



CENTRE FOR AMBITION
(An Institute for Civil Services)

BACKGROUNDER JULY 2016

Clarification regarding transgender

Supreme Court has refused to modify its 2014 order on transgenders while clarifying that lesbians, gays and bisexuals are not third gender. Clarification in this regard was asked by additional solicitor general (ASG) Maninder Singh, appearing for the Centre. The court has clarified that lesbians, gays and bisexuals are not transgenders.

Background:

In a landmark verdict, the Supreme Court had on April 15, 2014 granted legal recognition to transgenders or eunuchs as third category of gender and had directed the Centre and all states to treat them as socially and educationally backward classes to extend reservation in admission in educational institutions and for public appointments.

- Paving way to bring transgenders in national mainstream, the apex court directed governments to take steps to remove problems faced by them such as fear, shame, social pressure, depression, and social stigma. It had also said that section 377 of IPC is being misused by police and other authorities against them and their social and economic condition is far from satisfactory.
- However, in September 2014, the Centre had filed an application in the apex court seeking clarification on the definition of transgender saying lesbian, gay and bisexual cannot be treated under the category of transgender.

MHA opposes visa-free entry

The home ministry has shot down the commerce ministry's ambitious proposal for 'visa-free' entry for business visitors and tourists from BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) countries, citing security concerns.

Why MHA is opposing?

There is negligible rate of visa rejections in the country now and visa processing has also become expeditious in recent times. It now takes 48 hours for 87% of e-visa applicants and three days for 80% of regular visa applicants.

- Between January 1, 2016 and June 2, 2016, as many as 1,53,4313 regular visas were issued by India, of which only 16,509 (barely 1%) were rejected. Besides, 9.5 lakh e-visas have been issued since launch of the facility in November 2014, with the rate picking up drastically over the past five months.
- Hence, given the low visa rejection rate, the extension of evisa facility that allows applicants to get electronic confirmation of their tourist visa within 48 hours and the compressed processing time for regular visa applications makes little sense. It also adds up to the security considerations.

eVisa:

eVisa facility is available for citizens of over 40 eligible countries. The application for e-Tourist Visa must be made minimum 4 days in advance of the date of arrival.

- Visa is valid for 30 days from the date of arrival and can be obtained twice in a calendar year.
- e-Tourist Visa allows arrival at only 9 airports in the country.

Who is not eligible?

- Not available to Diplomatic/Official Passport Holders.
- Not available to individuals endorsed on Parent's/Spouse's Passport i.e. each individual should have a separate passport.
- Not available to International Travel Document Holders.

International Solar Alliance Cell and World Bank Signs Declaration for Promoting Solar Energy

In a significant push for solar power, the World Bank has signed an agreement with the International Solar Alliance (ISA) – launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Paris climate summit last year – to mobilize \$1 trillion in investments by 2030. This agreement establishes the World Bank group as a financial partner for the alliance.

- As part of the agreement, the World Bank Group will develop a roadmap to mobilize financing for development and deployment of affordable solar energy, and work with other multilateral development banks and financial institutions to develop financing instruments to support solar energy development.

Background:

- ISA was launched at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in 2015 by Modi and French President Francois Hollande.
- The alliance, headquartered in India, aims to bring together countries situated between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn which

receive abundant sunshine for around 300 days a year.

- This alliance brings together developing and developed countries to expand energy access, accelerate solar power deployment, and stimulate economic development.
- India will provide land and \$30 million to form a secretariat for the Alliance, and also support it for five years.
- Among the tasks that the Alliance would pursue are, cooperation in training, building institutions, regulatory issues, common standards, and investment including joint ventures.
- **The World Bank has announced \$ 1 billion** in support of India's ambitious solar generation plans, its largest financing of solar projects for any country in the world. The projects now under preparation include solar rooftop technology, infrastructure for solar parks, bringing innovative solar and hybrid technologies to the market, and transmission lines for solar-rich States. The commitment includes an agreement for a \$ 625 million **grid-connected rooftop solar programme** for financing the installation of at least 40 megawatts of solar photovoltaic installations.
- The United States-led biennial maritime warfare exercise **Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC)** recently began its five-week run off Hawaii, bringing together 27 countries around the Pacific Ocean to increase their interoperability at sea. This year's RIMPAC, the 25th time it has been held, is the largest ever in scale since the regional exercise was first held in 1971. Participating countries include **India, South Korea, China, Japan and Singapore** as well as European nations like Denmark, France, Germany and Britain. Indian Navy's association with Ex RIMPAC commenced with participation as an 'Observer' in 2006, 2010 and 2012. In 2014, Indian Naval participation was enhanced

with deployment of Indian Naval ship Sahyadri in the 24th edition of the exercise.

- The Defence Minister Shri Manohar Parrikar recently dedicated the **Defence Communication Network (DCN)** to the nation. The DCN is a strategic, exclusive, secure and state-of-the-art communication network. Implementation of DCN is a proof of strength of the Indian industry and has reaffirmed the emphasis of the Government on Make in India, program. The DCN is a major step towards ensuring Network Centricity across the three Services, Integrated Defence Staff and Strategic Forces Command. The network provides converged voice, data and video services to the three Services based on secured system with adequate redundancy.
- **'Prashikshak'**, the teacher education portal for District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) was recently launched by the government. It is a unique IT Initiative taken up under DIET. Prashikshak is a unique IT initiative, a first of its kind in the country, which will contain a comprehensive database of all DIETs in the country with all relevant performance indicators. It will help benchmark DIETs to enable aspiring teachers to make informed choices about their future. At the same time, it will give the opportunity to Central and State Governments to do real time monitoring of the institutions. Prashikshak was established through joint collaboration between Ministry of Human Resource Development and Central Square Foundation. The objective of Prashikshak is to define quality benchmarks and help DIETs to make informed decisions about their institutes, compare the performance of their institute against other DIETs in the state/country as well as helping aspiring teachers make informed decision making.

RCEP nations include Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

As part of a transparency drive, the government has made public direct tax data for last 15 years. However, data for individuals has been published only for 2012-13 assessment year, which shows taxes for income in financial year ended March 31, 2012.

Highlights of the data:

- Taxpayers account for just about 1% of India's population, but tax outgo was over Rs. 1 crore for as many as 5,430 individuals.
- A total of 2.87 crore individuals filed income tax returns for the year 2012-13, but 1.62 crore of them did not pay any tax – leaving the number of taxpayers at just about 1.25 crore.
- The tax outgo was less than Rs. 1.5 lakh for a vast majority of nearly 89% taxpayers (over 1.11 crore). Their average tax payable was just about Rs. 21,000, while the collective amount stood at over Rs. 23,000 crore.
- The three individuals in the top-bracket of Rs. 100-500 crore paid a total tax of Rs. 437 crore – resulting in an average tax outgo of Rs. 145.80 crore.
- As many as 5,430 individuals paid income tax of over Rs. 1 crore. Out of this, the tax range was Rs. 1-5 crore for more than 5,000 individuals, resulting in a total outgo of Rs. 8,907 crore.
- The bulk of individuals who filed returns for the assessment year 2012-13 earned an annual salary between Rs. 5.5 lakh and Rs. 9.5 lakh.
- Over 20.23 lakh taxpayers earned Rs. 5.5-9.5 lakh, while their cumulative salary earnings stood at Rs. 1.40 lakh crore in the financial year 2011-12.

- Further 19.18 lakh individuals earned salary of Rs. 2.5-3.5 lakh that year. Six individuals fell in the high-end earning bracket of Rs. 50-100 crore of salary income. In the salary range of Rs. 1-5 crore, there were as many as 17,515 individuals.
- Nearly 2.87 crore salary earners filed their I-T returns in assessment year 2012-13.

Concerns:

- These figures show that India remains a low-tax country despite the acceleration of economic growth in the past decade.
- The data also reveal that income inequality has risen in the past few decades. The share of the top 1% of the population in the country in the total national income was around 10% in the 1950s, but came down to less than 4% by the end of the 1970s before steadily climbing to 7% by the end of the 1990s. By the latest estimates, this went up to 13% for 2012, the highest since independence, but also, importantly, it almost doubled in the past 15 years.
- The increase in inequality has been one of the highest since independence and is much more than in any other country with a comparable per capita income or among developed economies. This also shows the inability of the state to tax the rich more.
- This has also contributed to a worsening fiscal situation by increasing exemptions, subsidizing the wealthy and through various tax giveaways.
- The data also indicate that India is the country with the lowest tax-to-GDP ratio among countries with a similar per capita income on a purchasing power parity basis. It is also the country with the lowest expenditure-to-GDP ratio. Expenditure on essential public services such as agriculture, nutrition (Integrated Child Development

Services, mid-day meals), education and health has been substantially cut.

What's the problem?

Successive governments at the centre have failed to tax the rich considerably. The problem has been aggravated by subsidies provided to the rich. Clearly, the subsidies to the rich are not only bad on the equity principle, but are also hurting the capacity of the government to spend more on essential sectors such as health and nutrition and education. Due to this, not only has our expenditure on a per capita basis on these sectors been among the lowest, but has also remained stagnant for the past two decades.

India's tax-to-GDP ratio is also not picking up. The current tax-to-GDP ratio of around 16.8% is roughly the same as it was at the beginning of economic reforms in 1991. The primary reason for the low tax collection has been the low tax base, as admitted by the finance ministry in the economic survey. The Indians who pay tax account for only 2% of the population. This is not only low compared to the ratio of voters in an economy but also low compared to the quantum of high-value transactions.

What's the solution?

As recommended by the Economic Survey, bringing more people into the tax net through some form of direct taxation will help. In some instances, higher tax rates can also be considered by the government. Experiences of developed countries can be considered here. Most of post-war Europe and other developed countries had an effective tax rate higher than 60% during the time their economies were being built after the war. On the other hand, India continued to lower tax rates not just on personal income but also on corporate entities, with the finance minister recently announcing a reduction in the corporate tax rates to 25% from the existing 30% by 2019.

Conclusion:

The approach of the government in the past few years regarding tax collection has not been very impressive. Overall, this has largely affected the poor in the country. Hence, it is high time for the government to take up the matter seriously and address the issues concerned.

The Union Law Ministry recently asked the Law Commission to examine in detail all issues pertaining to the Uniform Civil Code and submit a report to the government. With this, issues related to the implementation of UCC across India have once again come to the fore.

What is uniform civil code?

Uniform civil Code is a proposal to have a generic set of governing laws for every citizen without taking into consideration the religion.

What the constitution says?

Article 44 of the Constitution says that there should be a Uniform Civil Code. According to this article, "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India". Since the Directive Principles are only guidelines, it is not mandatory to use them.

Historical background:

Uniform Civil Code was one of the key issues debated during the writing of the Constitution, with passionate arguments on both sides. However, unable to arrive at a solution, a directive principle was struck regarding this in the constitution.

- But, several members of the Constituent Assembly disagreed vehemently with the compromise and argued that one of the factors that have kept India back from advancing to nationhood has been the existence of personal laws based on religion which keep the nation divided into

watertight compartments in many aspects of life.

- Though, after independence, few governments tried to have a UCC, religious conservative groups did not allow governments to proceed ahead in this regard.

India needs a Uniform Civil Code for the following reasons:

- A secular republic needs a common law for all citizens rather than differentiated rules based on religious practices.
- Another reason why a uniform civil code is needed is gender justice. The rights of women are usually limited under religious law, be it Hindu or Muslim. The practice of triple talaq is a classic example.
- Many practices governed by religious tradition are at odds with the fundamental rights guaranteed in the Indian Constitution.
- Courts have also often said in their judgements that the government should move towards a uniform civil code including the judgement in the Shah Bano case.

Why it is difficult to have a UCC?

India being a secular country guarantees its minorities the right to follow their own religion, culture and customs under Article 29 and 30. But implementing a Uniform Code will hamper India's secularism.

Concerns:

What is unfortunate is the demand for UCC has always been framed in the context of communal politics. Many see it as majoritarianism under the garb of social reform.

Way ahead:

The government cannot remain silent on the issue anymore. It is obvious that the government

would have to face several challenges from many conservative groups on this front. But, it will have to work hard to build trust, and more importantly, make common cause with social reformers rather than religious conservatives, as has been the wont of previous governments.

- One strategic option is to follow the path taken after the fiery debates over the reform of Hindu civil law in the 1950s.
- Rather than an omnibus approach, the government could also bring separate aspects such as marriage, adoption, succession and maintenance into a uniform civil code in stages.
- A comprehensive review of several other laws in the context of gender justice would also do well.

Goa model:

The civil law in Goa – derived from the Portuguese Civil Procedure Code of 1939 – could be a useful starting point for a national debate. Goa continued with its practice of treating all communities alike even after its entry into the Indian Union.

Conclusion:

Government's move to refer this matter to the law commission is hopefully the first step towards the implementation of something that has been delayed for far too long. It is now 66 years since the Constitution came into force. It is high time there was a decisive step towards a common civil code.

Harmonising RTE with minority schools

Setting aside Supreme Court's judgment on RTE, the Kerala High Court, in a remarkable verdict in June 2016, ruled that **Section 16 of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act), that mandates schools to not detain any child before s/he completes elementary education, is applicable**

to minority educational institutions as well (Sobha George v. State of Kerala).

What is Right to Education (RTE)?

The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 inserted **Article 21-A in the Constitution of India** to provide free and compulsory education of all children in the **age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine.**

- The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, means that every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards.

- Article 21-A and the RTE Act came into effect on 1 April 2010. With this, India moved forward to a rights based framework that casts a legal obligation on the Central and State Governments to implement this fundamental child right as enshrined in the Article 21A of the Constitution, in accordance with the provisions of the RTE Act.

- It is seen as the most historic development in universalisation of elementary education in the country. It implies that every child in the age group of 6 to 14 years has Right to elementary education. They are entitled for **free and compulsory education.**

Key features:

- The RTE Act provides for the Right of children to free and compulsory education till completion of elementary education in a neighbourhood school.
- It clarifies that 'compulsory education' means **obligation of the appropriate**

government to provide free elementary education and ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education to every child in the six to fourteen age group. 'Free' means that no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education.

- It makes provisions for a **non-admitted child to be admitted to an age appropriate class.**
- It specifies the duties and responsibilities of appropriate Governments, local authority and parents in providing free and compulsory education, and sharing of financial and other responsibilities between the Central and State Governments.
- It lays down the norms and standards relating inter alia to Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTRs), buildings and infrastructure, school-working days, teacher-working hours.
- It provides for rational deployment of teachers by ensuring that the specified pupil teacher ratio is maintained for each school, rather than just as an average for the State or District or Block, thus ensuring that there is no urban-rural imbalance in teacher postings. It also provides for prohibition of deployment of teachers for non-educational work, other than decennial census, elections to local authority, state legislatures and parliament, and disaster relief.
- It provides for appointment of appropriately trained teachers, i.e. teachers with the requisite entry and academic qualifications.

Supreme Court's judgment:

The Supreme Court had exempted minority schools from the purview of the RTE Act in **Pramati Education and Cultural Trust v. Union of India (2014)**. The court had observed

that the **Right to Education (RTE) Act is not be applicable to aided or unaided minority schools.**

High Court's view:

However, the High Court located this obligation not in the Act but under **Article 21 of the Indian Constitution**, which guarantees **right to life and liberty**. It ruled that no-detention policy (NDP) is in the "best interest" of the child and could independently be considered a fundamental right.

Significance of High Court's judgment:

The significance of the Sobha George verdict lies not only in making certain provision of the RTE Act applicable to minority schools but the strategy employed for this. The court's reasons: **"RTE Act has no application in a minority school, whether aided or unaided. However, the Court has to examine whether Section 16 of RTE Act is a mere statutory right or can be treated as a fundamental right expressed in the form of statutory provision."** A key takeaway from this judgment is the recognition that certain provisions of the RTE Act have a **universal appeal**, even if the Act lacks it. However, it is completely within judicial discretion to determine which provisions are these.

The Pramati judgment was erroneous on two counts.

- First, it failed to notice that besides the 25% quota in Section 12(1)(c), the RTE Act also has provisions on infrastructural norms, pupil-teacher ratio, prohibition on screening tests and capitation fee and ban on corporal punishment. Far from annihilating the 'minority character', these provisions benefit both the students and community.
- Second, it did not consider the fact that the government-aided minority schools stand on a different footing from their unaided

counterparts and are more amenable to regulations than the latter.

Are rights guaranteed under Article 30 absolute?

The generic scope of right to education seems to conflict with the specific contexts of the rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice under Article 30. That right, however, is not absolute. Freedom to 'administer' a school cannot include 'mal-administering' it. Regulations for maintaining academic standards, ensuring proper infrastructure, health and sanitation, etc. could be imposed on minority schools as well. Further, a government-aided minority school cannot discriminate against students on grounds of religion, race, caste, language in the matters of their admission (Article 29(2)).

Way ahead:

The Sobha George judgment opens possibilities of applying different provisions of the RTE Act on minority schools through the Article 21 route. It also simultaneously forces a rethink on the role of judicial precedents.

- However, two contrasting judgments on the same issue have made the overall position of law unclear. The Sobha George case may immediately benefit thousands of children in Kerala, yet conflicting judgments adversely affect realisation of rights of all children equally.
- Therefore, a 'constitutionally-permissible balance' between right to education and minority rights requires an interpretation that makes them mutually reinforcing rather than irreconcilable.

What needs to be done now?

The Supreme Court has to re-examine the positive and the negative aspects of educational rights of minorities and appreciate the special

case for guaranteeing right to elementary education universally and equitably.

Conclusion:

The problem with a judgment like Pramati is that for the issues it addresses, it either can overstay or is overruled. It might also lead to judicial conflicts and confusions. Hence, it is the responsibility of the Supreme Court to thoroughly re-examine the issue.

Why RBI governors need a longer tenure

A survey conducted by the Bank of International Settlements in 2009 showed that the average tenure of a central bank governor worldwide is between five and six years. However, the RBI governor has the shortest tenure among the heads of major central banks, with the possible exception of Brazil, where no fixed term is specified.

What is the main concern?

According to experts, a three-year term for the central bank chief is not sufficient.

How RBI governor is appointed in India?

In India, the appointment process is entirely a political one. Though an Appointments Committee is the formal vehicle designated to shortlist candidates for the job, in reality, the Prime Minister's Office chooses the governor after consulting the finance ministry and the outgoing governor.

Moreover, there are no stipulations in Indian law regarding the qualification of governors, or even for those who will be nominated by the government for India's first monetary policy committee. An economics or finance background is not *de rigueur* for the job, as is evinced by the record of those who have been appointed to the top job.

Why longer tenure is necessary?

- Since India is moving to a new rules-based monetary policy framework, a longer and more certain tenure is necessary.
- Apart from monetary policy, RBI also looks after banking supervision, currency market, and has an interest in maintaining overall financial stability in the economy. Hence, a longer tenure will allow the governor to plan better.
- A more clearly defined term for the governor will also help reduce uncertainty in financial markets.
- Various studies have also shown how central bankers who lived under the fear of recall were less effective in their duties.
- A fixed term is also widely seen as a mechanism to reduce the vulnerability of the central banker to political pressure.

Worldwide practice:

Among the developed countries, the chairman of the US Federal Reserve is appointed for a term of four years which can be renewed, while the governors of the Bank of England serve a much longer term. The president of the European Central Bank has a non-renewable term of eight years.

Way ahead:

Central bank chiefs are normally appointed by the political leadership all over the world, but their appointment does not necessarily have to be politicised. Any government should avoid uncertainty by clearly defining the term of the governor.

- However, longer terms by themselves don't necessarily translate into better outcomes. What is perhaps needed is a balance. Ideally, the term should not be so short that it hampers longer-term thinking, and it should not be too long to block new ideas.

- The new monetary policy framework seems to further complicate matters. The government has amended the RBI Act to create a monetary policy committee (MPC) that will have a term of four years. The inflation target will be decided by the finance ministry every five years. Clearly, a three-year term for the RBI governor does not make sense in this context. It will lead to misaligned incentives.

What would be an appropriate term for the RBI governor?

There is no clear indication of what is the optimum tenure for a central bank chief. The economic literature also doesn't offer much guidance in this respect.

- However, a five-year term for the governor will be more appropriate, and consistent with both the political cycle and the review of the inflation target.
- This will also provide continuity when the term of MPC members end. It will strengthen the independence of the central bank if the term of the governor is non-renewable.
- It will also help if the five-year term of the governor ends 12-18 months after the general elections so that there is stability at one end of the policy spectrum.

Conclusion:

Since India is changing the way monetary policy will be conducted, this is a good time to increase the minimum tenure of an RBI governor to five years.

Recognizing urban India

The ministry of urban development recently directed state governments to convert **census towns to urban local bodies** to allow for planned development and efficient service provision.

What are census towns?

Census towns are areas that are **governed by village panchayats but are recognized by the census of India as being urban**. According to the 2011 census, there are 3,894 census towns in India spread across states.

Concerns:

Urbanization has an important role to play in a country's economic growth and so it is critical to get it right. However, the extent of urbanization in India is still widely underestimated. This underestimation has led to a host of problems – from misallocation of resources to unsafe development of densely populated clusters.

Why it is difficult to convert census towns to urban local bodies?

The **ultimate decision to convert census towns to statutory urban local bodies rests with state governments**. Municipal laws in some states specify guidelines such as population and density thresholds for notifying areas as urban local bodies, but these guidelines vary widely.

- For instance, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have population thresholds of 30,000 and 25,000, respectively, for classifying an area as urban, whereas states such as Kerala and Punjab have no such criteria.
- Also, these guidelines are not binding and state governments can exercise discretion in notifying areas.

Why it is necessary to convert census towns to urban bodies?

- In India, at the state level, the extent of areas governed as urban has a weak relationship with income, poverty and population working in non-agricultural activities, all of which are thought to be correlates of urbanization.

- Having differing and flexible guidelines makes sense given the heterogeneity across states. But differing guidelines are only meaningful if they are able to capture the true urban and rural characteristics of places across states. But this is not the case in India. Hence, to bring in uniformity it is necessary to convert census towns to urban local bodies.

Extent of urbanization in India:

According to an IDFC Institute paper, only 26% of India is governed by urban local bodies as of 2011. The rate varies across states with small hill states such as Mizoram (37%), Nagaland (26%) and Manipur (25%) surprisingly having a higher percentage of its population governed as urban than larger states such as West Bengal (23%), Bihar (11%) and Kerala (16%).

According to the census definition, India is 31% urban. But if Ghana's definition of urban is applied, India is 47% urban, and if Mexico's definition is applied, India is 65% urban. The differences in urbanization rates are even starker at a subnational level. For instance, Kerala is an anomaly and goes from being around 16% urban as per the administrative definition to over 99% urban using Ghana's and Mexico's definitions.

Way ahead:

This desire to stay rural may stem out of perceived advantages that are enjoyed by rural areas, such as access to funding through rural development schemes or lower taxes. However, these advantages may not necessarily exist. In fact, according to few recent studies, areas that are urban in nature but governed by panchayats make disproportionately more use of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. Thus, while staying rural may not confer the benefits some imagine they will receive, the real losers from the state governments' actions are the de facto urban areas that are deprived of the benefits of

planned development and amenities and services provided to officially urban settlements.

Conclusion:

India cannot afford to govern its settlements in such an arbitrary manner, and the ministry of urban development's move is one in a series of many steps required to address the lacunae in the current rural-urban categorization system, prevent misallocation of resources, provide efficient services and governance structures, and leverage the ongoing structural transformation to boost economic development. India is more urban than we think. Finally, policymakers are coming round to reckoning with this reality.

Why the Chilcot report is vital

Sir John Chilcot's long-awaited report into the UK's role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq and its bloody aftermath is now published. Journalists and experts are now poring over the report for insights into what Chilcot concluded had been a military adventure based on flawed intelligence following which the occupation of Iraq had been "mishandled at every level".

- The Chilcot inquiry launched in 2009 as British troops withdrew from Iraq, tasked with investigating the run-up to the 2003 US-led invasion and the subsequent occupation.

What is the Chilcot report?

The report is the culmination of the Chilcot inquiry into the decisions that brought Britain into the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and Britain's subsequent role in occupied Iraq. The inquiry was announced in 2009 by then Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

Why has it taken so long to publish?

The report was initially slated for publication in 2014, but lengthy negotiations with the Americans and the 'Maxwellisation'

process – that is, allowing those criticised in the report a right of response – held things up. Concerns about releasing the report in the run-up to the 2015 general election were also raised, and so the report was pushed back until July 2016.

Who conducted the inquiry?

The inquiry was led by Sir John Chilcot, who was assisted by military historian and academic Sir Lawrence Freedman, historian Sir Martin Gilbert, Sir Roderic Lyne, Britain's former ambassador to Russia and the UN, and John Major's former private secretary and Baroness Prashar, member of the Joint Committee on Human Rights and chairwoman of the Judicial Appointments Commission. The inquiry was advised by General Sir Roger Wheeler, ex-chief of the British Army's General Staff and former President of the International Court of Justice Dame Rosalyn Higgins.

What restrictions has the committee faced?

Evidence would not be made public if it would endanger the national or economic interests of the UK; endanger the lives of anyone mentioned or was judged not to be in the public interest.

What happened?

In 2003, a US-led coalition invaded Iraq and toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein. The invasion began in March that year and Hussein was captured by December. Britain's involvement in the war was hugely contentious, with many MPs, including from the governing Labour party, voting against military action.

- In the absence of a concrete plan for the aftermath of the downfall of Hussein's regime – he had been in power since the 1970s – Iraq sank further into chaos, as sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shia engulfed the country. American and British troops, who continued to patrol the streets of major cities in the immediate aftermath, became targets of insurgent groups.

- It was only in 2011 that the U.S. and Britain formally ended their military presence in Iraq, by which time hundreds of thousands of civilians, tens of thousands of insurgents, and thousands of coalition troops (including 179 British troops) had died.
- Public pressure began to build for a full parliamentary inquiry. In 2009, the then-prime minister Gordon Brown announced that an independent inquiry would be launched in order to learn lessons from the Iraq war. It would be chaired by Sir John Chilcot. The Chilcot report, finally published seven years later, is the end result of that inquiry.

What did the inquiry find?

Sir John Chilcot said “Britain joined the 2003 invasion of * Iraq before peaceful options had been exhausted”, and that Britain’s policy was “based on flawed intelligence which was not challenged and should have been”. He also said that Saddam Hussein did not pose an imminent threat to the UK in 2003, that there was no definitive proof Iraq had WMDs and that the entire report is an “account of an intervention that went badly wrong”.

What the report says?

The Report leaves no ground for doubt about Mr. Blair’s culpability. It is clear that the U.K. chose to join the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 before all peaceful options for disarming Saddam had been exhausted, thus establishing that war at that time was not, as Mr. Blair claims, a last resort.

- There was no imminent threat from the Iraqi leader and with a majority of the United Nations Security Council supporting UN inspections and monitoring, Mr. Blair’s judgment about the severity of the threat posed by Iraq “were presented with a certainty that was not justified”, and intelligence that had “not established beyond doubt” that Saddam was proceeding

with the manufacture of chemical and biological weapons. In his presentation to the British Parliament just prior to the invasion, these were details that Mr. Blair hid.

