrity of our immigration system.”

### **Current regulations:**

Under current regulations, international students can stay in the U.S. as long as they are enrolled for a programme. Students who enter the U.S on F-1 visas are issued an entry document with an end date that states “duration of stay”, which is theoretically open-ended. They can stay as long as they have a valid I-20 document, which is issued by the university, with all details regarding the student’s programme of study,

financing, etc. They can also move from one programme to another and from one institution to another, by a notification to the DHS, based on a new I-20 document that the institution issues.

### **Implications of the new move:**

Foreign students in the United States may be required to reapply every year for permission to stay in the country. It will make their visa status time-bound. The proposed measures could increase costs and paper work for students and universities.

### **Implications for India:**

Since the proposal requires fees to be paid each time a student reapplies, it could make the U.S. a less attractive destination for students from India.

Indians are the fastest growing group among the international student population in the U.S. There are 1,66,000 students from India pursuing higher education in the U.S. now, up from about 1,00,000 two years earlier. A large majority of them pursue science, technology, engineering and math courses. Around 1.4 million international students are currently present in the U.S.

### **Sensor network to map and predict pollution, effluents in Godavari**

A group of U.S. researchers is working on a system to map undulating pollution trends in the Godavari, India's second longest river.

- Using a mix of methods, including satellite-monitoring, traversing stretches of the river to collect water samples and using special sensors to measure bacterial and chemical pollution, the researchers are trying to develop a cost-effective forecast system.
- Through cloud-based data collection and real-time mapping systems, the research and implementation teams intend to demonstrate the importance and value of detecting and anticipating pollutants that enter the river in the form of human waste, organic materials, and chemical contaminants.
- **The exercise is part of a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation project** to support the programme of the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) to provide city-wide sanitation improvements in urban Andhra Pradesh. Sensors to monitor river pollution are an emerging technological approach in India.

### **Objectives of the project:**

- The long-term objective is to be able to inform State officials and citizens of a probable spike in, say, levels of dangerous microbes or effluents, similar to weather and air pollution forecasts.
- Also, it is to be able to access “raw data” that could be used to inform the efficacy of a proposed faecal sludge treatment plant and whether behavioural interventions — including incentives or punishments — to restrict activities that pollute the river could actually work.

### **About Godavari River:**

The Godavari is **the second longest river** in India after the river Ganges having its source at Tryambakeshwar, Maharashtra.

- It starts in Maharashtra and flows east for 1,465 kilometres (910 mi) emptying into Bay of Bengal draining the Indian states Maharashtra (48.6%), Telangana(18.8%), Andhra Pradesh (4.5%), Chhattisgarh (10.9%), Madhya Pradesh (10.0%), Odisha (5.7%), Karnataka (1.4%) and Puducherry through its extensive network of tributaries.
- Measuring up to 312,812 km<sup>2</sup> (120,777 sq mi), it forms one of the largest river basins in the Indian subcontinent, with only the Ganges and Indus rivers having a drainage basin larger than it in India.
- Important tributaries include Pravara, Purna, Manjira, Pranhita, Indravati and Sabari.

### **India to celebrate Falun Gong:**

- Falun Gong, **the ancient Chinese holistic system that is banned in China**, will be celebrated in India on July 15 with a parade and Human Word Formation in the capital. The event would highlight the persecution against the practitioners in China. The practice is banned in China.
- Falun Gong is a Chinese spiritual practice that combines meditation and qigong exercises with a moral philosophy centered on the tenets of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance.
- The practice emphasizes morality and the cultivation of virtue, and identifies as a qigong practice of the Buddhist school, though its teachings also incorporate elements drawn from Taoist traditions.
- Through moral rectitude and the practice of meditation, practitioners of Falun Gong aspire to eliminate attachments, and ultimately to achieve spiritual enlightenment.

### **Pope Francis adds fourth path to sainthood:**

- Pope Francis has issued an apostolic letter **creating a new category — a fourth one — under which someone could possibly become a saint**. The pathway focuses on people who sacrifice their lives for others.
- The category added, called an oblatio vitae or a “free offering of one’s life” as described by the Vatican, involves people who freely accept an imminent death for the good of others.
- Previously, gaining consideration for sainthood in the Catholic Church took only three routes: martyrdom (dying for your faith); living a life of heroic, Christian values; or having a saintly and devout reputation. One of the most well-known figures to take one of those paths in recent times was humanitarian Mother Teresa, who was canonized as Saint Teresa of Calcutta in 2016.

### **Minimum qualifications for coop. societies’ polls:**

- **Rajasthan has become the country’s first State to lay down the minimum educational qualifications for contesting elections to village cooperative societies and various other cooperative bodies**. The State Cooperative Societies Rules, 2003, were amended for the purpose and notified.
- The educational qualifications will range from Class V to Class VIII for election as members of governing boards of dairy societies, farming societies, consumer societies, weavers’ societies, housing construction societies, urban banks, primary land development banks, credit societies, salary earners’ societies and cooperative unions.

### **CPWD reminded of challenges ahead as it turns 163**

The public sector construction major, Central Public Works Department (CPWD) turned 163 on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017. On this occasion, it was reminded of the challenges ahead and the need to innovate to retain its primacy.

#### **About CPWD:**

**CPWD came into existence in July, 1854 when Lord Dalhousie established a central agency for execution of public works and set up Ajmer Provincial Division**. It is housed under **the Ministry of Urban Development**.

- Through the professional expertise in disciplines including Architecture, Engineering, Project Management coupled with comprehensive experience in building construction and maintenance CPWD has been serving the nation for last 162 years and has executed priority of works in difficult and demanding geographical and climatic conditions.
- It is headed by DG who is also the Principal Technical Advisor to the Government of India. The regions and sub-regions are headed by Special DGs and Additional DGs respectively, while the zones in all state capitals (except a few) are headed by Chief Engineers.
- CPWD has PAN India presence and has ability to undertake construction of complex projects even in difficult terrain and maintenance in post construction stage.

- CPWD had been involved in construction of stadiums and other infrastructure requirements for Asian Games 1982 and Commonwealth Games 2010.

#### **CPWD consists of three wings in execution field:**

- B&R (Buildings and Roads).
- E&M (Electrical and Mechanical).

#### **Cabinet approves SASEC Road Connectivity Investment Program**

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Prime Minister has given its approval for upgradation and widening of 65 kms of Imphal-Moreh Section of NH-39 in Manipur. The project is being developed with ADB's loan assistance under the South Asian Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Road Connectivity Investment Program.

- **The project corridor is also a part of the Asian Highway No. 01 (AH01) and acts as India's Gateway to the East.** Thus trade, commerce and tourism in the region will get a boost.

#### **About SASEC:**

Established in 2001, the SASEC program is a project-based partnership to promote regional prosperity by improving cross-border connectivity, boosting trade among member countries and strengthening regional economic cooperation.

- **ADB is the secretariat and lead financier of the SASEC program**, which to date has supported a total of 46 projects worth \$9.17 billion in transport, trade facilitation, energy and information and communications technology (ICT).
- The SASEC OP, endorsed in June 2016 by the SASEC member countries, is SASEC's first comprehensive long-term plan to promote greater economic cooperation among the member countries in the areas of transport, trade facilitation, energy, and economic corridor development.
- Bringing regional cooperation to a higher level, the SASEC OP plans to extend physical linkages not only within SASEC but also with East and Southeast Asia by the next decade.

#### **Various Railways initiatives launched**

Following new railway initiatives were recently launched:

- RAIL CLOUD PROJECT.
- NIVARAN-Grievance Portal (First IT Application on Rail Cloud).
- Cashless treatment Scheme in Emergency (CTSE) Scheme and Handing over of 1st CTSE Card.

#### **RailCloud:**

Rail Cloud works on popular Cloud Computing system. Most Important works are done through Cloud Computing. Cloud Computing is the emerging technology for faster and on demand commensurate deployment of Server resources which result in reduced cost. It is developed by rail PSU RailTel.

#### **Potential benefits to Railways after implementation of RailCloud are:**

- Faster and on-demand deployment of application.
- Optimum use of Servers and storage.
- Utilization of existing infrastructure as part of Cloud.
- Rapid scalability and elasticity.
- IT Security enhancement and Standardization.
- Cost reduction.
- Better user experience.

### **NIVARAN-Grievance Portal:**

'NIVARAN-Grievance Portal' is the first IT application to be launched on the RailCloud. It is the platform for resolution of service related grievances of serving and former railway employees. The existing application was hosted on a conventional server; it has been made cloud-ready and being migrated as the first cloud application of Indian Railways. It will save significant revenue and at the same time user experience will also improve.

### **Cashless treatment Scheme in Emergency (CTSE):**

To provide immediate care to its retired employees in 'Golden Hour' Railway Board has decided to roll out a "Cashless treatment Scheme in Emergency" (CTSE), in empanelled hospitals, for retired employees and their dependent family members. A web based system of communication between private hospitals and railway authorities has been developed wherein identity of the beneficiary shall be established using biometrics stored in Aadhar (UIDAI) server, eligibility shall be determined using Railway Data Base and emergency shall be verified by Railway Medical Officer based on private hospital's clinical report. The whole system is online and even the bill processing shall be online. This scheme shall provide help and succor to the retired railway employees at the time of need and at the same time will have a morale boosting effect on the serving employees.

### **ISARC in Varanasi**

The Union Cabinet has approved the establishment of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), South Asia Regional Center (ISARC) at campus of National Seed Research and Training Center (NSRTC) in Varanasi.

- Under the proposal, a Centre of Excellence in Rice Value Addition (CERVA) will be set up in Varanasi. This will include a modern and sophisticated laboratory with capacity to determine quality and status of heavy metals in grain and straw. The Centre will also undertake capacity building exercises for stakeholders across the rice value chain.
- **This Center will be the first international Center in the eastern India** and it will play a major role in harnessing and sustaining rice production in the region. It is expected to be a boon for food production and skill development in the eastern India and similar ecologies in other South Asian and African countries.

### **Benefits from ISARC:**

The Centre will help in utilizing the rich biodiversity of India to develop special rice varieties. This will help India to achieve higher per hectare yields and improved nutritional contents. India's food and nutritional security issues will also be addressed. The Centre will support in adopting value chain based production system in the country. This will reduce wastage, add value and generate higher income for the farmers. The farmers in Eastern India will benefit in particular, besides those in South Asian and African countries.

### **Cabinet approves interpretative notes between India, Bangladesh**

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the Joint Interpretative Notes (JIN) on the agreement between India and Bangladesh for the promotion and protection of investments between the two countries.

- **The JIN includes** interpretative notes to be jointly adopted for many clauses, including, the definition of investor and investment, exclusion of taxation measures, Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET), National Treatment (NT) and Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment, expropriation, essential security interests and settlement of disputes between an investor and a contracting party.

### **Significance of the JIN:**

- Joint Interpretative Statements play an important supplementary role in strengthening the investment treaty regime. With increasing Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) disputes, issuance of such statements was likely to have strong persuasive value before tribunals.
- The JIN would impart clarity to the interpretation of the existing agreement between India and Bangladesh for the Promotion and Protection of Investments (BIPA).

### **China sends PLA unit to man overseas base**

China has dispatched People's Liberation Army (PLA) personnel to man its first overseas military base at Djibouti in the strategic Indian Ocean region, a move likely to spark concerns in the U.S.

#### **Base at Djibouti:**

The establishment of the PLA Djibouti base was a decision made by the two countries after friendly negotiations, and accords with the common interest of the people from both sides. The base is aimed at ensuring China's performance of missions, such as escorting, peace-keeping and humanitarian aid in Africa and West Asia.

The base will also conduct overseas tasks, including military cooperation, joint exercises, evacuating and protecting overseas Chinese and emergency rescue, as well as jointly maintaining security of international strategic seaways.

#### **Why is US worried?**

- Base at Djibouti is close to Camp Lemonnier. Established after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Camp Lemonnier is home to 4,000 personnel. Some are involved in highly secretive missions.
- Strategists worry that a naval port so close to Camp Lemonnier could provide a front-row seat to the staging ground for U.S. counterterrorism operations in the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa.
- The base, which is run by the Navy and abuts Djibouti's international airport, is the only permanent U.S. military installation in Africa.

#### **About Djibouti:**

Djibouti, officially the Republic of Djibouti, is a country located in the Horn of Africa. It is bordered by Eritrea in the north, Ethiopia in the west and south, and Somalia in the southeast. The remainder of the border is formed by the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden at the east.

#### **Bitcoin trade may come under SEBI**

The government is considering the introduction of a regulatory regime for virtual or crypto currencies, such as Bitcoin, that would enable the levy of the Goods and Services Tax on their sale.

- The new regime may possibly bring their trading under the oversight of the stock market regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

#### **Benefits of regulation of these currencies:**

Proper regulation of these currencies will "promote" a formal tax base, while keeping a tab on their use for illegal activities such as money laundering, terror funding and drug trafficking.

#### **What are cryptocurrencies?**

Crypto-currency that is planned to be brought under the regulatory regime is a digital currency which allows transacting parties to remain anonymous while confirming that the transaction is a valid one. It is not owned or controlled by any institution – governments or private.

There are multiple such currencies — bitcoin, ethereum, ripple are some of the popular ones. Currently, they are neither illegal nor legal in India.

### **Need for regulation:**

Cryptocurrencies have gained popularity in the last few years. Currently, they are neither illegal nor legal in many countries including India. The market cap for all crypto-currencies has just crossed \$100 billion, with most of the increase coming in the past few months. On April 1, 2017, the total market cap was just over \$25 billion, representing a 300% rise in just over 60 days. One bitcoin today is worth as much as 60 grams of gold.

### **Why banning cryptocurrencies altogether is not a good idea:**

Banning will give a clear message that all related activities are illegal and will disincetivise those interested in taking speculative risks. It will also impede tax collection on gains made in such activities and that regulating the currency instead would signal a boost to blockchain technology, encourage the development of a supervision ecosystem (that tracks legal activities and may also assist in tracking illegal activities) and promote a formal tax base.

### **Concerns associated with this move:**

However, the government is wary that regulation will provide legitimacy to “what is currently ambiguous,” and may lead to further rise in its valuation and end up contributing “to the investment bubble”.

### **Theatre Olympics:**

- India will host 8th Edition of Theatre Olympics ‘The Biggest Theatre Celebration of the World’ from February 17 – April 08, 2018.
- The Theatre Olympics, being held in India for the first time, is being organised by National School of Drama, under the aegis of Ministry of Culture.
- The **Theatre Olympics** was established in 1993 in Delphi, Greece, as the first international theatre festival. With the tagline ‘Crossing Millennia’, this is an initiative to connect the cultural past with the present and future, bringing the richness and diversity of theatre heritage to the experiments and research of contemporary theatre. The first country to host the Theatre Olympics was Greece in 1995

### **DIPP to set up India’s first TISC in Punjab**

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India, has signed an Institutional agreement with the Punjab State Council of Science and Technology to establish **India’s first Technology and Innovation Support Center (TISC) at Patent Information Centre, Punjab, under the World Intellectual Property Organization’s (WIPO) TISC program.**

### **Key facts:**

- **The Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) is designated as the National Focal Point for the TISC national network.**
- As the national focal point, CIPAM shall identify potential host institutions, assess their capacities and support them in joining the TISC program.
- CIPAM will also act as the main intermediary between WIPO and TISC host institutions and coordinate all the activities of the national TISC network.

- Over 500 TISCs operate worldwide and establishing TISC in India will give the host institutions an access to the global network.

### **What you need to know about TISC program?**

WIPO's Technology and Innovation Support Center (TISC) program provides **innovators in developing countries with access to locally based, high quality technology information and related services**, helping them to exploit their innovative potential and to create, protect, and manage their Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs).

The objective of the TISC is **to stimulate a dynamic, vibrant and balanced Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) system in India to foster creativity and innovation**, thereby promoting entrepreneurship and enhancing social, economic and cultural development by establishing a network of TISCs in India.

#### **Services offered by TISCs include:**

- Access to online patent and non-patent (scientific and technical) resources and IP-related publications.
- Assistance in searching and retrieving technology information.
- Training in database search.
- On-demand searches (novelty, state-of-the-art and infringement).
- Monitoring technology and competitors.
- Basic information on industrial property laws, management and strategy, and technology commercialization and marketing.

### **India ranks 116 out of 157 nations on SDG index**

The SDG index, that assesses the performance of countries towards achieving the ambitious sustainable development goals (SDGs), has been released for the year 2017

#### **Key facts on SDG index:**

- The SDG Index and Dashboards Report produced by **the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)** and the Bertelsmann Stiftung shows that world leaders need to strengthen their joint efforts to realise the 17 global goals.
- The SDG Index and Dashboard collect available data for 157 countries to assess where each country stands in 2017 with regard to achieving the SDGs.
- The SDG Index ranks countries based on their performance across the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

#### **Performance of countries:**

- **Sweden leads the list**, followed by Denmark and Finland. Among the G7 countries, only Germany and France can be found among the top ten performers.
- The United States ranks 42nd on the Index, while Russia and China rank 62nd and 71st respectively.
- **India is ranked 116th** on the index with a score of 58.1, behind countries such as Nepal, Iran, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and China. Pakistan is ranked 122.
- The countries which are closest to fulfilling the goals are not the biggest economies but comparably small, developed countries.
- Many of the richest countries in the world are nowhere near achieving the global policy objectives but also deteriorate the implementation process for poorer countries because of negative spillover effects.
- One of the greatest obstacles to achieving the global goals for high-income countries are poor performances regarding sustainable consumption and production. All countries that score lowest on electronic-waste generation, for example, are high-income countries.

- Not only does a rising trend of nationalism and protectionism impede the implementation of the goals, but as the report shows, industrialised countries are not serving as role models.

## **SDGs:**

The SDGs are a set of 17 goals and 169 targets aimed at resolving global social, economic and environmental problems. SDGs replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were adopted in 2000. Aiming to encompass almost every aspect of human life, the main themes of the SDGs are ending poverty, tackling inequality and combating climate change.

### **India Give Additional \$1 Million To United Nations Partnership Fund**

India has contributed an additional million dollars to a UN partnership fund launched to support sustainable development projects across the developing world.

- India had made an initial contribution of a million dollars when the fund was created and the amount was allocated for the implementation of a project benefiting seven Small Island Developing States in the South Pacific.

### **What you need to know about the India-UN Development Partnership Fund:**

The India-UN Development Partnership Fund was set up last month as a partnership between India and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC).

- Managed by UNOSSC, the fund will support Southern-owned and led, demand-driven, and transformational sustainable development projects across the developing world.
- **Focusing on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States**, United Nations agencies will implement the Fund's projects in close collaboration with partnering governments.
- The fund, launched by Minister of State for External Affairs MJ Akbar during the Oceans Conference at the world body's headquarters, prioritises reducing poverty and hunger, improving health, education and equality, and expanding access to clean water and energy.
- The first project under the fund was formulated by India and UNDP in consultation with the Governments of the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, the Solomon Islands and the Kingdom of Tonga.
- It will increase resilience to natural disasters in these seven Pacific island countries and contribute toward a Sustainable Development Goal of climate action.

### **Know about UNOSSC:**

The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) was established to promote, coordinate and support South-South and triangular cooperation globally and within the United Nations system.

UNOSSC, hosted by UNDP since 1974, was established by the UN General Assembly with a mandate to advocate for and coordinate South-South and triangular cooperation on a global and UN system-wide basis. UNOSSC receives policy directives and guidance from the General Assembly and through its subsidiary body, the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation. UNOSSC submits its strategic planning frameworks to the UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS Executive Board for approval and funding. The Director reports to the UNDP Administrator and has also been appointed Envoy of the Secretary-General on South-South Cooperation.