- The legal basis for military action was “far from satisfactory”, the report notes. In taking this action the U.K. “undermined the authority of the United Nations Security Council.” The report is equally critical on military planning, establishing that three military brigades were not properly prepared, and the risks not “properly identified nor fully exposed” to Ministers.
- Finally, planning and preparations for the post-Saddam period were “wholly inadequate,” the report states. The U.K. government “failed to achieve the stated objectives it had set itself in Iraq.” As a consequence of this, more than 200 British citizens died, and by July 2009, 150,000 Iraqis had died and more than one million were displaced, figures that continue to rise till date.

Why this is important?

Tens of thousands of Iraqis died during the conflict and the brutal sectarian war that followed, while 179 British soldiers also lost their lives – many of whose relatives are still searching for answers. The invasion was controversial at the time as it did not have explicit approval from the UN Security Council, while claims that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction proved unfounded.

So what happens next?

Many, including veterans of the war and families of the soldiers who died in Iraq, alongside organizations like Stop the War and Greenpeace, are calling for the report to be a first step in legal and political action against former PM Tony Blair. The International Criminal Court is also looking at the Chilcot

Report to see if its prosecutors find grounds to charge Blair on. And although the former PM cannot be charged with a war crime in the UK, he could be accused of misleading parliament, which is a prosecutable offense.

Conclusion:

The Iraq Inquiry is not a court and was not set up to make a legal case against Mr. Blair and individuals in his government who took wrong decisions that led to such disastrous consequences. But the painful reality of life after an unjust war is an experience that Iraq's people suffer every day. There is no justice that can undo what military action conducted on false premises against their country in 2003 has wrought.

Ministry seeks law panel's opinion on uniform civil code

The Union Law Ministry has asked the Law Commission to examine in detail all issues pertaining to the Uniform Civil Code and submit a report to the government. The government has clarified that a decision on the future course of action would be taken on the basis of the Law Commission report. If it is required in the larger interest of the country, the government has clarified that it will hold consultations with various stakeholders on the issue.

Constitutional provision regarding UCC:

Article 44 of the Constitution says that there should be a Uniform Civil Code. According to this article, "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India". Since, the Directive Principles are only guidelines, it is not mandatory to use them.

What is uniform civil code?

Uniform civil Code is a proposal to have a generic set of governing laws for every citizen

without taking into consideration the religion.

Current situation:

Currently, there are personal laws based on the scriptures and customs of each major religious community. They are separate from the public law and are applied on issues like-

- Marriage.
- Divorce.
- Inheritance.
- Adoption and maintenance.

Why it is difficult to have a UCC?

India being a secular country guarantees its minorities the right to follow their own religion, culture and customs under Article 29 and 30. But implementing a Uniform Code will hamper India's secularism.

India abstains on vote for LGBT rights at U.N.

India chose to abstain at the UN Human Rights Council vote recently to appoint an independent investigator to help protect homosexuals and transgender people worldwide from violence and discrimination.

- India abstained from the LGBT vote in the United Nations as the case is subjudice and the Supreme Court is yet to pronounce its verdict.
- However, overcoming strong objections by Saudi Arabia and Muslim countries, UNHRC adopted a Western-backed resolution by a vote of 23 states in favour and 18 against with six abstentions including that of India, South Africa and the Philippines.

Background:

In 2011, the UN rights body declared there should be no discrimination or violence against

people based on their sexual orientation. At the time, Western countries called the vote historic but Islamic states firmly rejected it.

India's response on the LGBT vote in the UN comes hours after LGBT community members expressed disappointment over its move to help protect the rights of homosexuals and transgenders worldwide.

UNHRC:

It is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them.

- It meets at the UN Office at Geneva.
- The Council is made up of 47 United Nations Member States which are elected by the UN General Assembly.
- The term of each seat is three years, and no member may occupy a seat for more than two consecutive terms.
- The council works closely with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and engages the United Nations' special procedures.
- The General Assembly can suspend the rights and privileges of any Council member that it decides has persistently committed gross and systematic violations of human rights during its term of membership. The suspension process requires a two-thirds majority vote by the General Assembly.

India's thriving biodiversity: 445 new species added in 2015

In all, 445 new species have been added to India's list in 2015, according to the report on animal and plant discoveries of 2015. The figure includes 262 animal species and 183 plant

species. The country is home to 97,514 species of animals.

Details:

- The list includes four species of reptiles, six species of amphibians, 26 species of fishes, three species of wild ginger and three of figs among others.
- Some of the notable additions to the list of animals include a rock gecko (*Hemidactylus yajurvedi*) found in Kanker Chhattishgarh, a new frog species (*Fejervarya gomantaki*) from the Western Ghats, and a shiny new species of fish (*Barilius ardens*), also from the Western Ghats.
- Among the plants, a new species of ginger *Zingiber bipinianum* has been found in the South Garo hills of Meghalaya, and a species of mushroom (*Bondarzewia zonata*) has been collected from north Sikkim at an altitude of 2,829 m.
- The most discoveries were made in the Eastern Himalaya region, which accounts for 19% of the total discoveries followed by the Western Ghats (18%) and Andaman and Nicobar Islands at about 15%.

FSSAI signs pact with ASCI to check misleading advertisements

Regulator FSSAI and Advertising Standard Council of India (ASCI) have signed an MoU to check misleading advertisements in the food and beverages sector.

Details:

- As per the MoU, advertising Standard Council of India (ASCI) will comprehensively monitor these advertisements across various media.
- The council has been given a suo motu monitoring mandate by FSSAI to process

complaints against misleading advertisements of food and beverages.

- The agreement also requires ASCI to report to FSSAI non-compliance of ASCI's decisions for further action as required per provisions of the Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) Act.
- FSSAI will also redirect complaints against misleading food and beverages advertisements to ASCI, which will be reviewed using ASCI's code and guidelines. The review will include violation of the FSS Act and regulations related to advertisements making misleading, unsubstantiated or false claims.
- This partnership will put in place a mechanism to monitor misleading advertisements and lead to streamlining advertisements effectively through structured guidelines and appropriate action.

About FSSAI:

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has been established under Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 which consolidates various acts & orders that have hitherto handled food related issues in various Ministries and Departments.

- It was created for laying down science based standards for articles of food and to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.
- Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the Administrative Ministry for the implementation of FSSAI.
- The Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) are appointed by Government of India.

- The Chairperson is in the rank of Secretary to Government of India.

Important functions performed by the authority:

- Framing of Regulations to lay down the Standards and guidelines in relation to articles of food and specifying appropriate system of enforcing various standards thus notified.
- Laying down mechanisms and guidelines for accreditation of certification bodies engaged in certification of food safety management system for food businesses.
- Laying down procedure and guidelines for accreditation of laboratories and notification of the accredited laboratories.
- To provide scientific advice and technical support to Central Government and State Governments in the matters of framing the policy and rules in areas which have a direct or indirect bearing of food safety and nutrition.
- Collect and collate data regarding food consumption, incidence and prevalence of biological risk, contaminants in food, residues of various, contaminants in foods products, identification of emerging risks and introduction of rapid alert system.
- Creating an information network across the country so that the public, consumers, Panchayats etc receive rapid, reliable and objective information about food safety and issues of concern.
- Provide training programmes for persons who are involved or intend to get involved in food businesses.

Plantation drive on 1,500 km of National Highways under Green Highways Project

The government recently launched the initial plantation drive on 1,500 km of National Highways at a cost of about Rs 300 crore under the **National Green Highways Mission**.

Background:

The government, in September 2015, flagged off its Green Highways (Plantation, Transplantation, Beautification and Maintenance) Policy 2015. The policy aims to help the environment, help local communities, and generate employment by planting trees along all the highways in the country.

Key features:

- The vision of the policy is to provide dignified employment to local people and communities.
- Under this policy, every year 1% of the total cost of highway projects will go to the **Green Highways Fund**. That works out to around Rs.1,000 crore every year.
- The policy's objectives include developing a framework for the plantation of trees along highways, reducing the impact of air pollution and dust, providing shade on glaring hot roads during summer, reducing the impact of noise pollution and soil erosion, preventing the glare from the headlights of oncoming vehicles, and generating employment.
- The Policy envisages a strict system of **auditing** whereby money will be released by the government to the empanelled agencies only if they have achieved a **survival rate of 90%** the previous year.
- The implementation and progress of plantation will be monitored via images by **Indian Space Research Organisation** or

ISRO and audit will involve modern information technology tools.

- According to the policy, contracts for greening will be given to **NGOS, agencies, private companies and government organisations** with proven track record in the past in the field. Those selected will be responsible for the survival and health of trees and will be strictly monitored by a body appointed by the ministry.
- The target for the first year is to cover 6,000 km of highways.

Benefits:

- The greening project has a huge potential to generate jobs and can prove to be a game-changer for agriculture and rural economy. It is estimated that greening of one km of highway provides employment to ten people.
- The community will gain in terms of huge employment opportunities and entrepreneurship development.
- Also, the afforestation is expected to help in sequestering approximately 12 lakh mt carbon annually.

Logistics performance index

India has improved its ranking in the World Bank Group's bi-annual "**Logistics Performance Index 2016**", jumping from 54th in 2014 to 35th in 2016. This was announced by the **World Bank Group** in its recent launch of the report.

- In the latest ranking India has gone past countries like New Zealand, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Iceland, Latvia and Indonesia who were ahead of it in the index.

India has improved significantly in the following sub-indices:

- The efficiency of customs and border management clearance, improving from 65 to 38.
- The ability to track and trace consignments, improving from 57 to 33.
- The quality of trade and transport infrastructure, improving from 58 to 36.
- The competence and quality of logistics services, improving from 52 to 32.
- On the remaining two sub-indices – the ease of arranging competitively priced shipments and the frequency with which shipments reach consignees within scheduled or expected delivery times – by 5 and 9 places respectively.

Background:

The World Bank Group's bi-annual report 'Connecting to Compete 2016: Trade Logistics in the Global Economy', launched recently, captures critical information about the complexity of international trade. The Logistics Performance Index (LPI) within the report scores 160 countries on key criteria of logistics performance.

- The scores are based on two sources of information: a worldwide survey of logistics professionals operating on the ground (such as global freight forwarders and express carriers), who provide feedback on the countries in which they operate and with whom they trade; and quantitative data on the performance of key components of the supply chain, such as the time, cost and required procedures to import and export goods.
- The World Bank studies the policy regulation as well as supply chain performance outcomes across six sub-

indices of the Logistics Performance Index and ranks countries based on their performance in all the indices.

Automation to hit textile sector jobs

According to a recently released report, the textile industry in the country is unlikely to create more jobs along with the growth in the industry.

What the report says?

Textile and apparel industry in India is likely to create only 29 lakh jobs compared to the government's target of one crore new jobs, even as the sector's market size is expected to grow by 40% to \$142 billion in the next five years.

Why?

This is mainly because of automation. The technological advancement leading to increased efficiency may reduce job opportunities. The spinning, autoconers and auto-splicers divisions have replaced a job of 20 workers by 2 workers. The inter-fiber shift, moving from relatively labour intensive spun yarn to synthetic filament segment, are also leading to lower job creation.

Concerns:

- As per a World Bank report, 69% of the jobs in India are at a higher risk of being replaced by automation.
- Also, according to the report, absence of FTAs with the EU, Australia and Canada, almost 55 lakh jobs are lost to added exports that would have been generated if the FTAs were signed.

Way ahead:

- The government recently approved a Rs.6,000 crore package for textiles and apparel sector with an aim to create one

crore new jobs in three years and attract investments of \$11 billion.

- Along with this, both Central and state governments need to actively promote hub and spoke model in the sector to increase supply of suitable jobs to rural women and youth.

Development of Port-Rail Connectivity Projects approved under Sagarmala Programme

The Ministry of Railways will be taking up 21 port-rail connectivity projects, at an estimated cost of more than Rs.20,000 Crores, as identified under the port-connectivity enhancement objective of **Sagarmala**, the flagship programme of the **Ministry of Shipping**.

- These projects are aimed at strengthening the rail evacuation network and the last mile connectivity to the ports. In addition, another six projects are being considered by the Indian Port Rail Corporation Limited (IPRCL).
- The Indian Port Rail Corporation Limited (IPRCL), which has been incorporated by the Ministry of Shipping, would take up the projects after prioritizing them. IPRCL has already awarded 3 port connectivity projects for Vishakhapatnam and Chennai ports for quick evacuation of cargo, and another 19 projects are in the pipeline.

Sagarmala Initiative:

The Sagarmala project seeks to develop a string of ports around India's coast. The objective of this initiative is to promote "Port-led development" along India's 7500 km long coastline.

- It aims to develop access to new development regions with intermodal solutions and promotion of the optimum

modal split, enhanced connectivity with main economic centres and beyond through expansion of rail, inland water, coastal and road services.

- The **Union Ministry of Shipping has been appointed as the nodal ministry** for this initiative.

The Sagarmala initiative will address challenges by focusing on three pillars of development, namely:

- Supporting and enabling Port-led Development through appropriate policy and institutional interventions and providing for an institutional framework for ensuring inter-agency and ministries/ departments/states' collaboration for integrated development.
- Port Infrastructure Enhancement, including modernization and setting up of new ports.
- Efficient Evacuation to and from hinterland.

Other objectives:

- In addition to strengthening port and evacuation infrastructure, it also aims at simplifying procedures used at ports for cargo movement and promotes usage of electronic channels for information exchange leading to quick, efficient, hassle-free and seamless cargo movement.
- It also strives to ensure sustainable development of the population living in the Coastal Economic Zone (CEZ). This would be done by synergising and coordinating with State Governments and line Ministries of Central Government through their existing schemes and programmes such as those related to community and rural development, tribal development and employment generation, fisheries, skill development, tourism promotion etc.

Nuclear plants insured

India's first insurance policy covering public liability to an atomic power plant operator has been issued to Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL).

Details:

- The insurance policy was issued by the country's largest non-life insurer **New India Assurance Company Ltd.**
- NPCIL got the insurance policy covering all its atomic power plants. The total premium came around Rs. 100 crore for a risk cover of Rs. 1,500 crore.
- The policy complies with all the provisions of the **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act.**
- The policy would cover the liability towards public as a consequence of any nuclear accident in the plants covered under the policy and also the right of recourse of NPCIL against equipment suppliers.
- However, the reinstatement premium would be decided post a claim based on the capacity – to underwrite the risk-available with the insurers. Reinstatement clause in an insurance policy enables a policyholder to extend the insurance cover to the original limit on payment of premium post a claim.
- The policy does not have any 'policy excess' – part of the claim a policyholder has to bear himself.

Background:

The Central government had announced in June 2015 the setting up of the Rs. 1,500-crore India Nuclear Insurance Pool to be managed by national reinsurer GIC Re.

- The GIC Re, four government-owned general insurers and also some private

general insurers have provided the capacity to insure the risks of up to Rs 1,000 crore with the balance Rs 500 crore being obtained from the British Nuclear Insurance Pool.

- The insurance pool was formed as a risk transfer mode for the suppliers and also NPCIL.

NDRF trains one lakh people in one month for better reach

To ensure resilience and better preparedness against disasters, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has trained over a lakh people across the country in one month on the do's and don'ts during man-made or natural emergencies.

- This was achieved between June 1 and 30 as part of a special initiative when instructors and trainers of the NDRF reached 482 villages, towns and cities to sensitise people about disasters that occur specifically in those areas and also in general.
- Under this Community Awareness Programme, a total of 1,07,112 people in 22 States were trained in basic understanding of disaster management and combat by the NDRF in 482 sessions. The force also trained school students.

Background:

The aim of this first-of-its kind exercise was to sensitise the vulnerable sections to disasters and bring about a sense of community capacity building. It is believed that if a community was well prepared to combat issues like floods and earthquakes, the loss of life and property could be brought down significantly.

NDRF:

The Disaster Management Act has made the **statutory provisions for constitution of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)** for

the purpose of specialized response to natural and man-made disasters.

- Two national calamities in quick succession in the form of Orissa Super Cyclone (1999) and Gujarat Earthquake (2001) brought about the realization of the need of having a specialist response mechanism at National Level to effectively respond to disasters. This realization led to the enactment of the DM Act on 26 Dec 2005.

ROLE AND MANDATE OF NDRF:

- Specialized response during disasters.
- Proactive deployment during impending disaster situations.
- Acquire and continually upgrade its own training and skills.
- Liaison, Reconnaissance, Rehearsals and Mock Drills.
- Impart basic and operational level training to State Response Forces (Police, Civil Defence and Home Guards).
- Community Capacity Building Programme.
- Organize Public Awareness Campaigns.

Why it is said to be UNIQUE?

- It is the only dedicated disaster response force of the world.
- The only agency with comprehensive response capabilities having multi-disciplinary and multi-skilled, high-tech, stand alone nature.
- Experienced paramilitary personnel specially trained and equipped for disaster response.
- Capabilities for undertaking disaster response, prevention, mitigation and capacity building.

Ozone layer over Antarctic shows signs of healing

Atmospheric scientists have seen signs of the mending of the ozone hole above the Antarctic. Scientists have said that this healing is a direct result of the curb on the release of chlorofluorocarbons following from the **Montreal protocol** of 1987.

- Scientists have found that the ozone hole has shrunk by more than four million square kilometres since 2000. This is the year when ozone depletion was at its peak.

What is ozone hole?

The ozone hole is a region of depleted layers of ozone above the Antarctic region, whose creation is linked to increased cases of skin cancer.

Factors responsible for the depletion of ozone:

Depletion of ozone is due to many factors, the most dominant of which is the release of chlorine from CFCs (Chlorofluorocarbons) which destroys the ozone. CFCs are released by products such as hairsprays, old refrigerators etc.

According to scientists, there are three stages in the ozone recovery process:

1. Reduced rate of decline.
2. Levelling off of the depletion.
3. Ozone increase linked to reduction of the levels of CFCs.

Montreal protocol:

The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer was designed to reduce the production and consumption of ozone depleting substances in order to reduce their abundance in the atmosphere, and thereby protect the earth's fragile ozone Layer. The

original Montreal Protocol was agreed on 16 September 1987 and entered into force on 1 January 1989.

- The Montreal Protocol includes a unique adjustment provision that enables the Parties to the Protocol to respond quickly to new scientific information and agree to accelerate the reductions required on chemicals already covered by the Protocol. These adjustments are then automatically applicable to all countries that ratified the Protocol.
- Montreal Protocol stipulates that the production and consumption of compounds that deplete ozone in the stratosphere—chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), halons, carbon tetrachloride, and methyl chloroform—are to be phased out by 2000 (2005 for methyl chloroform).
- These compounds significantly deplete the stratospheric ozone layer that shields the planet from damaging UV-B radiation.
- So far, 197 countries have signed the Protocol.
- The treaty now calls for complete phase out of HCFC by 2030.

SC rues barriers for disabled in govt. service

Quashing the central government's earlier orders on restricting reservation for the differently-abled in promotion to Group A and Group B posts, the Supreme Court has ruled that 3% reservation shall be provided to them in all posts and services under the Government of India.

Background:

The government had confined such reservation to Group C and Group D posts. In its memoranda issued in 1997 and 2005, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT)

had also created a distinction between posts to be filled through direct recruitment and those through promotion, while stating that no reservation shall be provided in posts to be filled through promotion in Group A and Group B categories.

Supreme Court's observations:

- The Court has declared the DoPT memoranda as "illegal and inconsistent" with the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995.
- The apex court has said that the government must scrutinise the barriers to their entry by rigorous standards within the legal framework of the 1995 Act.
- The court has also directed the government to extend 3% reservation to PWD (persons with disability) in all identified posts in Group A and Group B, irrespective of the mode of filling up such posts.

Significance of this judgement:

This is the first authoritative judgment that has explicitly directed the government to do away with the distinction and give benefits of reservation to the differently-abled, without any classification.

- Two indigenous Tejas Light Combat Aircrafts were recently inducted into the IAF squadron, known as the 'Flying Daggers 45'. The aircraft is equipped to handle air-to-air missiles, air-to-surface missiles, anti-ship missiles, bombs and rockets. It is considered to be the lightest multi-role supersonic aircraft of its class. HAL (Hindustan Aeronautics Limited), DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) and ADA (Aeronautical Development Agency) are the key state-run defence companies that are behind the design and development of this Light Combat Aircraft. The combat aircraft uses fourth generation

technologies and has intentionally been made longitudinally unstable to enhance manoeuvrability. The Tejas has a 'glass cockpit' which displays 'real-time' information to the pilot. The multi-role radar on Tejas - which was developed as **Indian-Israeli venture** - is meant to facilitate all weather use of a variety of air-to-air and air-to-surface weaponry. It is the primary targeting sensor on the LCA.

Jawaharlal Nehru Port Becomes First Port in Country to Implement Logistics Data Tagging of Containers

Jawaharlal Nehru Port has become the **first port in the country to implement logistics data tagging of containers**. The Port recently implemented the logistics data bank tagging of containers, first of its kind facility, which will help importers/exporters track their goods in transit through logistics data bank service.

How it operates?

An RFID (Radio Frequency Identification Tag) tag would be attached to each container which would be tracked through RFID readers installed at different locations.

Benefits:

- This would provide the 'Visibility' and 'Transparency' of the EXIM Container Movement by covering the entire movement through rail or road till the ICDs (Inland Container Depot) and CFSs (Container Freight Station).
- This service will integrate the information available with various agencies across the supply chain to provide detailed real time information within a single window.
- This would help in reducing the overall lead time of the container movement across the

western corridor and lower the transaction costs incurred by shippers and consignees.

What is RFID tagging?

RFID tagging is an ID system that uses small radio frequency identification devices for identification and tracking purposes. An RFID tagging system includes the tag itself, a read/write device, and a host system application for data collection, processing, and transmission. An RFID tag (sometimes called an RFID transponder) consists of a chip, some memory and an antenna.

RFID tags that contain their own power source are known as active tags. Those without a power source are known as passive tags. A passive tag is briefly activated by the radio frequency (RF) scan of the reader.

Impose Rs 5,000 fine for littering track: NGT to Railways

The National Green Tribunal has directed the Indian Railways to "strictly" impose fine of Rs 5,000 on those throwing waste on rail tracks and act against them effectively.

- The tribunal has also directed the Railways to produce a list of offenders who have been fined till date for throwing garbage and other waste on tracks.
- The tribunal has also slammed Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) for the delay in relocation and rehabilitation of slum clusters near the railway tracks.

Background:

The green panel had earlier slammed Railways over human defecation and other waste on rail lines and directed the authorities to expeditiously decide on rehabilitation of slum clusters located near the tracks. It had also asked the authorities to impose a fine of Rs 5,000 on those defecating and throwing waste on tracks and act against them effectively.

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 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:

- The sanctioned strength of the tribunal is currently 10 expert members and 10 judicial members although the act allows for up to 20 of each.
- The Chairman of the tribunal who is the administrative head of the tribunal also serves as a judicial member.
- Every bench of the tribunal must consist of at least one expert member and one judicial member. The Chairman of the tribunal is required to be a serving or retired Chief

Justice of a High Court or a judge of the Supreme Court of India.

- 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.

Other notable facts:

- The Tribunal has Original Jurisdiction on matters of "substantial question relating to environment" (i.e. a community at large is affected, damage to public health at broader level) & "damage to environment due to specific activity" (such as pollution). However there is no specific method is defined in Law for determining "substantial" damage to environment, property or public health.
- 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.
- Also Tribunal is competent to hear cases for several acts such as Forest (Conservation) Act, Biological Diversity Act, Environment (Protection) Act, Water & Air (Prevention & control of Pollution) Acts etc. and also have appellate jurisdiction related to above acts after establishment of Tribunal within a period of 30 days of award or order received by aggrieved party.

- The NGT Act says that decision taken by majority of members shall be binding and every order of Tribunal shall be final. 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.

Juno successfully enters Jupiter orbit: NASA

NASA's unmanned Juno spacecraft has successfully entered Jupiter's orbit, after a five year journey.

Background:

Juno was launched nearly five years ago on a mission to study Jupiter's composition and evolution. It's the first spacecraft to orbit Jupiter since Galileo. Galileo was deliberately crashed into Jupiter on September 21, 2003, to protect one of its discoveries – a possible ocean beneath Jupiter's moon Europa.

Galileo, launched in 1989, circled Jupiter for nearly a decade, beaming back splendid views of the planet and its numerous moons. It uncovered signs of an ocean beneath the icy surface of the moon Europa, considered a top target in the search for life outside Earth.

Other details:

- The Juno spacecraft – named after the Roman goddess and wife of Jupiter – is packed with nine instruments capable of peering into the planet's heart.
- It will fly 2,600 miles above the cloud tops – 3,000 miles closer to the surface than any other mission has ever achieved.
- Juno became the **first spacecraft to cruise this far out into the solar system powered solely by the sun**, beating Europe's Rosetta

spacecraft. A trio of massive solar wings sticks out from Juno like blades from a windmill, generating 500 watts of power to run its nine instruments.

- Juno, built by Lockheed Martin, is an armored spacecraft – its computer and electronics are locked in a titanium vault to shield them from harmful radiation. Even so, Juno is expected to get blasted with radiation equal to more than 100 million dental X-rays during the mission.

What next?

Once in position to begin its 20-month science mission, Juno will fly in egg-shaped orbits, each one lasting 14 days, to peer through the planet's thick clouds, map its gargantuan magnetic field and probe through the crushing atmosphere for evidence of a dense inner core. The probe also will hunt for water in Jupiter's thick atmosphere, a key yardstick for figuring out how far away from the sun the gas giant formed.

New Horizons' next goal

After its historic first-ever flyby of Pluto, NASA's New Horizons mission has received the green light to fly onward to an object deeper in the Kuiper Belt. NASA has extended its mission to go further into the Kuiper Belt to explore an ancient object, which is a remnant from the time when the planets in our Solar System first formed. The Kuiper Belt Object, the spacecraft is now heading for, is provisionally called 2014 MU69.

About New Horizons Mission:

New Horizons was launched on 19 January 2006, and has been travelling through space for the past nine years.

- Just over a year after launch, it passed Jupiter and used the giant world's gravity to boost its velocity, as well as making scientific

observations. This boost shortened the time to reach Pluto by years.

- In July 2015, New Horizons flew 12,500km above the dwarf planet's icy surface, becoming the first spacecraft to explore Pluto.
- New Horizon's core science mission is to map the surfaces of Pluto and Charon, to study Pluto's atmosphere and to take temperature readings.
- The spacecraft was launched in 2006, before the big debate started over Pluto's status as a planet. In August of that same year, the International Astronomical Union reclassified Pluto as a dwarf planet.

Kuiper belt is a region of the solar system beyond the planets, extending from the orbit of Neptune. It consist mainly small bodies or remnants from the solar system's formation.

- Researchers from Belgium have built a sensitive electronic nose with **metal-organic frameworks (MOFs)** that can detect pesticides and nerve gas in very low concentrations. MOFs are like microscopic sponges. They can absorb quite a lot of gas into their minuscule pores. The chemical sensor can easily be integrated into existing electronic devices. The new MOF is the most sensitive gas sensor to date for dangerous substances. MOFs can measure very low concentrations, so we could use them to screen someone's breath for diseases such as lung cancer and multiple sclerosis (MS) in an early stage.