### **When DNA is the new hard drive**

Scientists have successfully encoded a movie in the DNA of a living cell, where it can be retrieved at will and multiplied indefinitely as the host divides and grows. It is the latest and perhaps most astonishing example of the genome's potential as a vast storage device.

### **How was the movie encoded in the cell?**

- The geneticists ended up with a sequence of DNA molecules that represented the entirety of the film. Then they used a powerful **new gene editing technique, Crispr, to slip this sequence into the genome of a common gut bacteria, E. coli.**
- Despite the modification, the bacteria thrived and multiplied. The film stored in the genome was preserved intact with each new generation of progeny.

### **What is CRISPR?**

CRISPR, short for clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats, was named “2015 Breakthrough of the Year” by the U.S. journal Science.

- It allows scientists to selectively edit genome parts and replace them with new DNA stretches.
- Cas9 is an enzyme that can edit DNA, allowing the alteration of genetic patterns by genome modification.
- CRISPR is a collection of DNA sequences that direct Cas9 where to cut and paste.

### **Tribunal prohibits dumping of waste near Ganga banks**

An area of 100 metres from the edge of the Ganga between Haridwar and Unnao has been declared a ‘No Development Zone,’ with the National Green Tribunal (NGT) recently prohibiting dumping of waste within 500 metres of the river. An environment compensation of Rs. 50,000 will be imposed on anyone dumping waste in the river.

#### **Key facts:**

- The NGT also directed the Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand governments to formulate guidelines for religious activities on the ghats of the Ganga and its tributaries.
- It also directed the authorities concerned to complete projects, including a sewage treatment plant and cleaning of drains, within two years.
- The court also appointed a supervisory committee, headed by the Secretary of the Water Resources Ministry and comprising IIT professors and officials of the Uttar Pradesh government, to oversee implementation of the directions passed in its verdict. The committee is to submit reports at regular intervals.

#### **About the National Green Tribunal (NGT):**

NGT has been established under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.

- The tribunal deals with matters relating to the enforcement of any legal right relating to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property.
- The Tribunal is not bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, but shall be guided by principles of natural justice.
- The Tribunal’s dedicated jurisdiction in environmental matters shall provide speedy environmental justice and help reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts.
- The Tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing of the same.

## Members:

- **Sanctioned strength:** currently, 10 expert members and 10 judicial members (although the act allows for up to 20 of each).
- **Chairman:** is the administrative head of the tribunal, also serves as a judicial member and is required to be a serving or retired Chief Justice of a High Court or a judge of the Supreme Court of India.
- **Selection:** Members are chosen by a selection committee (headed by a sitting judge of the Supreme Court of India) that reviews their applications and conducts interviews.
- The **Judicial members** are chosen from applicants who are serving or retired judges of High Courts.
- **Expert members** are chosen from applicants who are either serving or retired bureaucrats not below the rank of an Additional Secretary to the Government of India (not below the rank of Principal Secretary if serving under a state government) with a minimum administrative experience of five years in dealing with environmental matters. Or, the expert members must have a doctorate in a related field.

## Saraswati, a supercluster of galaxies:

A team of Indian scientists have discovered a previously unknown ‘supercluster’ of galaxies, some four billion light years away from Earth, and named it Saraswati. This is one of the largest known structures in the neighbourhood of the universe, 4,000 million light-years away from Earth and roughly more than 10 billion years old. Its mass extends over the scale of 600 million light years.

Superclusters, a group of clusters of galaxies, are the largest structures of stars, planets and other heavenly bodies in the universe, and very few of them are known. A cluster could roughly have galaxies ranging from 1000 to 10,000. A supercluster could have clusters ranging from 40 to 43.

## EU, India set up fund for investments

The European Union (EU) and India have announced the establishment of an **Investment Facilitation Mechanism (IFM)** for EU investments in India.

### What you need to know about IFM?

The IFM has been established with the key objectives of paving the way for identifying and solving problems faced by EU companies and investors with regard to their operations in India.

- The mechanism will allow for a close coordination between the European Union and the Government of India with an aim to promote and facilitate EU investment in India. The IFM will **cover new investors as well as those already established in India.**
- The IFM is also going to serve as a platform for discussing general suggestions from the point of view of EU companies and investors with regard to ease of doing business in India. Ease of doing business is a fundamental priority of the Indian Government’s Make in India Campaign and the establishment of IFM for facilitating EU investments in India is another step to achieve this goal.
- As part of the IFM, the EU Delegation to India and the DIPP will hold regular high level meetings to assess and facilitate “ease of doing business” for EU investors in India. This will include identifying and putting in place solutions to procedural impediments faced by EU firms and investors in establishing or running their operations in India.

## Background:

The IFM builds on the Joint Statement of the 13th EU-India Summit held in Brussels in March 2016, where the EU had welcomed India’s readiness to establish such a mechanism and leaders from both sides had

reaffirmed their shared commitment to oppose protectionism and to work in favour of a fair, transparent and rule-based trade and investment environment.

### **US House passes Bill for strengthening defence ties with India**

The US House of Representatives has passed a \$621.5 billion defence policy bill that proposes to advance defence cooperation with India. An amendment in this regard was adopted by a voice vote by the House as part of **the National Defense Authorisation Act (NDAA) 2018**, beginning 1 October this year. NDAA-2018 was passed by the House 344-81.

#### **Key facts:**

- As passed by the House, NDAA-2018 asks the State Department and the Pentagon **to develop a strategy** that addresses common security challenges, the role of American partners and allies in India-US defence relationship, and role of the defence technology and trade initiative.
- Following the passage of the National Defence Authorisation Act, **the Secretary of Defence and Secretary of State have 180 days to develop a strategy** for advancing defence cooperation between the United States and India.
- It also asks them to address how **to advance the communications interoperability and security memorandum of agreement** and the basic exchange and cooperation agreement for geospatial cooperation.

The previous NDAA-2017 had designated India as a major defence partner which brings India at par with closest American partners in terms of defence trade and technology transfer.

#### **Way ahead:**

NDAA needs to be passed by the Senate before it can be sent to the White House for the US President Donald Trump to sign into law.

### **Centre to grant NIIF - 20,000 cr.**

The Department of Economic Affairs has signed an agreement with the NIIF for a ₹20,000 crore contribution to the Fund.

#### **About NIIF:**

The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) was proposed in Union Budget 2015. In the last week of December, the government has set up this Rs. 40000 crore fund to provide long term capital for infrastructure projects.

- The objective of NIIF is **to maximise economic impact through infrastructure development** in viable projects both greenfield and brownfield, including stalled projects, mainly in the core infra sector.
- **NIIF has been structured as a fund of funds and set up as Category II Alternate Investment Fund (AIF)** under the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Regulations.

### **Mahadayi: Goa open to out-of-tribunal settlement**

Goa has said that it is open to talks with Karnataka and Maharashtra to explore an out-of-tribunal settlement on Mahadayi issue.

#### **Background:**

Mahadayi, also known as the Mandovi river, is known as a lifeline in the northern parts of Karnataka. The river originates and flows in Karnataka and goes through Goa before meeting the Arabian Sea. The Mahadayi catchment area covers around 2,032 km and includes some parts of Maharashtra near the Maharashtra-Karnataka border region.

#### **About the dispute:**

The Karnataka government and Goa government are fighting on sharing of waters of the Mahadayi river (called Mandovi in Goa).

- In order to divert 7.56 tmcft of water to the Malaprabha river basin, Karnataka government proposed to build canals to link Kalasa and Banduri, the tributaries of Mahadayi. However, objecting the move, Goa government argued that if Karnataka implemented the Kalasa-Banduri project, it would prove disastrous for the ecologically sensitive Western Ghats as the proposed project was deep inside the forest.
- Karnataka had petitioned the tribunal seeking release of 7.56 tmcft of water for Kalasa-Banduri Nala project. The tribunal, which gave its interim order after hearing arguments from both Karnataka and Goa, had rejected the state's plea citing various grounds including ecological damage that the project may cause.

#### **Raipur Airport ranks first in customer satisfaction:**

- Raipur's Swami Vivekananda Airport in Chhattisgarh has been ranked first in customer satisfaction in a survey carried out by the AAI across 49 airports in the country.
- The airport in the Chhattisgarh capital was followed by those at Udaipur, Amritsar and Dehradun.
- The survey, which was carried out by an independent agency appointed by AAI, covers a wide range of parameters like transportation, parking, passenger facilities and cleanliness, among others.

#### **Antarctica iceberg break off:**

- A massive iceberg has broken away from Antarctica. The Trillion-tonne iceberg is considered as the one of the largest ever. The 5,800 square kilometre iceberg left the Larsen C Ice Shelf in Antarctica and has changed the landscape of the region.
- The final breakthrough of the rift was detected in data from NASA's Aqua MODIS satellite instrument, which images in the thermal infrared at a resolution of one kilometre and confirmed by NASA's Suomi VIIRS instrument. The development of the rift over the last year was monitored using data from the European Space Agency Sentinel-1 satellites – part of the European Copernicus Space Component.
- Although the remaining ice shelf will continue naturally to regrow, researchers have previously shown that the new configuration is potentially less stable than it was prior to the rift. There is a risk that Larsen C may eventually follow the example of its neighbour, Larsen B, which disintegrated in 2002 following a similar rift-induced calving event in 1995.

#### **India's first solar-powered 1600 HP DEMU train launched:**

Indian Railways has launched the country's first solar-powered local train with a battery bank facility that ensures sufficient power even in the absence of sunlight. The entire electrical need of the coaches, which includes lights, fans and information display system, will be met by the energy produced by solar panels fitted atop the coaches of the DEMU (diesel electric multiple unit) train. The train was launched from Safdarjung railway station.

#### **Govt. clears three export infra plans**

The Centre – for the first time under a new scheme called Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES) launched in March to address the infrastructure problem — has given its approval for three proposals.

### **Proposals include:**

- An Integrated Cargo Terminal (ICT) at the Imphal International Airport.
- Modernisation of infrastructure facility in Karnataka for marine exports.
- Construction of a new 'Standard Design Factory' building at Cochin Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

### **Status of export infrastructure in India:**

According to a March 2016 report on 'Export Infrastructure in India' by the Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce, "deficient infrastructure and the manner in which infrastructure is being operated (in India) are the major obstacles to ensure competitiveness in manufacturing of goods and exports thereof."

- It is estimated that the logistic cost in India is about 14% of the GDP whereas in advanced economies like the U.S. and the European Union, it is 8% and 10% of the GDP respectively. Owing to sub-optimal logistic capability, certain sectors dependent on logistics lose as much as 2% on sales return.
- An ASSOCHAM study conducted a few years ago shows that India runs against a disadvantage of about 11% of its trade due to deficient infrastructure.

### **Need for improvement:**

It is estimated that India can save up to \$50 billion if logistics costs are brought down from 14% to 9% of country's GDP thereby making domestic goods more competitive in global markets.

### **About TIES:**

The Scheme is focussed on **addressing the needs of the exporters**. The scheme replaces a centrally sponsored scheme — Assistance to States for creating Infrastructure for the Development and growth of Exports (ASIDE).

- The objective of the TIES is to enhance export competitiveness by bridging gaps in export infrastructure, creating focused export infrastructure and first-mile and last-mile connectivity.
- The Central and State Agencies, including Export Promotion Councils, Commodities Boards, SEZ Authorities and Apex Trade Bodies recognised under the EXIM policy of Government of India; are eligible for financial support under this scheme.
- The scheme would provide assistance for setting up and up-gradation of infrastructure projects with overwhelming export linkages like the Border Haats, Land customs stations, quality testing and certification labs, cold chains, trade promotion centres, dry ports, export warehousing and packaging, SEZs and ports/airports cargo terminuses.
- The TIES, which is being implemented from FY18 till FY20, has a budgetary allocation of Rs. 600 crore.

### **A looming threat**

The results from a limited number of children tested, under the Revised National TB Control Programme, is worrying.

- About 5,500 of over 76,000 children tested in nine Indian cities have been diagnosed with tuberculosis.
- 9% of them with multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB).
- Many children tested positive for TB showed resistance to Rifampicin, a first-line drug.

### **What are MDR-TB & MDR/RR-TB?**

MDR-TB is an abbreviation of Multi Drug Resistant TB and it is a specific type of drug resistant TB infection. It means that the TB bacteria that a person is infected with, are resistant to at least two of the most important

TB drugs, isoniazid (INH) and rifampicin (RMP). If bacteria are resistant to certain TB drugs this means that the drugs won't work. Other drugs then need to be taken by the person if they are to be cured.

### **What's the concern?**

Since the incidence of TB among children is a reflection of the prevalence of the disease in the community at large, the high prevalence of both drug-sensitive TB and drug-resistant TB in children from these nine cities is a grim reminder of the failure of **the health-care system to diagnose the disease early enough in adults and start them on treatment.**

### **What needs to be done?**

A proactive approach to **testing helps in early and correct diagnosis** of all contacts and in cutting the transmission chain. In line with World Health Organisation guidelines, the RNTCP requires all household contacts, particularly children, of a newly diagnosed pulmonary TB patient to be tested and started on treatment if needed. Children below six years of age in the household of a newly diagnosed patient are required to be given the drug Isoniazid as a prophylactic even when they do not have the disease.

The government should take up **contact screening** more urgently. Using the Xpert molecular diagnostic test to screen children with TB is a positive step and should be welcomed, but all the diagnosed children should be guaranteed paediatric Fixed-dose combination (FDC) drugs. It would be unethical to deny them this lifeline.

### **When too much is too little**

The issue of food wastage is considered as an issue of national importance.

### **How wastage occurs?**

Food wastage is sometimes linked to people's behaviour. However, there are wastages which happen in any case due to food's perishability and the absence of an effective distribution mechanism and legal framework.

### **How big is it?**

Food is lost or wasted throughout the supply chain, from initial agricultural production to final household consumption. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), "One third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted globally, which amounts to about 1.3 billion tons per year." The losses represent "a waste of resources used in production such as land, water, energy and inputs, increasing the green gas emissions in vain".

### **Impacts of food wastage:**

Food wastage has multiple socio-economic and environmental impacts.

- **On hunger:** In a country like India, not only is food scarce for many poor families, it is a luxury for many others. India ranked 97th among 118 countries in the Global Hunger Index for 2016. Though hunger cannot be tackled directly by preventing food wastage, a substantial amount of food that is wasted in our country can feed many hungry people.
- **Loss of resources:** The wastage of food entails loss of considerable amount of resources in the form of inputs used during production. For example, 25% of fresh water and nearly 300 million barrels of oil used to produce food are ultimately wasted.
- **Environmental impact:** The increasing wastage also results in land degradation by about 45%, mainly due to deforestation, unsustainable agricultural practices, and excessive groundwater extraction. Wastage

results in national economic loss. To put a monetary value to the loss in terms of wastage, India loses Rs. 58,000 crore every year.

- The energy spent over wasted food results in 3.3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide production every year. Decay also leads to harmful emission of other gases in the atmosphere; for instance, decaying of rice produces methane. Food waste emissions have a major impact on climate change and result in greater carbon footprint.

### **What needs to be done?**

Looking at the scale of problems, it is wise to frame a comprehensive strategy by combining the efforts of the government and private sectors and civil society. The government can create a time-bound task force under Niti Aayog, with experts from different sectors, to frame a national policy to tackle this gigantic issue, which can recommend the legal framework to support initiatives to reduce food loss and waste.

### **IBBI notifies rules for bankruptcy probe**

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), which is implementing the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), has notified the regulations for inspection and investigation of service providers registered with it.

#### **Key facts:**

- With this, the IBBI now has powers to start probes against service providers registered with it without intimating them. Insolvency professional agencies, professionals, entities and information utilities are considered as service providers under the Code.
- As per the regulations, the investigation authority has to serve a notice intimating the entity concerned about the probe at least ten days in advance. However, the requirement could be done away with on grounds such as apprehensions that the records of the particular service provider might be destroyed before the probe starts.
- Among others, the investigating authority has powers to seize records of the service provider being probed through a court order. The investigating authority can be one officer or a team of officers of the IBBI.

### **Background:**

The Code, which provides for a market-determined and time-bound resolution of insolvency proceedings, became operational in December 2016. It offers a market determined, time bound mechanism for orderly resolution of insolvency, wherever possible, and orderly exit, wherever required. The Code envisages an ecosystem comprising National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT), National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), Debt Recovery Appellate Tribunal (DRAT), Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT), Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (Board), Information Utilities (IUs), Insolvency Professionals (IPs), Insolvency Professional Agencies (IPAs) and Insolvency Professional Entities (IPEs) for implementation of the Code.

### **Govt. panel to study cow derivatives**

The government has set up a 19-member panel to carry out what it says will be scientifically validated research on cow derivatives including its urine, and their benefits.

- The committee will select projects that can help scientifically validate the benefits of panchgavya — the concoction of cow dung, cow urine, milk, curd and ghee — in various spheres such as nutrition, health and agriculture.

#### **Key facts:**

- The government has given the project the acronym **SVAROP**, which stands for Scientific Validation and Research on Panchagavya, and says it is a “national programme” that’s being conducted by the Department of Science and Technology, Department of Biotechnology, and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) of the Ministry of Science and Technology in collaboration with IIT-Delhi.

- This multi-disciplinary programme will involve participation of other related ministries, government departments, academic institutions, research laboratories, voluntary organisations and others to carry out research and development and also build capacities, and cover five thematic areas including scientific validation of uniqueness of indigenous cows.
- It will cover “scientific validation of ‘panchagavya’ for medicines and health, scientific validation of ‘panchagavya’ and its products for agriculture applications, scientific validation of ‘panchagavya’ for food and nutrition.

#### **Institutions in news- ICAR:**

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is celebrating its 89th foundation day.

ICAR:

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is **an autonomous body responsible for co-ordinating agricultural education and research in India**. It reports to the Department of Agricultural Research and Education, Ministry of Agriculture. **The Union Minister of Agriculture serves as its president**. It is the largest network of agricultural research and education institutes in the world.

#### **Institutions in news- NCDC:**

National Cooperative Development Corporation has released Rs.28771.31 crore in the year 2014-17 compared to Rs.15143.76 crore in the year 2011-14.

#### **About NCDC:**

National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) was established by an Act of Parliament in 1963 as **a statutory Corporation under Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare**. It has many regional centres to provide the financial assistance to Cooperatives/Societies/Federations.

#### **Eco-bridges for the movement of tigers**

Telangana State is planning to construct eco-friendly bridges over a canal cutting across the **tiger corridor linking the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) in the Chandrapur district of Maharashtra with the forests in Telangana’s Kumram Bheem Asifabad district**.

- The Telangana Irrigation Department has given its consent for the construction of the eco-bridges. Recommendations on the size and locations of the bridges are awaited from the National Board of Wildlife.

#### **What’s the plan?**

The ‘eco-bridges’ will be constructed at key spots along the 72 km-long, and at some places over a kilometre wide. The plan involves laying of fertile soil to grow grass and plants over the structure, so that fragmentation of the reserve forest is camouflaged.

#### **Background:**

The concept emerged after visits by experts from the Wildlife Board of India and the Wildlife Institute of India. They were concerned about the large-scale destruction of pristine forest along the corridor, which would result in cutting off tiger movement between TATR and Bejjur.

#### **Does a minimum wage kill jobs?**

The Union Cabinet is expected to approve a bill that, among other things, mandates **a universal minimum wage**. The code empowers the Centre to set a minimum wage to help poor, unskilled workers earn more.

## What's the concern?

Economists, however, have warned for long **that price floors prevent the available supply of goods from being fully sold**. So, the minimum wage would logically hurt workers by increasing unemployment.

A study found that employment among the youth in Denmark decreased by one-third when they attained the age at which their minimum wage increases by 40%. Other economists have found similar evidence suggesting that a minimum wage increases unemployment.

## An opposing viewpoint:

The above mentioned logic has been questioned by a famous 1993 study by David Card and Alan B. Krueger that made the case that **a rise in the minimum wage in New Jersey actually decreased unemployment**.

For instance, "Seattle's Minimum Wage Experience 2015-16", a 2017 study by researchers at the University of California Berkeley, found that since the city raised its minimum wage in 2015, unemployment dropped from 4.3% to 3.3%.

## Way ahead:

Given such contradictory empirical findings, some say it may be wise to trust age-old economic wisdom. The minimum wage increases unemployment, except when it is set below the market price for labour; or only marginally higher, in which case the minimum wage enhances the bargaining power of workers.

## Centre seeks debate in SC on J&K special status

The Centre has asked the Supreme Court to debate on the special status granted to the State of Jammu and Kashmir, saying it was both a sensitive and constitutional matter. The court agreed to schedule the case before a three-judge Bench.

## Background:

The centre's response came on a PIL plea filed by a Delhi-based NGO, We the Citizens, contending that the J&K government, given the State's special autonomous status under Articles 35A and 370, was discriminatory against non-residents as far as government jobs and real estate purchases were concerned.

## J&K High Court ruling:

Jammu and Kashmir High Court had previously ruled that Article 370 assumed a place of permanence in the Constitution and the feature was beyond amendment, repeal or abrogation. The court said **Article 35A gave "protection" to existing laws in force in the State**.

It also observed that the President under Article 370 (1) was conferred with power to extend any provision of the Constitution to the State with such "exceptions and modifications" as may be deemed fit subject to consultation or concurrence with the State government. The High Court said J&K, while **acceding to the Dominion of India, retained limited sovereignty and did not merge with it**.

## What is Article 370?

Article 370 of the Indian Constitution is a **'temporary provision' which grants special autonomous status to Jammu & Kashmir**.

- Under Part XXI of the Constitution of India, which deals with "Temporary, Transitional and Special provisions", the state of Jammu & Kashmir has been accorded special status under Article 370.

- All the provisions of the Constitution which are applicable to other states are not applicable to J&K.

#### **Important provisions under the article:**

- According to this article, except for defence, foreign affairs, finance and communications, Parliament needs the state government's concurrence for applying all other laws. Thus the state's residents live under a separate set of laws, including those related to citizenship, ownership of property, and fundamental rights, as compared to other Indians.
- Indian citizens from other states cannot purchase land or property in Jammu & Kashmir.
- Under Article 370, the Centre has no power to declare financial emergency under Article 360 in the state. It can declare emergency in the state only in case of war or external aggression. The Union government can therefore not declare emergency on grounds of internal disturbance or imminent danger unless it is made at the request or with the concurrence of the state government.
- Under Article 370 the Indian Parliament cannot increase or reduce the borders of the state.

#### **GM mustard policy: SC gives govt. time**

The government has informed the Supreme Court that a policy decision on the commercial release of the Genetically Modified (GM) mustard crop is yet to be finalised. It said it was poring through the various suggestions on and objections to the commercial rollout of the GM crops.

- The court has granted the government one week to report back on when the policy would be finalised. It said the policy should be good-intentioned and well-informed.

#### **Background:**

The court had on October 17, 2016, extended the stay on the commercial release of the GM mustard until further orders. It had asked the Centre to collect public opinion before the release. The government had assured the court that there would be no commercial release of GM seeds till the views of the public were collected and placed before the appraisal committee.

#### **What is a GM crop?**

A GM or transgenic crop is a plant that has a novel combination of genetic material obtained through the use of modern biotechnology.

For example, a GM crop can contain a gene(s) that has been artificially inserted instead of the plant acquiring it through pollination. The resulting plant is said to be "genetically modified" although in reality all crops have been "genetically modified" from their original wild state by domestication, selection, and controlled breeding over long periods of time.

#### **GM crops in India:**

The **GM mustard, developed by a Delhi University institution, is only the second food crop which got its clearance from the central regulator.** The GEAC had earlier in 2010 cleared the Bt Brinjal but the decision was not accepted by then environment minister Jairam Ramesh. Currently, only Bt Cotton – a non-food GM crop – is commercially cultivated in the country.

An application for commercial release of the GM Mustard was filed in December 2015. The GEAC had subsequently set up a sub-committee to examine the safety aspect of the use of transgenic variety of the mustard. The sub-committee had last year given its safety clearance while noting that the GM Mustard is safe for human consumption and environment. Decision of the GEAC was, however, vehemently opposed by environmentalists and anti-GM groups.

## National strategic plan for malaria elimination

The ambitious National Strategic Plan (NSP) for Malaria Elimination (2017-22) has been launched. The NSP, a year-wise roadmap for malaria elimination across the country, is based on last year's National Framework for Malaria Elimination, which was, in turn, spurred by World Health Organisation's Global Technical Strategy for Malaria, 2016-2030.

### What is this plan to eradicate malaria?

The NSP divides the country into four categories, from 0 to 3. Zero, the first category, has 75 districts that have not reported any case of malaria for the last three years.

- **Category 1** has 448 districts, in which the annual parasite incidence (API, or the number of positive slides for the parasite in a year) is less than one per 1,000 population. In **Category 2**, which has 48 districts, the API is one and above, but less than two per 1,000 population. **Category 3** has 107 districts, reporting an API of two and above per 1,000 population.
- The plan is **to eliminate malaria (zero indigenous cases) by 2022 in all Category 1 and 2 districts**. The remaining districts are to be brought under a pre-elimination and elimination programme.
- The NSP also **aims to maintain a malaria-free status for areas where transmission has been interrupted**. It seeks to achieve universal case detection and treatment services in endemic districts to ensure 100% diagnosis of all suspected cases, and full treatment of all confirmed cases.

### Components of the plan:

The plan has **four components, based on WHO recommendations**: diagnosis and case management; surveillance and epidemic response; prevention — integrated vector management; 'cross-cutting' interventions, which include advocacy, communication, research and development, and other initiatives.

### What kind of challenges is the NSP likely to face?

One of the biggest challenges is the shortage of manpower. According to the Health Ministry, there are only about 40,000 multipurpose health workers (MPWs) against the approximately 80,000 sanctioned posts in the 1,50,000 subcentres in the country. Other problems include access to conflict-affected tribal areas, and to areas with a high malaria endemicity and insecticide resistance. High endemicity states include those in the Northeast, which share borders with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, where the prevalence of malaria is high.

### Background:

In India, malaria is caused by the parasites *Plasmodium falciparum* (Pf) and *Plasmodium Vivax* (Pv). Pf is found more in the forest areas, whereas Pv is more common in the plains. The disease is mainly concentrated in the tribal and remote areas of the country. The majority of reporting districts are in the country's eastern and central parts — the largest number of cases are found in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and the Northeastern states of Tripura, Mizoram and Meghalaya.

- The government has launched a **low-cost indigenously developed hearing screening device for newborns called Sohum** to cater to nearly 26 million babies born every year in India.
- This device, which allows screening without requiring babies to be sedated, once available across the country can help minimise hearing impairment or even reverse the damage.
- The battery-operated noninvasive Sohum uses brainstem auditory evoked response technology.

## **E-commerce: RCEP nations talk details**

Sixteen Asia Pacific nations, including India, are discussing in detail norms on e-commerce as part of negotiations on the proposed mega Free Trade Agreement known as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

- Issues including digital certification, paperless trading, online consumer protection and customs duties in e-commerce have been identified for discussion.
- The discussions follow the setting up of a panel on e-commerce two years ago by RCEP countries in response to a Japanese proposal on easing foreign direct investment in the sector under which member countries would exchange best practices linked to online commerce.

### **Background:**

Many RCEP nations including Australia, Japan and China, are pushing for inclusion of a host of elements for 'Terms Of Reference' for RCEP negotiations concerning e-commerce. This is with a view to have some binding commitments from the RCEP members on liberalising e-commerce and ensure that the final pact has a separate chapter on e-commerce.

### **India's position:**

India has been opposing binding norms on opening up the e-commerce sector at the level of RCEP as well as the global level (WTO) talks on grounds including that it (India) is yet to have a comprehensive national policy on the topic. It is also believed that such binding norms would harm development by diminishing policy space, some economists have warned. Also, experts fear RCEP talks could be used by developed countries to get an outcome at the WTO ministerial in Argentina later this year.

### **What you need to know about RCEP?**

RCEP is proposed between the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and the six states with which ASEAN has existing FTAs (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand).

- RCEP negotiations were formally launched in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia.
- RCEP is viewed as an alternative to the TPP trade agreement, which includes the United States but excludes China.

## **Supreme Court allows Centre to replace MCI oversight committee**

The Supreme Court has allowed the Centre to replace the oversight committee set up to supervise the functioning of the Medical Council of India (MCI) with a fresh panel of five eminent doctors.

- It also gave the Centre liberty to replace any doctor in the list with another if he does not wish to be a part of the oversight committee.

### **Background:**

The court had asked the Centre to constitute a panel which would replace the oversight committee set up last year by the apex court to oversee the MCI's functioning till the government put in place an alternate mechanism. The committee, set up by the court on May 2 last year, was to function for a period of one year or till a suitable mechanism was brought in by the Centre to substitute it.

## About MCI:

The MCI was established in 1934 under the Indian Medical Council Act, 1933, as **an elected body** for maintaining the medical register and providing ethical oversight, with no specific role in medical education.

- The Amendment of 1956, however, mandated the MCI “to maintain uniform standards of medical education, both under graduate and postgraduate; recommend for recognition/de-recognition of medical qualifications of medical institutions of India or foreign countries; accord permanent registration/provisional registration of doctors with recognised medical qualifications; and ensure reciprocity with foreign countries in the matter of mutual recognition of medical qualifications.”
- The second amendment came in 1993, at a time when there was a new-found enthusiasm for private colleges. Under this amendment, the role of the MCI was reduced to an advisory body with the three critical functions of sanctioning medical colleges, approving the student intake, and approving any expansion of the intake capacity requiring prior approval of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

## Get real on Swachh

Despite the most stringent penal provisions in the law against manual scavenging, it continues in parts of India. The recent order of the Madras High Court asking the Centre and the Tamil Nadu government to ensure the strict enforcement of **the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013** points to the malaise.

## Why manual scavenging still persists?

- Manual scavenging persists mainly because of **the continued presence of insanitary latrines**, of which there are about 2.6 million that require cleaning by hand.
- In spite of a legal obligation to do so, **State governments are not keen to demolish and rebuild old facilities lacking sanitation**, or conduct a full census of both the latrines and the people engaged in clearing such waste.
- **Many communities still regard the inclusion of a sanitary toilet as ritual and physical pollution of the house**, and even the less conservative are ready to accept only large, expensive and unscientific structures much bigger than those recommended by the WHO.
- More pernicious is **the entrenched belief in the caste system**, that assumes Dalits will readily perform the stigmatised task of emptying latrines. Clearly, the law on punishment exists only on paper.
- The Central government, which directly runs the self-employment scheme for the rehabilitation of these workers, has also reduced funds from Rs. 448 crore in the 2014-15 budget to Rs. 5 crore this year. High allocation in the past has not meant substantial or effective utilisation.

## What needs to be done?

- A determined approach to end the scourge requires a **campaign against social prejudice** that impedes solutions. Change now depends on the willingness of the courts to fix responsibility on State governments, and order an accurate survey of the practice especially in those States that claim to have no insanitary latrines or manual scavenging.
- **Raising the confidence level among those engaged in manual cleaning** is vital; even official data show their reluctance to take up self-employment.
- **Empowerment holds the key to change**, but that would depend on breaking caste barriers through education and economic uplift.
- **Compensation sanctioned should be paid immediately**; only a fraction of those with verified claims have received it.

### **The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013:**

The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, makes it clear that no person, local authority or any agency shall, from such date as the state government may notify, which shall not be later than one year from the date of commencement of this Act, engage or employ, either directly or indirectly, any person for hazardous cleaning of a sewer or a septic tank.

The Act also says that any contract or agreement entered into before the commencement of the Act for engaging or employing a person for manual scavenging shall on the date of commencement of the Act be terminated and no compensation shall be payable therefor.

### **DGCA braces for ICAO safety audit**

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is bracing for a safety oversight audit by the U.N. body, **International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)**. Previously, the ICAO had raised safety concerns about India's aviation system.

- The measures include hiring flight operation inspectors, aligning its rules with ICAO norms, certifying flight examiners, among others.

### **About ICAO:**

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is a **UN specialized agency**, established by States in 1944 to manage the administration and governance of **the Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention)**.

- ICAO works with the Convention's 191 Member States and industry groups to reach consensus on international civil aviation Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) and policies in support of a safe, efficient, secure, economically sustainable and environmentally responsible civil aviation sector.
- These SARPs and policies are used by ICAO Member States to ensure that their local civil aviation operations and regulations conform to global norms, which in turn permits more than 100,000 daily flights in aviation's global network to operate safely and reliably in every region of the world.
- ICAO also coordinates assistance and capacity building for States in support of numerous aviation development objectives; produces global plans to coordinate multilateral strategic progress for safety and air navigation; monitors and reports on numerous air transport sector performance metrics; and audits States' civil aviation oversight capabilities in the areas of safety and security.

### **World's 1st Laser Weapon:**

- The US has launched **the world's first laser weapon known as the Laser Weapons System (LaWS)**. The LaWS is currently deployed aboard the USS Ponce, an amphibious transport ship, in the Persian Gulf.
- Operationally, **it works just like a laser pointer**. There's a chamber inside with special materials that release photons.
- The LaWS laser beam is **completely silent and invisible**. It's **also fast**: The laser travels at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second, or about 300,000 kilometers per second), meaning it's about 50,000 times the speed of an incoming intercontinental ballistic missile.
- In addition to being able to take down threats in the air, the LaWS can hit and disable objects in the water.

### **Gujarat retains top slot of states with most investment potential:**

- Gujarat has retained the top position in the list of 21 states and UTs with **most investment potential, according to a report by economic think-tank NCAER**.

- The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) State Investment Potential Index (N-SIPI 2017) report ranks states on their competitiveness in business and their investment climate. The ranking of 20 states and one Union Territory of Delhi was based on six pillars — labour, infrastructure, economic climate, governance and political stability, perceptions and land — and 51 sub-indicators.
- Gujarat is followed by Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh.
- While Gujarat topped in economic climate and perceptions, Delhi ranked one in infrastructure. While Tamil Nadu topped the chart in labour issues, Madhya Pradesh ranked one in land pillar.]

### **BharatNet deadline pushed to March 2019**

The Union Cabinet has approved the second phase of the BharatNet project that forms the backbone for the government's Digital India initiative. The deadline for the delay-marred project has been pushed to March 2019.

#### **Background:**

The Centre is still working on completing the first phase of the BharatNet project for which the deadline was March 2017. It had been able to lay optical fibre in nearly one-lakh GPs, however, only about 22,000 GPs have been provided Internet connectivity due to equipment procurement issues. The second phase aims at covering the remaining 1.50 lakh GPS.

#### **About BharatNet project:**

Bharat Net sought to connect all of India's households, particularly in rural areas, through broadband by 2017, forming the backbone of the government's ambitious Digital India programme. It proposes broadband connectivity **to households under village panchayats and even to government institutions at district level.** The project is being **funded through the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF).**

#### **Cabinet nod for IWAI bond issue**

The Union Cabinet has given its nod to Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) for raising ₹660 crore in bonds for extra budgetary resources in 2017-18.

- The proceeds from the bonds will be utilised by IWAI for development and maintenance of National Waterways (NWs) under National Waterways Act, 2016.
- Funds received through issue of bonds will be used exclusively for capital expenditure to improve infrastructure funding.

#### **About IWAI:**

Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is **the statutory authority in charge of the waterways in India.** Its headquarters is located in Noida, UP. It does the function of building the necessary infrastructure in these waterways, surveying the economic feasibility of new projects and also administration.

#### **Background:**

The National Waterways Act, 2016 merges 5 existing Acts which have declared the 5 National Waterways and proposes 106 additional National Waterways. The Act came into force in April 2016.

#### **Bill on mob violence**

Asaduddin Owaisi, MP and All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen chief, has sent notice for a private members Bill in the Lok Sabha to combat mob violence.

### Highlights of the bill:

- **The Bill criminalises mob violence as well as acts of omission by public servants.**
- **Special courts:** The Bill proposes special courts for trying cases of mob violence, with judges appointed by a collegium of five senior-most High Court judges. These courts will receive complaints of mob violence, set up special investigation teams and appoint public prosecutors. The SIT and public prosecutor will also be under Supreme Court supervision.
- **Punishment:** Punishment up to life imprisonment, special compensation and witness protection are built into the Bill.
- **Public servants under purview:** It proposes to award penalties to public servants when such cases are not properly investigated, either due to malafide intentions or wilful neglect. It proposes to award a minimum 10 years' imprisonment to public servants for "acts of omission".
- **Definition:** Mob violence include any act in which two or more persons injure, harm, oppress or threaten a person on the basis of his identity or prevent his enjoyment of a Constitutional right.

### Plastic realities

The use of plastics has used substantially since 1960s. Though, various regulations are in place to curb the overuse of plastics, hardly anything has changed on the ground.

### Threats posed by the overuse of plastics:

- **Environmental threats:** These bags pollute the environment, especially soil and water, as they take about 200 years to decompose naturally.
- **Food chain:** The use of plastic has become so ubiquitous that even birds, animals and fish have unwittingly made it part of their diet. Disposed plastic degrades slowly, its chemicals getting leached into surroundings. Further, it breaks down into smaller components over time, entering our food chain and landing up on our plates.
- **Microbeads:** Microbeads have emerged as a new form of threats. First patented in 1972 for use in cleansers, microbeads began to replace natural material like ground almonds, oatmeal and sea salt in the area of cosmetics. Many cosmetics and toiletry products — ranging from facewashes to toothpastes — use it today. Their abrasive nature lends itself to use in industries such as petroleum, textiles, printing and automobile. BIS has classified them as unsafe for consumer products.

### What needs to be done?

**People's participation:** This multifaceted problem cannot be dealt with by the government alone. While the government should take measures to strengthen the recycling economy and recycle the most plastic bags in use, people have to learn to sort the garbage they produce every day so that waste management facilities and businesses can easily separate the recyclable waste to turn them into resources again.

The problem of plastic bags is not only related to social governance, but also to our idea about modern society. As such, the government must take multiple measures to make the ban on plastic bags truly effective, and reverse the current polluting trend, which will not only help protect the environment but also restore the credibility of the legal system.

### BITs and pieces of trade with Israel

In their first 25 years of diplomatic relations, India and Israel have established and achieved a lot and there are enthusiastic and passionate discussions on both sides on how much more they can do. Indian prime minister's first visit is considered 'groundbreaking' event in the diplomatic world. This is because it was the first visit of

an Indian PM after the establishment of full diplomatic ties in 1992, and also because an Israeli PM, Ariel Sharon, had already visited India back in 2003.

### Why is Israel important for India?

Growing trade and investment relations are a strong reason to study India-Israel relations on their own merit.

- **Trade:** Bilateral merchandise trade increased from \$200 million in 1992 to around \$4 billion in 2016, an increase of 2,000% in 25 years.
- **FDI:** Cumulative foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows from Israel, from April 2000 to March 2017, stood at \$122 million. While these are low, constituting only 0.04% of total FDI inflows to India, there is enormous potential for Israeli investment in fields such as renewable energy and water management.
- **Defence production**, which is at the heart of the 'Make in India' campaign, is another area with significant potential for Israeli investment, a move that will help India save billions of dollars it currently spends on importing weapons from Israel.
- **Arms:** Israel is the third largest supplier of arms to India after Russia and the U.S. Investment in defence production will also give a fillip to domestic manufacturing, reduce dependence on bureaucratic state-owned ordnance factories and bring in new technology.