RBI's steps on FCNR get FSDC nod

The Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) recently said that the Reserve Bank of India has taken the right steps to address the issue of concessional swaps against Foreign Currency Non-Resident (FCNR) deposits.

Background:

Banks had raised about \$34 billion through FCNR (B) deposits in 2013, most of which are due this year. In 2013 the rupee was at an all-time low of 68.85 against the dollar and the central bank had asked commercial banks to raise the foreign currency deposits to shore up reserves. Banks, then, had swapped those dollars with the RBI. The central bank thereafter readied itself by buying forwards dollar. Now, the RBI estimates that the immediate effect of the maturity of these deposits would be an outflow of about \$20 billion.

Details:

- FCNR (B) deposits mature mostly in three years. RBI had said that the swaps and the forwards will take care of the dollar requirement and should be neutral for the reserves. However, banks should witness deposit base depletion and some rupee liquidity will be strained.
- RBI had also said that it would take "all necessary measures to even out the resultant rupee liquidity gaps through use of appropriate instruments".
- Assuring the market that the swaps are adequately covered by RBI's forward purchases, the central bank, however, had also cautioned that the foreign exchange reserve could see some dip in the interim as the swaps and forwards are not timed perfectly.

FCNR:

An FCNR account is a term deposit account that can be maintained by NRIs and PIOs in foreign currency. Thus, FCNRs are not savings accounts but fixed deposit accounts. The account can be opened in the name of NRI individuals (single/ joint) or with resident Indians on 'former or survivor' basis.

What foreign currencies can one maintain in FCNR accounts?

Prior to 2011, FCNR deposits were allowed to be maintained in six currencies: US dollar, Pound Sterling (GBP), Euro, Japanese Yen, Australian dollar and Canadian dollar. However, in October 2011, the RBI decided that authorised dealer banks in India may be permitted to accept FCNR deposits in any permitted currency. 'Permitted currency' for this purpose would mean a foreign currency which is freely convertible and popularly include Danish Krone, Swiss Frank and Swedish Krona among others.

Exemption from IT:

It should also be noted here that interest income from FCNR (B) accounts is exempt from Income Tax. And deposit held under FCNR (B) a/cs is not taxable under Wealth Tax.

Interest subvention

The Union Cabinet has approved the Interest Subvention Scheme for farmers for the year 2016-17. The Government has earmarked a sum of Rs. 18,276 Crore for this purpose.

- This will help farmers getting short term crop loan payable within one year up to Rs. 3 lakhs at only 4% per annum.

The salient features of the scheme are as follows:

- The Central Government will provide interest subvention of 5% per annum to all farmers for short term crop loan upto one year for loan upto Rs. 3 lakhs borrowed by them during the year 2016-17. Farmers will thus have to effectively pay only 4% as interest. In case farmers do not repay the short term crop loan in time they would be eligible for interest subvention of 2% as against 5% available above.

- In order to give relief to small and marginal farmers who would have to borrow at 9% for the post harvest storage of their produce, the Central Government has approved an interest subvention of 2% i.e an effective interest rate of 7% for loans upto 6 months.
- To provide relief to the farmers affected by Natural Calamities, the interest subvention of 2% will be provided to Banks for the first year on the restructured amount.
- In case farmers do not repay the short term crop loan in time they would be eligible for interest subvention of 2% as against 5% available above.

MoU between India and Mauritius in the field of Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation

The Union Cabinet has approved signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Mauritius.

Details:

- The MoU will help to establish a framework for cooperation between the National Development Unit, Prime Minister's Office of the Republic of Mauritius and the Ministry of Rural Development of the Republic of India in the sphere of rural development.
- The MoU will encourage cooperation in the field of rural development and capacity building on the basis of equality and mutual benefit between both countries.
- Under the MoU, a Joint Committee on Cooperation on Rural Development will be established which will meet alternatively in both countries on mutually agreed dates.
- Both countries have agreed to coordinate and facilitate appropriate technical cooperation, including the access to Indian expertise institutions that can assist in fulfilling the

objectives of this MoU, exchange of relevant information and documents in the sphere of rural development.

- The MoU also facilitates transfer of latest technology, state of the art equipment and materials, and share best practices.

Background:

Both India and Mauritius have a large segment of their population living in rural areas and are pre-dominantly dependent on agriculture and its allied activities for their livelihoods. The Ministry of Rural Development plays a pivotal role in the overall development strategy of rural areas of the country.

SC sets deadline for blocking online sex selection ads

Rapping online search engines like Google, Yahoo and Microsoft for patently violating Indian law, the Supreme Court recently asked the Centre to hold a meeting with their technical experts so as to find a solution to check advertisements and information on pre-natal sex determination being hosted by them.

- The court has asked the Centre to convene a meeting of technical experts and the search engines within 10 days to explore ways to block such advertisements.

Background:

The apex court had in January last year directed the search engines to strictly comply with Indian laws and lock advertisements on sex determination of a foetus.

PCPNDT Act:

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

- The main purpose of enacting the act is to ban the use of sex selection techniques before or after conception and prevent the misuse of prenatal diagnostic technique for sex selective abortion.
- Offences under this act include conducting or helping in the conduct of prenatal diagnostic technique in the unregistered units, sex selection on a man or woman, conducting PND test for any purpose other than the one mentioned in the act, sale, distribution, supply, renting etc. of any ultra sound machine or any other equipment capable of detecting sex of the foetus.

Main provisions in the act are:

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

counselling centres, genetic laboratories, genetic clinics and ultrasound clinics.

- Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 (PNDT), was amended in 2003 to The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition Of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT Act) to improve the regulation of the technology used in sex selection. The Act was amended to bring the technique of pre conception sex selection and ultrasound technique within the ambit of the act. The amendment also empowered the central supervisory board and state level supervisory board was constituted. In 1988, the State of Maharashtra became the first in the country to ban pre-natal sex determination through enacting the Maharashtra Regulation of Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act.
- The Centre has given its 'in-principle' approval to set up the country's **13th major port at Enayam, near Colachel in Tamil Nadu**. A special purpose vehicle (SPV) will be formed for the development of port that will act as a major gateway container port for cargo and become a trans-shipment hub for East-West trade route. The initial investment for the SPV will come from three major ports in Tamil Nadu – V. O. Chidambaranar Port Trust, Chennai Port Trust and Kamarajar Port Limited. The new port at Enayam will also reduce the logistics cost for exporters and importers in south India who currently depend on trans-shipment in Colombo or other ports leading to additional port handling charges.
- The Centre has approved an outlay of Rs.10,000 crore towards a scheme to provide apprenticeship training to 50 lakh youth by 2020. The approved **National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme** will provide financial incentives to employers to engage apprentices. Under the scheme, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship will share 25% of the total stipend payable to an apprentice with employers. The government will also fund 50% of the total expenditure incurred by the employer in providing basis training to apprentices.
- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing of a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Mozambique on Drug demand reduction and prevention of illicit trafficking** in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals and related matters. The MoU is aimed to enhance mutual cooperation between the two countries in combating illicit trafficking in Narcotic drugs, Psychotropic substances and their precursors through exchange of information, expertise and capacity building.
- The Union Cabinet has approved signing of a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Tanzania in the field of Traditional Systems of Medicine and Homeopathy**. The MoU will provide structured frame work for the cooperation between the two countries for the promotion and propagation of Indian Traditional Systems of Medicine & Homeopathy in Tanzania.

PM pays tributes to Babu Jagjivan Ram on his death anniversary

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, paid tributes to Babu Jagjivan Ram on his death anniversary on 6th July.

Key facts:

- Jagjivan Ram, popularly known as Babuji was a national leader, a freedom fighter, a crusader of social justice, a champion of depressed classes, an outstanding Parliamentarian, a true democrat, a distinguished Union Minister, an able administrator and an exceptionally gifted orator.

- Jagjivan Ram had organized a number of **Ravidas Sammelans** and had celebrated **Guru Ravidas Jayanti in different areas of Calcutta** (Kolkata).
- In 1934, he founded the **Akhil Bhartiya Ravidas Mahasabha** in Calcutta and the **All India Depressed Classes League**. Through these Organizations he involved the depressed classes in the freedom struggle.
- In October 1935, Babuji appeared before the **Hammond Commission at Ranchi and demanded, for the first time, voting rights for the Dalits**.
- Babu Jagjivan Ram played a very active and crucial role in the freedom struggle. Inspired by Gandhiji, Babuji courted arrest on 10 December 1940. After his release, he entrenched himself deeply into the Civil Disobedience Movement and Satyagraha.
- Babuji was arrested again on 19 August 1942 for his active participation in the Quit India Movement launched by the Indian National Congress.
- He has also served as the deputy prime minister of India.
- the top place at 41st rank, followed by China at 59th (up three places), South Africa up 10 places at the 65th spot and Brazil moving up to the 72nd position.
- The list is once again topped by Singapore while Finland has also retained its second place.
- Others in the top-ten are Sweden, Norway, the US, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the UK, Luxembourg and Japan.
- India's position on the list has come down for the fourth year in a row, from 89th in 2015, 83rd in 2014 and 68th in 2013.
- While India has scored better in terms of political and regulatory environment (78th position), it fares worse in terms of business and innovation environment (110th).
- In terms of infrastructure it is even worse at 114th place, while it is ranked very high at 8th place in terms of affordability. India also fares poorly on sub-indices for skills and individual usage.
- According to the report, lack of infrastructure (114th) and low levels of skills among the population (101st) remain the key bottlenecks to widespread ICT adoption, especially in terms of individual usage (120th).

Network Readiness Index

India has slipped two places to the 91st position on a global list of countries in terms of their readiness for transition to a digitised economy and society. The annual **Networked Readiness Index** was released by the Geneva-based World Economic Forum (WEF).

- The index, forming part of the WEF's Global Information Technology Report, measures countries' success in creating the conditions necessary for a transition to a digitised economy and society.
- The report further noted that a third of the Indian population is still illiterate and a similar share of youth is not enrolled in secondary education.
- India's performance in terms of providing online services and allowing e-participation has so far been in line with that of peer countries, but far from the global best (57th and 40th, respectively).

Key facts:

- Among the major emerging markets, India is ranked the lowest with Russia retaining

'Almost 30 per cent of our land undergoing degradation'

According to a study, nearly 30% of the country's total geographical area is undergoing degradation. The ongoing study, initiated by the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change, was led by the Indian Space Research Organisation and involved 19 institutes. The study analysed satellite imageries of the country over an eight-year period.

- The report was recently released by ISRO's Space Applications Centre in the form of a 'Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas', combining GIS and remote sensing data.

Highlights of the report:

- The degrading area has increased over 0.5% to 29.3 million hectares during the period 2003-05 and 2011-13. Desertification increased by 1.16 million hectares (m ha) and stood at 82.64 m ha during 2011-13.
- There was high desertification and degradation in Delhi, Tripura, Nagaland, Himachal Pradesh and Mizoram, while Odisha, Telangana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh showed some improvement.
- Just nine States together account for nearly 24% of desertification; the other States have less than one per cent of this land. The culprit States in that order are Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana.
- Southern State Kerala figures among northern and northeastern States where less than 10% land is degraded. With it are relatively greener States of Assam, Mizoram, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Arunachal Pradesh.
- The main culprit for degradation is water erosion (26%) followed by degrading

vegetation (rising slightly nearly 9%) and land or soil erosion due to wind.

India has committed itself to the U.N. Convention on Combating Desertification that it would fully stop land degradation by 2030. The atlas, adding 68 vulnerable districts, would form part of the country's action plan to arrest the phenomenon and also be a status report to the U.N. body.

Collegium reiterates objections to draft memo

The Supreme Court collegium has reiterated its rejection of several crucial clauses in the government's draft Memorandum of Procedure for appointment of judges. The collegium is standing firm by its objections despite government's insistence to smoothen ruffled feathers over judicial appointments. The collegium has said both merit and seniority should be balanced.

Background:

Raising concerns over two issues in the draft Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) for appointment of judges including the one relating to government's right to reject a recommendation on concerns of national interest, the Supreme Court had sent back the draft on judges' appointment in May 2016.

Proposed contentious rules:

- Government's right to reject a recommendation on concerns of national interest.
- Involvement of the AG in suggesting a list of suitable candidates.
- Names for judges' appointments could be suggested by all judges of the bench as well as by the AG and the bar.
- The list of candidates brought before the collegium will first be vetted by a committee of two retired judges and an eminent person.

Present scenario:

Presently, the government is bound to comply if the Supreme Court collegium chooses to override its disapproval of a person recommended for judicial appointment. If the government returns the candidate's file to the collegium, and the latter reiterates its recommendation, the government has no choice but to comply.

- **Kutchi new year** was celebrated on 6th July. The Kutchi people celebrate Kutchi New Year on Ashadi Beej, that is 2nd day of Shukla paksha of Aashaadha month of Hindu calendar. This Hindu New Year is observed in the Kutch region in Gujarat. As for people of Kutch, this day is associated with beginning of rains in Kutch, which is largely a desert area. Hindu calendar month of Aashaadh usually begins on 22 June and ending on 22 July.
- The findings of the 2.6 million-word Iraq Inquiry – seven years in the making – were recently released by probe chairman John Chilcot in London. The official inquiry delivered a devastating indictment of Britain's decision to invade Iraq, finding that the war was based on flawed intelligence and had been launched before diplomatic options were exhausted. The probe chairman has said that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein posed "no imminent threat" when the U.S-led invasion was launched in March 2003, and that while military action against him "might have been necessary at some point," the "strategy of containment" could have continued for some time. The report also notes that Blair's decision to invade Iraq was influenced by his interest in protecting the UK's relationship with the United States. The inquiry was commissioned in June 2009 by Blair's successor, Gordon Brown, following pressure from the public and Parliament.

- The finance ministry has set up a **committee under former chief economic adviser Shankar Acharya to examine the desirability and feasibility of having a new fiscal year**. Currently, India follows the April-March fiscal year and all macroeconomic and company data, including the government's budget, are compiled and prepared for the same period. However, most countries follow a January-December fiscal year. A committee of secretaries headed by the cabinet secretary had earlier this year recommended changing the fiscal year to January-December. The committee will examine the merits and demerits of various dates for the start of the fiscal year, including the existing dates. The committee has been asked to submit its report by 31 December.

Utensil makers oppose quality norms on ste

Manufacturers and exporters of stainless steel utensils and cutlery in India are opposing the recent curbs imposed on the import of different types of so-called 'substandard' stainless steel.

Why?

According to them, the move will result in a shortage of raw material and push up costs for the sector. This, they warned, could in turn lead to closure of several firms in the sector due to non-viability of operations, thereby causing large-scale unemployment.

Background:

The government recently brought out the quality-control order. The order prohibits manufacture, storage, sale and distribution of stainless steel products that do not conform to the standards specified in that order and which do not bear the 'Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)' mark (given after obtaining a licence from the BIS).

- The move is also aimed to prevent 'poor quality' steel imports from countries, including China. It is applicable on various grades of stainless steel plate, sheets and strips used for utensils as well as for low nickel austenitic stainless steel sheet and strips used in kitchen appliances and utensils.
- The quality control order was imposed over and above the minimum import price (MIP) ranging from \$341 to \$752 per tonne on 173 steel products to protect local steel manufacturers from a surge in cheap imports of steel.
- The MIP, which was imposed on February 5 is in place at least until August 4. In March, the government had also extended the safeguard duty (of 20% that will gradually drop to 10%) on steel imports till March 2018.

Putin signs controversial 'Big Brother' law

Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed into law a package of controversial anti-terror amendments dubbed "Big Brother" measures by critics that may cost Internet companies billions.

Controversial provisions in the law:

- Tougher sentences for extremism and heightened electronic surveillance of Russian citizens.
- Telecommunications operators are required to store recordings of their customers' phone calls and text messages for six months.
- Messaging services such as Facebook and Telegram have to provide decryption keys to Russia's Federal Security Service, or FSB.
- Russians have to inform authorities about potentially grave crimes or their planning,

stiffen penalties for re-posting information deemed extremist on the Internet. R

- Postal employees are required to inspect packages.
- The number of crimes with which children between the ages of 14 and 17 can be charged is also increased.
- Public calls for terrorism or its public justification in the Internet will entail a penalty of up to 1 million rubles (\$15,620) or liberty deprivation for a term of 5-7 years.

Sri Lanka to seal trade pact with India by mid-2017

India and Sri Lanka are planning to expedite negotiations on the proposed Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA). In this regard, a delegation from India will shortly visit Colombo.

Background:

India, accounting for 23% (\$ 4,268 million in 2015) of Sri Lanka's total imports, has been negotiating with the island nation on the ETCA, an extension over the existing Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

ETCA:

The Indo-Lanka **Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement** better known as ETCA (formerly CEPA) is a trade agreement. The ETCA agreement seeks to boost cooperation in technical areas, scientific expertise and research amongst institutions, boost standards of goods and services able to compete on the global market and improve opportunities for manpower training and human resource development.

DRI unearths Rs. 2,240 cr. banking-hawala scam

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) in Mumbai has unearthed a 'banking-hawala' scam, in which reputed public sector banks illegally remitted Rs. 2,240 crore overseas based on forged documentation and declarations of traded goods by exporters and importers.

DRI:

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence was constituted on 4th December 1957, for dealing exclusively with the work relating to the collection and study of information on smuggling activities and the deployment of all anti-smuggling resources at the all India level, besides arranging training for the intelligence and Investigation officers of the Custom Houses and Central Excise Collectorates deployed on similar work.

- DRI is the major intelligence agency which eradicates smuggling of drugs, gold, diamonds, electronics, foreign currency, counterfeit Indian currency, etc.
- The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence functions under the Central Board of Excise and Customs in the Ministry of Finance, Department of Revenue.
- The Directorate is run by officers from Central Excise and Customs. Though its early days were committed to combating smuggling in of gold, it has now tuned itself to the changing nature of crimes in the field of narcotics and economic crimes.

The essential features of the organization are:

- It is designed to collect and collate information and to strike swiftly;
- It is officer-intensive and the ministerial staff has been kept at a minimum;

- Although small, it is a high-powered organization so that it can issue instructions to Collectors and can command the confidence and respect of the other State and Central organizations with which it has necessarily to deal in order to become effective;
- It consists of selected officers, that is, those who by temperament and experience, are equipped to do this specialized kind of work;
- It will have no routine job of its own in the sense that it is required to collect a certain amount of revenue. It will have complete liberty to act on 'hunches' and only the ends will justify the means it adopts.

'Clean Ganga' project launched at 100 places

The Central government has launched 231 projects under the 'Namami Gange' project. This would take it closer to achieving its Clean Ganga objective.

Namami Gange Programme:

The Union government approved "Namami Gange" Program in May 2015. It integrates the efforts to clean and protect the Ganga River in a comprehensive manner.

Focus of the programme:

Among other things, the programme will focus on pollution abatement interventions namely Interception, diversion & treatment of wastewater flowing through the open drains through bio-remediation / appropriate in-situ treatment / use of innovative technologies.

Implementation:

- The program would be implemented by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), and its state counterpart organizations i.e., State Program Management Groups (SPMGs).

- In order to improve implementation, a three-tier mechanism has been proposed for project monitoring comprising of a) High level task force chaired by Cabinet Secretary assisted by NMCG at national level, b) State level committee chaired by Chief Secretary assisted by SPMG at state level and c) District level committee chaired by the District Magistrate.
- The program emphasizes on improved coordination mechanisms between various Ministries/Agencies of Central and State governments.

Other details:

- The program has a budget outlay of Rs. 20,000 crore for the next 5 years.
- Under this programme, the focus of the Government is to involve people living on the banks of the river to attain sustainable results.
- The programme also focuses on involving the States and grassroots level institutions such as Urban Local Bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions in implementation.
- Germany has enacted a landmark **sexual assault law**. The German Parliament has passed “no means no” rape law. The law broadens the definition of sex crimes and makes it easier to deport migrants and refugees who commit them. It explicitly covers cases in which a victim withheld consent but did not physically fight back. It also lowers the bar for deporting sex offenders, classifies groping as a sex crime and targets assaults committed by large groups. It specifically upgrades groping to a sex crime with sentences of up to two years’ jail or a fine.
- The **second anti-drug working group meeting of heads of anti-narcotics agencies of BRICS countries** has begun in New Delhi. The meeting discusses issues related to

narco-terrorism and money laundering. The meeting has been organised by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) of India.

MoUs between India and Mozambique

Three agreements were signed in areas of drug trafficking, pulse trading and sports between India and Mozambique during PM Modi’s recent visit to the country.

The three Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) are:

1. On reduction of drug trafficking and psychotropic substances and related materials.
2. On cooperation in the field of youth affairs and sports.
3. On long term agreement for purchase of pulses.

Key aspects of the MoUs:

- Mozambique will be focusing on the production of tur dal (Pigeon Peas) to facilitate the long term trade goals with India.
- The imports are aimed at dropping the consistent inflation of pulses that has been over 30% since a few months. The import deal has been signed for a duration of five financial years (till 2020-21).
- The trade will either be held by both the governments directly or through government-nominated private channels.
- The MoU on drug trafficking will aim at the reduction of the trade of psychotropic substances and related materials.

Pizzas in Kerala get a 14.5% 'fat tax' topping

Kerala has announced a 14.5% "fat tax" on pizzas, burgers, sandwiches and tacos sold through branded outlets. This announcement is in sync with the World Health Organization's advocacy of using fiscal tools to promote healthy eating.

Will it have any positive outcomes?

According to the government, "the 'fat tax' may not stop children from eating junk food altogether. But there will definitely be a drop in consumption because many parents will put their foot down when it comes to spending more."

- Also, like a cigarette tax and an alcohol tax, a fat tax would dissuade children from eating a lot of energy dense foods.
- Although the outcome is still being debated, the British Medical Journal said a year ago that consumption of 'junk food' fell in Denmark by 10 to 15%.
- Data from Finland show demand for sugar, sweets and sugary drinks is quickly affected by prices, particularly among less affluent sections, and helps cut body weight and thus diabetes risk.

Background:

Worldwide, obesity rates have prompted governments to consider imposing a tax to slow sales of food laden with saturated fat and sugars. Denmark introduced a surcharge a few years ago on foods that contain over 2.3% saturated fat, drawing criticism about excessive bureaucracy. It was abolished in 15 months.

SC ends impunity for armed forces in disturbed areas

Supreme Court has ruled that armed personnel cannot just shoot to kill militants who create internal disturbances under the presumption that they are enemies, and would face criminal prosecution if found using excessive force even in areas where the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (Afspa) is in force.

- The verdict is likely to have far reaching consequences in places where security forces have been insulated by Afspa to carry out counter-insurgency operations.

Important observations made by the Court:

- Indefinite deployment of armed forces in the name of restoring normalcy under AFSPA "would mock at our democratic process", apart from symbolising a failure of the civil administration and the armed forces.
- It does not matter whether the victim was a common person or a militant or a terrorist, nor does it matter whether the aggressor was a common person or the state. The law is the same for both and is equally applicable to both.
- There is no concept of absolute immunity from trial by a criminal court if an Army man has committed an offence.

Background:

The judgment came on a plea by hundreds of families in the north-eastern State of Manipur for a probe by a Special Investigation Team into 1,528 cases of alleged fake encounters involving the Army and the police.

Implications:

- The verdict tears down the cloak of secrecy about unaccounted deaths involving security forces in disturbed areas and serves as a judicial precedent to uphold civilian and

human rights in sensitive areas under military control. Henceforth, a thorough enquiry will be conducted into “encounter” killings in disturbed areas.

- Also, errant armed personnel would face criminal charges notwithstanding the immunity conferred under Afspa for anything done in “lawful exercise” of “official duties.”

What is Afspa?

Afspa, which was enacted in 1958 amid the nascent Naga insurgency, 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.

Security forces can “arrest without warrant” a person, who has committed or even “about to commit a cognizable offence” even on “reasonable suspicion”. It also protects them from legal processes for actions taken under the act.

Which states are under Afspa?

It is in force in Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Manipur (except the Imphal municipal area). In Arunachal Pradesh, only the Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts plus a 20-km belt bordering Assam come under its purview. And in Meghalaya Afspa is confined to a 20-km area bordering Assam.

What are ‘disturbed’ areas?

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

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.

What is state government’s role?

The state governments can suggest whether the act is required to be enforced or not. But under Section (3) of the act, their opinion can be overruled by the governor or the Centre.

Is the act uniform in nature?

Initially, it was meant only for Assam and Manipur, where there was an insurgency by Naga militants. After the reorganisation of the northeast in 1971, the creation of new states like Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh paved the way for the Afspa to be amended, so that it could be applied to each of them. The amendments contain different sections as applicable to the situation in each state.

SC to consider whether NHRC is ‘toothless tiger’

The Supreme Court has proposed to consider the grievance of the National Human Right’s Commission (NHRC) that it has become a “toothless tiger”. NHRC had also recently complained about difficulties in discharging its duties, including non-cooperation from State governments and lack of staff.

- The court has noted NHRC’s submission that “it was helpless in taking any coercive measures since it has no power to take action against persons or authorities who do not follow the guidelines laid down by it nor

does it have power to give directions or pass orders but can only make recommendations.”

- The matter was considered by the court while dealing with a PIL petition on extra-judicial killings in militancy infested Manipur and the plea for repealing the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.

NHRC:

It is a statutory body established in 1993.

Composition:

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

Appointment:

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

Term:

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

Removal:

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

Indian Captain Radhika Menon Is First Woman To Get Bravery At Sea Award

Captain Radhika Menon, first woman captain of the Indian Merchant Navy will receive IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea.

- The 2016 **International Maritime Organisation Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea** will be given to Captain Radhika Menon for her role in the dramatic rescue of seven fishermen from a sinking fishing boat in tumultuous seas in the Bay of Bengal in June last year.

About IMO:

The International Maritime Organization – is the **United Nations specialized agency** with responsibility for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine pollution by ships.

- It has 171 Member States and three Associate Members.
- The IMO's primary purpose is to develop and maintain a comprehensive regulatory framework for shipping and its remit today includes safety, environmental concerns, legal matters, technical co-operation, maritime security and the efficiency of shipping.
- IMO is governed by an assembly of members and is financially administered by a council of members elected from the assembly.
- The IMO's structure comprises the Assembly, the Council, the Maritime Safety Committee, the Marine Environment Protection Committee, the Legal Committee, the Technical Cooperation Committee, and the secretariat, headed by a Secretary-General.

IMO council:

The IMO Council acts as the IMO's Governing Body. It has a crucial role to play in deciding various matters in relation to the global shipping industry, including its work programme strategy and budget.

- Members of the Council consist of 40 member states, elected by its Assembly including 10 members in category A with the largest interest in providing international shipping services; 10 members in category B with the largest interest in international seaborne trade and 20 members in category C with special interests in maritime transport or navigation.
- India has been one of the earliest members of the IMO, having ratified its Convention and joined it as a member-state in the year 1959.

About the award:

The annual Award was established by IMO to provide international recognition for those who, at the risk of losing their own life, perform acts of exceptional bravery, displaying outstanding courage in attempting to save life at sea or in attempting to prevent or mitigate damage to the marine environment.