### Is an India-Israel BIT possible?

In 1996, India and Israel signed a BIT. However, this was reportedly terminated by India when it unilaterally discontinued 58 BITs recently. For a new BIT to be negotiated, both sides will have to start afresh.

### Challenges ahead:

There are challenges given the many fundamental differences Israel and India have on BITs, as outlined in their Model BITs of 2003 and 2016, respectively.

- **Investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS)** provision that allows foreign investors to bring claims against a host state for alleged treaty breaches at international arbitral forums. The Israeli model gives an investor the choice to submit any investment dispute with a state to international arbitration if not resolved within six months through negotiations. The Indian model imposes many procedural and jurisdictional restrictions on an investor's right to bring an ISDS claim. These include a foreign investor having to litigate in domestic courts for five years before pursuing a claim under international law. These requirements make it very difficult for a foreign investor to make efficient use of the ISDS provision.
- **Definition of FDI:** Israel's model provides a broad asset-based definition of foreign investment that covers both FDI and portfolio investment. The Indian model of 2016 defines investment narrowly as an enterprise (with its assets) that has to possess certain characteristics of investment including the investment having 'significance for the development' — words not defined in the BIT — of the host country.
- **MFN provision:** The Israeli model contains a broad most favoured nation (MFN) provision — a cornerstone of non-discrimination in international economic relations — which is missing in the Indian model. The absence of MFN, from Israel's perspective, would mean that its businesses would have no remedy under international law if India were to discriminate against it, say, by offering greater incentives to another defence manufacturer over an Israeli one.
- **Taxation:** The Indian model excludes taxation altogether from the purview of the BIT. Thus, the foreign investor cannot bring an ISDS claim even if taxes imposed are confiscatory, discriminatory or unfair. However, in the Israeli model, taxation-related measures are recognised as an exception only to MFN and national treatment provisions. Foreign investors can still challenge taxation-related measures for violating other BIT provisions such as the fair and equitable treatment or expropriation.

### Way ahead:

In sum, the Indian position on BITs is very pro-state, offering limited rights and protection to foreign investors. The Israeli position is the opposite. An India-Israel BIT looks difficult till both sides move away from their

stated positions. Both sides should work towards having a BIT that reconciles investment protection with a state's right to regulate.

### Think beyond loan waivers

Recently a few States like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab and Karnataka have responded to farm distress by rolling out farm loan waiver schemes as a measure of immediate relief to those farmers who qualify certain criteria. The demand for such measures is spreading to other States too.

- The **ultimate goal of farm loan waiver is to lessen the debt burden of distressed and vulnerable farmers and help them qualify for fresh loans.** The success of the loan waiver lies on the extent to which the benefits reach the needy farmers.

### Drawbacks of loan waivers:

- Firstly, **it covers only a tiny fraction of farmers.** The loan waiver as a concept excludes most of the farm households in dire need of relief and includes some who do not deserve such relief on economic grounds.
- Second, **it provides only a partial relief to the indebted farmers** as about half of the institutional borrowing of a cultivator is for non-farm purposes.
- Third, in many cases, one household has multiple loans either from different sources or in the name of different family members, which entitles it **to multiple loan waiving.**
- Fourth, **loan waiving excludes agricultural labourers** who are even weaker than cultivators in bearing the consequences of economic distress.
- Fifth, **it severely erodes the credit culture,** with dire long-run consequences to the banking business.
- Sixth, **the scheme is prone to serious exclusion and inclusion errors,** as evidenced by the Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) findings in the Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, 2008.
- Lastly, schemes have serious implications for **other developmental expenditure,** having a much larger multiplier effect on the economy.

### What needs to be done?

- **Proper identification:** For providing immediate relief to the needy farmers, a more inclusive alternative approach is to identify the vulnerable farmers based on certain criteria and give an equal amount as financial relief to the vulnerable and distressed families.
- **Enhance non- farm income:** The sustainable solution to indebtedness and agrarian distress is to raise income from agricultural activities and enhance access to non-farm sources of income. The low scale of farms necessitates that some cultivators move from agriculture to non-farm jobs.
- **Improved technology, expansion of irrigation coverage, and crop diversification** towards high-value crops are appropriate measures for raising productivity and farmers' income. All these require more public funding and support.
- Another major source of increase in farmers' income **is remunerative prices** for farm produce. This requires removal of old regulations and restrictions on agriculture to enable creation of a liberalised environment for investment, trading and marketing.
- Agrarian distress and farmers' income will be addressed much better **if States undertake and sincerely implement long-pending reforms** in the agriculture sector with urgency.

### Way ahead:

It appears that loan waiving can provide a short-term relief to a limited section of farmers; it has a meagre chance of bringing farmers out of the vicious cycle of indebtedness. There is no concrete evidence on reduction in agrarian distress following the first spell of all-India farm loan waiver in 2008. In the longer run, strengthening the repayment capacity of the farmers by improving and stabilising their income is the only way to keep them out of distress.

### **Ministry, NITI Aayog moot privatisation of select services in district hospitals**

As a part of a radical ‘privatisation project’, the Health Ministry and the NITI Aayog have developed a framework to let private hospitals run select services within district hospitals, on a 30-year lease. The framework was prepared in consultation with the World Bank.

#### **What you need to know about the proposed framework?**

- As per the framework, the government will be allowing “a single private partner or a single consortium of private partners” to bid for space in district level hospitals, “especially in tier 2 & 3 cities.”
- Under this Public Private Partnership (PPP), care for only three non-communicable diseases — cardiac disease, pulmonary disease, and cancer care — will be provided.
- As per the draft model contract, private hospitals will bid for 30-year leases over portions of district hospital buildings to set up 50- or 100-bed hospitals in smaller towns across the country. The State governments could lease up to five or six district hospitals within the State.
- Further, the State governments will give Viability Gap Funding (VGF), or one-time seed money, to private players to set up infrastructure within district hospitals. The private parties and State health departments will share ambulance services, blood banks, and mortuary services.

#### **Concerns:**

- A major concern about the policy is that under ‘principles’ of the financial structure, the document states that “there will be no reserved beds or no quota of beds for free services” in these facilities.
- The policy document has also come under sharp criticism for the Ministry’s failure to consult with key stakeholders from civil society and academia.
- Another particularly disturbing suggestion is that only Below Poverty Line (BPL) patients and those in insurance schemes will be able to access free care. This would effectively exclude hundreds of millions of the Indian population from vital hospital services.

### **200th anniversary celebrations of the Paika Rebellion**

The President of India Shri Pranab Mukharjee recently inaugurated the “**Bicentenary celebration of the heroic Paika Rebellion of Odisha**, a valiant uprising of Paikas against the British rule” organised by the Ministry of Culture.

#### **About Paika rebellion:**

Two-hundred years ago in 1817, a **valiant uprising of soldiers led by Buxi Jagabandhu (Bidyadhar Mohapatra) took place in Khurda of Odisha**. This is known as Paika rebellion.

#### **Reason for the revolt:**

**The Paikas were the traditional land-owning militia of Odisha and served as warriors.** When armies of the East India Company overran most of Odisha in 1803, the Raja of Khurda lost his primacy and the power

and prestige of the Paikas went on a decline. The British were not comfortable with these aggressive, warlike new subjects and set up a commission under Walter Ewer to look into the issue.

- The commission recommended that the hereditary rent-free lands granted to the Paikas be taken over by the British administration and this recommendation was zealously adhered to. They revolted against the British.
- However, the rebellion had several other underlying causes – like the rise in the price of salt, abolition of the cowrie currency for payment of taxes and an overtly extortionist land revenue policy.
- Although initially the Company struggled to respond they managed to put down the rebellion by May 1817. Many of the Paik leaders were hung or deported. Jagabandhu surrendered in 1825.

### **Ram Nath Kovind elected as the 14th President of India**

Former Bihar governor Ram Nath Kovind is the 14th President of India. He won with over 7 lakh votes against Opposition candidate Meira Kumar.

### **Who elects the president?**

**Article 54** of the Indian Constitution lays the guidelines about voters in a Presidential election. It says, “Election of President The President shall be elected by the members of an electoral college consisting of the elected members of both Houses of Parliament; and the elected members of the Legislative Assemblies of the States.”

Who can't vote? The nominated members of Parliament, Legislative Assemblies, and members of Legislative Council don't vote in the Presidential election.

### **Who is eligible to run for the President?**

- A person who is 35 years of age.
- An Indian National.
- Must have a support of 50 MPs/MLAs (these can't be nominated members).
- Must deposit Rs 15,000 as a security amount with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- Must not hold any Office of Profit. (Any Constitutional position, which may further give rise to a conflict of interests in discharging of duties).

### **Voting Pattern:**

**Article 55** of Indian Constitution lays the guidelines about the way Indian President is to be elected. It says, “The election of the President shall be held in accordance with the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote and the voting at such election shall be by secret ballot.”

### **Other key facts:**

#### **Secret Vote:**

Unlike the voting for any Bill or any motion in Parliament or state Assembly, secret voting is done to elect the President (Nobody can ever come to know who voted for whom).

#### **Parties can't issue a whip to their members:**

Since the Presidential election is intended to be free and fair, and representatives are supposed to exercise their free will, political parties are not allowed to issue a whip to their members for voting.

**Vote value:**

Vote of each MP and MLA carries a certain value. In the case of MLAs, the value is calculated by dividing total population of the state by the number of elected members to the Legislative Assembly, further divided by 1000. As of now, the value of each MLAs vote is fixed. The population data is taken from the 1971 Census. In the case of an MP, the vote value is decided by dividing the total value of votes of all MLAs of the whole country, divided by the total number of elected MPs in Lower House (Lok Sabha) and Rajya Sabha (Upper House). At present, the vote value of each MP is fixed at 708.

**Voting System:**

Unlike the conventional ballot voting, where the voter polls only for a single candidate of his choice, the lawmakers mark their preferences in the Presidential election. It is mandatory for every lawmaker to mark his first preference, otherwise the vote is deemed invalid. He or she, however, can leave other preferences vacant. Unlike the general election counting, where an MP or an MLA is elected through 'first past the post' system, the winner in Presidential election is declared on the basis of a quote which is obtained by dividing the total number of valid votes by 2, and adding 1 to quotient (total number of valid votes/2+1).

**Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY)**

Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY), a pension scheme exclusively for senior citizens, has been launched.

- PMVVY is a Pension Scheme exclusively **for the senior citizens aged 60 years and above.**
- The Scheme can be purchased offline as well as online through Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India which has been given the sole privilege to operate this Scheme.

**Benefits under the Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY):**

- Scheme provides an assured return of 8% p.a. payable monthly (equivalent to 8.30% p.a. effective) for 10 years.
- Pension is payable at the end of each period, during the policy term of 10 years, as per the frequency of monthly/ quarterly/ half-yearly/ yearly as chosen by the pensioner at the time of purchase.
- The scheme is exempted from Service Tax/ GST.
- On survival of the pensioner to the end of the policy term of 10 years, Purchase price along with final pension installment shall be payable.
- Loan upto 75% of Purchase Price shall be allowed after 3 policy years (to meet the liquidity needs). Loan interest shall be recovered from the pension installments and loan to be recovered from claim proceeds.
- The scheme also allows for premature exit for the treatment of any critical/ terminal illness of self or spouse. On such premature exit, 98% of the Purchase Price shall be refunded.
- On death of the pensioner during the policy term of 10 years, the Purchase Price shall be paid to the beneficiary.

**First meeting of Integrated Monitoring and Advisory Council (IMAC)**

Minister of State (I/C) for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan recently chaired the first meeting of apex body for policy formulation and implementation of 'Roadmap to achieve target of 10 % reduction in import dependency in oil and gas by 2021-22 under an institutional mechanism 'Integrated Monitoring and Advisory Council' (IMAC).

**What you need to know about IMAC?**

IMAC was envisaged to **facilitate better coordination and comprehensive strategy for all energy resources by focusing on supply and demand side management.**

- IMAC is consisted of Secretary, Petroleum & Natural Gas and other Senior Officers from various Ministries such as Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Urban Development, Road and Transport, Agriculture, Power/Bureau of Energy Efficiency, Rural Development, Finance, Petroleum Planning Analysis Cell, PCRA, DGH etc.

### **Aajeevika Grameen Express Yojana**

The Ministry of Rural Development is all set to launch a new sub-scheme under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) which will be named as “Aajeevika Grameen Express Yojana (AGEY)”.

#### **What you need to know about AGEY?**

The main objectives of AGEY are to **provide an alternative source of livelihoods to members of Self Help Groups (SHGs) under DAY-NRLM by facilitating them to operate public transport services in backward rural areas.**

- This will provide safe, affordable and community monitored rural transport services like e-rickshaws, 3 and 4 wheeler motorised transport vehicles to connect remote villages with key services and amenities including access to markets, education and health for the overall economic development of the area.

#### **Implementation:**

- The sub-scheme will be implemented in 250 blocks in the country on a pilot basis for a period of 3 years from 2017-18 to 2019-20. The States have been informed about the number of blocks allocated to them to take up this sub-scheme in the pilot phases.
- One of the options proposed to be given under the sub-scheme is that the Community Based Organisation (CBO) will provide interest free loan from its own corpus to Self Help Group member for purchase of the vehicle.

#### **About Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM):**

The Government is implementing DAY-NRLM across the country in all States and Union Territories (except Delhi and Chandigarh).

- The financial support under **the programme is mainly in the form of Revolving Fund and Community Investment Funds, given as grants to the Self Help Groups (SHGs) and their federations.**
- DAY-NRLM **also focuses on bank linkage of the institutions.**
- The programme has a **special focus on women empowerment including a dedicated component for promoting farm and non-farm based livelihoods for women farmers in rural areas.**
- **In addition, start-up enterprises at village levels are also supported to promote entrepreneurial activities in those areas.**

#### **Guidelines for implementation of Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana**

Draft guidelines for implementation of Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) have been prepared by the Ministry.

- The draft guidelines inter-alia provide Aadhaar linkage, Direct Benefit Transfer of Rs. 5000 in beneficiary's bank/post office account in three instalments at the stage of early registration of pregnancy,

after six months of pregnancy on at least one antenatal check-up and registration of child birth & first cycle of immunisation of the child.

#### **About Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):**

Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), previously Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY), is a maternity benefit program run by the government of India.

- It is a **conditional cash transfer scheme for pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for first two live births.**
- It provides a **partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare** and to provide conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices.
- In 2013, **the scheme was brought under the National Food Security Act, 2013** to implement the provision of cash maternity benefit of ₹6,000 stated in the Act.
- It is Centrally Sponsored Scheme under which the cost sharing ratio between the Centre and the States & UTs with Legislature is 60:40, for North-Eastern States & three Himalayan States, it is 90:10 and 100% Central assistance for Union Territories without Legislature.

#### **Cabinet approves MOC in respect of tax matters between India and BRICS countries**

The Union Cabinet has given the approval for the signing of Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) in respect of tax matters between India and the Revenue administrations of BRICS countries namely, Brazil, Russian Federation, China and South Africa.

#### **Objective:**

The MoC aims to further promote cooperation amongst the BRICS Revenue administrations in international forum on common areas of interest in tax matters and in the area of capacity building and knowledge sharing. It envisages regular interaction amongst the heads of Revenue administration of BRICS countries to continue discussion on common areas of interest and strive towards convergence of views and meeting of the Experts on tax matters to discuss the contemporary issues in areas of international tax. In addition, the MoC accords confidentiality and protection to information exchanged under this MoC.

#### **Impact:**

The MoC will stimulate effective cooperation in tax matters. The collective stand of BRICS countries can prove to be beneficial not only to these countries but also to other developing countries in the long run in tax matters being steered by the G20.

#### **Background:**

The Heads of Revenue of the BRICS countries have been meeting regularly to discuss the potential areas of cooperation in tax matters and to exchange opinions and views based on the existing commitment to openness, solidarity, equality, mutual understanding, inclusiveness and mutually beneficial cooperation, as stated in the Goa Declaration issued on October 16, 2016. The BRICS countries have identified four areas of mutual interest on which understanding and cooperation can be further strengthened. The heads of Revenue of BRICS countries in their meeting held on the sidelines of FTA plenary at Beijing, China in May, 2016 decided to sign a MoC outlining these areas of cooperation.

#### **IRDAI's admission as a signatory to International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS)**

The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval for IRDAI's admission as a signatory to International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS), Multilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MMoU).

**Key facts:**

- MMoU provides a formal basis for cooperation and information exchange between the Signatory Authorities regarding the supervision of insurance companies where cross-border aspects arise.
- The scope of the IAIS MMoU is wider than the existing agreements as this agreement also provides for supervision of other regulated entities such as insurance intermediaries under Anti Money Laundering, (AML) and Combating the Finance of Terrorism (CFT).

**About IAIS:**

The International Association of Insurance Supervisors is a **global framework for cooperation and information exchange between insurance supervisors**. International Association of Insurance Supervisors, Multilateral Memorandum of Understanding is a statement of its signatories' intent to cooperate in the Field of information exchange as well as procedure for handling information requests.

**Need for international cooperation:**

With increasing integration of financial market and growing number of internationally active insurance companies there is an increased need for mutual cooperation and information exchange between insurance industry supervisors.

**Cabinet approves revision of Indian Community Welfare Fund guidelines**

The Union Cabinet has approved revision of the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) guidelines.

- The revised guidelines being made broad-based seek to expand the scope of welfare measures that can be extended through the Fund.
- The guidelines would cover three key areas namely Assisting Overseas Indian nationals in distress situations, Community Welfare activities and Improvement in Consular services.
- They are expected to provide Indian Missions and Posts abroad greater flexibility in swiftly addressing to requests for assistance by Overseas Indian nationals.

**About ICWF:**

ICWF, set up in 2009, is aimed at assisting Overseas Indian nationals in times of distress and emergency in the most deserving cases on a means tested basis.

- The ICWF would be funded through budgetary support from the Ministry, funds raised by the Indian Missions by levying a nominal service charge on consular services and through Voluntary contributions from the Indian community.
- Apart from assisting Indian nationals in distress abroad, ICWF has been a critical support in emergency evacuation of Indian nationals in conflict zones in Libya, Iraq, Yemen, South Sudan and other challenging situations like assistance extended to undocumented Indian workers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the Nitaqat drive in 2013 and the ongoing Amnesty drive in 2017.
- It has also created a sense of confidence among the migrant workers going overseas about the support they can expect from India during critical times.
- ICWF stands extended to all Indian Missions and Posts abroad and is primarily funded by levying service charge on various consular services rendered by Indian Missions and Posts abroad.

**Untrained teachers get 2 years to qualify**

The Lok Sabha has passed **the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Bill**.

### **Key facts:**

The bill **allows teachers appointed on or before March 31, 2015 to acquire minimum qualifications within a period of four years from the date of commencement of the Act.** This gives the 8.5 lakh unqualified teachers, appointed after implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) law, another chance to get recognized degrees.

### **What necessitated this move?**

Many new schools had come up in the days of educational expansion under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the RTE, and many teachers who were hired did not have requisite degrees, some having studied only till school. They were given five years to train themselves, and many did, but 5-6 lakh private schools teachers and 2.5-lakh government school teachers still did not have the requisite degrees. The qualifications are deemed necessary to ensure that teachers are well-qualified to ensure quality of education.

### **Background**

According to the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, which came into force on April 1, 2010, a teacher, who did not possess minimum qualifications, was required to acquire them in five years.

**The Act was enacted to provide free and compulsory education to all children between the age of six and 14 years.** The central government subsequently received requests from states for extension of the period to enable them complete the training process for in-service untrained teachers.

### **India, Japan civil nuclear deal comes into force**

The India-Japan Agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy entered into force on July 20, 2017 with the exchange of diplomatic notes between Dr. S. Jaishankar, Foreign Secretary and H.E. Mr. Kenji Hiramatsu, Ambassador of Japan to India.

- The pact was signed in Tokyo during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Japan on November 11, 2016.

### **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 move:**

- This Agreement is a reflection of the strategic partnership between India and Japan and will pave the way for enhanced cooperation in energy security and clean energy.
- It seeks to promote full cooperation between the two countries in the development and uses of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes on a stable, reliable and predictable basis.

- The deal is essential for bringing a network of nuclear energy cooperation for India, especially with the U.S. as prominent American nuclear companies are owned by the Japanese nuclear majors.

### **Government mulls insurance cover for digital transaction frauds**

The government is “very seriously” considering the recommendations of the Chandrababu Naidu committee on digital payment security, including insurance cover for the victims of fraudulent digital transactions.

#### **Important recommendations made by the committee:**

- The Committee of Chief Ministers on Digital Payment, chaired by Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh N. Chandrababu Naidu, has in its interim report suggested several measures for digital payment security, including an insurance scheme to cover losses incurred in digital transactions on account of fraud, etc.
- The report suggests that in order to address the apprehension of the general public in adopting digital payments, the scheme should target low-ticket transactions to cover the vulnerable sections like small merchants, farmers etc.

#### **Need for digital security:**

The number of digital transactions in the country was rising and hence the concern for their security.

- Around 1,200 crore digital transactions take place annually in the country. Of these, between 0.005% and 0.007% are fraudulent transactions.
- The number of cases of frauds involving credit cards, ATM/debit cards and Internet banking during 2015-16 was 16,468 and in 2016-17 it was 13,653.
- As per incidents reported to the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), 40 phishing incidents affecting 19 financial organisations and 10 incidents affecting ATMs, Point of Sale (POS) systems and Unified Payment Interface (UPI) have been reported during November 2016 to June 2017.

### **India performs miserably in war on inequality**

**The index and the inequality report** was recently released by the international NGO Oxfam and Development Finance International.

- It measures the efforts of governments that had pledged to reduce inequality as part of the sustainable development goals.
- The index mainly focusses on redistributive actions governments can take, rather than those that would prevent rising inequality in the first place.

#### **Performance of various countries:**

- India has been ranked 132 out of 152 countries.
- OECD countries headed by Sweden ranked the highest while Nigeria was at the bottom.
- The US had the highest level of inequality among developed countries, though it is the wealthiest country in history.
- Bhutan, known for coining the term ‘Gross National Happiness’, is ranked even lower than India at 143.
- Of India’s immediate neighbours, all but Nepal (81) and China (87) ranked between 138 and 150.

### **NGT directs Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh to submit guidelines on forest fire**

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh governments to submit the national forest fire prevention and control guidelines.

- The court has also asked both the state governments to inform it about the total number of forest fires till date starting from 2016.

- The tribunal had earlier directed the states to submit crisis management plan for prevention and control of forest fires to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF).

### **Background:**

In Himachal Pradesh during 2016-17, there were 1,545 forest fires which affected 13,069 hectare causing loss of Rs 1.53 crore, whereas, in 2015-16, there were 672 fire incidents which caused harm in 5,749.95 hectare area causing loss of Rs 1.34 crore.

### **National Green Tribunal (NGT):**

The National Green Tribunal has been established under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources including enforcement of any legal right relating to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

- It is a specialized body equipped with the necessary expertise to handle environmental disputes involving multi-disciplinary issues. The Tribunal shall **not be bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, but shall be guided by principles of natural justice.**
- The Tribunal's dedicated jurisdiction in environmental matters shall provide speedy environmental justice and help reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts.
- **The Tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing of the same.**
- **The powers of tribunal related to an award are equivalent to Civil court and tribunal may transmit any order/award to civil court have local jurisdiction.**
- Any person aggrieved by an award, decision, or order of the Tribunal **may appeal to the Supreme Court within 90 days of commencement of award but Supreme Court can entertain appeal even after 90 days if appellant satisfied SC by giving sufficient reasons.**

### **Jaitley releases National Trade Facilitation Action Plan**

The National Trade Facilitation Action Plan (NTFAP) has been released.

### **What you need to know about the NTFAP?**

The Action Plan aims to transform cross-border clearance ecosystem through efficient, transparent, risk-based, co-ordinated, digital, seamless and technology driven procedures which are supported by advanced sea ports, airports, and land borders.

- The NTFAP aims to achieve improvement in ease of doing business by reducing cargo release time and cost, promote paperless regulatory environment, transparent and predictable legal regime and improved investment climate through better infrastructure.
- **NTFAP also awards specific responsibilities to all regulatory agencies** like Customs, FSSAI, Drug Controller, Plant Quarantine, DGFT, etc to be completed in a time-bound manner.
- This Action Plan gives a time bound map, not only for implementing TFA, but also for India's initiatives for trade facilitation and Ease of Doing Business which goes beyond TFA.
- Apart from activities under the ambit of TFA, the Action Plan also goes beyond to what has been defined as **TFA Plus category**. It covers many activities in the areas of infrastructure augmentation, particularly the roadways and railways leading to ports and the infrastructure within ports, airports, ICDs, land customs stations that cuts across all stakeholders for which various ministries like shipping, civil aviation, railways, road transport and highways, Home Affairs, Finance, Commerce etc have been assigned specified targets.
- **All actions covered under the plan have been categorized by prioritizing the activities into short term, midterm and long term.** The National Plan would be monitored by the Steering Committee (the operational arm of the NCTF) chaired by the Revenue Secretary and the Commerce Secretary. The plan would be reviewed by the Cabinet Secretary.

### **Trade facilitation:**

The Trade Facilitation Agreement forms part of **the Bali Package agreed by members at the Ninth Ministerial Conference in Bali.**

- The agreement contains provisions for faster and more efficient customs procedures through effective cooperation between customs and other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance issues.
- It also contains provisions for technical assistance and capacity building in this area.
- It is being believed, especially by the proponents of the agreement that deal could add \$1 trillion to global GDP and also can generate 21 million jobs by slashing red tape and streamlining customs.

### **Government plans ‘I stand by my country’ campaign**

The government hopes to trigger a **citizen movement** around **the theme ‘I stand by my country’** as part of a twin celebration to **commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Quit India movement and the 70th Independence Day.**

### **What you need to know?**

As part of the programme, the government plans a multimedia campaign that will focus on inspiring the young generation and instilling in them a sense of pride and responsibility.

- The celebrations will stress that in the next five years — in an era of determination, will and struggle — a ‘New India’ will be built which is “rid of corruption and black money” and fulfils the aspirations of its teeming millions.
- The campaign will also drive home the point that the country has already proved its worth in every field, be it science and technology, sports, spirituality, art, space exploration, economy and defence.
- **The aim of the campaign, hence is to portray an India which is “bold and decisive, can secure its future, is on the path of reforms, and that cares.**

### **Background:**

The Quit India Movement, also known as the August Movement was a Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Gandhi for independence. The movement was accompanied by a mass protest on non-violent lines, in which Gandhi called for “an orderly British withdrawal from India”.

### **MPC members to get Rs. 1.5 lakh per meet, must disclose assets**

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently notified the Monetary Policy Committee and Monetary Policy Process Regulations, 2016.

### **Highlights of the regulations:**

- **Remuneration:** Members of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) will be paid Rs. 1.5 lakh per meeting along with air travel and other reimbursements.
- **Silent period:** Members will have to observe a “silent period” of seven days before and after the rate decision for “utmost confidentiality”. Members are also required to be mindful of any conflict between their personal and public interest while interacting with profit making organisations and making personal financial transactions.
- **Voting pattern:** Each member of the MPC has one vote and in case the numbers are equal, the governor has the casting vote.

- **Report:** The MPC, which has the responsibility of achieving a set inflation target, should submit a report to the government in case of failure to achieve the required target. In such instances, the report shall be sent to the central government “within one month from the date on which the bank has failed to meet the inflation target“.
- **Meetings:** MPC has to hold meetings at least four times in a year. The schedule of the MPC meetings for the entire fiscal year needs to be announced in advance. At least 15 days of notice is required for convening a meeting ordinarily, but an emergency meeting can be called with 24 hours notice for each member and technology-enabled arrangements need to be made for even shorter notice period meetings.
- **Assets declaration:** All members need to disclose their assets and liabilities and update this information once every year.
- After conclusion of MPC meeting, a resolution needs to be made public including on the policy repo rate and any other monetary policy measures at the discretion of the Chairperson while keeping in view the functioning and timing of financial markets.

### **About the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC):**

The six-member MPC was constituted in September 2016. It has been deciding on policy rates since October last year.

### **Composition:**

The **committee will have six members**. Of the six members, the government will nominate three. No government official will be nominated to the MPC.

The other three members would be from the RBI with the governor being the ex-officio chairperson. Deputy governor of RBI in charge of the monetary policy will be a member, as also an executive director of the central bank.

### **Decision:**

Decisions will be taken by majority vote with each member having a vote.

### **RBI governor’s role:**

The RBI Governor will chair the committee. The governor, however, will not enjoy a veto power to overrule the other panel members, but will have a casting vote in case of a tie.

### **Selection:**

The government nominees to the MPC will be selected by a Search-cum-Selection Committee under Cabinet Secretary with RBI Governor and Economic Affairs Secretary and three experts in the field of economics or banking or finance or monetary policy as its members.

### **Term:**

Members of the MPC will be appointed for a period of four years and shall not be eligible for reappointment.

### **Government plans new agency to keep check on Chartered Accountants**

The government is reviewing plans to put in place **the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA)** as it seeks to rein in the Institute of Chartered Accounts for India (ICAI) for its perceived failure in enforcing discipline.

## **Background:**

While **Companies Act 2013** had provided for **NFRA as a regulatory agency for audit, accounts and financial reporting**, Section 132 of the law has remained on paper as the rules are yet to be notified. It is one of the few sections of the law that has not been notified yet.

## **What you need to know about the new agency?**

The new agency -which can have up to 15 members, including the chairman – **is mandated to advise on issues related to audit and accounting standards and be the regulator for the profession.**

The law provides for **NFRA to look into matters of professional or other misconduct and also suspend CAs and firms from practising for six months to 10 years.**

## **Opposition to this move:**

Several chartered accountants had lobbied with the government to block the notification as it would have taken away several powers that are currently vested with ICAI. Under the 1956 law, the Centre was to prescribe accounting standards prepared by ICAI in consultation with the National Advisory Committee on Accounting Standards (NACAS) -powers that are to be transferred to NFRA now.

## **Need for the new agency:**

ICAI's disciplinary record is often criticised-a charge that the institute is now trying to cope with. Just around 25 auditors have faced action in over a decade and around 1,400 cases were pending.

## **Bengaluru Declaration calls for SC/ST quota in judiciary**

The **Bengaluru Declaration** was recently adopted by the Karnataka State government sponsored **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar International Conference 2017**. The theme of the conference: "**Quest for Equity**".

- The declaration recommends a slew of **affirmative action measures** in private sector, judiciary, educational institutions, government contracts and promotions for Dalits.
- The declaration has 40 recommendations under **six broad categories** — safeguarding the people, strengthening democratic institutions, deepening social justice, enhancing human development, ensuring responsive governance, and promoting social security.

The **Preamble of the declaration** states, "This Peoples' Declaration hopes to be a dynamic blueprint that addresses the needs and aspirations of all Indians, and a starting point for an 'alliance of equity' of all progressive forces committed to safeguarding the idea of India".

## **Important recommendations made:**

- **Reserve seats** for SC/ST in appointment of judges, promotions, government contracts up to ₹1 crore, in private higher educational institutions and private sector.
- Establish an **Equal Opportunities Commission**, to oversee affirmative action.
- **Reserve seats** in legislature for other backward classes.
- Set up of a **farmers' income commission**.
- **Uphold Rule of Law** through police reforms and state action to prevent lynchings.
- Enact a **law against gender and caste discrimination** at education institutions.
- Ensure **land ownership** for SC/STs and establish **SC/ST land bank**, where government buys these lands at market prices and re-allots to the same community, to ensure non-dilution of ownership.
- Allocate 20% of the land in private housing layouts for urban poor.

- Launch a “**living wage**” and comprehensive social security scheme for all labourers working in the unorganised sector apart from ensuring dignity in retirement through enhanced pensions of ₹1,500 per month.

#### **Add-on for Prelims:**

Similar Declaration was adopted by Madhya Pradesh in 2002. The **Bhopal Declaration** that called for “**liberalisation of capital for Dalits**” was adopted in 2002 during the tenure of Congress leader Digvijaya Singh in Madhya Pradesh.

#### **Arab League chief says Israel ‘playing with fire’ over Jerusalem**

The Arab League has warned Israel is “playing with fire” over the “red line” of Jerusalem and and risking a major crisis with the Arab and Islamic world.

#### **Immediate cause for the conflict:**

Israel sent extra troops into the occupied West Bank after violence erupted over Israel’s installation of metal detectors at entry points to the Noble Sanctuary-Temple Mount compound in Jerusalem’s walled Old City. Palestinians view the new security measures as an Israeli attempt to assert further control over the site, the holiest site in Judaism and the third holiest in Islam. Israel says the detectors are necessary to prevent another incident in which illegal weapons are taken into the compound and turned against Israeli forces.

#### **What’s the conflict is all about?**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is over who gets what land and how it’s controlled. The 1967 war is particularly important for today’s conflict, as **it left Israel in control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip**, two territories home to large Palestinian populations.

Today, **the West Bank is nominally controlled by the Palestinian Authority and is under Israeli occupation**. This comes in the form of Israeli troops, who enforce Israeli security restrictions on Palestinian movement and activities, and Israeli “settlers,” Jews who build ever-expanding communities in the West Bank that effectively deny the land to Palestinians. Gaza is controlled by Hamas, an Islamist fundamentalist party, and is under Israeli blockade but not ground troop occupation.

#### **Add- on for Prelims:**

**What is Arab League?** The Arab League is a regional organization of Arab countries in and around North Africa, the Horn of Africa and Arabia. It was formed in Cairo on 22 March 1945 with six members: Kingdom of Egypt, Kingdom of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. Currently, the League has 22 members, but Syria’s participation has been suspended since November 2011, as a consequence of government repression during the Syrian Civil War.

The League’s **main goal** is to “draw closer the relations between member States and co-ordinate collaboration between them, to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to consider in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab countries“.

#### **Cyber space global conference**

India will be hosting the 5th Global Conference on Cyber Space (GCCS) in 2017, one of the world’s largest conference on Cyber Space and related issues.

#### **Key facts:**

- The GCCS is taking place **outside OECD nations for the first time**.
- It is being held **in India for the first time**. inclusive, Sustainable, Developmental, Safe and Secure Cyberspace’.

- **Participants:**

The **theme** for the GCCS 2017 is ‘Cyber4All: An In

The conference will see participation of around 2000 delegates from senior Government officials, industry leaders, academia and civil society from over 100 countries.

### **Aim of the conference:**

GCCS will congregate and deliberate on issues relating to promotion of cooperation in cyberspace, norms for responsible behaviour in cyberspace and to enhance cyber capacity building.

### **What you need to know about GCCS?**

GCCS is a prestigious international conference that aims **at encouraging dialogue among stakeholders of cyberspace**, which has been taking place since 2011. Incepted in 2011 in London, GCCS witnessed a participation of 700 global delegates. Global Forum on Cyber Expertise (GFCE) for capacity building in cyber space was launched in the fourth edition of the conference held in The Hague, Netherlands.

### **Google’s machine-raised mosquitoes to shrink vector’s numbers**

Google’s parent company Alphabet and scientists in the US have teamed up to release 20 million machine-raised mosquitoes to shrink the numbers of the disease-carrying ones.

### **What you need to know about the project?**

The project, called **Debug Fresno**, is being undertaken by Verily, a subsidiary of Alphabet, Google’s holding company.

- **The goal is to cut the numbers of Aedes aegypti mosquitoes** — the species responsible for spreading zika, dengue and chikungunya.
- For 20 weeks, the company plans to release a million of the sterile, non-biting male mosquitoes in two neighbourhoods in Fresno county.
- **The male mosquitoes are bred and infected with Wolbachia, a bacterium that is naturally found in at least 40% of all insect species. The bacterium used to sterilise mosquitoes “is not known” to infect humans.**
- In a phenomenon called **cytoplasmic incompatibility**, matings between Wolbachia-infected males and uninfected females result in embryo lethality or low hatch rates.

### **World’s first wind farm being built off Scotland coast:**

The world’s first full-scale floating wind farm is being built off the coast of Scotland. The wind farm, known as Hywind, is a trial project which will bring power to 20,000 homes. The technology will allow wind power to be harvested in waters that are too deep for the existing bottom-standing turbines.

## **Meet on island development**

Ten islands from Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep have been identified by the government for improving maritime economy, preserving the eco-system and addressing security concerns. The decision was taken at the first meeting of **the newly- constituted Islands Development Agency (IDA)**.

- The islands include Smith, Ross, Aves, Long and Little Andaman in Andaman and Nicobar and Minicoy, Bangaram, Suheli, Cherium and Tinnakara in Lakshadweep.

## **About IDA:**

The IDA was set up on June 1 this year following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's review meeting for the development of islands.

- The meetings of the agency are **chaired by the Union Home Minister**.
- **Members of the IDA include** cabinet secretary, home secretary, secretary (environment, forests and climate change), secretary (tourism) and secretary (tribal welfare).

## **Admiralty Bill**

Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Bill, 2017 has been passed unanimously by the Rajya Sabha. The bill was earlier passed by the Lok Sabha in March, 2017.

**Admiralty laws deal with cases of accidents in navigable waters or involve contracts related to commerce on such waters.** The Bill repeals laws such as the Admiralty Court Act, 1861, the Colonial Courts of Admiralty Act, 1890.

## **What you need to know about the Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Bill?**

The Bill aims to establish a legal framework for consolidation of related laws to replace the age old archaic laws with modern Indian legislation and to confer admiralty jurisdiction on all High Courts of the coastal states of the country.

## **Highlights of the Bill:**

### **Admiralty jurisdiction:**

The jurisdiction with respect to maritime claims under the Bill will vest with the respective High Courts and will extend up to the territorial waters of their respective jurisdictions. The central government may extend the jurisdiction of these High Courts. Currently admiralty jurisdiction applies to the Bombay, Calcutta and Madras High Courts. The Bill further extend this to the High Courts of Karnataka, Gujarat, Orissa, Kerala, Hyderabad, and any other High Court notified by the central government.

### **Maritime claims:**

The High Courts may exercise jurisdiction on maritime claims arising out of conditions including:

- (i) disputes regarding ownership of a vessel,
- (ii) disputes between co-owners of a vessel regarding employment or earnings of the vessel, (
- (iii) mortgage on a vessel,
- (iv) construction, repair, or conversion of the vessel,
- (v) disputes arising out of the sale of a vessel,
- (vi) environmental damage caused by the vessel, etc. The Bill defines a vessel as any ship, boat, or sailing vessel which may or may not be mechanically propelled.

While determining maritime claims under the specified conditions, the courts may settle any outstanding accounts between parties with regard to the vessel. They may also direct that the vessel or a share of it be sold.

With regard to a sale, courts may determine the title to the proceeds of such sale.

**Priority of maritime claims:** Among all claims in an admiralty proceeding, highest priority will be given to maritime claims, followed by mortgages on the vessel, and all other claims. Within maritime claims, the highest priority will be given to claims for wages due with regard to employment on the vessel. This would be followed by claims with regard to loss of life or personal injury in connection with the operation of the vessel. Such claims will continue to exist even with the change of ownership of the vessel.