- Nominations are scrutinized by an Assessment Panel made up of members of non governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO, under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General.
- Subsequently, a Panel of Judges meets (under the chairmanship of the Chairman of the Council, with the participation of the Chairmen of the Maritime Safety Committee, the Marine Environment Protection Committee, the Legal Committee, the Technical Cooperation Committee and the Facilitation Committee) to consider the recommendations of the Assessment Panel and to select the recipient of the Award.

There are **three categories of honour**: first, the Award itself, for the nominee judged to have performed the most outstanding act of bravery from among those described. Secondly, Certificates of Commendation are awarded to nominees who have committed acts of extraordinary bravery. And, thirdly, Letters of Commendation are sent to those nominees who are judged to deserve some special recognition for meritorious actions.

India to seek help for services pact at UN

During the forthcoming **Nairobi meet of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)**, India is planning to press for endorsement by more nations for its proposal on a global pact to expedite the services trade flow.

About the pact:

- It will officially be known as the '**Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) for Services**' at the World Trade Organisation (WTO)-level.
- The proposed pact, among other things, is aimed at making it easier for services professionals and skilled workers to move across borders for 'short-term' projects.
- Its objectives include streamlining procedures for global services trade, besides ensuring recognition at the WTO-level for services as a tradable item by establishing a framework – for clarity on definitions and for settlement of disputes.

Background:

The idea of a 'TFA for Services' – similar to the WTO's 'TFA for Goods' – was mooted by India soon after the WTO's tenth Ministerial Conference in Nairobi in December 2015. India had on April 22 ratified the 'TFA for Goods', which is aimed at easing customs norms and boosting global merchandise trade.

- India had reiterated the proposal for a TFA in Services during the informal meeting of trade ministers from 25 WTO member countries on the sidelines of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ministerial council meeting in Paris.

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.

UNCTAD:

UNCTAD has 194 member States and is the UN subsidiary looking at measures to boost trade and investment in developing countries.

- Upcoming Nairobi (Kenya) meet will be the UN Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) 14th quadrennial 'Ministerial Conference'.
- The 'Ministerial Conference' is the Geneva-headquartered UNCTAD's highest decision-making body, and is held every four years ever since UNCTAD was set up in 1964.

India signs five agreements with Tanzania

India and Tanzania have signed five agreements. The agreements were signed following delegation-level talks headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Tanzanian President John Magufuli.

Details:

- According to one agreement, India will extend a line of credit of \$92 million for the rehabilitation and improvement of the water supply system in Zanzibar.
- A memorandum of understanding (MoU) on water resource management and development was also signed.
- Another MoU seeks to establish a vocational training centre in Zanzibar.
- An MoU was also signed on visa waiver for diplomatic and official passport holders.
- An agreement was also signed between the National Small Industries Corporation of India and the Small Industries Development Organisation of Tanzania.

SC seeks review of law on advocates

The Supreme Court has asked the Law Commission to review "all relevant aspects" relating to the law governing the legal profession, including issues like professional misconduct by lawyers, in consultation with all stakeholders. Therefore, **Advocates Act**, under which lawyers are governed, will be reviewed.

- The court has also asked the government to take appropriate steps in the light of report of the Law Commission within six months. The Central Government may file an appropriate affidavit in this regard within one month after expiry of one year.

Background:

The direction came in a verdict by which the apex court upheld the conviction of a Uttar Pradesh-based advocate for criminal contempt for intimidating and threatening a civil judge in Etah.

Law commission:

Law Commission of India is an **executive body established by an order of the Government of India**. Its major function is to work for legal reform. Its membership primarily comprises legal experts, who are entrusted a mandate by the Government. The Commission is established for a **fixed tenure and works as an advisory body to the Ministry of Law and Justice**.

Farmer can't be evicted even after lease expires: SC

The Supreme Court has held that **a farmer, who is in possession of leased land even after expiry of the lease period, cannot be evicted if the owner either acknowledges the tenancy or is accepting the rent.**

Background:

These observations were made by the court during the review of the verdict of the Punjab and Haryana High Court. Referring to a provision of the **Transfer of Property Act**, the court has set aside the verdict of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which ordered the eviction of a farmer after expiry of the lease period of the land.

What has the Supreme Court said?

The operation of Section 116 of the Transfer of Property Act would confer legitimacy to the possession of the tenant even after the termination or expiration of the deemed period of the lease so as to confer on him a status akin to that of a statutory tenant and hence protection from eviction as

envisaged by the provisions of the Act (Punjab Security of Land Tenure Act) of 1953.

Also, there was no legal provision to evict the farmer as the eviction conditions laid down in the Punjab Security of Land Tenure Act 1953 and the Punjab Tenancy Act 1887 did not include a tenant whose lease had expired.

DAWN marks ice-bearing Ceres craters

Scientists with NASA's Dawn mission have identified, on the dwarf planet Ceres, permanently shadowed regions most of which likely have been cold enough to trap water ice for a billion years. The findings suggest that that ice deposits could exist in these regions even now.

Key findings:

- The conditions on Ceres are right for accumulating deposits of water ice. Ceres has just enough mass to hold on to water molecules, and the permanently shadowed regions identified are extremely cold – colder than most that exist on the moon or Mercury.
- Permanently shadowed regions do not receive direct sunlight. They are typically located on the crater floor or along a section of the crater wall facing the pole. The regions still receive indirect sunlight, but if the temperature stays below about minus minus 151 degrees Celsius, the permanently shadowed area is a cold trap: a good place for water ice to accumulate and remain stable.

Dawn mission:

NASA's Dawn mission will study the asteroid Vesta and dwarf planet Ceres, celestial bodies believed to have accreted early in the history of the solar system. The mission will characterize the early solar system and the processes that dominated its formation.

- Russia has offered Indian oil companies a stake in the second phase of **Yamal LNG**, the **biggest project to produce liquefied natural gas in the Arctic**. The Russian firm holds 50.1% stake in the project that comprises development of the South-Tambeyskoye field with proven deposits of 1.3 trillion cubic meters of natural gas and the construction of natural gas liquefaction plant (LNG) for producing 16.5 million tonnes of LNG a year by 2017.
- '**kuji mendha**', a threatened breed of sheep **found only in coastal Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara districts of Odisha** has been conferred '**rare and singular species**' tag by the central government. The **National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR)** has accorded the genetic recognition. With NBAGR conferring it genetically rare status, conserving these domesticated species would receive a boost.

Key facts:

- Kuji Mendha sheep are fast breeders giving multiple birth. Sheep in other parts of Odisha are not known for giving multiple birth. This characteristic makes them distinctive from other species.
- The rare genetic traits lead to the **multiple birth syndrome** in them. These animals are dwarf in built with the body covered with coarse hair. The average adult sheep weighs 18-20 kg.
- Kendrapada sheep are primarily used for production of mutton. The other product of economic importance is their skin. They are well adapted to high ambient temperature, high humidity and heavy rains.

Background:

Researchers of Fisheries and Animal Resources Development (FARD) Department, Odisha

Livestock Resources Development Society and College of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry had earlier conducted scientific study on this rare breed and had found the sheep to be carrying a rare gene mutation. Researchers from state units had laid claim for accordance of rare genetic status on the breed.

India, Kenya to deepen security ties

India and Kenya have signed seven pacts. These pacts were signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ongoing visit to the country.

Details:

MoUs signed between the two nations include:

- MoU on Defence Cooperation.
- MoU on Cooperation in the field of National Housing Policy Development and Management.
- MoU between Bureau of Indian Standards and Kenya Bureau of Standards.
- Agreement on Exemption of Visa for holders of Diplomatic Passports.
- Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income.
- Line of Credit Agreement for US\$ 15 million to IDB Capital Limited, for development of small and medium enterprises [SMEs].
- Line of Credit Agreement for US\$ 29.95 million to the Government of Kenya for upgrade of Rift Valley Textiles Factory (RIVATEX).

300 Indians stranded in Juba as civil war reignites

Reignited civil war in Juba has left at least 300 Indians stranded. Juba is the capital of South Sudan. Fleeing the fight between the heavily armed rival factions divided on ethnic lines, Indians have taken refuge at various locations, including the Embassy of India.

- Law and order has broken down in the country. Even the U.N. peacekeeping contingent was busy defending its bases.

Background:

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in July 2011, but the hard-won celebration was short-lived. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement, the ruling political party that originally led the way for independence, is now divided and fighting for power.

Recent crisis:

In December 2013, political infighting erupted into violence in the streets of the capital, Juba, after South Sudan's president accused his vice president of an attempted coup. Violence spread across the young nation like wildfire, displacing 413,000 civilians in just the first month of conflict. Tens of thousands of civilians rushed to seek refuge in U.N. bases that were subsequently turned into makeshift displacement camps. The fighting has continued, becoming increasingly brutal and affecting nearly the entire country.

What's going on now?

A handful of peace agreements have been signed over the course of the war – the most recent in August 2015 – but they have been repeatedly violated. The situation remains highly unstable. While some regions have recently become slightly less volatile, allowing people to move around fairly freely and return to their homes, violent outbreaks are still occurring throughout the country.

Roots of Khasis

Pre-historic megaliths and tools discovered in Meghalaya's Ri-Bhoi district indicate that the Khasi tribe had made the State their home since around 1200 BCE.

- Excavations carried out near Lummawbuh village in the northern slopes of **Sohpetbneng (Heaven's Naval) peak near the NH-40** revealed these facts.
- Archeologists have found megalithic structures, and iron implements that date back to the prehistoric period in the ridge spreading over 1.5 k.m.

Key facts:

- The Khasi people are an indigenous tribe, the majority of whom live in the State of Meghalaya, with a significant population in the border areas of the neighbouring state of Assam, and in certain parts of Bangladesh.
- They call themselves **Ki Khun U Hynñiewtrep**, which means "The Children of The Seven Huts" in their language.
- Their language, also called Khasi, is categorized as the northernmost language under the Austroasiatic family stock. The Khasi language was essentially oral until the arrival of Christian missionaries.
- The Khasi people form the majority of the population of the eastern part of Meghalaya, and is the state's largest community.
- Though the majority of the 85% Khasi populace have embraced Christianity, a substantial minority of the Khasi people still follow and practice their age old indigenous religion, which is known as "Ka Niam Khasi".
- The Khasi people designed and built the famous living root bridges of the Cherrapunjee region.

- Under the Constitution of India, the Khasis have been granted the status of Scheduled Tribe.
- A unique feature of the Khasi people is that they follow the matrilineal system of descent and inheritance.
- To address the issue of trolls and abusive online behaviour, the Women and Child Development (WCD) ministry has set up a **cyber cell and appointed an officer of the rank of joint secretary to monitor it**. As part of the initiative, a separate e-mail id will be created for women to file their complaints. The cyber cell will go through the complaints. If the trolling pertains to threat or violent behaviour, the cell will refer it to the cyber crime department of Delhi Police for necessary action. Complaints will also be sent to social media platforms – Twitter or Facebook – where the alleged online abusive behaviour took place.
- The **Bornean orangutan** (*Pongo pygmaeus*) is now critically endangered, with populations in sharp decline due to habitat destruction and illegal hunting. This was announced by the IUCN recently. Bornean orangutans live only on the **island of Borneo**, where their populations have declined by 60% since 1950. New projections anticipate their numbers will fall another 22% by the year 2025 to an estimated 47,000 apes. The species, along with the Sumatran orangutan (critically endangered), belongs to the only genus of great apes native to Asia. The new IUCN findings suggest that hunting, habitat destruction, habitat degradation and fragmentation are the biggest drivers behind the population loss.
- Gujarati litterateur **Dr Raghuvver Chaudhari** was recently honoured with the 51st Bharatiya Jnanpith award for the year 2015 by President Pranab Mukherjee. The Jnanpith Award is one of the prestigious literary honours in the country. The award was instituted in 1961. Any Indian citizen who writes in any of the official languages of India is eligible for the honour.
- The government has decided to set up a **committee headed by Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian to consider increasing the Minimum Support Price (MSP)** and the bonus for pulses, a move that could promote pulses farming. The committee would consider a reasonable increase in the MSP for pulses and bonus for farmers for growing the crops. The committee will submit a report within two weeks.
- **Sushila Karki** recently took charge as the first woman chief justice of Nepal's Supreme Court.

Ending impunity under AFSPA

The Supreme Court of India recently ruled that the **armed forces cannot escape investigation for excesses in the course of the discharge of their duty even in "disturbed areas"**. This was observed by the court while hearing petitions demanding an inquiry into 1,528 deaths in counter-insurgency operations and related incidents in Manipur. In disturbed areas, **security personnel enjoy statutory protection for their use of "special powers"**.

Important observations made by the court:

The provisions of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act and the purported immunity it offers to the use of force "even to the extent of causing death" are not invincible. Such legal protection has to yield to larger principles of human rights, and no allegation of the use of excessive or retaliatory force can be ignored without a thorough inquiry. This is a requirement both of democracy and for the preservation of the rule of law.

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. Security forces can “arrest without warrant” a person, who has committed or even “about to commit a cognizable offence” even on “reasonable suspicion”. It also protects them from legal processes for actions taken under the act.

Which states are under Afspa?

It is in force in Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Manipur (except the Imphal municipal area). In Arunachal Pradesh, only the Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts plus a 20-km belt bordering Assam come under its purview. And in Meghalaya Afspa is confined to a 20-km area bordering Assam.

What are ‘disturbed’ areas?

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

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.

What is state government’s role?

The state governments can suggest whether the act is required to be enforced or not. But under Section (3) of the act,

their opinion can be overruled by the governor or the Centre.

Is the act uniform in nature?

Initially, it was meant only for Assam and Manipur, where there was an insurgency by Naga militants. After the reorganisation of the northeast in 1971, the creation of new states like Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh paved the way for the Afspa to be amended, so that it could be applied to each of them. The amendments contain different sections as applicable to the situation in each state.

Why have AFSPA?

- The army is opposed to the withdrawal of Afspa. Many argue that **removal of the act will lead to demoralising the armed forces and see militants motivating locals to file lawsuits against the army.**
- Also, the forces are aware that they cannot afford to fail when called upon to safeguard the country’s integrity. Hence, they require the **minimum legislation that is essential to ensure efficient utilization of combat capability.** This includes safeguards from legal harassment and empowerment of its officers to decide on employment of the minimum force that they consider essential.
- The absence of such a legal statute would adversely **affect organizational flexibility and the utilization of the security capacity of the state.** This would render the security forces incapable of fulfilling their assigned role.
- AFSPA is necessary to **maintain law and order in disturbed areas,** otherwise things will go haywire. The law also dissuades advancement of terrorist activities in these areas.

Arguments against AFSPA:

- Critics say the undemocratic act has failed to contain terrorism and restore normalcy in disturbed areas, as the number of armed groups has gone up after the act was established. Many even hold it responsible for the spiralling violence in areas it is in force.
- Common people see it as 'Right to Kill' Act. Since its inception many Human Rights organizations and civil societies have been opposing it.
- The decision of the government to declare a particular area 'disturbed' cannot be challenged in a court of law. Hence, several cases of human rights violations go unnoticed.
- It is inhumane to make people live in curfew like conditions for their entire lives.
- The justice Jeevan Reddy Committee was set up in 2005 to review Afspa and make recommendations. It recommended that Afspa should be repealed and the Unlawful Activities Protection Act strengthened to fight militancy.

Conclusion:

It is high time that concerted and sincere efforts are continuously made by the four stakeholders – civil society in Manipur, the insurgents, the State of Manipur and the Government of India to find a lasting and peaceful solution to the festering problem, with a little consideration from all quarters. It is never too late to bring peace and harmony in society. The verdict is likely to have far reaching consequences in places where security forces have been insulated by Afspa to carry out counter-insurgency operations.

Seven failures of economic liberalization

2016 marks 25 years since the so-called “economic reforms” were launched in India in July 1991. By now, intentions behind policies and practices that characterized such reforms are well known, viz. radical deregulation, marketization and privatization of the industrial, technological and financial sectors, and an across-the-board induction of foreign direct investment and foreign institutional investment, and so on.

What necessitated such transformation?

Licence raj had the unintended consequence of giving birth to a vast and unending bureaucracy, significant public expenditure and the development of a few large corporations that would dominate the private sector. Besides, exports were encouraged while at the same time imports were discouraged.

What changes were introduced?

The external shock of 1991 set the stage for a fundamental mindset shift. The government no longer selectively removed restrictions and rules, though they were only selectively applied. The government also did away with licence raj, ended many public monopolies, and opened several sectors to automatic approval of foreign direct investment. It was an undeniable paradigm shift, and one that changed India dramatically.

The broad goals of this transformation were:

- To increase the productivity of investment of Indian industries.
- To improve the performance of the public sector in order to gain a competitive edge in a fast changing global economy.
- To achieve greater social equity.

Failures of economic liberalization:

The end of the licence raj and the opening up of the economy to private and foreign capital are some positive outcomes of reforms initiated in 1991. However, these reforms have some failures too.

- The share of manufacturing in the gross domestic product is 16.2% now. In 1989-90, the share was 16.4%. This shows that its share in the economy has not increased.
- The combined fiscal deficit of the centre plus the states, as a percentage of GDP, has risen beyond the 1991 level. In 2014-15, the combined fiscal deficit, as a percentage of GDP, was higher than it was in 1995-96. Hence, it has failed to curb the combined fiscal deficit.
- The central government's gross tax revenues as a percentage of gross domestic product have also remained below the 1991-92 level.
- In 1990-91, capital expenditure accounted for 30% of total central government expenditure. The budget for the current fiscal year puts the share of capex at a mere 12.5%. Productive capital expenditure on infrastructure has not significantly improved.
- Economic liberalization has failed to provide secure and decent jobs to the mass of the population. In spite of all the reforms, the number of employees per non-agricultural establishment has been coming down steadily. It was an average of 2.39 employees per establishment in the 2013 economic census, compared to 3.01 persons in the 1980 economic census. This means the vast majority of the establishments in India are in the informal sector, with neither the capital nor the technology to improve productivity.
- Compared to neighbouring Bangladesh and Nepal, India's performance in bringing

down under-five mortality rates is not so encouraging.

Conclusion:

Widespread liberalisation of the economic policy regime was long overdue in 1991, and has played a positive role since, but its impact has run its course and the policy has recognisable limits. It's now up to the government to address these failures.

All you need to know about NATGRID

Senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Ashok Patnaik has been appointed as the CEO of National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID) by the government. This shows that the present government is more serious about NATGRID. The appointment in the post of CEO, which has been lying vacant for several months, came a month after Prime Minister Narendra Modi reviewed the working of the Natgrid.

What is the NATGRID?

NATGRID is an ambitious counter terrorism programme, which will utilise technologies like Big Data and analytics to study and analyse the huge amounts of data from various intelligence and enforcement agencies to help track suspected terrorists and prevent terrorist attacks. It will connect, in different phases, data providing organisations and users besides developing a legal structure through which information can be accessed by the law enforcement agencies.

Background:

NATGRID is a post Mumbai 26/11 attack measure. It aims to mitigate a vital deficiency – lack of real time information, which was considered to be one of the major hurdles in detecting US terror suspect David Headley's movement across the country during his multiple visits between 2006 and 2009.

It's role:

- NATGRID will become a secure centralised database to stream sensitive information from 21 sets of data sources such as banks, credit cards, visa, immigration and train and air travel details, as well as from various intelligence agencies.
- The database would be accessible to authorised persons from 11 agencies on a case-to-case basis, and only for professional investigations into suspected cases of terrorism.

Developments so far:

In the first phase, 10 user agencies and 21 service providers will be connected, while in later phases about 950 additional organisations will be connected. In subsequent years, over 1,000 additional organisations will be connected.

- While the clearance for the Rs 3,400-crore project from the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) came in 2011, execution of the project slowed down after the exit of then home minister P Chidambaram in July 2012.
- Currently, there are around 70 personnel, drawn from both the government and private sectors, in NATGRID.

How is it different from NCTC and NIA?

Unlike the NCTC and the NIA which are central organisations, the NATGRID is essentially a tool that enables security agencies to locate and obtain relevant information on terror suspects from pooled data of various organisations and services in the country. It will help identify, capture and prosecute terrorists and help preempt terrorist plots.

Criticisms:

- NATGRID is facing opposition on charges of possible violations of privacy and

leakage of confidential personal information.

- Its efficacy in preventing terror has also been questioned given that no state agency or police force has access to its database thus reducing chances of immediate, effective action.
- According to few experts, digital databases such as NATGRID can be misused. Over the last two decades, the very digital tools that terrorists use have also become great weapons to fight the ideologies of violence.
- The Snowden files have already revealed the widespread misuse in recent years of surveillance capabilities to compromise individual privacy and even violate national sovereignty.

Why do we need NATGRID?

The danger from not having a sophisticated tool like the NATGRID is that it forces the police to rely on harsh and coercive means to extract information in a crude and degrading fashion. After every terrorist incident, it goes about rounding up suspects – many of who are innocent. If, instead, a pattern search and recognition system were in place, these violations of human rights would be much fewer.

- Natgrid would also help the police and the Intelligence Bureau keep a tab on persons with suspicious backgrounds. The police would have access to all his data and any movement by this person would also be tracked with the help of this data base.

Conclusion:

In its present form, NATGRID suffers from few inadequacies, some due to bureaucratic red tape and others due to fundamental flaws in the system. If the government takes enough measures to ensure that information does not fall through the

firewalls that guard it, NATGRID has the potential to become India's go-to grid for a 360-degree perspective to prevent and contain crises.

BSE unveils online system for Sovereign gold bond

BSE has unveiled an online bidding platform for sovereign gold bonds and begun conducting mock bidding sessions on the system. BSE has received Reserve Bank's approval to start an online bidding platform for **sovereign gold bond (SGB) scheme**. So far, three tranches of the bonds have been issued amounting to about Rs.1,322 crore.

About Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme:

Under the scheme, gold bonds are issued in denominations of 5 grams, 10 grams, 50 grams and 100 grams for a term of 5-7 years with a rate of interest to be calculated on the value of the metal at the time of investment. The scheme has an annual cap of 500 grams per person.

- The bonds will be sold through banks, Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited and designated post offices.
- As per the scheme, the gold bonds will be sold only to resident Indian entities including individuals, Hindu undivided families, trusts, universities, and charitable institutions.
- The bond tenure will be eight years with exit option beginning the fifth year onwards. They will also be tradable in the bourses.
- Bonds can also be used as collateral for loans.

'Flat fee optimal for spectrum use'

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has drilled holes in a formula government uses to calculate annual spectrum charges payable by mobile phone operators and suggested using value generated by use of the

airwaves to be included in the basis for computing levies.

- It has said that formula in practice may have a significant impact on the revenue payable to the government. TRAI has also identified complications in adopting flat spectrum rate recommended it earlier.

TRAI's proposal:

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) has suggested adding another element – the final bid value for a spectrum band won in an auction – to the weighted-average formula proposed by the telecom department (DoT), saying the change would reflect potential revenue from the airwaves that had been acquired, and thus was a better way of calculating SUC. If the proposal is accepted, telcos will need to pay more to the government.

Background:

The Cabinet last month approved spectrum auction rules except spectrum usage charges (SUC) recommended by the inter-ministerial panel Telecom Commission. The Cabinet asked telecom ministry to seek Trai's view on SUC before it approves the rule.

- Currently, telcos are charged different rates based on the complicated weighted-average formula, which takes into account non-auctioned or auctioned spectrum, quantum of airwaves bought, and the specific SUC applicable to the auction from which airwaves were bought. The 4G spectrum bought in 2010 is kept out of this formula and is charged at a flat 1% of annual revenue.
- The DoT's latest formula includes the 2010 4G airwaves for calculating SUC. In 2013, Trai had proposed a flat 3% SUC across all bands of spectrum – auctioned or not – which could be gradually brought down to 1%, as it was difficult to distinguish revenue accruing from different bands of airwaves.

- All operators that currently pay SUC as per weighted-average formula had been in favour of flat SUC of 3%, citing problem with revenue segregation, especially with 4G services being offered using different airwaves. This, they felt, could lead to revenue arbitrage.
- Currently, telecom operators pay in the range of 3% to 8% of their adjusted gross revenue as SUC for spectrum bands expect 2300 MHz, for which the charge is 1 per cent of AGR. This arbitrage may be exploited by operators as it is not possible for the government to segregate revenue accrued from different bands of spectrum.

Tribunal rejects Beijing's claims on South China Sea

The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague, Netherlands, has ruled that **China's claims of historical rights over South China Sea (SCS) has no legal basis.** China has boycotted the hearings at the Permanent Court of Arbitration, saying it does not have jurisdiction to decide on the matter.

Background:

The case against China was initiated by the Philippines. The Philippines formally lodged its arbitration case under the United Nations' 1982 Convention of the Law of the Sea, known as UNCLOS, in January 2013.

What did the arbitration panel rule?

The Hague-based PCA ruled that China has no legal basis to claim historical rights to islands in the SCS, and has violated Philippines' sovereign rights. It said Beijing "had no historic rights to resources in the waters of the South China Sea" and that "such rights were extinguished to the extent they were incompatible with the exclusive economic zones provided for in the Convention."

Why is South China Sea considered so important?

The SCS is a busy international waterway, being one of the main arteries of the global economy and trade. More than \$5 trillion of world trade ships pass through the SCS every year. The SCS is also resource rich, with numerous offshore oil and gas blocks.

So what is the dispute about?

There are a few hundred small islands in the SCS, a part of the Pacific Ocean. Some of the main ones are Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands and Scarborough Shoal – the bone of contention between China and the Philippines. China claims most of these islands as its own. Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines and Taiwan have rival claims. China has said it will not permit other nations to infringe on what it considers its sovereign rights in the strategically vital area.

Implications of this ruling:

The ruling stands to further ramp up tensions in the region, where China's increased military assertiveness has spread concern among its smaller neighbours and is a point of confrontation with the United States. This victory for the Philippines could spur Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei, which also have overlapping claims, to file similar cases.

- India is planning to seek greater market access in the Japanese market for its farm products such as sesame seeds as well as for its services professionals including nurses, during the upcoming joint committee meeting. The focus on sesame seeds is because **Japan is the world's second largest importer of the item** (after China). Following the detection of pesticides and insecticides such as DDT and malathion in some sesame seeds consignments from India over two decades ago, Japan has been reluctant to import the commodity from India. **India is the world's**

largest sesame seed producer with an annual production of around 7 lakh tonnes. India is also the world's largest exporter of the item.

- In a bid to expand its customer base and gain access to loan portfolios that enjoy priority sector status, **IDFC Bank has decided to acquire micro-lender Grama Vidiyal in an all-cash deal.** IDFC Bank, a former infrastructure financier, converted itself to a bank in October last year. Headquartered in Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu, Grama Vidiyal Micro Finance, which started operations in 1997, has a loan book of about Rs.1,502 crore and 1.2 million customers primarily in its home State, Puducherry and Kerala and in parts of Karnataka and Maharashtra. While the assets of Grama Vidiyal will be transferred to IDFC Bank books, the former will retain its existence as a subsidiary of IDFC Bank, which will act as a business correspondent.
- The Navy's dedicated base for its Special Operation Forces - **MARCOS - INS Karna** was recently commissioned in Visakhapatnam. The establishment of the first base for Indian Navy's elite force with capability to operate in all three dimensions of warfare - air, land and sea - in the home port of the Navy on the Eastern Seaboard marks another milestone in Indian Navy bonding with the city of Visakhapatnam.