**Jurisdiction over a person:** Courts may exercise admiralty jurisdiction against a person with regard to maritime claims. However, the courts will not entertain complaints against a person in certain cases. These include: (i) damage, or loss of life, or personal injury arising out of collision between vessels that was caused in India, or (ii) non-compliance with the collision regulations of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 by a person who does not reside or carry out business in India. Further, Courts will not entertain action against a person until any case against them with regard to the same incident in any court outside India has ended.

**Arrest of vessel:** The courts may order for the arrest of any vessel within their jurisdiction for providing security against a maritime claim which is the subject of a proceeding. They may do so under various reasons such as: (i) owner of the vessel is liable for the claim, (ii) the claim is based on mortgage of the vessel, and (iii) the claim relates to ownership of the vessel, etc.

**Appeals:** Any judgments made by a single Judge of the High Court can be appealed against to a Division Bench of the High Court. Further, the Supreme Court may, on application by any party, transfer an admiralty proceeding at any stage from one High Court to any other High Court. The latter High Court will proceed with the matter from the stage where it stood at the time of the transfer.

**Assessors:** The central government will appoint a list of assessors qualified and experienced in admiralty and maritime matters. The central government will also determine the duties of assessors, and their fee. Typically, assessors assist the judges in determining rates and claims in admiralty proceedings.

### **What necessitated this move?**

India is a leading maritime nation and maritime transportation caters to about ninety-five percent of its merchandise trade volume. However, under the present statutory framework, the admiralty jurisdiction of Indian courts flow from laws enacted in the British era. Admiralty jurisdiction relates to powers of the High Courts in respect of claims associated with transport by sea and navigable waterways. The repealing of five admiralty statutes is in line with the Government's commitment to do away with archaic laws which are hindering efficient governance.

### **Sexual Harassment electronic-Box (SHe-Box)**

#### **What is it?**

It is **an online complaint management system for registering complaints related to sexual harassment at workplace**. It was launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. The complaint management system has been developed **to ensure the effective implementation of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (the SH Act), 2013**.

#### **What you need to know about the She-Box?**

This portal is an initiative to provide **a platform to women working or visiting any office of Central Government** (Central Ministries, Departments, Public Sector Undertakings, Autonomous Bodies and Institutions etc.) **to file complaints related to sexual harassment at workplace under the SH Act**. Those who had already filed a written complaint with the concerned Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) constituted under the SH Act are also eligible to file their complaint through this portal.

- It is also an effort to provide speedier remedy to women facing sexual harassment at workplace as envisaged under the SH Act.
- Once a complaint is submitted to the portal, it will be directly sent to the ICC of the concerned Ministry/Department/PSU/Autonomous Body etc. having jurisdiction to inquire into the complaint.

Through this portal, WCD as well as complainant can monitor the progress of inquiry conducted by the ICC.

### **Background:**

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 seeks to protect women from sexual harassment at their place of work. This statute superseded the Vishakha Guidelines for prevention of sexual harassment introduced by the Supreme Court of India.

Under the Act, which also covers students in schools and colleges as well as patients in hospitals, employers and local authorities will have to set up grievance committees to investigate all complaints. Employers who fail to comply will be punished with a fine of up to 50,000 rupees.

### **Bill introduced to replace Banking regulation ordinance**

The Banking Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2017 to authorise the RBI to direct banking companies to resolve the problem of stressed assets has been introduced in the Lok Sabha by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.

### **Highlights of the Bill:**

- The Banking Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2017, seeks **to amend the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 and replace the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2017**, which was promulgated in May this year.
- It **gives powers to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to ask any bank to initiate insolvency proceedings and give directions for resolution of stressed assets.**
- The RBI would **also be empowered to issue other directions for resolution, appoint or approve for appointment, authorities or committees** to advise the banking companies for stressed asset resolution.

### **Rationale behind the introduction of this Bill:**

Stressed assets in the banking system have reached unacceptably high levels and hence, urgent measures were required for their speedy resolution. Therefore, the government considered it necessary to make provisions in the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 for authorizing the Reserve Bank of India to issue directions to any banking company or banking companies to effectively use the provisions of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 for timely resolution of stressed assets.

### **Bill to divert 2.5 per cent proceeds of CRF to national waterways introduced in Lok Sabha**

The government has introduced in the Lok Sabha the **Central Road Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2017** providing for allocation of about Rs 2,000 crore from Central Road Fund (CRF) for developing national waterways (NWs).

- The bill seeks to amend the Central Road Fund Act, 2000, to allocate 2.5% of the proceeds of CRF for development and maintenance of NWs and a reduction in the share provided for development of National Highways.

### **Background:**

Parliament had last year enacted National Waterways (NWs) Act, 2016, for developing and maintaining the existing five NWs and 106 new NWs across the country. The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has estimated that approximately Rs 25,000 crore would be required for development of identified projects on NWs till 2022-23.

## **What you need to know about Central Road Fund?**

The Central Road Fund was established by the government **as per the Central road fund act 2000** to fund the development and maintenance of National Highways, State Highways and Rural roads.

- In order to mobilise the fund, the Central Road Fund Act 2000 proposed **to levy and collect by way of cess, a duty of excise and duty of customs on petrol and high speed diesel oil.**
- The fund is utilised for the development and maintenance of National highways, State roads, Rural roads and for provision of road overbridges/under bridges and other safety features at unmanned Railway Crossings.

## **SC ready to revisit Lodha reforms**

The Supreme Court is all set to revisit, if not modify, some key recommendations Justice R.M. Lodha Committee to usher in transparency in the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and the cricket administration.

### **Background:**

Following allegations of corruption, match fixing and betting scandals in cricket in the country, the Supreme Court of India appointed a three-panel member led by Justice R M Lodha in January 2015 to look into the functioning of BCCI and suggest reforms. The Lodha Committee, in January 2016, released its list of reforms which had some major contentious points. The reforms were contested by several BCCI post holders.

### **Contentious proposals:**

The possibility of one state, one vote became the biggest point of debate among several others; restriction on ministers and civil servants and those above 70 from becoming its members and cooling off period were some other major contentions. The recommendations focused mainly on BCCI administrative structures and not on its cricketing functions. Lodha panel also suggested the setting up of a players' association in the country.

### **What next?**

The Court has said that it would hear the BCCI, the State cricket associations and member bodies on issues such as “memberships, number of votes” in an effort to make the running of “cricket, the gentleman’s game” come as close to perfect as possible.

Meanwhile, the court has exhorted the BCCI and its members to implement the Lodha reforms as regards all issues other than the ones flagged for further debate in court.

### **Key recommendations accepted by the BCCI:**

- The induction of the representative of the Comptroller and Auditor General as the member of the Apex Council and the IPL Governing Council.
- The formation of the Apex Council – to replace the working committee, according to the Lodha report – with certain modifications. The Lodha report had recommended that only the BCCI president, vice-president, secretary, joint secretary and treasurer be part of the Apex Council but it is understood that the board was in favour of all the members of the working committee remaining a part of the Apex Council.
- Putting in place various committees as recommended by the Lodha Committee, including the special committee for the differently abled and the women’s committee.
- The formation of the Players Association.
- Voting rights for the Associate members as per the ICC guidelines.

- Puducherry (Pondicherry) to be granted associate membership in the BCCI.

### **Aarambh app for Road maintenance**

The government has launched a **mobile app- Aarambh- for road maintenance**.

- This Mobile Phone App aims at **use of GIS based mapping** for making road inventories, condition surveys, and producing cost estimates and other relevant data for preparation and monitoring of annual road maintenance plans.
- Its usage would greatly enhance the service delivery of the state level institutions in planning and implementing performance based rural roads maintenance contracts.

### **Government to go ahead with electoral bonds even if consensus eludes**

The government is planning to go ahead with electoral bonds even if consensus eludes on the issue as political parties have not come up yet with any suggestion on the proposal.

#### **Background:**

In a major move aimed at promoting transparency in political funding, Jaitley had in this year's Budget speech announced capping of anonymous cash donations to political parties at Rs 2,000 and introduced the concept of electoral bonds. The government had also asked political parties to offer a better suggestion on the proposed electoral bond mechanism.

#### **What you need to know about Electoral Bonds?**

As per the electoral bond mechanism announced in the Budget, the proposed bonds will resemble a **promissory note and not an interest-paying debt instrument**. They will be sold by authorised banks and can be deposited in notified accounts of political parties within the duration of their validity.

The bonds will not **carry the name of the donor and routing of the money through banks will ensure that only tax paid money comes into the political system**.

#### **Advantages of Electoral Bonds:**

The advantage of the electoral bond system over donations through cheques is that many donors expressed reluctance to use cheques because it becomes transparent and leads to political vendetta by rivals. The other reason that donors did not want their names to be known was that, following the donation, if they legitimately win a contract, then they open themselves up to suspicion of benefiting from a quid pro quo arrangement with the party in power.

### **India-China standoff: A look at key background of the dispute**

The tense standoff between India and China over the Doklam plateau has only escalated, raising concerns in both capitals of an all-out military conflict. Both sides have made threats while simultaneously calling for negotiations. The US State Department has urged the two sides to work together toward a peaceful resolution.

#### **What is the dispute all about?**

Negotiations since 1985 to settle the boundary dispute have seen little success. The land they're currently arguing over spans 269 square kilometers (104 square miles) on a sparsely populated plateau in western Bhutan, which has no diplomatic ties with China and coordinates its relations with Beijing through New Delhi.

Bhutan's foreign ministry called China's move to construct road in this region a "direct violation" of agreements reached in 1988 and 1998 to maintain peace and refrain from unilateral action in the area pending a final border settlement. Bhutan hopes that the status quo in the Doklam area will be maintained.

### **Significance of Doklam plateau:**

For India, securing the Doklam Plateau is seen as essential to maintaining its control over a land corridor that connects India's mainland with its remote northeastern states. India has said the Chinese road project threatens its access to the corridor.

### **223 anti-dumping probes initiated by India since January 2012**

India has initiated as many as 223 anti-dumping investigations between January 2012 and July 14 this year against various countries, including China and Indonesia. During the period, maximum number of cases were against China.

- Product categories on which the levy was imposed include chemicals, fibre boards, glass & glassware, pharmaceuticals and steel.

### **What you need to know about Anti-dumping duty?**

Anti dumping is a measure to rectify the situation arising out of the dumping of goods and its trade distortive effect.

**Purpose:** The purpose of anti dumping duty is to rectify the trade distortive effect of dumping and re-establish fair trade.

**Is it permitted?** The use of anti dumping measure as an instrument of fair competition is permitted by the WTO. It provides relief to the domestic industry against the injury caused by dumping. It is levied on distrustfully low-priced imports, so as to protect the domestic manufacturers.

**Need for anti-dumping duty:** Dumping is an unfair trade practice of exporting goods to another country at a price lesser than what is paid in the exporting nation or their normal production cost, thereby distorting international trade and causing injury to the domestic manufacturers of the goods in the importing country.

### **Mekedatu: Karnataka replies to CWC**

The Karnataka State government has replied to clarifications sought by the Central Water Commission (CWC) on its proposal to build a balancing reservoir across the Cauvery at Mekedatu at a cost of Rs. 5,912 crore.

### **Background:**

Karnataka had sought the CWC's permission to start work on Mekedatu project, which has been opposed by Tamil Nadu alleging that it violates the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal order. The State had submitted the Detailed Project Report on Mekedatu to the chief engineer of CWC in June, 2017. After this, the CWC had sought a few clarifications on the DPR, including whether the project violates the final award of Tribunal and whether the construction of a balancing reservoir would affect flow of water to Tamil Nadu.

### **What is Mekedatu dispute all about?**

Karnataka intends to build a reservoir across river Cauvery near Mekedatu in Kanakapura taluk. It was first proposed along with Shivanasamudra hydro power project at Shimsa in 2003 with an intention to use the water for a hydro power station and supply drinking water to Bengaluru city.

However, Tamil Nadu objected saying Karnataka had not sought prior permission for the project. Its argument was that the project would affect the flow of Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu.

### **Know about CWC:**

It is a premier Technical Organization of India in the field of Water Resources and is presently functioning as **an attached office of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Government of India.**

The Commission is entrusted with the general responsibilities of initiating, coordinating and furthering in consultation of the State Governments concerned, schemes for control, conservation and utilization of water resources throughout the country, for purpose of Flood Control, Irrigation, Navigation, Drinking Water Supply and Water Power Development.

Central Water Commission CWC is headed by a **Chairman, with the status of Ex-Officio Secretary to the Government of India.**

### **National Anti-profiteering Authority**

The GST Council has formed a Selection Committee under the Chairmanship of Cabinet Secretary to identify and recommend eligible persons for appointment as the Chairman and Members of the National Anti-profiteering Authority under GST.

### **What you need to know about the National Anti-profiteering Authority?**

The National Anti-profiteering Authority **is tasked with ensuring the full benefits of a reduction in tax on supply of goods or services flow to the consumers.**

- When constituted by the GST Council, the **National Anti-profiteering Authority shall be responsible for applying anti-profiteering measures** in the event of a reduction in rate of GST on supply of goods or services or, if the benefit of input tax credit is not passed on to the recipients by way of commensurate reduction in prices.
- The National Anti-profiteering Authority shall be headed **by a senior officer of the level of a Secretary to the Government of India** and shall have four technical members from the Centre and/or the States.
- The constitution of the National Anti-profiteering Authority is expected to bolster consumer confidence and ensure all stakeholders reap the intended benefits of GST.

### **Powers and functions of the authority:**

In the event the National Anti-profiteering Authority confirms the necessity of applying anti-profiteering measures, it has the power to order the business concerned to reduce its prices or return the undue benefit availed along with interest to the recipient of the goods or services. If the undue benefit cannot be passed on to the recipient, it can be ordered to be deposited in the Consumer Welfare Fund. In extreme cases the National Anti-profiteering Authority can impose a penalty on the defaulting business entity and even order the cancellation of its registration under GST.

### **Nai Roshni Scheme**

NITI Aayog had conducted an evaluation study on 'Nai Roshni'- the scheme for Leadership Development of Minority Women in 2015-16. The main objective of the study was to assess the impact of the scheme on minority women and to identify policy/ programme impediments in implementation of the scheme.

### **Performance of the scheme:**

According to NITI Aayog, majority of the findings of the study indicate that the programme has been appreciated by most of the segments of the population of the society and it has assisted in creating confidence among minority women and developing leadership spirit in them. Moreover, the trained women are also utilizing their enriched knowledge within their surroundings and thereby helping their families as well as neighbours in raising their essential demands and claims from various Government authorities.

#### **About Nai Roshni scheme:**

The scheme **aims to empower and instill confidence among minority women by providing knowledge, tools and techniques** for interacting with Government systems, Banks and other institutions at all levels. The scheme is implemented through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The scheme is implemented with the involvement of the Gram Panchayat at village level and Local Urban bodies at the District level.

#### **Amendment to NMC Bill**

A four member Committee headed by Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog, which was constituted to examine all options for reforms in the Medical Council of India (MCI) and suggest a way forward, has framed a **draft “National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill”** which provides for constitution of NMC in place of MCI.

- The draft Bill has been relooked by a Group of Ministers (GoM) constituted for the purpose. The GoM has approved the draft Bill with some modifications.

#### **About the National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill:**

The National Medical Commission Bill, 2016 was introduced by the NITI Aayog. It extends to the whole country. It aims to create world class educational system. The bill seeks to repeal Indian Medical Council Act 1956 and be replaced by a body called National Medical Commission.

#### **The Bill aims to:**

- Ensure adequate supply of high quality medical professionals at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
- Encourage medical professionals to incorporate the latest medical research in their work and to contribute to such research.
- Provide for objective periodic assessments of medical institutions.
- Facilitate the maintenance of a medical register for India and enforce high ethical standards in all aspects of medical services.
- Ensure that the medical institutes are flexible enough to adapt to the changing needs of a transforming nation.

#### **As per the Bill, the Central Government shall constitute a Commission, to be called the National Medical Commission:**

The Commission shall be a body corporate by the name aforesaid, having perpetual succession and a common seal, with power, subject to the provisions of this Act, to acquire, hold and dispose of property, both movable and immovable, and to contract, and shall, by the said name, sue or be sued.

The Central Government shall, by notification, establish autonomous Boards under the overall supervision of this Commission, to fulfil the functions related to the conduct of under-graduate and post-graduate education, assessment and rating of medical institutions and registration of medical practitioners and enforcement of medical ethics.

#### **Transfer unclaimed accruals to fund: IRDA**

As per the new direction from IRDA, insurance companies can no longer retain unclaimed amounts of policyholders if those accruals are more than 10 years old. Such sums need to be, instead, transferred to the Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund (SCWF) of the Centre.

#### **Background:**

The direction from the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India has come in the backdrop of the amendment made in April to the Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund Rules. The amendment expanded the purview beyond the unclaimed amounts in small savings and other saving schemes of the Centre, PPF and EPF.

It brought in unclaimed amount lying with banks, including cooperative banks and RRBs; dividend accounts, deposits and debentures of companies coming under the Companies Act; insurance companies and Coal Mines PF.

#### **About the Senior Citizens Welfare Fund:**

The Centre brought in Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund Act, 2015 (SCWF) as part of the Finance Act, 2015, which mandates transfer of unclaimed amounts of policyholders to the fund (SCWF) after a period of 10 years.

- **The fund will be administered by an Inter-Ministerial Committee, headed by a Chairperson.** The Committee will be competent to spend money from the fund for satisfying various objectives.
- **The accounts of the fund will be open to audit by CAG, regularly.** The Central Government will present the annual report and the one furnished by CAG to be laid before the Parliament.

#### **Sri Lanka clears revised deal for Hambantota port**

Sri Lanka's Cabinet has cleared a revised deal for the **Chinese-built port in Hambantota**. The modified agreement is believed to be more profitable to Sri Lanka and also addresses security concerns raised by other countries.

- As per the deal, while the Chinese would manage port operations, no naval ship, including Chinese ones, can call at Hambantota without Sri Lanka's permission.

#### **Why is India worried?**

India's apprehensions about the apparently growing Chinese presence in the island are well known, given the two countries' competing strategic interests in the island. **The Hambantota port is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative.**

Chinese control of Hambantota, which is part of its modern-day "Silk Route" across Asia and beyond, as well as a plan to acquire 15,000 acres (23 sq miles) to develop an industrial zone next door, had raised fears that it could also be used for Chinese naval vessels.

#### **India rejects OIC move on vigilantism**

India has strongly rejected the resolutions of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that had expressed concern about the recent attacks on people by cow-vigilante groups. India has termed the resolutions adopted at the OIC's latest foreign ministers' meeting as "factually incorrect".

#### **Background:**

The OIC noted that incidents of violence against the Muslim community were being committed by extremist Hindu groups and said it viewed such incidents "with grave concern".

### **About the OIC:**

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation is an international organization founded in 1969, consisting of 57 member states. The organisation states that it is “the collective voice of the Muslim world” and works to “safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony“. The OIC **has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union.**

### **Human antibodies produced in lab for first time**

In a first, scientists have produced human antibodies in the laboratory using a technique that could usher the rapid development of new vaccines to treat a wide range of infectious diseases.

### **What are antibodies and why are they produced?**

Antibodies are produced by the body’s B cells to fight off infections by bacteria, viruses, and other invasive pathogens. When an individual B cell recognises a specific pathogen-derived “antigen” molecule, it can proliferate and develop into plasma cells that secrete large amounts of antibody capable of binding to the antigen and fending off the infection.

### **About the new technique:**

In addition to encountering a specific antigen, B cells need a second signal to start proliferating and developing into plasma cells. Researchers provided this second signal by short DNA fragments called CpG oligonucleotides, which activate a protein inside B cells named TLR9.