Juno Spacecraft Sends First Image From Orbit Around Jupiter

NASA's Juno spacecraft has sent an image of Jupiter and three of its moons. It's the first space image returned after the probe's daring plunge through Jupiter's lethal radiation belts.

Details:

- Juno took the photo while it was 2.7 million miles away from the solar system's biggest planet.

- In it, Jupiter's beautiful atmospheric bands and shrinking Great Red Spot are visible. Also shown, hanging against the cosmic black, are three of the planet's four Galilean moons-volcanic Io, humongous Ganymede, and watery Europa.

Background:

Juno was launched nearly five years ago on a mission to study Jupiter's composition and evolution. It's the first spacecraft to orbit Jupiter since Galileo. Juno spacecraft successfully entered Jupiter's orbit recently, after a five year journey.

Other details:

- The Juno spacecraft - named after the Roman goddess and wife of Jupiter - is packed with nine instruments capable of peering into the planet's heart.
- It will fly 2,600 miles above the cloud tops - 3,000 miles closer to the surface than any other mission has ever achieved.
- Juno became the first spacecraft to cruise this far out into the solar system powered solely by the sun, beating Europe's Rosetta spacecraft. A trio of massive solar wings sticks out from Juno like blades from a windmill, generating 500 watts of power to run its nine instruments.
- Juno, built by Lockheed Martin, is an armored spacecraft - its computer and electronics are locked in a titanium vault to shield them from harmful radiation. Even so, Juno is expected to get blasted with radiation equal to more than 100 million dental X-rays during the mission.

Sebi notifies stricter transfer norms for Participatory Notes

To allay concerns over misuse of controversy-ridden P-Notes, regulator Sebi has notified new norms restricting transfer of these offshore instruments **only to entities authorised**

for their use and that too after prior consent from the issuer foreign investor.

Details:

- As per the new notification, a foreign portfolio investor will have to ensure that any transfer of offshore derivative instruments issued by or on behalf of it, is made subject to two specific conditions – such ODIs are transferred to persons fulfilling Sebi norms for subscription and a prior consent of the FPI is obtained for such transfer, except when the persons to whom the ODIs are to be transferred to are pre-approved by the FPI.
- As per the Sebi regulations, no FPI can issue, subscribe to or otherwise deal in ODIs, directly or indirectly, unless they satisfy certain strict conditions. As per these conditions, the ODIs can be issued only to persons who are regulated by an appropriate foreign regulatory authority and they can be issued only after compliance to the prescribed 'know your client' norms.
- Also, only the top-two categories of FPIs, including sovereign funds, central banks and multi-lateral institutions, and certain broad-based funds including insurers and pension notes, can issue or deal in ODIs.
- The Category III FPIs, which mostly include hedge funds and individual investors, cannot issue, subscribe to or otherwise deal in ODIs, directly or indirectly.
- All these conditions would now also apply for transfer of the ODIs.

What are P-notes?

Participatory Notes or Offshore Derivative Units are issued by Sebi-registered foreign portfolio investors to other overseas entities looking for an exposure to the Indian markets

without getting registered directly to save on costs and procedures.

Asylum seekers can own property

The Union Cabinet has approved proposals for extending several benefits to "persecuted" minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh living in India on long-term visas.

Details:

- The beneficiaries can buy property for self-occupation or use in self-employment. They are allowed free movement within the State of their stay, and can get their long-term visa papers transferred from one State to another.
- The government has permitted them to apply for long-term visas from the place of their current residence, even if they have moved to the present place without seeking permission.
- The Collector or District Magistrate would be empowered to authorise an officer not below the rank of Sub-divisional Magistrate for administering the oath of allegiance to the applicant.
- The powers will be delegated to the Collectors of 16 districts in Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh for two years for registration as citizens of India.
- The government has waived the penalty on late application for extension of their short- or long-term visas. The registration fees for citizenship will be reduced to Rs. 100 from Rs. 3,000-15,000.
- Soon, the Citizenship Rules, 2009, will be amended to help such persons get citizenship.

Background:

Many members of the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities have come to India fearing persecution in their home countries.

Beijing could declare air defence zone over South China Sea

China is planning to set up an air defence zone in the South China Sea (SCS). This announcement comes shortly after a UN-backed tribunal ruled the country had no historic rights over islands in the contested region.

Implications:

Setting up an ADIZ would mean that international flights flying over the waters would be required to notify China. China had set up an ADIZ over the East China Sea in 2013, prompting angry reactions from the US and Japan, though the zone was not fully enforced.

Background:

An arbitral tribunal set up by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PAC) in The Hague recently ruled that China had violated the sovereign rights of the Philippines and caused harm to the coral reef environment. However, China dismissed the verdict, calling the tribunal “illegal” and the ruling “null and void”.

Many don't have power in 'power-surplus India'

The Central Electricity Authority (CEA) has released the Load Generation and Balance Report (LGBR) 2016-17.

Highlights of the report:

- In India, 300 million people don't have access to electricity, power cuts are rampant and per capita power consumption is significantly lower than the world average.

- The deficit has reduced from 11% in 2008-09 to 2.9% in 2015-16 and for the first time, there will be a surplus in 2016-17. India is likely to experience the energy surplus of 1.1% in 2016-17. However, state discoms are unable to buy electricity due to poor financial health.

- Transmission and distribution constraints are also responsible for power cuts. To solve this problem, the government launched the Ujjawal Discom Assurance Yojana (UDAY) in November 2015. By operational and financial turnaround of discoms, UDAY is expected to facilitate reliable, adequate and sufficient power supply to consumers, among other things.

- On an average, in 2015-16, the per capita consumption in India was 1,070 kWh, less than the world average of 3,026 kWh. It is also the lowest among BRICS nations.

- The low per capita consumption is mainly due to a large population, a low per capita income and a huge population not having access to electricity.

- Note that six States – Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Odisha, Sikkim, Mizoram, Tripura – will be power-surplus in 2016-17 but the per capita availability in the States is lower than the national average. Overall, 17 States will have power-surplus in 2016-17.

- Power demand for India grew by 6.6% in 2014-15 and 4.2% in 2015-16. In the last two years, Bihar – which has the lowest per capita power availability, witnessed the highest percentage growth, with demand increasing by around 25% in both years. This is indicative of more people getting connected to the grid.

Ashok Patnaik is NATGRID chief

The government has appointed a serving Intelligence Bureau (IB) officer Ashok Patnaik as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID).

- The appointment is being seen as the government's effort to revive the project, which was conceived in the wake of the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

What is NATGRID?

NATGRID was among the ambitious slew of intelligence reforms undertaken in the wake of the Mumbai attacks of November 2008. NATGRID is a centralised agency which stores sensitive personal information on citizens from almost two dozen agencies to be made available for counter-terror investigations. It will be an attached office of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

It's role:

- NATGRID will become a secure centralised database to stream sensitive information from 21 sets of data sources such as banks, credit cards, visa, immigration and train and air travel details, as well as from various intelligence agencies.
- The database would be accessible to authorised persons from 11 agencies on a case-to-case basis, and only for professional investigations into suspected cases of terrorism.

India Post to sell collectible stamps

The Department of Post is planning to set up an independent company for its philately business with an aim to boost revenues from the sale of collectible stamps. The proposal would soon be sent to the Cabinet.

Details:

- India Post Philately Company is proposed as a public limited company, fully owned by the government, with an authorised capital of Rs. 100 crore.
- The proposed company will be a service-based one, which will not only sell its products to existing customers – collectors

and philatelists – but will also try to attract new ones. It will focus on promotion of philately, mainly among the younger generation.

- As per the proposal, the new firm will have a corporate office and four zonal offices. The board of directors will have seven officials. While the Secretary, Department of Posts, will be the non-executive chairman, India Post officials of the rank of Joint Secretary will be appointed as chairman and managing director on deputation. The board will have three persons from the department and four outsiders.

Background:

India Post is eyeing a jump of Rs. 100 crore, or over 250%, in turnover from the philately segment to Rs. 141 crore in the current fiscal. The earnings from this segment stood at Rs. 39.88 crore during 2015-16 and Rs. 32.85 crore during 2014-15.

New Central scheme targets skilling of one crore people

The Cabinet has cleared the decks for a Rs. 12,000-crore plan to train 60 lakh youths and certify 40 lakh informally skilled workers over the next four years with a revamped version of the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), which includes a mechanism to revive the traditional Guru-Shishya approach to train youth with the help of local craftsmen and trade practitioners.

Details:

- As per the approved plan, training centres will be categorised on the basis of their infrastructure and past performance and third party agencies will be deployed to validate their training efforts and placement records.
- Members of Parliament will also be roped in to mobilise youth for training, monitor the

scheme in their constituencies and post-training placement of trainees.

- For youths from the Kashmir Valley, the Leh region, the north-eastern States and Left-wing extremism-affected districts, residential programmes will be promoted.
- Training partners under the scheme will be required to ensure valid Aadhaar numbers of trainees at the time of enrolment and subsequently track attendance through students' biometrics.

PMKVY:

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) is the flagship outcome-based skill training scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE). The objective of this skill certification and reward scheme is to enable and mobilize a large number of Indian youth to take up outcome based skill training and become employable and earn their livelihood. Under the scheme, monetary reward would be provided to trainees who are successfully trained, assessed and certified in skill courses run by affiliated training providers.

Census 2011 records rise in literacy among disabled

New numbers released from Census 2011 show that **literacy among disabled has increased in the country.**

Highlights:

- More than half of the total disabled population in India are now literate. The literacy rate among the disabled has increased from 49.3% in 2001 to 54.5% in 2011. However, this is significantly lower than the overall literacy level of India which stands at 74%.
- Both rural and urban areas saw an increase of around four percentage points in literacy rate of the disabled.

- Among the urban disabled, 68% are literate while the number stands at 49% for disabled in the rural areas.

- The difference between literacy rate of males and females is wider in rural areas – 72% of disabled males and 61% of disabled females in urban areas are literate, a difference of nine percentage points.

- But in rural areas, the difference stands at 20 percentage points, as 58% of disabled males and only 38% of disabled females are literate.

India slips on business optimism index: survey

Business Optimism Index, part of Grant Thornton International Business Report (IBR) for April-June 2016, was recently released. The survey took note of 2,500 businesses across 36 economies.

Highlights:

- India slipped to the **third position**, during April-June, after remaining on top globally for the two preceding quarters.
- Companies in India were mainly concerned about the delays in key reforms like the goods and services tax, non-resolution of tax disputes and the banking sector's performance.
- India continues to top the chart on expectations of revenue increases.
- Growth in employment expectations dropped to the second position during this period from top rank in the previous quarter.
- The rank on optimism further slipped to fourth in terms of profitability expectations.
- While the business confidence in India has weakened, there is a rise in optimism on the export front. However, red tape continued

to hamper growth and ranked India as number two on the issue.

- Research and development continue to be an area of concern.
- On the global front, there is a rise in the proportion of businesses worldwide expecting increased revenue over the coming 12 months. However, growth in global export expectations continues to be slow, indicating that revenue is dependent on domestic consumer spending power.
- Consumer spending is now under threat from increased political instability, recovering oil prices and reduced plans to offer pay increases.

Ulaanbaatar Declaration adopted

The 11th edition of the Asia-Europe Meeting Summit (ASEM11) was recently concluded in Ulaanbaatar.

- The theme of the Summit is '20 Years of ASEM: Partnership for the Future through Connectivity'.
- **Ulaanbaatar Declaration** was adopted as an outcome document of the Summit, in which the participating leaders from Asia and Europe renewed their political will and strong resolve to work together to promote mutually beneficial partnership and co-operation between the two continents, with a view to building a better future for the peoples of Asia and Europe.

Highlights:

- The declaration has reaffirmed ASEM's commitment for greater partnership through informal political dialogue and initiatives in economic and socio-cultural fields.
- It also has expressed its commitment for united fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

- The declaration will also focus on maritime security cyber security.

ASEM:

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an informal process of dialogue and cooperation bringing together the 28 European Union member states, 2 other European countries, and the European Union with 21 Asian countries and the ASEAN Secretariat.

- The ASEM dialogue addresses political, economic and cultural issues, with the objective of strengthening the relationship between the two regions, in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership.

- It was officially established on 1 March 1996 at the first summit in Bangkok, Thailand.

- The ASEM Summit is a biennial meeting between the Heads of State and Government, the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

UNESCO declares Nalanda Mahavihara World Heritage Site

UNESCO has declared Bihar's much awaited ancient site - the ruins of Nalanda Mahavihara - a World Heritage Site.

- With the inclusion of Nalanda, this would be the **second UNESCO Heritage Site in Bihar after Mahabodhi temple in Bodh Gaya**.

Key facts:

- Nalanda stands out as the most ancient university of the Indian Subcontinent. It engaged in the organized transmission of knowledge over an uninterrupted period of 800 years.

- The historical development of the site testifies to the development of Buddhism into a religion and the flourishing of monastic and educational traditions.
- It was a major Mahavihara or a large Buddhist monastery that also doubled up as an important centre of learning from the 5th to 1200 AD in the erstwhile kingdom of Magadh.
- The construction of Nalanda university began in 5th century AD and flourished under the Gupta rulers. It came to an end in the 12th century when it was destroyed in 1193 AD by the invading Turkish army led by its commander Bakhtiar Khilji.

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.
- The List of recorded sites on the World Heritage now stands at 981 which include both cultural and natural wonders.
- Italy is home to the greatest number of World Heritage Sites with 50 sites.

Madhya Pradesh becomes first state to have 'Happiness Department'

Madhya Pradesh has become the first state in the country to set up 'Happiness Department'.

Key facts:

- The department will work to ensure "happiness in the lives of common people" on the lines of Bhutan.
- A panel of experts will be formed in the newly-constituted department which will give suggestions to ensure happiness in the lives of the people.
- The department will identify and define parameters that make people happy, coordinate among various departments, recommend policy changes and formulate an action plan to "increase the level of happiness and satisfaction" among the state's more than 7.25 crore population – all on a Rs 3.60 crore budget.
- The department will have a president, a chief officer, a director (research), a director (coordination) and four research assistant among others. Experts working in the field could be nominated to the department.
- The department will take feedback from people on the happiness parameters at regular intervals, publish survey reports and carry out research to improve the existing parameters.

Background:

Bhutan, the first country to come up with the concept of gross national happiness, has fixed standards of living, health, education, good governance and psychological happiness among the various parameters that make its citizens happy.

- Some of the US states that follow Gross National Wellness have included emotional and psychological ability, physical health, work, income, economic progress and holidays among other parameters.
- The parameters used by the United Nations include per capita GDP, health, community cooperation during bad times, and trust-inducing measures like corruption-free government and business, freedom to take decisions, and philanthropy.
- Female healthcare workers – **38% of the total – were found to be more educated and medically qualified** than their male counterparts.
- Ignoring those who don't have a medical qualification, there are **36 doctors per lakh population** in India. As for nurses and midwives, India had **61 workers per lakh population** compared to 96 in China. The number reduced tenfold to 6 per lakh population, if only those with a medical qualification were considered.

WHR:

The World Happiness Report 2016 by the UN ranks India at 118th among 156 countries, behind Somalia (76), China (83), Pakistan (92), Iran (105), Palestinian Territories (108) and Bangladesh (110). Madhya Pradesh, which has made remarkable progress in agriculture in recent times, does not figure among the country's developed states, and fares badly when it comes to social indices like maternal and infant mortality. It also has a very high rate of crimes against women.

WHO report sounds alarm on 'doctors' in India

The report of a study titled 'The Health Workforce in India' was recently released. The study was conducted by the WHO. The data for each district in the country from the 2001 census were specially extracted for this study, which provided a comprehensive picture of health workers in each district.

Highlights:

- Almost **one-third (31%) of those who claimed to be allopathic doctors in 2001 were educated only up to the secondary school level and 57% did not have any medical qualification.**
- The situation was far worse in rural India, where just **8% of allopathic doctors had a medical qualification.**

- There is **substantial variation in the density of health workers across States and districts.** For instance, Kerala had 38.4% of the country's medically qualified nurses but constituted only 3.1% of the total population. Similarly, West Bengal had 30.6% of all homoeopathic doctors in the country but only 7.8% of the population. Better-off States seemed to afford more doctors plus nurses per capita.

- District-wise, the inequalities were massive. The **density of allopathic doctors with any level of education in the lowest 30 districts – half of which were in north-eastern States and the other in central States – was a little over 4 per lakh of the population whereas, in the highest 30 districts, it was 159 per lakh of population.**

- In the case of dentists, the situation was even worse. The **national density of dentists was extremely low at 2.4 per lakh population,** with 58 (of the total 593) districts having no dentists at all in 2001. In fact, 175 districts (30%) had no dentists with a medical qualification.

India basks in glow of UNESCO honours

Besides **Nalanda Mahavihara, two other sites from India have made it to the World Heritage List.** Two other sites are-

Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP) and Chandigarh's famed Capitol Complex. This was announced at the 40th session of the World Heritage Committee (WHC) currently under way at Istanbul in Turkey.

- This is the **first time that any country got three sites inscribed in the World Heritage List at a single session** of the committee meeting.
- **India now has 35 sites**, including 27 cultural properties, seven natural sites and one mixed site, notified as World Heritage Sites.

Details:

- The KNP is the **first 'mixed' heritage site from India** to make it to the list. A **'mixed site' exhibits qualities of both natural and cultural significance.**
- The park qualified as a mixed site under the Operational Guidelines of WHC for its "exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared."
- The park exhibits one of the widest altitudinal ranges of any protected area worldwide. It boasts of a unique diversity of lowlands, steep valleys and snow-clad mountains, including the **world's third highest peak, Mt. Khangchendzonga**, besides numerous lakes and glaciers.
- The KNP, which covers 25% of Sikkim, is home to a significant number of endemic, rare and threatened plant and animal species. A large number of bird and mammal species has also been recorded from here.
- The park combines the religious and cultural practices of Buddhism as well as the ecological significance of the region, and stands out as an outstanding example of traditional knowledge and environmental preservation. It is also a unique example of

coexistence and exchange between different religious traditions and people.

- **Chandigarh's famed Capitol Complex, which includes the Legislative Assembly, Secretariat and High Court, was designed by French architect Le Corbusier.**
- The complex was designed by Le Corbusier in the 1950s when the city was constructed as a symbol of independent, modern India.

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.
- **Italy is home to the greatest number of World Heritage Sites.**

Selection criteria:

Until the end of 2004, there were six criteria for cultural heritage and four criteria for natural heritage. In 2005, this was modified so that there is only one set of ten criteria. **Nominated sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one of the ten criteria.**

- Represents a masterpiece of human creative genius and cultural significance.
- Exhibits an important interchange of human values, over a span of time, or within a

cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning, or landscape design.

- To bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.
- Is an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural, or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates a significant stage in human history.
- Is an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture, or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.
- Is directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.
- Contains superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.
- Is an outstanding example representing major stages of Earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features.
- Is an outstanding example representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems, and communities of plants and animals.
- Contains the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of

outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

Govt notifies norms for retrofitting electric kit in vehicles

To curb vehicular pollution, the government has notified **rules for retrofitment of hybrid electric system, orelectric kit**, for vehicles. The rules – Central Motor Vehicles (Seventh Amendment) Rules, 2016 – were notified following amendment in the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989. This **applies to the vehicles that meet emission norms and are run on either diesel or gasoline only.**

Details:

- The Retrofitment of hybrid electric system kit to vehicles having **Gross Vehicle Weight not exceeding 3,500 kg shall be permitted if it conforms to Bharat Stage-II or subsequent emission norms**, if it was not retrofitted earlier.
- **It mentions that the installation of type approved hybrid electric system kit shall be done only by an installer authorised by the manufacturer or supplier of such kits.**
- The notification also mentions that the **conversion of vehicles for pure electric operation with fitment of electric kit shall be permitted if the vehicle was manufactured on or after January 1, 1990** and “it is not provided with permits for carrying dangerous or hazardous goods, as defined in CMV Rules, 1989.”
- It also stipulated that the **kit manufacturer or supplier shall obtain the type approval certificate from a specified test agency** and such certificate will be valid for three years from the date of issue.

Army yet to hack new terror tech

More than a year after a new technological solution used by terrorists began causing headache to the Army in Kashmir, no breakthrough has been made to crack it. An indigenous software patch for intercepting the new mode of communication has also failed.

Concern:

Terrorists infiltrating from Pakistan have been using smartphones paired with **very high frequency (VHF)** radio sets to communicate with one another, resulting in a drop in communication intercepts and adversely affecting military efforts to deal with them.

Background:

The concept of pairing mobile phones with radio handsets originated in the wake of Hurricane Sandy in New York in 2012. This mode of sending mobile communications without using mobile towers is of great help for rescue operations during calamities, but is now among the key technology deployed by terrorists to avoid the security forces while crossing the Line of Control.

- This technology is secure and active even in high peaks and forests especially near the Line of Control where conventional mobile and satellite phones can give away their location.
- Terrorists also use other technologies such as self-destroying chats and end-to-end encryption to overcome interception.

Speaker facing the axe can't disqualify MLAs, says SC

The Supreme Court recently ruled that a **Speaker should refrain from deciding the disqualification of MLAs for defection under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution if he himself is facing the prospect of removal.**

- The ruling was a safeguard against a Speaker using the disqualification proceedings of legislators for his own political ends.

Observations made by the court:

- A Speaker, under the threat of losing his position, may choose to disqualify the MLAs to alter the composition of the House in his favour. But, it would be constitutionally impermissible for a Speaker to adjudicate upon disqualification petitions under the Tenth Schedule, while a notice of resolution for his own removal from the office of Speaker is pending.
- If a Speaker truly enjoys the support of the House's majority, there would be no difficulty whatsoever to demonstrate the confidence which the members of the State Legislature repose in him.
- The office of Speaker, with which the Constitution vests the authority to deal with disqualification petitions against MLAs, must surely be a Speaker who enjoys the confidence of the Assembly.

Article 179:

This was ruled by the court while interpreting **Article 179 of the Constitution** in a judgment on the Arunachal Pradesh crisis recently. Article 179(c) provides that a Speaker (or Deputy Speaker) "**may be removed from his office by a resolution of the Assembly passed by a majority of all the then members of the Assembly**".

- The judgment points to the phrase "all the then members of the Assembly" to conclude that the composition of legislators should remain the very same while deciding whether a majority in the House wants the Speaker to continue or not.
- The court held, "The words 'all the then members' demonstrate an expression of

definiteness. Any change in the strength and composition of the Assembly, by disqualifying sitting MLAs, for the period during which the notice of resolution for the removal of the Speaker (or the Deputy Speaker) is pending, would conflict with the express mandate of Article 179(c), requiring all 'the then members' to determine the right of the Speaker to continue."

- Further, the court said MLAs so disqualified by the Speaker would be subsequently deprived of the opportunity to participate in the motion against the Speaker himself under Article 179(c).

TRI-NETRA - Terrain imaging for diesel dRivers Infra-red, Enhanced Optical & Radar Assisted system

Ministry of Railways, Railway Board has initiated a proposal to install TRI-NETRA systems on locomotives for enhancing the vision of Locomotive Pilots in inclement weather. **TRI-NETRA stands for - Terrain imaging for diesel dRivers INfra-red, Enhanced opTical & Radar Assisted system.**

How it operates?

TRI-NETRA system is made up of high-resolution optical video camera, high sensitivity infra-red video camera and additionally a radar-based terrain mapping system. These three components of the system act as three eyes (Tri-Netra) of the Locomotive Pilot.

TRI-NETRA is designed to "see" the terrain ahead of the running locomotive during inclement weather by combining the images captured by the three sub-systems and to create a composite video image which shall be displayed in front of the Loco Pilot on a computer monitor.

Significance:

During fog, heavy rain and also during night, the locomotive pilots face serious challenges in looking out ahead to spot any obstruction on the track such as vehicles which get stuck while crossing the track or trees or boulders which have fallen across the track etc. Because of the heavy momentum of the running train, the train driver has to always adjust the speed of the train such that he or she can stop the train on visually seeing the obstruction. In fair weather and in daytime, this is not a problem since train driver has a clear view of the track ahead. But in poor visibility, he has to reduce the speed suitably so that the brakes can be applied in time to stop the train without hitting the obstructions.

Background:

The concept of TRI-NETRA was developed by Development Cell under the guidance of Member Mechanical, Railway Board while brainstorming on how to use the technology employed by fighter aircrafts to see through clouds and operate in pitch darkness and the technology used by naval ships in mapping the ocean floor and navigating in the night.

- Pema Khandu is the new **Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh**. At 37, he is also the youngest CM in the country.
- India's **first e-court has been opened at High Court of Judicature at Hyderabad**, which is the common high court for the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. The purpose of e-courts was to ensure speedy justice for the litigants.

High-value transactions under scanner

The CBDT is looking into about nine lakh pieces of information of high-value transactions and planning to send preliminary notices to the suspected cases. Out of the total nine lakh

pieces, one lakh cases valued over Rs 1 crore are under the department's scanner.

About CBDT:

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

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

SC stands by Lodha panel report to revamp cricket

The Supreme Court has upheld almost all the recommendations of the R.M. Lodha Committee to overhaul the cricket administration at the end of a long hearing spanning over two years during which BCCI and State associations fought tooth-and-nail to protect their turf. The apex court found no reason to interfere with the recommendations.

- The apex court approved most of the recommendations and has given a time period of **six months to BCCI to implement all the changes**.

Major recommendations upheld by the SC:

- Ministers and IAS officers are disqualified from being a member of the BCCI.

- CAG nominee will be in BCCI and office bearers in BCCI should not be beyond the age of 70 years.
- 'One state, one vote' concept has also been upheld. States like Maharashtra and Gujarat having more than one cricket association will have voting rights on rotational basis.
- There should be a player's association in the BCCI.
- One person should hold one post in cricket administration to avoid any conflict of interest.
- It is left to the Parliament to decide whether BCCI functioning can be brought under RTI as recommended by Lodha Panel.
- Parliament will decide recommendation of Lodha panel for legalising betting in cricket.

Background:

The committee headed by justice (retd) RM Lodha was appointed by the apex court last year in the wake of a sport-fixing scandal in IPL, the biggest crisis to hit the cash-rich sports body in the country.

- Ever since the sweeping reforms were proposed, BCCI have raised objections to several recommendations including: advertisements between overs during a match broadcast, 'one state, one vote', the presence of two members from IPL franchises on the league's governing council, the formation of an apex council, and a cap on the tenure of the office bearers.

Kerala House adopts resolution against merger of SBT with SBI

A substantive motion moved by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, asking the Union government and the RBI to desist from merging the State Bank of Travancore (SBT) with the State Bank of India (SBI), was recently adopted by the Assembly.