- However, treating patient-derived B cells with CpG oligonucleotides stimulates every B cell in the sample, not just the tiny fraction capable of producing a particular antibody. Researchers produced specific human antibodies in the laboratory by treating patient-derived B cells with tiny nanoparticles coated with both CpG oligonucleotides and an antigen.
- With this technique, CpG oligonucleotides are only internalised into B cells that recognise the specific antigen, and these cells are therefore the only ones in which TLR9 is activated to induce their proliferation and development into antibody-secreting plasma cells.

### **Significance of this discovery:**

This approach will help researchers rapidly generate therapeutic antibodies for the treatment of infectious diseases and other conditions such as cancer. Specifically, it should allow the production of these antibodies within a shorter time frame in vitro and without the need for vaccination or blood/serum donation from recently infected or vaccinated individuals.

This method also offers the potential to accelerate the development of new vaccines by allowing the efficient evaluation of candidate target antigens.

### **First Two NOPVs Shachi and Shruti Launched**

Reliance Defence and Engineering Limited (RDEL) has launched the **first two Naval Offshore Patrol Vessels (NOPVs)** at their shipyard in Pipavav, Gujarat.

### **Key facts:**

- The ships are part of a five ship project being constructed for the Indian Navy.

- The primary role of NOPVs is **to undertake surveillance of the country's vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) besides operational tasks such as anti-piracy patrols, fleet support operations, maritime security of offshore assets, coastal security operations, and protection of shipping lanes.**
- The NOPVs would increase the ocean surveillance and patrolling capabilities of the Indian Navy.
- The NOPVs are patrol ships and are armed with 76mm Super Rapid Gun Mount (SRGM) system along with two 30mm AK-630M guns which provide medium range and short range offensive and defensive capabilities.
- The armament is remotely controlled through an electronic Fire Control System.
- The ships are fitted with diesel engine driven propulsion systems and can deliver speeds upto 25 knots.
- All ship operations are controlled by an intelligent Integrated Platform Management System which has interfaces for all operational activities onboard the ship.

### **States can't enact law on parliamentary secretaries: SC**

The Supreme Court has ruled that state assemblies hold no power to enact a law that enables them to appoint parliamentary secretaries.

#### **Background:**

The ruling came on a plea challenging the appointment of 13 MLAs as parliamentary secretaries by the Assam government in 2015. The verdict would also have an impact on the Aam Aadmi Party government's decision to appoint 21 MLAs as parliamentary secretaries. The Delhi High Court too had quashed their appointments, saying 'it lacked the approval of the lieutenant governor'.

#### **What's the issue?**

The question posed before the court was whether **Article 194(3) and Entry 39 of List II of the 7th Schedule** authorised the state legislature to make the impugned Act. Entry 39 indicates the field of legislation regarding the powers, privileges, and immunities of the house of legislatures.

#### **Who is a parliamentary secretary?**

A Parliament Secretary is similar to a Minister of State who assists a Minister in his or her duties.

#### **What is the controversy over the 21 AAP MLAs who were appointed Parliamentary Secretaries to Ministers of the Delhi government?**

##### **It raises two issues.**

- **Office of profit:** First, the Constitution specifies conditions which disqualify MPs, MLAs, Municipality and Panchayat members from membership of their respective institutions. The first is holding an "Office of Profit" under the state or central government. The essence of this disqualification is that there should be no conflict between the duties and interests of an elected member. MPs and MLAs hold the government accountable for its work, and if they held an "Office of Profit" under the government, they might be susceptible to government influence and might not discharge their constitutional mandate fully.
- **Cap:** Second, the Constitution caps the number of members in the union and state cabinet. Article 164(1A) specifies that the number of ministers including the Chief Minister has to be within 15% of the total number of members of the Assembly. (10% in the case of Delhi, which is not a 'full' state) Over the last few years, courts across the country have struck down the appointment of Parliamentary Secretaries for violating the Constitution.

## Union Cabinet clears minimum wage code bill

The Union Cabinet has approved the **new wage code bill** which will ensure a minimum wage across all sectors by integrating four labour related laws. The proposed legislation is expected to benefit over 4 crore employees across the country. **Labour is on the concurrent list.**

### Highlights of the Bill:

- The Labour Code on Wages Bill will consolidate the Minimum Wages Act, 1948; the Payment of Wages Act, 1936; the Payment of Bonus Act, 1965; and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.
- The bill seeks to empower the Centre to set a minimum wage across all sectors in the country and states will have to maintain that. However, states will be able to provide for higher minimum wage in their jurisdiction than fixed by the central government.
- The new minimum wage norms would be applicable for all workers irrespective of their pay. At present, the minimum wages fixed by the Centre and states are applicable to workers getting up to Rs 18,000 pay monthly. This would ensure a universal minimum wage for all industries and workers, including those getting monthly pay higher than Rs 18,000.
- The minimum wage would be applicable on all classes of workers. At present, it is applicable for scheduled industries or establishments in the law.
- The wage code will empower the Centre to notify a ‘national minimum wage’ (below which no state can fix their minimum wages) and this will be revised every two years (five years if the dearness allowance becomes part of the minimum wages).

## Policy boosts care for blood disorders

The Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry’s recently released a **policy on the Prevention and Control of haemoglobinopathies in India**. With this, people living with thalassaemia, sickle cell anaemia and other haemoglobin disorders can now look forward to better screening and treatment.

### Highlights of the policy:

- The policy aims at creating treatment protocol benchmarks, to improve the quality of life of patients.
- It is also a guide on prevention and control, which includes antenatal and prenatal testing to reduce the incidence of live haemoglobin disorder births.
- Using public health awareness programmes and education, it highlights various haemoglobinopathies.
- The guidelines include the creation of a national registry to plan future patient services. The registry will also collect useful data, such as the location of patients to identify areas of high concentration, ethnicity or other characteristics, age distribution, records of deaths and their cause.
- Supported by the National Health Mission, Blood Cell and the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram, the guidelines provide for screening of pregnant women during antenatal check-up, pre-marital counselling at college level and one-time screening for variant anaemia in children.

### Background:

Thalassaemia and sickle cell anaemia are the most frequently encountered ‘rare blood disorders’ in the country and impose a significant economic burden on families. **They are caused by errors in the genes responsible for the production of hemoglobin**, a substance composed of a protein (globin) plus an iron molecule (heme) that is responsible for carrying oxygen within the red blood cell. These disorders can cause fatigue, jaundice, and episodes of pain ranging from mild to very severe. They are inherited, and usually both parents must pass on an abnormal gene in order for a child to have the disease. When this happens, the resulting diseases are serious and, at times, fatal.

## **India's Alternate Governor on the Board of Governors of the Asian Development Bank (ADB)**

Subhash Chandra Garg, Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Ministry of Finance, Government of India has been appointed as India's Alternate Governor on the Board of Governors of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Manila, Philippines.

### **About ADB:**

It is a regional development bank established on 22 August 1966 and is headquartered in Philippines. It aims to facilitate economic development of countries in Asia. It also aims for an Asia and Pacific free from poverty.

### **Membership:**

The bank admits the members of **the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific** (UNESCAP, formerly known as the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East) and non-regional developed countries.

Currently, it has 67 members – of which 48 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.

### **Voting:**

ADB was modelled closely on the World Bank, and has **a similar weighted voting system where votes are distributed in proportion with member's capital subscriptions.**

### **Funding:**

ADB raises funds through bond issues on the world's capital markets.

- ADB also rely on its members' contributions, retained earnings from its lending operations, and the repayment of loans.
- Japan holds the largest proportions of shares at 15.67%. The United States holds 15.56%, China holds 6.47%, India holds 6.36%, and Australia holds 5.81%.

### **Board of Governors:**

- It is the highest policy-making body of the bank.
- It is composed of one representative from each member state.
- The Board of Governors also elect the bank's President who is the chairperson of the Board of Directors and manages ADB.
- The Alternate Board of Governors are nominated by Board of Governors of ADB's 67 to represent them at the Annual Meeting that meets formally once year to be held in a member country.

### **Loans:**

It offers both Hard Loans and Soft loans. The ADB offers "hard" loans from ordinary capital resources (OCR) on commercial terms, and the Asian Development Fund (ADF) affiliated with the ADB extends "soft" loans from special fund resources with concessional conditions.

## **Codex standards for pepper, cumin and thyme**

In a major recognition of India's efforts to benchmark global spices trade, **the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC)** has adopted **three Codex standards for black, white and green pepper, cumin and thyme**, paving the way for universal agreement on identifying quality spices in various countries. This would facilitate evolving a common standardization process for their global trade and availability.

### **Significance of this move:**

The Codex standards were adopted in the wake of India conducting three sessions of Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH) at Kochi (2014), Goa (2015) and Chennai (2017). The Chennai session succeeded in achieving this consensus. Subsequently, these drafts were placed before the CAC, and it was adopted by consensus with an overwhelming support from the member-countries.

### **Significance of this move:**

With the adoption of the Codex standards on pepper, cumin and thyme, spices have been included for the first time as commodities that will have such universal standards. The adoption of the Codex standards would imply that there are now reference points and benchmarks for the member-countries to align their national standards for spices with Codex.

It will bring harmony to the global spice trade and ensure availability of high quality, clean and safe spices to the world. She said It will also benefit the trade from universal agreement to identify good quality spices.

### **Need for standards:**

Historically, the developed countries, being the major importers of spices, have always insisted on unreasonably strict standards, which have had adverse effects on spice trade. This is an issue that the Codex, jointly formed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), seeks to address.

### **Codex Alimentarius Commission:**

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) is an **intergovernmental body** with over 180 members, within the framework of the Joint Food Standards Programme.

- **It was established by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO)**, with the purpose of protecting the health of consumers and ensuring fair practices in the food trade.
- The Commission also promotes coordination of all food standards work undertaken by international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

## **Niti Aayog clears six proposals for high-tech public transport**

Niti Aayog has cleared proposals of the transport ministry exploring options to improve public transport. These proposals include mass rapid transportation technologies such as hyperloop, metrinio and pod taxis.

- Following the go-ahead, the transport ministry has formed a six member committee, headed by a former top official of Railways, to study safety parameters associated with these technologies and global practices.

### **Significance of this move:**

These new technologies are path breaking and can alter the way of intercity travel in the country. The new technologies are being explored as current public transportation is unable to resolve the increasing traffic crisis in the country. Besides, some of them are more cost effective than the existing ones.

### **What are Metrino, Podtaxi and Hyperloop?**

**Metrino:** Fully automatic, driverless small pods travel independently suspended over an overhead network which is usually 5-10 meters above the ground.

**Podtaxi:** Small automated vehicles/podcars/cable cars which carry a small number of passengers. The ropeway-like system runs on electricity and driverless pods and comes down at designated stations, thus removing the traffic burden from crowded roads.

**Hyperloop:** A hyperloop comprises a sealed tube or series of tubes through which a pod may travel free of air resistance or friction conveying people or objects at speeds matching that of an aircraft.

### **Scientists to chase solar eclipse using NASA jets**

In a first, scientists are planning to chase the shadow of the Moon using NASA's research jets during the upcoming total solar eclipse in the US, in order to capture the clearest ever images of the Sun's outer atmosphere.

- The jets will capture the clearest images of the Sun's corona to date and the first-ever thermal images of Mercury, revealing how temperature varies across the planet's surface.

### **Why solar eclipse?**

The total solar eclipse provides a rare opportunity for scientists to study the Sun, particularly its atmosphere. As the Moon completely covers the Sun and perfectly blocks its light during an eclipse, the typically faint corona is easily seen against the dark sky.

### **Why scientists are interested in studying the Corona?**

The corona is heated to millions of degrees, yet the lower atmospheric layers like the photosphere – the visible surface of the Sun – are only heated to a few thousand degrees. Scientists are not sure how this inversion happens.

- One theory proposes micro explosions, termed nanoflares – too small and frequent to detect individually, but with a large collective effect – might release heat into the corona.
- No one has yet directly seen nanoflares. It is hoped that the new experiment might reveal their effects on the corona.

### **Background:**

The corona is the outermost layer of the Sun, starting at about 1300 miles (2100 km) above the solar surface (the photosphere). The temperature in the corona is 500,000 K (900,000 degrees F, 500,000 degrees C) or more, up to a few million K. The corona cannot be seen with the naked eye except during a total solar eclipse, or with the use of a coronagraph. The corona does not have an upper limit.

### **NABARD takes first step to access Green Climate Fund**

India's National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has signed an Accreditation Master Agreement (AMA) with the Green Climate Fund. With the signing of the AMA, NABARD becomes the first Indian organisation to get Direct Access Entity status and is the first step for the body to access GCF resources.

### **About GCF:**

The GCF was set up in 2010 **under the UNFCCC's financial mechanism to channel funding from developed countries to developing countries to allow them to mitigate climate change and also adapt to disruptions arising from a changing climate.** It was central to the Paris climate agreement signed in 2015, that the world's largest historical emitter.

### **How it helps?**

- The Green Climate Fund will support projects, programmes, policies and other activities in developing country Parties using thematic funding windows.
- It is intended to be the centrepiece of efforts to raise Climate Finance of \$100 billion a year by 2020.
- The Fund will promote the paradigm shift towards low-emission and climate-resilient development pathways by providing support to developing countries to limit or reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the impacts of climate change, taking into account the needs of those developing countries particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.
- The Fund will strive to maximize the impact of its funding for adaptation and mitigation, and seek a balance between the two, while promoting environmental, social, economic and development co-benefits and taking a gender-sensitive approach.

### **Who will govern the Fund?**

The Fund is governed and supervised by a Board that will have full responsibility for funding decisions and that receives the guidance of the COP. **The Fund is accountable to, and functions under the guidance of, the COP.**

### **BRICS Labour & Employment Ministers' Meet in China**

China is the chair for the BRICS Labour & Employment Ministers' Meet for the year 2017. This year's meeting was held in Chongqing, China. The meeting concluded with the adoption of **the BRICS Labour and Employment Ministerial Declaration** by the BRICS Labour and Employment Ministers.

### **About the BRICS Labour and Employment Ministerial Declaration:**

- The Declaration covered a variety of areas that are of critical importance to all BRICS countries including India and called upon strengthening collaboration and cooperation on these through appropriate institutionalisation.
- These areas consisted of: "Governance in the Future of Work", "Skills for development in BRICS", "Universal and sustainable social security systems", "BRICS Network of Labour Research Institutions", "BRICS Social Security Cooperation Framework" and "BRICS entrepreneurship research".

### **Background:**

The BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – are home to 42% of the world's population. Their total share in the global economy has risen from 12% to 23% in the past decade, while contributing more than half of global growth.

## **Sagar Vani**

“Sagar Vani”, a mobile app, was launched recently on the occasion of Foundation Day of Ministry of Earth Sciences.

### **About Sagar Vani:**

The ‘Sagar Vani’ is a software platform where various dissemination modes will be integrated on a single central server. The ‘Sagar Vani’ includes Multi Lingual SMS, Voice Call / Audio Advisory, Mobile Apps (User / Admin modules), Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), Email, GTS, Fax, Digital Display Boards, Radio / Television broadcast units, IVRS, Cloud Channels, etc.

- The system also has facility to provide access to various stakeholders (NGOs, State Fishery Departments, Disaster Management Authorities, etc.) so that they too will be able to further disseminate these ocean information and alerts to the user community.
- This ‘Sagar Vani’ system compares with the most advanced countries’ services in terms of speed of delivery, omni channel capabilities and diverseness of services. With this system, the services will be disseminated in local languages using advanced artificial intelligence and machine learning capabilities.
- For the first time in India, the power of television and cable network mediums for topical and alert dissemination services is being used.
- The ‘Sagar Vani’ will now serve the coastal community, especially the fishermen community with the advisories and alerts towards their livelihood as well as their safety at Sea.

## **India Quake**

“India Quake” is a mobile app launched recently on the occasion of Foundation Day of Ministry of Earth Sciences.

About India Quake:

To overcome the delay in dissemination of the information during earthquakes, India Quake Mobile App has been developed by the National Centre for Seismology (NCS) for automatic dissemination of earthquake parameter (location, time and magnitude) after the occurrence of earthquakes.

- The App will make information dissemination faster with no restrictions on the number of recipients. Any citizen can download this App and get the real time earthquake location information on his/her mobile.
- Other than scientific and administrative benefits of the App, it will help in reducing panic amongst people during an earthquake. For example, if an earthquake occurs in Hindukush region, Afghanistan and is strongly felt in Delhi, then people in Delhi will know in less than 2 minutes that the earthquake has actually occurred in Afghanistan and not in Delhi.

## **Guidelines for Planning and Implementation of Family Participatory Care**

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has released Operational Guidelines for Planning and Implementation of **Family Participatory Care (FPC)** for improving newborn health. The new guidelines have been released by the government for improving health of babies in special units across the country.

### **Key facts:**

- The guidelines will serve as a guiding document for those intending to introduce FPC in their facility as an integral part of facility based newborn care.
- The operational guidelines of FPC are for all stakeholders involved in the process of planning and delivering newborn care.
- Under the guidelines—Operational Guidelines for Planning and Implementation of Family Participatory Care (FPC)—parent-attendants will be trained in newborn care through a structured programme including

an audio-visual module and a training guide. The staff at a newborn care unit would provide continuous supervision and support.

- The guidelines address various aspects of attitudes, infrastructural modifications and practice that will help in establishing FPC at Special Newborn Care Units (SNCU) such as sensitization of State and District Managers on FPC, prioritization of SNCUs for initiating FPC etc.

### **Background:**

FPC has emerged as an important concept of health care which provides for partnership between health care staff and families for care of sick newborns. Under FPC, the capacities of parents-attendants are built in newborn care through a structured training programme (audio -visual module and a training guide). The staff at newborn care unit will provide continuous supervision and support. Provisions for infrastructure and logistics strengthening required for implementing FPC are ensured in the annual state Program Implementation Plan (PIP).

### **Need for family participation:**

Sick and newborn are highly vulnerable and require careful nurturing in order to survive the neonatal period and first year of life. In recent years, health experts have found that if parents are trained during the stay of their babies in hospital to provide supportive care to sick newborns, it helps in not only improving survival of babies after discharge but also provides for psycho-social and developmental needs of the newborn.

In this regard, Family Participatory Care has emerged as an important concept of health care which provides for partnership between health care staff and families in care of sick newborns admitted in the SNCU. The move is expected to bring down infant mortality.

### **Ministry of WCD seeks suggestions issues related to civil aspects of “International Child removal”**

The ministry for women and child development has put out in the public domain a “concept note” on issues related to civil aspects of **International Child Removal**. A multi member committee led Chairmanship Justice Rajesh Bindal, Judge Punjab and Haryana High Court was set-up in February to study all aspects of the matter pertaining to **Hague Convention on Child Abduction** in detail and make its recommendation. Before it gives the final report the Committee has sought suggestions on the concept note and the various concerns raised.

### **Why a law in this regard is necessary?**

The instances of an Indian citizen marrying an NRI or a person of Indian origin having citizenship of a foreign nation, popularly referred to as ‘transnational marriages’ are frequent and in abundance. However, many a times, it so happens that the spouses fall apart and the marriage breaks down irretrievably. In many such cases, the spouses return to the net of their families/extended families in India, seeking mental comfort for themselves and their children. However, such instances often land such estranged spouse in a situation of being perceived as abductors of their children in light of The Hague convention provisions.

- In another situation where both the spouses may be Indians, residing in India, one of the spouses may move out of India along with the child born out of such wedlock after breakdown of marriage. In such situation, the issue of getting the child back from the foreign land assumes importance, in the process of redressing the grievance of the left behind spouse. In such cases, the signatory countries of the Hague convention can avail access to the Central authorities of the other contracting states to resolve such issues.
- Another factor that deserves consideration, is that many a times, on account of the broken marriages, often the complaint of child abduction is alleged against each other by the estranged spouse, to settle their personal scores.