- SBT was formed way back in 1946 and was the succour of the Kerala government as a huge majority of its transactions was done through the bank.
- The majority union of SBT has already expressed deep concern in the move by the State Bank of India for the acquisition of its five associate banks including SBT.
- With these signings, the total number of APAs entered into by the CBDT has reached 77. This includes 3 bilateral APAs and 74 Unilateral APAs. In the current financial year, a total of 13 Unilateral APAs have been entered into so far.

About APA:

The APA Scheme was introduced in the Income-tax Act in 2012 and the “Rollback” provisions were introduced in 2014.

Why merger is being opposed?

It is feared that if the merger took place, the SBI could lose sight of its welfare-oriented lending policies and become corporatised.

Background:

The Union Cabinet, in June 2016, approved the merger of State Bank of India (SBI), the country’s largest lender, and its associate banks. The merged entity will have an asset base of about Rs.37 lakh crore, with nearly 24,000 branches and about 58,700 ATMs across the country as of March 2016. Associate banks to be merged are- State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur, State Bank of Hyderabad, State Bank of Mysore, State Bank of Patiala and State Bank of Travancore.

Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) signs seven Unilateral Advance Pricing Agreements (APAs)

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has entered into seven **Unilateral Advance Pricing Agreements (APAs)** with Indian taxpayers. Some of these agreements also have a “Rollback” provision in them.

- The APAs signed pertain to various sectors of the economy like banking, Information Technology and Automotives. The international transactions covered in these agreements include software development Services, IT enabled Services (BPOs), Engineering Design Services and Administrative & Business Support Services.

- The scheme endeavours to provide certainty to taxpayers in the domain of transfer pricing by specifying the methods of pricing and setting the prices of international transactions in advance.

- Since its inception, the APA scheme has attracted tremendous interest and that has resulted in more than 700 applications having been filed in just four years.

What is an advance pricing agreement?

An APA, usually for multiple years, is signed between a taxpayer and the tax authority (CBDT) on an appropriate transfer pricing methodology for determining the price and ensuing taxes on intra-group overseas transactions.

Centre releases ¹ 100 cr for Atal Pension Yojana

The Centre has released nearly ¹ 100 crore as its share of contribution for members of the Atal Pension Yojana. The fund has been released through the **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority**.

- The scheme has over 30 lakh subscribers and the Finance Ministry estimates that about 5,000 new subscribers are added every day.

Atal Pension Yojna (APY):

Under the APY, subscribers would receive a fixed minimum pension of Rs. 1000

per month, Rs. 2000 per month, Rs. 3000 per month, Rs. 4000 per month, Rs. 5000 per month, at the age of 60 years, depending on their contributions, which itself would vary on the age of joining the APY.

- The Central Government would also contribute 50% of the total contribution or Rs. 1000 per annum, whichever is lower, to each eligible subscriber account, for a period of 5 years, that is, from 2015-16 to 2019-20, to those who join the NPS before 31st December, 2015 and who are not members of any statutory social security scheme and who are not Income Tax payers.
- The minimum age of joining APY is 18 years and maximum age is 40 years. The benefit of fixed minimum pension would be guaranteed by the Government.
- **Koti Lingala**, the shrine of Shiva, as well as the **first capital city of the Satavahana dynasty** said to date back to 271 BCE, located on the shores of the **Godavari**, is on the verge of submergence with the backwaters of the **Sripada Yellampalli project lapping** at the temple shrine. Sripada Yellampalli project is an irrigation project located at Yellampalli Village in Karimnagar district - Adilabad district in Telangana. The beginning of the Satavahana rule is dated variously from 271 BCE to 30 BCE. Satavahanas dominated the Deccan region from the 1st century BCE to the 3rd century CE. The dynasty reached its zenith under the rule of **Gautamiputra Satakarni** and his successor **Vasisthiputra Pulamavi**.
- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has ordered Road Transport Offices (RTO) in Delhi to **de-register all diesel vehicles that are over 10 years old** and directed it to share data of the vehicles that will be de-registered. The police in turn are to take appropriate steps to implement the directions of the green court. These

measures were being brought in to ensure that air quality improves as schemes run by the state government, including odd-even, weren't enough. On April 7, 2015, the NGT had ordered a ban on diesel vehicles over 10 years old. The order was challenged, but the NGT dismissed the appeal.

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has clarified that the **Delhi CM does not have the powers to sign on suspension orders** of any Delhi government official. According to the rules, the Delhi government does not have power to suspend any All India Services officer. Also, a Chief Minister cannot issue suspension orders on his own. It is the prerogative of the Home Ministry.

Rural areas pose hurdle for small finance banks

With merely 8 months remaining to start operations, small finance banks are facing headwinds to open 25% of their total branches in unbanked areas as it will impact their profitability. Hence, in a recent meeting with the banking regulator, the small finance bank representatives have requested the regulator to give them three years to comply with the norms.

Concerns:

- According to them, the cost of opening or converting the present microfinance institutions branches into full-fledged bank branches is higher. Therefore, one year will be very challenging from the profitability point of view for these institutions.
- The other issue that is posing a hurdle is that compliance with the Basel norms. According to the guidelines for small finance banks, RBI had said as small finance banks are not expected to deal with sophisticated products, the capital adequacy ratio will be computed under Basel Committee's standardised approaches.

Background:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has mandated that the small finance banks have to open at least 25% of their branches in unbanked rural areas within one year of their operations. Unbanked rural areas are the centres having a population less than 9,999 as per latest census.

In September 2015, RBI granted in-principle licences to 10 entities to start small finance banks. These entities will have to start operations within 18 months, else the licences will lapse. Out of the 10, nine entities were predominantly involved in microlending. Only one entity, out of 10 that received licences, has commenced operations - Jalandhar headquartered Capital Small Finance Bank, which was a local area bank earlier.

What are small finance banks?

The small finance bank will primarily undertake basic banking activities of acceptance of deposits and lending to unserved and underserved sections including small business units, small and marginal farmers, micro and small industries and unorganised sector entities.

What they can do:

- Take small deposits and disburse loans.
- Distribute mutual funds, insurance products and other simple third-party financial products.
- Lend 75% of their total adjusted net bank credit to priority sector.
- Maximum loan size would be 10% of capital funds to single borrower, 15% to a group.
- Minimum 50% of loans should be up to 25 lakhs.

What they cannot do:

- Lend to big corporates and groups.

- Cannot open branches with prior RBI approval for first five years.
- Other financial activities of the promoter must not mingle with the bank.
- It cannot set up subsidiaries to undertake non-banking financial services activities.
- Cannot be a business correspondent of any bank.

The guidelines they need to follow:

- Promoter must contribute minimum 40% equity capital and should be brought down to 30% in 10 years.
- Minimum paid-up capital would be Rs 100 cr.
- Capital adequacy ratio should be 15% of risk weighted assets, Tier-I should be 7.5%.
- Foreign shareholding capped at 74% of paid capital, FPIs cannot hold more than 24%.
- Priority sector lending requirement of 75% of total adjusted net bank credit.
- 50% of loans must be up to Rs 25 lakh.

Centre injects Rs.22,915 cr into 13 public sector banks

In a bid to boost credit growth in the economy, the Centre has announced a sum of Rs.22,915 crore for recapitalisation of 13 public sector banks. State Bank of India (SBI) will receive the largest allocation of Rs.7,575 crore. Indian Overseas Bank and Punjab National Bank are to get Rs.3,191 crore and Rs.2,816 crore respectively.

- The infusions required in the current year were assessed from the CAGR of credit growth for the last five years and the banks' projections of credit growth. The potential for growth of each these banks was also factored in.

Background:

In the Union Budget, the Centre had allocated a total of Rs.25,000 crore for the capitalisation of public sector banks in the current financial year 2016-17, in line with the infusion plans announced under the umbrella scheme “**Indradhanush**” introduced last year. The plan proposes infusions adding up to Rs.25,000 crore in 2015-16 as well as in 2016-17, followed by Rs.10,000 crore each in 2017-18 and 2018-19.

What is Mission Indradhanush?

Mission Indradhanush aimed to revamp the functioning of public sector banks so that PSBs can compete with the Private Sector Banks. The mission is a brainchild of PJ Nayak committee.

- It is launched by Ministry of Finance under the Department of Financial Services. The mission is regarded as one of the big steps after the nationalisation of banks in 1970s.
- The mission includes the seven key reforms of appointments, board of bureau, capitalisation, de-stressing, empowerment, framework of accountability and governance reforms.

Centre lets microbeads off the hook

Based on a petition requesting a ban on **microbeads**, also called **microplastics**, a National Green Tribunal Bench has asked the Ministries of Health, Environment and Water Resources file their response.

What the petition says?

The crux of petition is that these plastics are too small to be caught by sewage treatment and water filtration techniques and they pass unchecked into rivers and seas and contaminated them. They take centuries to degrade and worse, are sometimes eaten by fish and other aquatic animals and could even make

their way into human diets. The United States has promulgated a ban, which will come into effect next July, on cosmetic products containing microbeads.

What are Microbeads?

Microbeads, small pellets of plastic, extensively used in personal care products such as shampoo, baby lotion and face cream and considered toxic to marine life, are being banned internationally, but key arms of the Indian government have side-stepped the issue either passing the buck or saying that no studies have been conducted to ascertain the harm posed to the environment or its potential toxicity.

Concerns:

Over 299 million tonnes of plastic was produced worldwide in 2013 some of which made its way to oceans, costing approximately \$13 billion per year in environmental damage to marine ecosystems, says a June 2015 report by the United Nations Environmental Programme that investigated the possible harm by microbeads/microplastics.

Panama to sign tax treaty

Panama has agreed to sign a multilateral tax treaty, which the Indian agencies believe will help them expedite investigations into the “Panama papers” recently made public by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

Implications:

Signing and ratifying the Convention will be a very significant step forward in implementing its commitment to tax transparency and effective exchange of information.

About the convention:

Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters was

developed jointly by the OECD and the Council of Europe in 1988.

- It was amended in 2010, in response to the call by the G20 to align it to the international standard on exchange of information and to open it to all countries, “thus ensuring that developing countries could benefit from the new transparent environment.”
- The Convention represents a wide range of countries, including all G20, BRIICS and OECD countries, financial centres and several developing countries.
- India is among the 98 countries and jurisdictions that have already joined the Convention.
- The Supreme Court has clarified that an **offender cannot be directed to undergo two life sentences consecutively** as that would be “anomalous” and “irrational” and will disregard the fact that “humans like all other living beings have but one life to live”. The apex court, however, said that multiple sentences for imprisonment for life can be awarded for multiple murders or other offences punishable with imprisonment for life but such sentences needs to be **superimposed over each other** so that any remission or commutation granted in one does not ipso facto result in remission of the sentence awarded to the prisoner for the other.
- **Tata is India’s most valuable brand in 2015-16** with a brand valuation of \$13.7 billion despite 11% value erosion during the year due to troubles concerning its steel business in the U.K, according to Brand Finance India’s top 100 most valued Indian brands. The top 10 brands of 2015-16 include Tata, LIC (\$6.6 billion), Airtel (\$5.7 billion), SBI (\$5.7 billion), Infosys (\$4.7 billion), Reliance (\$3.5 billion), ONGC (\$3.4 billion), L&T (\$3.3 billion), Indian Oil (\$3.2 billion) and HCL (\$3.2 billion).
- **SpiceJet has topped the list among domestic private airlines** in a study titled ‘India’s Most Reputed Aviation Brands 2016’, followed by Jet Airways with a 34% lower Brand Reputation Score. The study was conducted by media analytics firm BlueBytes in association with TRA Research.
- The trail of death and destruction left by **Nepatrak, the first Typhoon to hit China’s eastern coast** this season, has led to the sacking of a number of senior officials – a move emblematic of the Chinese leadership’s mood to enforce accountability in the wake of a string of disasters.
- A significant bill aimed at putting in place a single common examination for medical and dental courses was recently passed by the Lok Sabha, with the government saying even private colleges will be under its ambit. The Indian Medical Council (Amendment) Bill, 2016 and the Dentists (Amendment) Bill, 2016 provides a Constitutional status to the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) examination” which is intended to be introduced in the academic session next year. These bills replace the Ordinances that were promulgated by the government to circumvent the Supreme Court order for implementation of NEET examination this session itself.

Tea Board unveils accident cover for workers

The Tea Board of India has introduced an accident insurance scheme for **workers in small tea gardens** at an annual premium of Rs.14. Of this, tea farmers will have to pay only Rs. 3.50 annually.

- The scheme provides **compensation to small tea farmers between 18 and 70 years** for a Rs.2 lakh-cover.

Background:

The share of small growers in total Indian tea production is rising. Of the total Indian tea production of 1,233 million kg in 2015-16, around 33.8% came from small tea gardens. The scheme aims to help these small growers along with tea growers in the unorganized sector.

About Tea Board of India:

The Tea Board is set up under the **Tea Act 1953**. It has succeeded the Central Tea Board and the Indian Tea Licencing Committee which functioned respectively under the Central Tea Board Act, 1949 and the Indian Tea Control Act, 1938 which were repealed.

- The Tea Board is functioning as a **statutory body of the Central Government under the Ministry of Commerce**.
- The Board is constituted of 31 members (including Chairman) drawn from Members of Parliament, tea producers, tea traders, tea brokers, consumers, and representatives of Governments from the principal tea producing states, and trade unions . The Board is reconstituted every three years.

Functions:

- The Tea Board India is responsible for the assignment of certification numbers to exports of certain tea merchants. This certification is intended to ensure the teas' origin, which in turn would reduce the amount of fraudulent labelling on rare teas.
- The Tea Board India's tasks include endorsement of the diverse production and productivity of tea, financial support of research organisations and the monitoring of advances in tea packaging as it relates to health beneficial aspects.
- It coordinates research institutes, the tea trade and government bodies, ensuring the technical support of the tea trade in the global industry.

Cabinet approves amendment in the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) amendment Bill

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for introducing amendments to the **Benami Transactions (Prohibition) (Amendment) Bill, 2015** in Parliament. The amendments aim to strengthen the Bill in terms of legal and administrative procedure so as to overcome the practical difficulties which may arise in the implementation of the provisions of the Bill when it becomes an Act.

Significance of the Bill:

- The legislation is intended to effectively prohibit benami transactions and consequently prevent circumvention of law through unfair practices.
- It empowers the Government to confiscate benami property by following due procedure. It therefore promotes equity across all citizens.
- Also, those who declare their benami properties under income declaration scheme will get immunity under the Benami Act.

Details:

- The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Bill is aimed at curbing domestic black money.
- The bill provides for a fine of up to 25% of the fair value of the asset and imprisonment of up to seven years, unlike an earlier lapsed version of the bill, which stipulated either a fine or imprisonment.
- Under the bill, the term "property" will cover movable, immovable, tangible and intangible properties. In case of joint ownership of property, the tax payer will have to show financing sources.

Background:

The bill was tabled in May last year but was subsequently referred to Parliament's standing committee on finance. The committee submitted its report in the budget session this year and recommended a host of small changes including providing more time to allow property holders to furnish information, a time-bound process for initiating investigation and for filing appeals.

What is benami property?

The benami (without a name) property refers to property purchased by a person in the name of some other person. The person on whose name the property has been purchased is called the benamdar and the property so purchased is called the benami property. The person who finances the deal is the real owner.

Nod to Transgender Bill

The cabinet has approved the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2016** for social, economic and educational empowerment of transgenders.

Details:

- The bill will benefit a large number of transgender persons, mitigate the stigma, discrimination and abuse against this marginalized section and bring them into the mainstream of society.
- It will lead to greater inclusiveness and will make the transgender persons productive members of the society.
- The bill will make all the stakeholders responsive and accountable for upholding the principles underlying the bill.
- It will bring greater accountability on the part of the central government and state governments/Union Territories administrations for issues concerning transgender persons.

Background:

The transgender community is one of the most marginalized in the country because they don't fit into existing gender categories. Consequently, they face problems ranging from social exclusion to discrimination, lack of education facilities, unemployment, and lack of medical facilities.

Sagarmala Development Company (SDC)

The cabinet has approved incorporation of the **Sagarmala Development Company (SDC)** with a share capital of Rs.1,000 crore.

Details:

- With the formation of the SDC, the shipping ministry will now be able to provide equity support to the Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) and funding support to the residual projects under its ambitious Sagarmala Programme.
- SDC will be under the **administrative control of the Ministry of Shipping**.
- SDC will be incorporated under the Companies Act, 2013, with an initial Authorized Share Capital of Rs. 1,000 Crore and a Subscribed Share Capital of Rs. 90 Crore.
- SDC will Identify port-led development projects and assist the project SPVs in project development and structuring activities, bidding out projects for private sector participation, putting in place suitable risk management measures for strategic projects cutting across multiple States / Regions and obtaining requisite approvals and clearances.
- Since the Identified projects will be undertaken by multiple agencies, SDC will also work as the nodal agency for coordination and monitoring of all the

currently identified projects as well as other projects emerging from the master plans or other sources.

- SDC will undertake the preparation of the detailed master plans for the Coastal Economic Zones (CEZs) identified as part of the NPP and provide a framework for ensuring the integrated development of Indian maritime sector.
- Other important role assigned to SDC is to manage the coastal community development scheme and fund coastal community development projects identified under the Sagarmala Programme. The projects considered would be specific time-bound local interventions and innovative in nature.
- SDC will be raising funds as debt/equity (as long term capital), as per the project requirements/ by leveraging resources provided by the Government of India and from multi-lateral and bilateral funding agencies. SDC will also aim to increase the scope of private sector participation in project development.

Background:

Sagarmala is a strategic and customer-oriented initiative of the shipping ministry to modernize India's ports so that port-led development can be augmented and 7,500 km of coastline across 13 states can be developed to contribute in India's growth.

The shipping ministry estimates that Sagarmala can lead to annual logistics savings of close to Rs.35,000 crore and boost India's merchandise exports to \$110 billion by 2025. Apart from this, the Sagarmala project is estimated to create 10 million new jobs, 4 million of which will be direct employment.

New IT Ministry to have say over UIDAI and NIC

A mega role for the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** has been carved out with say over all policy matters relating to information technology, electronics and the Internet, other than licensing of Internet Service Providers.

- In this regard, the amendments made by President Pranab Mukherjee to the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961 pertaining to the Ministry of Electronics and Information and the Ministry of Science and Technology and Earth Sciences were recently notified by the cabinet secretariat.

Details:

- Under the new rules, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology will have complete jurisdiction over the **Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) and National Informatics Centre**.
- Two separate departments, **Telecommunications and Posts**, have been placed under the Ministry of Communications headed by the Minister of State for Communications (Independent Charge).
- All matters relating to cyber laws, administration of the Information Technology Act, 2000 (21 of 2000) and other IT-related laws would be part of the domain of the new Ministry.
- The Ministry would lead the 'Initiative on bridging the Digital Divide: Matters relating to Media Lab Asia', Promotion of Standardisation, Testing and Quality in IT and standardisation of procedure for IT application and Tasks.
- The Ministry has also been entrusted with the task of promotion of the Internet, IT and

IT-enabled services, assistance to other departments in the promotion of e-Governance, e-Commerce, e-Medicine, e-Infrastructure and promotion of IT education and IT-based education.

- It would also deal with matters relating to promotion and manufacturing of Semiconductor Devices in the country excluding all matters relating to Semiconductor Complex Limited (SCL), Mohali.
- Besides, interaction in IT-related matters with international agencies such as Internet for Business Limited (IFB), Institute for Education in Information Society and International Code Council (ICC) would also be under its ambit.
- The Union Cabinet has approved signing of the **Air Services Agreement between India and Mozambique**. Presently there is no Air Services Agreement between India and Mozambique. To promote the air connectivity between the two countries, the two sides initiated the process of consultation in 2011 to finalize the text of Air Services Agreement.
- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for establishment of new **All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) at Gorakhpur** in Uttar Pradesh under **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)**. The setting up of AIIMS under PMSSY aims correcting the regional imbalances in availability of affordable/reliable tertiary level healthcare in the country in general, and to augment facilities for quality medical education in under-served or backward States, in particular. Under this scheme, AIIMS have been established in Bhubaneswar, Bhopal, Raipur, Jodhpur, Rishikesh and Patna while work of AIIMS Rae Bareilly is in progress. Also, three AIIMS in Nagpur (Maharashtra),

Kalyani(West) and Mangalagiri in Guntur (A.P) have been sanctioned in 2015.

Joint dedication of the Petrapole Integrated Check Post (ICP)

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi and the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina recently jointly inaugurated the **Petrapole Integrated Check Post** through video-conferencing.

Details:

- The Petrapole ICP will provide better facilities for effective and efficient discharge of functions such as security, immigration, customs, quarantine, etc. while also providing support facilities for smooth cross-border movement of persons, goods and transport.
- Petrapole ICP will be the **second ICP on the India-Bangladesh** border after the Agartala ICP at the Agartala (India)-Akhaura (Bangladesh) land border. It will also be the **biggest land port in South Asia**.
- It is expected that the capacity will double with the commissioning of the Petrapole ICP and the local business community will benefit immensely from reduced transaction time and costs.
- The commissioning of the Petrapole ICP will also serve to foster greater economic integration and connectivity between India and Bangladesh.

Background:

Petrapole-Benapole is an important land border crossing for India-Bangladesh trade. More than 50% of the India-Bangladesh trade passes through Petrapole. Trade worth more than Rs. 15000 Crore takes place through the Petrapole ICP, which is more than all the other Indian Land Ports and Land Customs Stations put together. Approximately 15 lakh people and

150,000 trucks cross Petrapole-Benapole every year.

NDB's 1st AGM, board of governors meetings held in China

BRICS' New Development Bank headed by eminent Indian banker K V Kamath recently held its first annual general body and board of governors meetings. The meetings were held in Shanghai.

- The bank has issued its first loans this year worth about USD 911 million for projects in the BRICS member counties. The bank was expected to provide substantial loans by next year.
- Ahead of the meeting, the NDB had issued its first bonds worldwide worth about USD 449 million to raise funds for clean energy projects in member states.
- The five-year green bonds, denominated in the Chinese currency renminbi or yuan, are worth three billion yuan (USD 449 million) and were sold in China's onshore interbank bond market.

NDB:

It is a multilateral development bank operated by the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). It is seen as an alternative to the existing US-dominated World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

- The New Development Bank was agreed to by BRICS leaders at the 5th BRICS summit held in Durban, South Africa in 2013.
- The bank is set up to foster greater financial and development cooperation among the five emerging markets.
- The bank will be headquartered in Shanghai, China.
- Unlike the World Bank, which assigns votes based on capital share, in the New

Development Bank each participant country will be assigned one vote, and none of the countries will have veto power.

What it does?

The New Development Bank will mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, to supplement existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development.

Benefits:

- The establishment of the Bank will help India and other signatory countries to raise and avail resources for their infrastructure and sustainable development projects.
- It would also reflect the close relations among BRICS countries, while providing a powerful instrument for increasing their economic cooperation.
- It is expected to allow India to raise and obtain more resources for the much needed infrastructure development, the lack of which is coming in the way of inclusiveness and growth as of now.
- It will make available additional resources thereby recycling the savings accumulated in emerging countries which are presently being locked up in Treasury bonds having much lower returns.

National Electoral Roll Purification 2016 launched

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has launched the **National Electoral Roll Purification (NERP) programme** across the country to correct errors in electoral rolls and enrolment of all eligible citizens, among other things.

Highlights:

- NREP 2016 will ensure single electoral register entry for every eligible elector with unique Elector Photo Identity Card (EPIC) number, removal of all absent, shifted or dead electors' entries and repeat entries.
- Photo electoral rolls will be updated with good quality images of every elector confirming to ECI standards, and linking electors with ECI by obtaining their contact details.
- Geographic Information System (GIS) would be used to standardise sections, polling station boundaries and locations.
- Booth Level Officers (BLOs) will conduct door-to-door field verification of entries apart from collecting electors' information on contact details, family members, including non-enrolled and persons who would become eligible on January 1, 2017. The collected details would be uploaded on the NERP portal for further processing and action by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs).
- To provide easy access to citizens and electors for enhanced electoral rolls related services, voluntary collection of mobile number/e-mail ids and details of family members will be done under NERP 2016. The Commission has also ordered that such information, under no circumstances, should be put in public domain or shared with any authority.
- Provision has been made to provide the information electronically on National Voters Service Portal (NVSP). Poor quality and black and white images are proposed to be replaced by the District Election Officers (DEOs) through deployment of sufficient number of digital cameras.
- To ensure transparency and meaningful involvement and active participation of

citizens of the area, the Commission has decided that the Electoral Registration Officers (ERO) would prepare part wise list of names proposed to be removed from the electoral roll on account of absence, shifted, dead and repeat entries to be displayed in the office for a period of at least seven days from the date of pasting of the list.

Will explore options to pellet guns: Govt

The government is planning to set up an expert committee to recommend non-lethal alternatives of crowd control after many members of Parliament expressed concern over the loss of lives and injuries in Jammu and Kashmir due to the **use of pellet guns**.

What are pellet guns?

They are a form of non-lethal crowd control methods used by police and military worldwide. The other popular methods are tear gas, water cannon, pepper spray, taser guns etc. Pellet guns are also popular in hunting and pest control.

What are they intended for?

Pellets guns are intended to injure individuals and cause pain. They are effective over short ranges up to 500 yards but when fired from close quarters can be lethal, particularly when sensitive parts like eyes are hit. Pellets can penetrate soft tissues.

Who manufactures them?

Pellet guns are manufactured at the Ordinance Factory, Ishapore.

When were they introduced?

They are used by Jammu & Kashmir Police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). They were first introduced in August 2010. The CRPF has 600 such guns.

Now, private citizens can seek sanction to prosecute IAS officers

In a major move, the Centre has agreed to permit private persons seek sanction for **prosecution of State and central IAS officers under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.**

Existing rules:

Under the existing rules, requests for sanction for prosecution of All India Services Officers (IAS/IPS/IFS etc) can be initiated by the investigative agencies only. A decision to grant or deny the permission can be made only by a "competent authority" designated by the Centre.

Details:

The government will now entertain proposals/requests from private persons for sanction of public servants in compliance of a Supreme Court verdict of 2012. In this regard, the centre has intimated all states the procedures to be followed.

Supreme Court's judgment:

The Supreme Court in its judgment in Dr. Subramanian Swamy versus Dr. Manmohan Singh case had observed that "there is no provision either in the (Prevention of Corruption Act), 1988 Act or the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (Cr.PC) which bars a citizen from filing a complaint for prosecution of a public servant who is alleged to have committed an offence."

The apex court had further observed that if the Competent Authority is satisfied that the material placed before it is sufficient for prosecution of the public servant, then it is required to grant sanction or refuse sanction if the evidence is not sufficient. In either case, the decision taken on the complaint made by a citizen is required to be communicated to him

and if he feels aggrieved by such decision, then he can avail legal remedy.

- A previously unknown species of meat-eating dinosaur from 80 million years ago has been unearthed in Argentina, adding to the dinosaur family known as the "Giant Thieves." The fossil is named **Murusraptor barrosaensis** and may reveal more about the origins of the group known as the **megaraptorids**. Murusraptors walked on two legs, bore large sickle-shaped toe claws and were fast, agile and smart with voracious appetites that led to the nickname, 'Giant Thief'.
- According to Moody's Investors Service, India had \$474 billion in external debt as of 2015, **representing 16% of the Asia Pacific region's total debt.** India's external debt has grown two to three times slower than China, at a five-year annual average rate of 8.4%. As a result, the external debt to GDP ratio in India has risen from 17% in 2005 to 23% in 2015, but is still one of the lowest globally.
- India's space agency ISRO and USA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) of the NASA are jointly working on the development of a 'Dual Frequency (L&S band) Synthetic Aperture Radar Imaging Satellite' which will be useful for variety of applications including natural resources mapping and monitoring. The joint mission is expected to bring result by 2021. Named as the **Nasa-Isro Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR)**, the satellite will also be used for estimating agricultural biomass over full duration of crop cycle, assessing soil moisture, monitoring of floods and oil slicks, coastal erosion, coastline changes and variation of winds in coastal waters, assessment of mangroves and surface deformation studies among others.
- A new species of gecko "**EUBLEPHARIS SATPURAENSIS**" (reptile) has been

discovered for the first time in Chhattisgarh's rich biodiversity forest at **Bhoramdeo Wildlife Sanctuary in Kawardha district**. Previously, the species was discovered in Madhya Pradesh. The species was spotted during tiger census being conducted in the sanctuary on the hills of **Satpuda range**. The species is shy and nocturnal in nature and were found only in dusk. They are a non-venomous species and very vibrant and attractive in coloration.

Solar Power Tree

Union Minister for Science & Technology and Earth Sciences, Dr. Harsh Vardhan, recently launched the '**Solar Power Tree**'.

Who developed it?

It has been developed by the CSIR-Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-CMERI), a constituent laboratory of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

What's good about this?

Solar Power Tree innovatively addresses the challenge of increasing demand for Green Energy by gainfully utilizing scarce land resources in the country.

- The Solar Power Tree harnesses solar energy for producing electricity with an innovative vertical arrangement of solar cells. It thus reduces the requirement of land as compared to conventional Solar Photovoltaic layout, on one hand, while keeping the land character intact on the other.
- Even the cultivable land can be utilized for solar energy harnessing along with farming at the same time. The innovation finds its viability both in rural and urban areas.

The Salient Features of the Solar Power Tree are:

- It takes only 4 square feet of land for a 5 KW Solar Power tree, whereas in a conventional layout, it requires 400 square feet of land.
- By holding the photovoltaic panels at a higher height, on an average it gets more sunrays for one hour in a day. As a result, it is possible to harness 10-15% more power in comparison to a conventional layout on ground.
- It has a battery back-up of 2 hours on full load, hence giving light even after sunset.
- It is facilitated with water sprinkler at the top for self-cleaning of panels, that increases the efficiency of the solar panels.
- The estimated cost of the device is around Rs. 5 Lakh for a 5 KW specification.

Way ahead:

The device has been functioning effectively at three places in West Bengal as a pilot project. As a future prospect, the Solar Power Tree would be developed in a rotatable module, which would have a motorized mechanism to align itself with the movement of the Sun during the day. Hence, it would be possible to harness 10-15% more power over and above the current capacity.

Facebook Internet drone 'Aquila' passes first full-scale test

Facebook has completed its first successful test of its solar-powered Aquila drone, being developed to deliver internet service to remote areas of the world. The test flight represents a major milestone for Facebook's efforts to bring the internet to underserved locations of the planet.

Background:

The lightweight Aquila is Facebook's ambitious project, which aims at providing affordable internet access across the globe. Facebook has invested billions of dollar in getting more people online through the not-for-profit internet.org and by building drones.

- The project consists of a solar-powered aircraft with a wingspan bigger than a Boeing 737 that can stay up for months on end.
- The plane uses a laser to beam data to a base station on the ground.
- The plane will operate between 60,000ft (18km) and 90,000ft (27km) – above the altitude of commercial airplanes – so it would not be affected by weather.
- It will climb to its maximum height during the day, before gliding slowly down to its lowest ebb at night, to conserve power when its solar panels are not receiving charge.
- Lacking wheels, or even the ability to climb from ground level to its cruising altitude without aid, it will be launched with the help of helium balloons, which will rise it to its preferred height.

Parliamentary panel approves debt recovery law with changes

Suggesting some changes to the proposed debt recovery law, a Parliamentary panel has submitted its report on the bill which seeks to expedite disposal of over 70,000 pending cases involving more than Rs 5 lakh crore.

- The Joint Parliamentary Committee has proposed amendments, ranging from definitions to several terms such as company, financial lease, and secured creditor, to the **Enforcement of Security Interest and Recovery of Debts Laws and**

Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Bill.

- The Bill seeks to facilitate expeditious disposal of debt recovery applications. There are around 70,000 cases are pending in Debt Recovery Tribunals involving more than Rs 5 lakh crore.

Important proposals:

- The committee proposed amendment to the net owned fund for a securitisation or reconstruction company.
- The Committee suggested relaxation of restrictions on holding controlling interest in the capital of Asset Reconstruction Companies so as to have no restrictions on the composition of board of directors of ARCs.
- The panel recommended that passing of an ex-parte order after the show cause notice of 30 days of the service of summons may be a violation of the principles of natural justice.

Background:

The Enforcement of Security Interest and Recovery of Debts Laws and Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Bill, 2016 is important legislation which seeks to amend the Recovery of Debts due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 and the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and make consequential amendments in the Indian Stamp Act, 1899 and the Depositories Act, 1996.

- The legislation proposes to give RBI powers to regulate asset reconstruction companies, prioritise secured creditors in repayment of debts and provide stamp duty exemption on loans assigned by banks and financial institutions to asset reconstruction firms.
- The object of the amendments proposed in the Bill is to improve the ease of doing

business and facilitate investment leading to higher economic growth and development.

India ranks 110th on Sustainable Development index

India has ranked a low 110 out of 149 nations assessed on where they stand with regard to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, according to a new sustainable development index.

Key facts:

- The index is topped by Sweden and shows all countries face major challenges in achieving these ambitious goals.
- The countries which are closest to fulfilling the goals are not the biggest economies but comparably small, developed countries.
- Sweden is followed by Denmark and Norway on the top three performing countries.
- Germany (6) and the UK(10) are the only G7 countries to be found among the top ten performers.
- The US ranks 25th on the index, while Russia and China rank 47th and 76th respectively.
- India ranks 110th on the list followed by Lesotho on 113th position, Pakistan (115), Myanmar (117), Bangladesh (118) and Afghanistan (139).
- Poor and developing countries understandably score lowest on the SDG Index as they often have comparably little resources at their disposal.
- The Central African Republic and Liberia are at the bottom of the Index and still have the longest way to go in achieving the SDGs.
- No country has achieved the SDGs and even top Sweden scores “red” on several goals.

- The report shows how leaders can deliver on their promise and urges countries not to lose the momentum for important reforms. The report notes that in order to achieve the ambitious goals, immediate and comprehensive action is needed in the crucial first years of implementation of the new global agenda.

- The report highlights major challenges per region: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries struggle to meet the goals on inequality, sustainable consumption, climate change and ecosystems, while many developing countries face major difficulties in providing basic social services and infrastructure access to their populations.

- In spite of significant progress in recent years in Sub-Saharan Africa, the world’s poorest region faces major challenges across almost all SDGs, with extreme poverty, hunger and health as major areas where substantial improvement is needed.

About the index:

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Bertelsmann Stiftung launched a new Sustainable Development Goal Index and Dashboard to provide a report card for tracking Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) progress and ensuring accountability.

- The index collected available data for 149 countries to assess where each country stands in 2016 with regard to achieving the SDGs.
- It ranks countries based on their performance across the 17 global goals, a set of ambitious objectives across the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability, underpinned by good governance.
- The index helps countries identify priorities for early actions and shows that every

country faces major challenges in achieving the SDGs.

- Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation has constituted a committee to prepare draft **Ganga Act**. Justice Shri Girdhar Malviya (Retd.) is the Chairman of the committee. The Committee has been asked to prepare a Draft Act on Ganga ensuring wholesomeness of the River. The Act should have provisions to ensure cleanliness (Nirmalta) and uninterrupted e-flow (avirlta) of Ganga. The Committee may take into consideration any other issue which it may deem fit in the drafting of the Act. The tenure of the Committee would be for a period of three months which may be extended by another three months, if required.
- Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation has constituted a committee to prepare guidelines for **desiltation of river Ganga from Bhimgauda (Uttarakhand) to Farakka (West Bengal)**. Shri Madhav Chitale (Expert Member, NGRBA) has been appointed as Chairman of the committee. The committee has also been asked to establish difference between desilting and sand mining and also to establish need for desilting for ecology and e-flow of the river Ganga. The tenure of the committee would be for a period of three months.

Siege by sullage will end at Fort St. George moat

Archaeological Survey of India has begun the restoration plan at **Fort St. George** in Chennai. As a part of the restoration plan, the 2.3 km moat surrounding the historic Fort will be renovated. The moat dating back to 1760s and built in the wake of a French attack became a wastewater chamber over the years, leaving

only a 500-metre bit near the flag-hoisting area dry.

- Sludge in the moat will be removed without damaging the heritage structure. The idea is to restore the British-era water lines that prevented flooding here.

Background:

A big section of the moat, around 30 ft. deep and 50 ft. wide, is used to hold the waste flowing from the Fort Complex. This follows sea incursion into the **Cooum river and North Buckingham Canal**. However, allowing sea water in, according to the ASI, will endanger the Complex.

About the fort:

Fort St George is the name of the first English fortress in India, founded in 1644 at the coastal city of Madras, the modern city of Chennai.

- The construction of the fort provided the impetus for further settlements and trading activity, in what was originally an uninhabited land.
- The fort currently houses the Tamil Nadu legislative assembly and other official buildings. The fort is one of the 163 notified areas (megalithic sites) in the state of Tamil Nadu.

Red Corridor to be redrawn by govt.

The government is planning to reduce the number of Maoist-affected districts by about a fifth in the country.

Details:

- Over 20 of the 106 districts which have been described as being Maoist-affected and are part of the **Red Corridor** will be removed from the list. This exercise, under way now for two years, is being done for the first time since 2006, when the Maoist-affected

districts were identified and graded on the basis of their violence profile.

- The names of the districts and the reasons for being considered to be taken off the list have been communicated to the States and a response is awaited.
- However, the names are not being revealed now because of the sensitivities of the States which fear that once a district is taken off the list financial aid which is made available to the districts – to the tune of Rs. 30 crore annually for various developmental work – will dry up.

What are LWE affected states?

The 106 districts which span 10 States – Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh – are described as those affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE) and constitute the 'Red Corridor.' Of these, 44 districts are said to be the worst-affected. India has a total of 683 districts.

The considerations on which the government has examined the districts with LWE features are:

- Their violence profile.
- An assessment of the kind of logistical and other support provided to armed Maoist cadres by their sympathisers and over ground workers.
- The kind of positive changes brought about by development work that these districts have seen.

U.P., Rajasthan lead in crimes on SCs

According to the latest data released recently by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan lead the country in the number of crimes registered against the Scheduled Castes.

Highlights:

- P. with 20% of India's Dalit population accounts for 17% of the crimes against them.
- 52% to 65% of all crimes in Rajasthan have a Dalit as the victim. This despite the fact that the State's SC (Dalit) population is just 17.8% of its total population.
- Bihar, with 6,721 to 7,893 cases, accounts for 16-17% of the all-India crimes against Dalits with just 8% of the country's SC population.
- Gujarat's numbers of crimes against Dalits had jumped to 6,655 in 2015 from 1,130 in 2014.

About National Commission for Scheduled Castes:

It is a **constitutional body** established with a view to provide safeguards against the exploitation of Scheduled Castes. To promote and protect their social, educational, economic and cultural interests, special provisions were made in the Constitution.

Background:

In order to ensure that the safeguards provided to SCs and STs are properly implemented, the Constitution on its inception provided for appointment of a special office under Article 338 of the Constitution to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes and report to the President about the working of these safeguards. In pursuance of this provision a Special Officer known as the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes was appointed for the first time on 18th November, 1950.

- A proposal was mooted for amendment of Article 338 of the Constitution (46th Amendment) by replacing the single member Special Officer by multi-member

system. The first Commission for SC & ST came into being on August, 1978.

- The setup of the Commission of 1978 underwent change in 1987 and it was named as National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This Commission being a National Level Advisory body played the role of adviser on major policy and developmental issues relating to SCs/STs
- Later, through the 89th Amendment of the Constitution it was decided to have a separate National Commission for Scheduled Castes & separate National Commission for Scheduled Tribes. This came into effect in 2004.
- Thus, the erstwhile National Commission for SCs & STs was bifurcated into two different Commissions.

Functions of the commission:

- To investigate and monitor all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Castes under this Constitution or under any other law for the time being in force or under any order of the Government and to evaluate the working of such safeguards.
- To inquire into specific complaints with respect to the deprivation of rights and safeguards of the Scheduled Castes.
- To participate and advise on the planning process of socio-economic development of the Scheduled Castes and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union and any State.
- To present to the President, annually and at such other times as the Commission may deem fit, reports upon the working of those safeguards.
- To make in such reports recommendations as to the measures that should be taken by

the Union or any State for the effective implementation of those safeguards and other measures for the protection, welfare and socio-economic development of the Scheduled Castes.

- To discharge such other functions in relation to the protection, welfare and development and advancement of the Scheduled Castes as the President may, subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament, by rule specify.

Composition:

The Commission consists of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and three other members. They are appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal. Their conditions of service and tenure of office are also determined by the president. The commission presents an annual report to the president.

J&K gets 10% of Central funds with only 1% of population

A study has revealed that Jammu and Kashmir has received 10% of all Central grants given to states over the 2000-2016 period, despite having only 1% of the country's population.

Highlights:

- Uttar Pradesh makes up about 13% of the country's population but received only 8.2% of Central grants in 2000-16. That means J&K, with a population of 12.55 million according to the 2011 Census, received Rs.91,300 per person over the last sixteen years while Uttar Pradesh only received Rs.4,300 per person over the same period.
- Even among the special category states, Jammu and Kashmir receives a disproportionate amount of Central assistance. The state received Rs.1.14 lakh crore in grants over the sixteen years under review. This is more than a quarter of the

Central funds disbursed to the 11 special category states in that period.

Zebrafish provide insights into a rare human disease

Scientists from the Delhi-based CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology are a step closer to bringing hope to children born with a rare disorder – **CHARGE syndrome** – if the results seen in zebrafish are reproducible in humans. Scientists have studied the fertilised egg of a zebrafish to better understand the CHARGE syndrome.

Why zebrafish?

Following fertilization, zebrafish embryos are transparent. This allows scientists to observe the inside of the embryo and watch in real time how various organs develop. Since most organs begin forming in the first 24-36 hours and are fully formed within five days, it allows researchers to study the development of an organism from egg to maturity. An RNA injected into a one-cell embryo interferes with the making of the CHD7 protein, thus producing a zebrafish embryo with very similar problems as the human babies with CHARGE syndrome.

Background:

About 1 in 20,000 people in the world, and an estimated 50,000 in India alone, are born with CHARGE syndrome – multiple life-threatening problems such as deafness and blindness, heart defects, genital problems and growth retardation and facial bone and nerve defects that cause breathing and swallowing difficulties. There is a high death rate in the very first year in children born with CHARGE. A mutation in the CHD7 gene is responsible for 60-70% of all CHARGE defects. The expression of the gene peaks in the early stages of embryo development, starting from 2-4 cells.

About CHARGE syndrome:

CHARGE syndrome is a disorder that affects many areas of the body. **CHARGE stands for coloboma, heart defect, atresia choanae (also known as choanal atresia), retarded growth and development, genital abnormality, and ear abnormality.**

- The pattern of malformations varies among individuals with this disorder, and infants often have multiple life-threatening medical conditions. **About two third of cases are due to a CHD7 mutation.**
- The major characteristics of CHARGE syndrome are more specific to this disorder than are the minor characteristics. Many individuals with CHARGE syndrome have a hole in one of the structures of the eye (coloboma), which forms during early development.
- Some people also have small eyes (microphthalmia). One or both nasal passages may be narrowed or completely blocked.
- Individuals with CHARGE syndrome frequently have cranial nerve abnormalities. The cranial nerves emerge directly from the brain and extend to various areas of the head and neck, controlling muscle movement and transmitting sensory information.
- Abnormal function of certain cranial nerves can cause swallowing problems, facial paralysis, a sense of smell that is diminished (hyposmia) or completely absent (anosmia), and mild to profound hearing loss. People with CHARGE syndrome also typically have middle and inner ear abnormalities and unusually shaped ears.
- The diagnosis of CHARGE syndrome is often difficult, because it is rare. The syndrome spans many disciplines, and as such, can be diagnosed by a pediatrician, oral and maxillofacial surgeon, ENT specialist,

ophthalmologist, audiologist, endocrinologist, cardiologist, urologist, developmental specialist, radiologist, geneticist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, or orthopedic specialist.

- China has completed the production of the **world's largest amphibious aircraft**. The plane, dubbed the **AG600**, was unveiled by the state-owned Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC). The aircraft, which has a maximum range of 4,500 km, is intended for fighting forest fires and performing marine rescues. At around the size of a Boeing 737, it is far larger than any other plane built for marine take-off and landing.
- Stepping up its scrutiny of NGOs, especially their financial dealings, the Centre has made **obtaining unique identification numbers and registering them on the NITI Aayog portal**, including the details of the Aadhaar and PAN numbers of all their trustees and office-bearers, **mandatory for them to apply for grants from any ministry**. In this regard, all ministries have been directed to process the proposal for grants and releases to the NGOs only through the Aayog's portal. Also, as per the latest decision, managers, directors, board members of NGOs will have to declare their personal assets, jewellery, cash, moveable and immovable property by July 31. They will also be subject to rules and regulations for government officials under the Prevention of Corruption Act.
- The **world's most sensitive dark matter detector, Large Underground Xenon (LUX)**, has failed to yield any trace of the elusive substance, dark matter, thought to account for more than four-fifths of the mass of the universe, even after 20 months of operation. The Large Underground Xenon (LUX) dark matter experiment, which operates beneath a mile of rock at the Sanford Underground

Research Facility in the Black Hills of South Dakota, U.S., has completed its silent search for the missing matter of the universe. Dark matter is thought to account for more than four-fifths of the mass in the universe. Scientists are confident of its existence because the effects of its gravity can be seen in the rotation of galaxies and in the way light bends as it travels through the universe.

'Feed the future' programme launched

The Union Agriculture Ministry and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have launched the second phase of the "Feed the Future" India triangular training programme.

About "Feed the Future" programme:

This programme aims to bring specialised agriculture training to 1,500 agricultural professionals across Africa and Asia.

- The programme builds upon five decades of joint work utilising science and technology to bring innovative solutions to the challenges facing farmers. The programme is expected to enable India and the U.S. to share these farming techniques worldwide, helping countries in Africa and Asia revolutionise their agriculture practices and ultimately, improve global nutrition levels.
- Led by the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management- MANAGE, the programme will train agricultural professionals from 17 countries in Africa and Asia on specialised farming practices such as agricultural marketing, dairy management, food processing and ways to prevent post-harvest losses.

Background:

The pilot project launched in 2010 focused on the three African Countries i.e., Kenya, Liberia

and Malawi with potential to expand throughout the African Continent in the days to come. The effort included Triangular Cooperation adapting technological advances and innovative solutions to address Food Security Challenges in Africa.

Notice for privilege motion against Jairam

A notice for a **privilege motion** has been given in the Rajya Sabha against Congress MPs Jairam Ramesh and Renuka Chowdhury for allegedly misbehaving with Union Minister Harsimrat Badal.

What is a privilege motion? Who can move it? How?

Parliamentary privileges are certain rights and immunities enjoyed by members of Parliament, individually and collectively, so that they can “effectively discharge their functions”. When any of these rights and immunities are disregarded, the offence is called a breach of privilege and is punishable under law of Parliament.

A notice is moved in the form of a motion by any member of either House against those being held guilty of breach of privilege. Each House also claims the right to punish as contempt actions which, while not breach of any specific privilege, are offences against its authority and dignity.

Govt. intervention sought for Hepatitis C treatment

In absence of a policy intervention for Hepatitis C, civil society and legal aid organisations have put together a policy brief, calling upon the government to take concerted action to address the right to health of **people living with HCV (PLHCV)**.

Background:

HCV is a significantly bigger epidemic than HIV and yet, there has been considerably less awareness about it. While HIV testing and treatment are free of cost through the government programme, HCV is not supported in any way. Despite the estimated disease burden of 8.7 million Hepatitis C patients, India does not have data and, therefore, does not have appropriate budgets to address the concerns of the patients.

Also, the price of treatment of HCV has become a global concern with the Indian government granting patent for the drug Sofosbuvir to American pharmaceutical giant Gilead Sciences. While Gilead’s Sofosbuvir is priced at almost \$84,000 for an entire course in the U.S., generic Indian companies are selling their versions for less than \$200 for a full course.

What is hepatitis?

“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. Toxins, certain drugs, some diseases, heavy alcohol use, and bacterial and viral infections can all cause hepatitis. Hepatitis is also the name of a family of viral infections that affect the liver; the most common types are Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C.

What is the difference between Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C are diseases caused by three different viruses. Although each can cause similar symptoms, they have different modes of transmission and can affect the liver differently. Hepatitis A appears only as an acute or newly occurring infection and does not become chronic. People with Hepatitis A usually improve without treatment. Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C can also begin as acute infections, but in some people, the virus remains in the body, resulting in chronic disease and long-term liver problems.

There are vaccines to prevent Hepatitis A and B; however, there is not one for Hepatitis C. If a person has had one type of viral hepatitis in the past, it is still possible to get the other types.

What is Hepatitis C?

This is a transmissible disease – it spreads the same way as HIV – and if not treated can lead to chronic conditions of the liver such as liver cirrhosis, cancer or failure. With an estimated disease burden of 8.7 million patients, HCV kills nearly six times as many people as HIV.

Spread:

The hepatitis C virus is a bloodborne virus and the most common modes of infection are through unsafe injection practices, inadequate sterilization of medical equipment, and the transfusion of unscreened blood and blood products.

- A huge **Yazidi temple** is under construction in a small Armenian village, intended as a symbol of resilience for a persecuted religious tradition. Named **Quba Mere Diwane, this will be the largest Yazidi temple in the world**, although there are relatively few contenders. **Yazidis are the largest minority group in Armenia**, with a population of about 35,000, although many have left or are leaving to find work elsewhere, particularly in Russia. They originated in eastern Turkey and northern Iraq, but many were killed or driven out of Turkey during the bloody rule of the Ottoman Empire. Yazidis describe themselves as “a people of 72 genocides”. The Yazidi faith is derived from **Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam**. They have been denounced as infidels by Islamic extremists, and unfairly accused of being devil-worshippers.
- Brazilian scientists have identified another type of Zika-transmitting mosquito, responsible for over 1,700 cases of

microcephaly in newborns in the South American country since October 2015. It was announced that researchers found the presence of the **Culex quinquefasciatus** mosquito infected by the Zika virus in three out of 80 groups of mosquitoes analyzed up until now. Up until now, transmission of the virus was only known through the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, the same insect that spreads dengue and chikungunya. Brazil is currently in a state of health emergency due to the increase in detected microcephaly cases in newborns, attributed to the Zika virus, even though the link between the disease and the virus has still to be scientifically confirmed.

- The nation's **first Green Rail Corridor**, a 114-km long Rameswaram-Manamadurai stretch in Tamil Nadu which ensures zero toilet discharge on rail tracks, was recently inaugurated by Railways Minister Suresh Prabhu. Trains in the section have been equipped with bio-toilets ensuring zero discharge of human waste on the rail tracks. In these toilets, **anaerobic bacteria** – developed by DRDO and hence called ‘DRDO Bacteria’ – converts human waste into water and gas which is released through outlets. Water is subjected to chlorination and then discharged outside and the long-term impact will be a clean and environmental-friendly track that also facilitates a healthy working condition for those working on railway tracks.

Irom Sharmila to end fast, contest elections in Manipur

Sixteen years after starting her hunger strike demanding the repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, Irom Chanu Sharmila has decided to end it on August 9 and contest the Manipur Assembly elections as an Independent candidate.

Who is Irom Sharmila?

She is the woman crusader who has been on a fast-unto-death since November 2000 demanding the repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in Manipur. She was also recently acquitted in a case of attempted suicide registered in 2006.

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act:

It is an Act empowering armed forces to deal effectively in 'Disturbed Areas'. Any area which is declared 'Disturbed' under the disturbed areas act enables armed forces to resort to the provisions of AFSPA.

Who declares an area as disturbed?

The choice of declaring any area as 'disturbed' vests both with state and central government.

Special powers provided to armed forces:

After an area comes under the ambit of AFSPA, any commissioned officer, warrant officer, non-commissioned officer or another person of equivalent rank can use force for a variety of reasons while still being immune to the prosecution.

Ambit:

The act was passed on 11 September 1958 by the parliament of India to provide special legal security to the armed forces carrying out operations in the troubled areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura (seven sisters).

- In 1990 the act was extended to the state of Jammu and Kashmir to confront the rising insurgency in the area.
- In Manipur, despite opposition from the Central government, state government withdrew the Act in some parts in Aug, 2004.

The government can declare AFSPA in the following conditions:

- When the local administration fails to deal with local issues and the police proves inefficient to cope with them.
- When the scale of unrest or instability in the state is too large for the police to handle.

Blow to India as arbitration tribunal rules against Antrix

An international tribunal in The Hague has ruled against the Indian government over the cancellation of a contract between telecommunications firm Devas Multimedia and Antrix Corporation Ltd., in a decision that could cost the Centre billions of dollars in damages.

Background:

In 2005, the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) commercial arm Antrix Corporation entered into an agreement with Devas to lease out satellite spectrum which the Bangalore-based company could use to provide high-quality telephony and Internet services. The deal involved Antrix committing to manufacturing and launching two ISRO satellites and then leasing nearly 70 MHz of S-band satellite spectrum to Devas for a period of 12 years. In return, Devas committed to paying upfront fees of a little over \$30 million.

- In 2011 however, a leaked draft audit report noted that there were potentially a number of irregularities in the agreement including conflict of interest, favouritism, financial mismanagement and non-compliance of standard operating procedures. While two committees that were set up to investigate the matter didn't find evidence of a quid pro quo between ISRO and Devas, there were a number of procedural lapses that had apparently taken place.

- Shortly after the controversy exploded, ISRO decided to annul the agreement, with newly appointed space chief K. Radhakrishnan stating that the S-band spectrum was needed for “larger national and strategic purposes”.

Tribunal’s observations:

The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague has ruled that the government’s actions in 2011 amounted to expropriation and that in annulling the ISRO-Devas contract, the country has breached treaty commitments to accord fair and equitable treatment to Devas’s foreign investors.

The PCA’s logic is essentially as follows: by annulling the contract and denying the commercial use of S-band spectrum, the Indian government has not only damaged the business interests of Devas but also expropriated the investments of the company’s foreign shareholders. This, the tribunal believes, makes the government liable to pay financial compensation.