## What next?

With the rise in trans-national marriages and complexities involved in modern day relationships, the protection of rights of parents and children involved has become a critical issue of National and International importance. The report of the committee once ready will steer further deliberations of the WCD ministry to recommend to the government of India on whether India should ratify the Hague convention and if it does how to ensure that the rights of the parents and child are not compromised in any way.

## About the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction:

It is a multilateral treaty on custodial issues of children. The **Convention seeks to protect children from the harmful effects of abduction and retention across international boundaries by providing a procedure to ensure their prompt return.**

- The convention is intended to enhance the international recognition of rights of custody and access arising in place of habitual residence, and to ensure prompt return of the child who is wrongfully removed or retained from the place of habitual residence.
- It seeks to return children abducted or retained overseas by a parent to their country of habitual residence for the courts of that country to decide on matters of residence and contact.
- **The convention shall apply to any child, up to the age of 16 years** who is a habitual resident of any of the contacting states.

## NPCI receives final nod from RBI to function as Bharat Bill Payment Central Unit

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), the umbrella organisation for all retail payment systems, has said it has received a final nod from the Reserve Bank of India to function as the Bharat Bill Payment Central Unit (BBPCU) and operate the Bharat Bill Payment System (BBPS).

- The final clearance from RBI comes almost a year after NPCI launched the BBPS pilot project to make payment of utility bills easier.

## About BBPS:

- The Bharat Bill Payment System (BBPS) is an **RBI conceptualised system driven by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)**. It is a **one-stop payment platform** for all bills, providing an interoperable and accessible “Anytime Anywhere” bill payment service to customers across the country with certainty, reliability and safety of transactions.

Payments through BBPS may be **made using cash, transfer cheques and electronic modes**. Bill aggregators and banks, who will function as operating units, will carry out these transactions for the customers.

## NPCI:

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) is an **umbrella organization for all retail payments system in India**. It was set up with the **guidance and support of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Indian Banks' Association (IBA)**. NPCI has ten promoter banks.

## ‘Scheme for banks not applied as envisaged’

According to a report by the CAG, the Centre’s ‘Indradhanush’ scheme to recapitalise public sector banks (PSBs) based on their performance was not implemented in a manner envisaged.

## What the report says?

- As per the scheme, a portion of the recapitalisation was to be based on the bank's performance. However, this was not followed during disbursement of funds.
- The parameters used to determine whether banks required capital changed from year to year and in some years the rationale for capitalising banks was not even recorded. Hence, the scheme's target of raising Rs. 1.1 lakh crore from the markets by 2018-19 was not likely to be met.
- Also, some banks that did not qualify for additional capital as per the decided norms, were infused with capital, and in some cases, banks were infused with more capital than required.

## **Background**

gross NPAs with PSBs had risen sharply in recent years, from Rs. 2.27 lakh crore as of March 31, 2014 to about Rs. 5.4 lakh crore at the end of March 2016.

### **Mission Indradhanush:**

In 2015, under the Indradhanush plan, the government had announced capital infusion of ₹70,000 crore in public sector banks for four years, starting from 2015-16. In the first two financial years, ₹25,000 crore had been earmarked per year with ₹10,000 crore to be disbursed in each of the remaining two years. However, credit rating agencies had pointed out that the sum was insufficient as banks needed to meet Basel-III norms as well as make provisions for rising bad loans.

The mission includes **the seven key reforms** of appointments, board of bureau, capitalisation, de-stressing, empowerment, framework of accountability and governance reforms.

### **India's anti-China missile can't be trusted in fights, says CAG**

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has severely criticised India's home-made Akash air defence missile system. As per a report by the CAG, as many as a third of the home-made Akash surface-to-air missiles are unreliable, unusable and untested, posing an operational risk during hostilities.

#### **What the CAG report says?**

- The missiles fell short of the target, had lower than the required velocity, and there was malfunctioning of critical units.
- The missile systems were to be installed at six designated sites (in northeast), between 2013 and 2015. But till date, none of the missile systems have been installed.
- Out of 80 missiles received up to November 2014, 20 missiles were test fired during April-November 2014. Six of these missiles, which is 30%, failed the test.
- Two of the missiles failed to even take off. These deficiencies pose an operational risk during hostilities.
- The lifespan of some missiles had expired by March 2017.
- The missiles were bought at a high cost but would stay usable for a less period than their stipulated life.
- Delay in civil works at the sites pushed the installation of the missile systems behind schedule.

#### **What's the main concern now?**

This revelation comes at a time when a stand-off between Indian and Chinese troops continues along the border in Sikkim sector. Akash, to be positioned in the vulnerable Siliguri corridor (also referred to as the Chicken's neck), was India's counter to any strike by Chinese Air Force fighters. But the CAG report puts a big question mark on its utility and also on the Make in India initiative that seeks to trim the country's dependence on imported arms.

The report is also a body blow to the missile system and comes after the Army earlier this year showed interest in going for the Israeli quick-reaction surface-to-air missiles (QR-SAMs) to take on enemy fighters, helicopters and drones instead of Akash.

### **Know about Akash Missile:**

The Akash missile is India's **first indigenously designed**, developed and produced **air defence surface-to-air missile system**. Akash is a supersonic short range surface-to-air missile capable of neutralising aerial threats.

- The asset of this missile system is its capability to neutralise multiple aerial targets coming from different directions at the same time.
- The maximum range of this missile is 25 kilometres and can neutralise targets at a maximum altitude of 20 kilometres. It is meant for neutralising medium range air targets flying at low or medium height.
- Akash has been indigenously built. It is a result of 96% indigenisation, with the design being developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation and built by Bharat Dynamics Limited along with the involvement of Bharat Electronics Limited.

### **India's first unmanned tank Muntra**

India's first unmanned tank developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has been rolled out of the Chennai lab.

#### **Key facts:**

- Muntra, the unmanned tank, has three variants – surveillance, mine detection and reconnaissance in areas with nuclear and bio threats. It is likely to be used in Naxal-hit areas.
- Muntra-S has been developed for unmanned surveillance missions, whereas Muntra-M is built for detecting mines. Muntra-N, on the other hand, will be deployed in areas where nuclear radiation or bio weapon risk is high.
- The vehicle has been tested. Its surveillance radar, which has an integrated camera can be used to spy on ground target 15km away.

### **India among top nations with potential for digital payments': Digital Evolution Index**

India has emerged strong, exhibiting a high potential in terms of digital payments and has been categorised under the "break out" segment among 60 countries, according to the Digital Evolution Index 2017.

#### **What you need to know about the index:**

The Fletcher School at Tufts University in partnership with Mastercard, unveiled the Digital Evolution Index 2017.

- The Index is a comprehensive research that tracks the progress countries have made in developing their digital economies and integrating connectivity into the lives of billions.
- The Index measures four key drivers – supply, consumer demand, institutional environment, and innovation.
- With nearly half of the world's population online, the research maps the development of 60 countries, demonstrating their competitiveness and market potential for further digital economic growth.

#### **What is break out segment?**

The 'break out' segment refers to countries that have relatively lower absolute levels of digital advancement, yet remain poised for growth and are attractive to investors by virtue of their potential.

### **Performance of India:**

- India has been experiencing rapid strides of progress with an evolving payments landscape, catalysed by the government's demonetisation decision.
- The government's endeavour to boost the acceptance infrastructure coupled with a host of other economic reforms have further hastened the momentum for the country's journey towards a cashless society.
- Adoption of digital payments has also witnessed a massive growth with a shift in behaviour change as more people adopt digital payments in daily life.
- With new players foraying into the market and an entire gamut of solutions for alternate payments, the India payment ecosystem is growing each day.

### **China produces gas from 'flammable ice' under South China Sea**

China has successfully produced natural gas from methane hydrate, also known as "flammable ice", in an experimental project in the South China Sea. The government has promised to "actively develop" natural gas hydrate over the 2016-2020 five-year plan period.

What you need to know about the flammable ice?

Flammable ice **consists of methane trapped within water crystals**, and has been identified as a potential new gas source for China, with the South China Sea thought to contain some of the world's most promising deposits.

Officially known as **methane clathrates or hydrates**, they are formed at very low temperatures and under high pressure. They can be found in sediments under the ocean floor as well as underneath permafrost on land. Despite **the low temperature, these hydrates are flammable**.

- By lowering the pressure or raising the temperature, the hydrates break down into water and methane – a lot of methane. One cubic metre of the compound releases about 160 cubic metres of gas, making it a highly energy-intensive fuel.
- Many countries including the US and Japan are working on how to tap those reserves, but mining and extracting are extremely difficult.

### **Why is it important?**

Methane hydrates are thought to have the potential to be a revolutionary energy source that could be key to future energy needs – likely the world's last great source of carbon-based fuel. Vast deposits exist basically underneath all oceans around the globe, especially on the edge of continental shelves. Countries are scrambling for a way to make the extraction safe and profitable.

### **Accessing the power of this flammable ice has been difficult, for two reasons.**

- First, these reserves are often distributed over a large area rather than concentrated in one spot as oil or natural gas reserves often are.
- The bigger problem, however, is that, true to their moniker as flammable ice, methane hydrates are unstable and potentially explosive. Drilling into the seafloor could destabilize the methane ice crystals and cause explosions, spewing vast troves of methane into the atmosphere, where it is a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>).

### **What next?**

Any exploitation of the reserves must be done with the utmost care because of environmental concerns. The potential threat is that methane can escape, which would have serious consequences for global warming. It is a gas that has a much higher potential to impact climate change than carbon dioxide.

## Supreme Court allows two broke firms to settle dispute

The Supreme Court, using its extraordinary constitutional powers, has allowed two companies to withdraw from insolvency proceedings and settle their loan dispute despite the case having been admitted by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).

- It should be noted here that once the NCLT admits a case for initiating corporate insolvency resolution process under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code of 2016, the case cannot be withdrawn even if the parties have decided to settle.

Is the Supreme Court empowered to do so?

Yes. **Article 142** provides that “the Supreme Court in the exercise of its jurisdiction may pass such decree or make such order as is necessary for doing complete justice in any cause or matter pending before it”.

### What’s the concern?

Just seven months after the operationalization of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), it has been tested by the Supreme Court with its latest judgment. The policy underlying IBC shifts the incentive of the parties from individual recovery actions to collective action. In that context, after a petition has been filed in NCLT, **allowing out-of-court bilateral settlement between the borrower and one creditor may contradict that basic objective of collective action.**

After the admission of the petition, it acquires the character of representative suit and through publication in newspapers, other creditors get a right to participate in the insolvency resolution process and therefore IBC does not allow the petition to be dismissed on the basis of a compromise between the operational creditor and corporate debtor.

### National Company Law Tribunal:

National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) is a quasi-judicial body that will govern the companies in India. It was established **under the Companies Act, 2013** and is a **successor body of the Company Law Board.**

- NCLT will have the same powers as assigned to the erstwhile Company Law Board (which are mostly related to dealing with oppression and mismanagement), Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR)(revival of sick companies) and powers related to winding up of companies (which was available only with the High Courts).
- The setting up of NCLT as a specialized institution for corporate justice is based on the recommendations of **the Justice Eradi Committee on Law Relating to Insolvency and Winding up of Companies.**

### Gaming: a question of skill

Gaming in India is rapidly gaining acceptance, by both customers and legislators. Although ‘gaming’ in popular parlance has taken on the meaning of playing computer or video games, the term is in fact a reference to competitive activities — like rummy, chess, bridge, and the like — that are not categorised as sports, as well as the betting that is done on them.

### Why should betting be included under Gaming?

There are some industry players who believe that betting on sports such as cricket should also come under gaming and be termed as games of skill. Regulating sports betting will bring it into the light and will prevent match-fixing, they argue. The Lodha Committee report, too, recommends this course of action.

- FICCI, in a report in 2013, had said that the government stands to earn about ₹7,200 crore a year from taxes from only half the ₹3 lakh crore gaming industry in India.

## **How is gaming treated across states in India?**

The regulation of gaming in India is **fragmented, with each state currently deciding the rules applicable in its jurisdiction**, with variations emerging on the definition of gaming, the kinds of games that qualify, and the punishments meted out for indulging in gaming not allowed by law.

- For example, Sikkim has the Sikkim Online Gambling (Regulation) Act, 2008 that only looks at online gaming, and not at activities conducted in brick and mortar gaming houses. The Nagaland Prohibition of Gambling and Promotion and Regulation of Online Games of Skill, Act, 2015 only permits skill-based games, defined as all games where there is a preponderance of skill over chance.
- The Delhi Public Gambling Act, 1955 penalises the operation of a gaming-house and imposes a penalty for being found in a gaming-house. However, Section 13 of the Delhi Act exempts games of “mere skill” from its ambit.
- Laws in other states such as Goa, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Rajasthan are variations of this format. The All India Gaming Federation has asked the Law Commission — tasked with looking into the regulation of gaming — to consider proposing a nation-wide central gaming law.

## **What can India learn from other countries?**

The U.K. enacted an updated gambling law in 2005 that provided for the creation of a Gambling Commission, which was tasked with crime prevention, the promotion of an open and transparent gaming and gambling industry, and the protection of vulnerable people from the ills and dangers of gambling. The country further updated this legislation in 2014.

- Spain has set a 25% tax rate on gambling revenue, among the highest in Europe, and requires customers to provide their unique national identification numbers, names, and addresses before they can be registered to gamble.
- Other countries like Singapore, Malta, and the Isle of Man, have robust gaming legislations that can provide good examples of how India can regulate gaming and gambling while increasing government tax revenue, and curtailing misuse.

## **Way ahead:**

There are moral and ethical dimensions involved that have kept gambling and betting illegal so far. It has to be seen if betting can encourage match fixing. The regulatory frame work will have to be pretty strict.

## **New gold bond scheme may draw more investors**

The Government announced a few changes in its Sovereign Gold Bond (SGB) Scheme recently.

### **Changes introduced are as follows:**

- The primary change was the increase in the limit to 4 kg (from 0.5kg) for individuals, HUF and 20 kg for Trusts. This was probably done to encourage high net-worth individuals, rich farmers as well as trusts to invest in these bonds. The basic premise is that most Indians believe in gold as a time-tested and safe asset class and prefer it over other forms of investment.
- The Government also introduced flexibility in the scheme to design and introduce variants to cater to a cross-section of investors.

## Why was the scheme introduced?

The sovereign gold bond was introduced by the Government in 2015. While the Government introduced these bonds to help reduce India's over dependence on gold imports, the move was also aimed at changing the habits of Indians from saving in physical form of gold to a paper form with Sovereign backing.

## Background:

Annual consumption of gold in India is in the range of 700-800 tonnes, almost all of which is imported. Of this, approximately 500-600 tonnes is bought by consumers as jewellery for cultural reasons (mainly for weddings). The balance is in the form of gold bars and coins for savings or investment purposes, which is what the Government hopes to convert to paper form so that both are served — investors are happy as long as they earn some returns and capital appreciation at the time of redemption, as well as it helps reduce an equivalent amount of physical gold imports.

## Performance of the scheme:

So far, SGB has been moderately successful with the launch of eight tranches of these bonds since November 2015, garnering approximately ₹5,000 crore or about 16 tonnes of gold. However, the potential to scale up is huge.

- The sovereign gold bond initially introduced by the Government in 2015 has achieved only limited success because of its **unrealistic pricing pattern vis-a-vis the international price of bullion**. Past SGB prices ranging from ₹3,150 per gm to ₹2,750 per gm was often not in parity with the market rate realities and this often led to the SGB consumers losing money, despite earning a 2.5% return on investments.
- Another factor diminishing the attractiveness of the SGB is **its price being pegged to a 10% import duty**, and any reduction in the import duty by the Government in the subsequent period would likely inflict severe loss of value to those who have already invested.

What needs to be done?

- The pricing of SGB ideally should be the average of the bullion price of the 60 day-period preceding the issue date of SGB.
- To reduce the loss of value to those who have already invested, the Government should fix the pricing of SGB at bullion rates exclusive of import duty and IGST.
- To ensure further success, the Government should allow mass channels such as gold loan Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs) to also market it. Gold loan companies have been a credible, customer-facing platform for millions of Indians who trust them and hence it can help the scheme reach many more consumers in urban, semi-urban and rural areas.
- Further, offering gold loan against Sovereign Gold Bonds would help popularise the product from a consumer angle. For, it would then be perceived as being as liquid as physical gold. Over time, it would also help reduce various risk factors, such as spurious quality gold, and operational costs linked to manual assessment of gold for gold loan NBFCs.

## Flexible bio-glue for wound healing developed

Scientists have developed a super strong, flexible adhesive material inspired by the glue secreted by slugs that sticks to biological tissues – even when wet – without causing toxicity. Slugs secrete a special kind of mucus when threatened that glue it in place, making it difficult for a predator to pry it off its surface.

What you need to know about the new bio-glue?

The new material is a **double-layered hydrogel consisting of an alginate-polyacrylamide matrix supporting an adhesive layer** that has positively- charged polymers protruding from its surface.

- The polymers bond to biological tissues via three mechanisms – electrostatic attraction to negatively charged cell surfaces, covalent bonds between neighbouring atoms, and physical interpenetration – making the adhesive extremely strong.
- The key feature of the new material is **the combination of a very strong adhesive force and the ability to transfer and dissipate stress**, which have historically not been integrated into a single adhesive.
- The “tough adhesive” is biocompatible and binds to tissues with a strength comparable to the body’s own resilient cartilage.
- It also causes no tissue damage or adhesions to surrounding tissues.

#### **Way ahead:**

Such a high-performance material has numerous potential applications in the medical field, either as a patch that can be cut to desired sizes and applied to tissue surfaces or as an injectable solution for deeper injuries.

#### **Scooping out oil spills made easy**

Scientists have developed a simple, cheap and environment-friendly system that can effectively remove crude oil from sea that can pollute and even destroy marine ecosystems. The hydrophobic sorbent developed by scientists can suck up oil and congeal it.

#### **What you need to know about the new system?**

Scientists developed the hydrophobic sorbent by using a cheap raw material (mannitol) and cellulose pulp as a matrix. (A hydrophobic material automatically becomes oil-loving and takes up oil when it comes in contact with it). Mannitol was converted into a hydrophobic gelator through a one-step process and a solution was made using this compound. Cellulose balls the size of marbles were then dipped in the solution and dried.

- The gelator gets adsorbed on the cellulose fibre through hydrogen bonding. This process of adsorption of gelator on the cellulose fibre matrix changes the cellulose matrix from being very hydrophilic (water-loving) to hydrophobic (water repelling). A hydrophobic material naturally becomes oleophilic (oil-loving).
- Unlike other alternatives, the sorbent can be easily applied over oil-water mixture, and no solvent is needed for spraying the gelator thus making it environmental benign. The gelator adsorbed on the surface of cellulose fibre is able to absorb oil when it comes in contact with it.
- Once the sorbent sucks the oil, the gelator slowly gets released from the cellulose fibre and congealing of oil takes place. Only when the oil congeals can it be removed without the oil dripping due to gravity.
- Congealing of oil becomes possible as the gelator used by scientists self-assembles to form micro fibres and the oil loses its fluidity and gets trapped within the entangled fibrous network to form a rigid gel. Gelation essentially turns the liquid oil phase into a semi-solid one and this allows the fibre balls with the congealed oil to be simply scooped out or removed using a scoop or a sieve.

#### **Benefits:**

It takes only about 30 minutes to two hours from the time of application to scooping out the rigid fibre balls containing congealed oil, leaving behind clean water. Studies found that the sorbent was able to absorb and congeal 16 times its own weight of oil. The absorbed oil can be recovered by applying pressure or fractionated by a simple distillation process.