About PCA:

The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) is an international organization based in The Hague, the Netherlands. The PCA was created in The Hague by treaty in 1899.

- It is not a court and does not have permanent judges. The PCA is a permanent bureaucracy that assists temporary tribunals to resolve disputes among states (and similar entities), intergovernmental organizations, or even private parties arising out of international agreements.
- The cases span a range of legal issues involving territorial and maritime boundaries, sovereignty, human rights, international investment, and international and regional trade.

High-level panel to recast UGC, AICTE

The Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) has directed the high-level committee, headed by Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Arvind Panagariya, to prepare a road map for reforming the two regulatory bodies in the field of education – the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) – as well as the board looking after Homeopathy and Ayurvedic education in the country.

NMC:

The committee has already proposed the scrapping of Medical Council of India (MCI) and replacing it with the **National Medical Commission (NMC)**. The main objective behind this is to end the inspector raj in the medical field in the country.

Details:

- NMC will become the main regulatory body and will take over all roles and responsibilities of the MCI.
- NMC will have eminent doctors and experts from related fields to suggest the direction that should be given to medical education in the country so as to ensure that the quality of education is at par with global standards.
- NMC will have around 19-20 members and their tenure will be about five years. It will also have members from other fields such as economics, law, etc in a bid to inculcate more professionalism in the body.
- It will have a chairman as well as there will be four Boards – Under Graduate Medical Board, Post Graduate Medical Board, Accreditation and Assessment Board and a board for registration of medical colleges as well monitoring of the ethics in the profession.

- These boards will be given autonomy and they will work on the fields for which they are formed.

So what if jallikattu is an age-old tradition

While asserting that it disapproves arguments that the 'Jallikattu' should be allowed because it's centuries old, the Supreme Court has set August 30 as the final hearing date to decide on the constitutionality of Jallikattu.

Background:

The court's strong response was after Tamil Nadu argued that Jallikattu - the mostly southern bull-racing sport - should be permitted as it showcases a cultural tradition that has been part of the custom and culture of people of the state for 5,000 years.

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

Jallikattu:

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

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

Indo-U.S. expedition discovers natural gas in Indian Ocean

A large natural gas discovery has been made in the Indian Ocean following a joint expedition by India and the U.S., opening up a new resource to meet energy needs. India's Oil Ministry and the U.S. Geological Survey made the discovery of large, highly enriched accumulations of **natural gas hydrate** - an icy form of the fuel - in the Bay of Bengal. This is the first discovery of its kind in the Indian Ocean that has the potential to be producible.

Natural gas hydrates:

Natural gas hydrates are a naturally occurring, ice-like combination of natural gas and water found in oceans and polar regions.

- Gas hydrates are considered as vast resources of natural gas and are known to occur in marine sediments on continental shelf margins.
- By nature this gas is mostly methane. Methane gas hydrate is stable at the seafloor at water depths beneath about 500 meters.

Their occurrence:

The amount of gas within the world's gas hydrate accumulations is estimated to greatly exceed the volume of all known conventional gas resources. Gas hydrate resources in India are estimated at 1,894 trillion cubic meters and these deposits occur in Western, Eastern and Andaman offshore areas.

- According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration gas hydrate deposits along ocean margins are estimated to exceed known petroleum reserves by about a factor of three.

Cabinet rescinds decision to set up Concurrent Evaluation Office in Ministry of Rural Development

The Union Cabinet has decided to rescind the earlier decision of the Government to set up the **Concurrent Evaluation Office (CEO)** for managing Concurrent Evaluation Network (CENET) in Ministry of Rural Development.

- The decision will pave the way for a need based strengthening of the Economic and Monitoring Wing of the Ministry of Rural Development for managing and carrying out evaluation studies of Rural Development programmes.

Background:

The CEO was envisaged to undertake concurrent evaluation of Rural Development programmes in conjunction with Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the erstwhile Planning Commission.

About the CEO:

The proposal for a concurrent evaluation office (CEO) was approved by the Union cabinet in 2013.

- The CEO was envisaged to manage a system of concurrent evaluations that will be done through an accredited network of reputed institutions – a Concurrent Evaluation Network (CENET).
- The CEO had to disseminate data related to the Ministry's work in the public domain and produce a world-class annual report of the evaluation activities and findings.
- The institutions was supported by the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR), institutes of national importance as designated by the GoI, the Indian Institutes of Management, and some other reputed institutions.

Functions performed:

- Identify appropriate evaluations to be undertaken.
- Design Terms of Reference (ToRs) and identify appropriate institutions to undertake studies.
- Guide the implementation of the studies to ensure they are on time and of requisite quality.
- Identify learnings and recommend policy changes.
- Review the "Action taken reports" prepared by the program divisions in response to the evaluations.
- Disseminate findings and datasets.
- Produce an annual report of its activities and key findings of its studies.

Cabinet approves revised cost estimate for NATRIP project

Government has approved the revised cost estimate of Rs 3,727.30 crore for the **National Automotive Testing and R&D Infrastructure Project (NATRIP)**.

- This approval ensures completion of the projects under NATRIP which is an important initiative by the government for the establishment of the global test centres in India.
- This will address the R&D requirements of the automotive industry, full-fledged testing and homologation centres.
- Also, the NATRIP project is required to adopt global best practices to ensure road safety, environmental protection etc in design, manufacture, testing and operation of motor vehicles in India since **India is signatory to UN Regulation on**

Harmonisation of Vehicle Specifications under WP-29 of 1998.

About NATRIP:

National Automotive Testing and R&D Infrastructure Project (NATRiP), the largest and one of the most significant initiatives in Automotive sector so far, represents a unique joining of hands between the Government of India, a number of State Governments and Indian Automotive Industry to create a state of the art Testing, Validation and R&D infrastructure in the country.

The Project aims at creating core global competencies in Automotive sector in India and facilitate seamless integration of Indian Automotive industry with the world as also to position the country prominently on the global automotive map.

Lok Sabha approves changes in Lokpal Act

Lok Sabha has approved an amendment to the Lokpal Act to allow extension to 50 lakh central government employees and NGOs receiving government funds in the deadline for filing asset declaration beyond July 31.

Details:

- Spouse and dependent children of government employees, ministers and MPs have been spared from declaring their assets.
- Also, the deadline for filing asset declaration by public servants and certain NGOs has been extended beyond July 31. The NGOs that receive more than 1 crore of government grants and donations above 10 lakh from abroad fall under the ambit of Lokpal.
- However, the senior management personnel of NGOs and public servants are still required to declare their assets.

- The amendment pertains to Section 44 of the Lokpal Act which deals with declaration of assets and provision of making assets public.

Background:

As per the rules notified under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act 2013, every public servant shall file declaration, information and annual returns pertaining to his assets and liabilities as well as for his spouse and dependent children on March 31 every year or on or before July 31 of that year.

Farewell Philae: Earth severs link with silent probe on comet

Earth has bid a final farewell to robot lab Philae, severing communications after a year-long silence from the pioneering probe hurtling through space on a comet.

- After more than 12 months without news, it has been decided to preserve all remaining energy available to Philae's orbiting mothership Rosetta. Rosetta will remain in orbit around comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko for another two months.
- Rosetta will crash-land on September 30 to join Philae in their final resting place, concluding a historic quest for cometary clues to the origins of life on Earth.

Philae:

Philae 's mission was to land successfully on the surface of a comet, attach itself, and transmit data from the surface about the comet's composition. It is a robotic European Space Agency lander.

- It landed on comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko, more than ten years after departing Earth.
- The mission seeks to unlock the long-held secrets of comets – primordial clusters of

ice and dust that scientists believe may reveal how the Solar System was formed.

- The scientific goals of the mission focus on “elemental, isotopic, molecular and mineralogical composition of the cometary material, the characterization of physical properties of the surface and subsurface material, the large-scale structure and the magnetic and plasma environment of the nucleus.”
- Philae was equipped with an array of experiments to photograph and test the surface of Comet 67P as well as to find out what happens when the roasting effect of the sun drives off gas and dust.
- The bill provides for a fine of up to 25% of the fair value of the asset and imprisonment of up to seven years, unlike an earlier lapsed version of the bill, which stipulated either a fine or imprisonment.
- Under the bill, the term “property” will cover movable, immovable, tangible and intangible properties. In case of joint ownership of property, the tax payer will have to show financing sources.
- The Bill also seeks to establish an Appellate Tribunal to hear appeals against any orders passed by the Adjudicating Authority. Appeals against orders of the Appellate Tribunal will lie to the high court.

Lok Sabha passes comprehensive Bill to check benami transactions **Background:**

Seeking to check black money, Lok Sabha has passed a comprehensive Benami Transactions Amendment Bill, with Finance Minister Arun Jaitley assuring that genuine religious trusts will be kept out of the purview of the legislation.

The bill was tabled in May last year but was subsequently referred to Parliament’s standing committee on finance. The committee submitted its report in the budget session this year and recommended a host of small changes including providing more time to allow property holders to furnish information, a time-bound process for initiating investigation and for filing appeals.

Significance of the Bill:

- The legislation is intended to effectively prohibit benami transactions and consequently prevent circumvention of law through unfair practices.
- It empowers the Government to confiscate benami property by following due procedure. It therefore promotes equity across all citizens.
- Also, those who declare their benami properties under income declaration scheme will get immunity under the Benami Act.
- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for **raising foreign shareholding limit from 5% to 15% in Indian Stock Exchanges** for a stock exchange, a depository, a banking company, an insurance company, a commodity derivative exchange. The Cabinet has also approved the proposal to allow foreign **portfolio investors to acquire shares through initial allotment**, besides secondary market, in the stock exchanges. The move will help in enhancing global competitiveness of Indian stock exchanges by accelerating/facilitating the adoption of latest technology and global best practices which will lead to overall growth and development of the Indian Capital Market.

Details:

- The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Bill is aimed at curbing domestic black money.
- The Union Cabinet has approved **Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) between India**

and Cambodia. The Treaty seeks to promote and protect investments from either country in the territory of the other country with the objective of increasing bilateral investment flows. The Treaty encourages each country to create favourable conditions for investors of the other country to make investments in its territory and to admit investments in accordance with its laws. The Treaty is the first Bilateral Investment Treaty in accordance with the text of the Indian Model BIT, approved by the Cabinet in December, 2015.

- The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the establishment of a new **AIIMS at Bhatinda in Punjab under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)**. The Central Sector Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) was first announced in August 2003 with the primary objective of correcting the regional imbalances in availability of affordable/reliable tertiary level healthcare in the country in general, and to augment facilities for quality medical education in under-served or backward States, in particular. Under this scheme AIIMS have been established in Bhubaneswar, Jodhpur, Raipur, Rishikesh, Bhopal and Patna while work of AIIMS Rae Bareilly is in progress. Also, three AIIMS in Nagpur (Maharashtra), Kalyani (West Bengal) and Mangalagiri in Guntur (A.P) have been sanctioned in 2015.
- **Bezwada Wilson**, a prolific campaigner for eradication of manual scavenging in India, and Carnatic singer **T M Krishna** from Chennai, are the winners of the prestigious **Ramon Magsaysay Award for 2016**. Apart from the two Indians, four others have been selected for the award – Conchita Carpio-Morales of the Philippines, Dompet Dhuafa of Indonesia, Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers and

‘Vientiane Rescue’ of Laos. The prize was established in April 1957 by the trustees of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund based in New York City with the concurrence of the Philippine government. Ramon Magsaysay is an annual award established to perpetuate former Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay’s example of integrity in governance, courageous service to the people, and pragmatic idealism within a democratic society. The Ramon Magsaysay Award is often considered to be an Asian equivalent to the Nobel Prize. The award is given to individuals and organisations from Asia region for their service to the society.

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) has officially declared **Brazil free of measles**, after no case of the disease was registered in the year 2015. Measles is a highly contagious airborne disease transmitted orally, through mucus or saliva. It mainly affects children and can be spread rapidly through the air due to sneezing or a cough. Thus it is highly infectious airborne disease.

Surplus river basins face drop in rainfall: IIT study

A study carried out by a team of researchers from IIT Madras and IIT Bombay

Findings

- decrease in spatial variability of mean monsoon rainfall over major river basins in India.
- there is no statistically significant increase in monsoon rainfall over major water deficit river basins.
- Major surplus basins such as Mahanadi, Godavari, Brahmani and West Flow River-I are witnessing significant decrease in rainfall
- The decrease in water yield in recent periods in major surplus basins has been more than

10 per cent in the case of Mahanadi and West Flow River-I.

- In the case of other surplus basins, the decrease has been within 10 per cent.
- Ganga, which is a major water deficit basin, has seen significant increase in rainfall, while Yamuna, Krishna and Cauvery river basins exhibit a decrease.
- There has been an increase in extreme rainfall events in India but this does not play a significant role in water availability as the surplus water gets wasted.

Challenges to interlinking

- study has found that the amount of summer monsoon rainfall over Indian river basins does not support the paradigm “wet gets wetter and dry gets drier”.
- The changes in rainfall pattern over major river basins in India raises concerns regarding the suitability and viability of interlinking major river water basins.
- The water demand in a surplus basin first needs to be assessed and then met under decreasing water availability scenarios before transferring water to deficit basins.
- Planning for inter-basin water transfer [in order to supply water from surplus to deficit river basins] necessitates an immediate reassessment with a systematic approach

Green bonds can finance the future

What is a Green Bond?

- A green bond is a fixed income instrument for the purpose of raising debt capital through markets.
- certifies that the proceeds will be used exclusively for specific “green” purposes
- can provide a long-term source of debt capital for renewable infrastructure projects

▪ It is a way by which the government provides subsidies for green projects

Need

- Renewable energy is more capital-intensive than coal
- An ambitious target of generating 100GW of energy from solar energy sources and 60GW from wind energy sources by 2022
- Need for \$160 billion of capital – \$120 billion as debt and \$40 billion as equity
- High interest rates of loans from banking sector
- Banks are unlikely to be able to expand their balance sheets to be able to finance the additional requirements of the renewable sector
- can facilitate the flow of capital to low carbon infrastructure investments, the demand for such investment is driven by low-carbon policy mandates
- Green bonds would enable investor diversification, mitigate risks since the repayment is tied to the issuer only
- build a community of green investors and enable refinancing bank loans at a lower cost.

Classifying Green Bond

- Depreciation: capital expenditure is allowed to be depreciated by 80 per cent in the first year and the remaining in the following five years
- Feed-in tariffs: long-term contracts with discoms to purchase power from a renewable project, usually at higher rates.
- Viability gap funding: a capital grant from the government that bridges the gap between project cost under the prevailing

electricity rate and the price quoted by the developer

- Generation-based incentive: the government provides Rs. 0.5/kWh (kilowatt hour) supplied to the grid, subject to a cumulative maximum of Rs.10 million/MW
- Renewable Purchase Obligations(RPO): the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) has set an ambitious RPO target of 15 per cent by 2020

Developing a green bond market

- Green bonds have been around for a decade but regulation and investment in them is still minuscule.
- Problems
- lack of green bond standards
- low credit rating of potential issuers
- higher cost of issuance
- the government essentially needs to increase the funds available for investment in green projects, by providing for specific tax incentives
- development of long-term finance markets
- changing Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority norms for size of investment for insurance companies
- creating mandates for provident funds to invest in infrastructure and environmentally sustainable projects
- increasing the priority sector lending limit for bank loans under solar energy from a meagre Rs.15 crore
- standardising the definition of green to be able to target government efforts in the direction

▪ mobilising retail savings by way of tax exemption on the lines of Section 80CCF

- Three Key steps that can be taken by Indian govt
- standardise “green” bonds as a way to finance environmentally sustainable projects
- provide incentives to investing in projects funded by a carbon tax on polluting sources of energy
- increase funds channelled towards investing in environmentally sustainable projects.

Green light for Afforestation Fund Bill

The Rajya Sabha unanimously passed the contentious Compensatory and Afforestation Fund (CAF) Bill, 2016 that allows States to access nearly Rs. 42,000 crore and channel into afforestation projects.

Salient Features

- The Bill establishes the National Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of India, and a State Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of each state.
- These Funds will receive payments for: (i) compensatory afforestation, (ii) net present value of forest (NPV), and (iii) other project specific payments. The National Fund will receive 10% of these funds, and the State Funds will receive the remaining 90%.
- These Funds will be primarily spent on afforestation to compensate for loss of forest cover, regeneration of forest ecosystem, wildlife protection and infrastructure development.
- The Bill also establishes the National and State Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authorities to manage the National and State Funds.

Concerns

- greater powers in the forest bureaucracy than to resident tribals
- Official records show that 19.4 million hectares has been afforested by the forest department over the last decade but forest cover has barely increased,
- the possible violation of tribal rights under Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006
- gram panchayats not having the final say in deciding what kind of forests could be grown
- Even though both the Kanchan Chopra Committee and the IIFM Committee on Forest NPV (value of loss of forest ecosystem) clearly mention that communities must be compensated for the loss of forests, the CAF bill is totally silent about their rights and compensation.
- doubts on whether it would lead to an ecologically-sustainable replenishing of forests
- A 2013 CAG report noted that state forest departments lack the planning and implementation capacity to carry out compensatory afforestation and forest conservation. With the share of funds transferred to states increasing from 10% to 90%, effective utilisation of these funds will depend on the capacity of state forest departments.

Background

- The Compensatory Afforestation, Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) has over the years accumulated a staggering Rs 41,000 crore as recompense for forest land having been diverted for non-forestry purposes.
- The amount is calculated on the Net Present Value (NPV) of the diverted forest and the cost of afforestation; it ranges between Rs 5-

11 lakh per hectare depending on the type and condition of a forest.

- The fund of Rs.42,000 crore has been collected in lieu of forest land diverted under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, for non-forest purposes such as industrial projects like mining.
- Of the Rs.42,000 crore, Odisha (Rs.6,000 crore), Chhattisgarh (Rs.3,861 crore) Madhya Pradesh (Rs.3,460 crore), Jharkhand (Rs.3,099 crore), Maharashtra (Rs.2,433 crore), Andhra Pradesh (Rs.2,223) and Uttarakhand (Rs.2,210 crore) are expected to be the biggest beneficiaries.
- The Bill was first passed in the Lok Sabha during the UPA government's tenure but was in cold storage after opposition in the Rajya Sabha. It was again cleared by the Lok Sabha this year after incorporating amendments.

GST - An Overview

Why GST?

- Multiplicity of taxes - Central and State level
- Cascading effect on cost of products and services
- Differential tax treatment for goods & services
- Double taxation on the same tax event
- Complexity in tax laws leading to tax avoidance and excessive litigation
- Tax inefficiency
- Fragmented market

Features

- Destination based consumption tax
- Apply to all stages of the value chain - primary, secondary & tertiary including retail

- Apply to all supplies of goods or services (as against manufacture, sale or provision of service) except
- Exempted goods or services
- Goods or services outside the purview of GST
- Transactions below threshold limits
- Dual GST having two concurrent components
- CGST levied & collected by the Centre
- SGST levied & collected by the States
- CGST & SGST on intra-State supplies of goods or services in India
- IGST (broadly equal to CGST + SGST) on inter-State supplies of goods or services in India – levied & collected by the Centre
- IGST applicable to imported goods
- Export of goods or services – Zero rated
- All goods or services likely to be covered under GST except
- Alcohol for human consumption – State Excise plus VAT
- Electricity – Electricity Duty
- Real Estate – Stamp Duty plus Property Taxes
- Petroleum Products – deferred for possible inclusion in future
- Tobacco products – under GST plus Central Excise
- Central Taxes likely to be subsumed in GST
- Central Excise Duty
- Additional Duties of Excise
- Excise Duty under Medicinal & Toiletries Preparation Act
- Additional Duties of Customs
- Service Tax
- Surcharges & Cesses
- State Taxes likely to be subsumed in GST
- State VAT / Sales Tax / CST
- Purchase Tax
- Entertainment Tax
- Luxury Tax
- Entry Tax (not levied by local bodies)
- Taxes on Lottery, Betting & Gambling
- Surcharges & Cesses

GST Impact

- On Government revenues
- Widening of tax base
- Growth in revenues leading to higher tax-GDP ratio
- Comprehensive taxation on goods and services up to the retail
- On competitiveness and growth for Industry
- Eliminating cascading impact of taxes on production and distribution cost of goods and services
- Removal of tax barriers – facilitate economy of scale in manufacturing and reduction in supply chain cost
- Improve the competitiveness of indigenous goods and services leading to accelerated GDP growth
- Tax neutrality in export of goods and services

- On consumers & demand for goods
- Reduction in prices leading to increase in demand
- On Investment and economic efficiency
- Removal of tax induced distortions
- Simpler tax system will lead to sustainable higher growth based on competitive strength
- Tax efficiency will ultimately lead to reduction in the tax rates attracting more productive investment for growth

122nd Constitutional Amendment Bill

- Concurrent jurisdiction for levy of GST by Centre & States – Article 246A
- Authority for Centre to levy & collect IGST on supplies in the course of inter-State trade or commerce including imports – Article 269A
- GST defined as any tax on supply of goods or services or both other than on alcohol for human consumption – Article 366(12A)
- Constitution of GST Council – its functions, responsibilities & manner of functioning – Article 279A
- To be constituted within 60 days from the coming into force of the Constitutional Amendment
- Consists of Union FM & Union MOS (Rev) & all State Ministers of Finance
- Quorum is 50% of total members, decisions by majority of 75% of weighted votes of members present & voting (1/3rd weighted votes for Centre & 2/3rd for all States together)
- Changes in definitions, entries in List –I & II

- Authority for Centre to levy non-vatable Additional Tax – retained by origin State
- Compensation for loss of revenue to States for five years

Mahadayi: Karnataka bandh may hit life today

The Mahadayi water-sharing dispute has the states of Goa, Maharashtra and Karnataka vying for water from the Mahadayi river

River Mahadayi

- Mahadayi, the west-flowing inter-state river in the Western Ghats, takes birth in Degaon village, Khanapur taluk, Belagavi district.
- The river travels 35 km in Karnataka; 82 km in Goa before joining the Arabian Sea.
- The River Mahadayi is called Mandovi in Goa.
- Total catchment area 2,032 sq km. Catchment area in Karnataka 375 sq km

Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal (MWDT) Interim Order

- The tribunal, headed by J.N. Panchal, after hearing Karnataka and Goa and gives interim order on 28 July 2016
- Rejected Karnataka's plea for diversion of 7 tmcft of water from the river to the Malaprabha basin.
- Considerations in the Tribunal's order
- The ecological damage that the project may cause since the Mahadayi water is a key component in maintaining the ecological balance in a wildlife reserve on the Goa side
- Karnataka hadn't shown what would be the downstream effects at 3 km and 5 km of lifting the river and so "relief couldn't be granted."

- Given the enormous amount of water being transferred, the tribunal reasoned, there would be huge submersible pumps and specialised equipment that would be required.
- The tribunal said it “didn’t have confidence” that Karnataka would rely on temporary structures and equipment – as it has claimed – to effect this transfer of water into the Malaprabha basin
- Karnataka government had also not obtained environmental and wildlife clearances to execute the project.
- Karnataka’s contention that 108.72 tmcft of water is available at 75 per cent dependability in the Mahadayi basin wasn’t cogent.
- Karnataka has relied on the data from the Central Water Commission that is seriously contested by Goa.
- The tribunal’s interim order signals a halt to Karnataka’s Kalasa-Banduri Nala project which is intended to utilise water from the Mahadayi river for drinking purposes in Hubballi-Dharwad and the districts of Belagavi and Gadag.
- **What is Kalasa-Banduri Nala project?**
- The Kalasa-Banduri Nala is a project undertaken by the Government of Karnataka to improve drinking water supply to the Districts of Belagavi, Dharwad and Gadag.
- It involves building across Kalasa and Banduri, two tributaries of the Mahadayi river to divert 7.56 TMC of water to the Malaprabha river, which supplies the drinking water needs of the said 3 districts, i.e., Dharwad, Belagavi and Gadag.
- It is canal project undertaken by Karnataka to divert water from the Mahadayi river to the Malaprabha
- crucial to meet the drinking water needs of the twin towns, Hubli and Dharwad, that aim to be the first in India to supply water round-the-clock to all its citizens.

Dispute

- Kalasa-Banduri project planned in 1989; Goa raised objection to it.
- Goa filed a complaint seeking setting up of a tribunal in July 2002.
- The Ministry of Water Resources kept the clearance given to Karnataka in abeyance in September 2002.
- Goa moved the Supreme Court in 2006 seeking constitution of a tribunal, withdrawing approval for any work in the basin.
- Mahadayi (Mandovi) is a water deficit basin and water diversion could impact the environment.
- The Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal was set up on 22.11.2010.

Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor to be delayed

The much delayed completion of work on India’s first Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam is likely to be completed only by March 2017

What is PFBR?

- The Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor is a 500 MWe fast breeder nuclear reactor presently being constructed at the Madras Atomic Power Station in Kalpakkam, India
- The Kalpakkam PFBR is using uranium-238 not thorium, to breed new fissile material, in a sodium-cooled fast reactor design
- Construction is over and the owner/operator, Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut

Nigam Limited (BHAVINI), is waiting clearance from the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)

DAE is implementing this project which is expected to add 500 MWe to the Southern grid by the year 2017

Background

Dept of Atomic Energy(DAE) has been pursuing the following 3-stage Nuclear Power Programme :

- Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)
 - The first stage comprises setting up of Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) and associated fuel cycle facilities.
 - PHWRs use natural uranium as fuel and heavy water as moderator and coolant
 - The first stage is already in commercial domain.
 - The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL), a public sector undertaking of DAE, is responsible for the design, construction and operation of nuclear power reactors
 - Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs)
 - The second stage envisages setting up of Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs) backed by reprocessing plants and plutonium-based fuel fabrication plants.
 - A breeder reactor is one that breeds more material for a nuclear fission reaction than it consumes.
 - Plutonium is produced by irradiation of uranium-238
 - The prototype FBR is fuelled by a blend of plutonium and uranium oxide, called MOX fuel.
 - The Fast Breeder Programme is in the technology demonstration stage.
 - A new public sector undertaking Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam (BHAVINI) of
- DAE is implementing this project which is expected to add 500 MWe to the Southern grid by the year 2017
 - The tariff of electricity produced from PFBR is comparable with that of other contemporary base-load electricity generating technologies like coal based thermal power stations in the region
 - Advanced Heavy Water Reactor (AHWR)
 - The third stage is based on the thorium-uranium-233 cycle.
 - Uranium-233 is obtained by irradiation of thorium
 - India has one of the largest reserves of thorium
 - The ongoing development of 300 MWe Advanced Heavy Water Reactor (AHWR) at BARC aims at developing expertise for thorium utilization and demonstrating advanced safety concepts.
 - Thorium-based systems can be set up on commercial scale only after a large capacity based on fast breeder reactors, is built up.

With thrust on innovation, scheme to INSPIRE young scientists to be renamed

The INSPIRE Awards (Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research), as they are now called, will be rechristened MANAK (Million Minds Augmenting National Aspirations and Knowledge) from this year

What is Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research (INSPIRE)?

- This scheme offers 10,000 scholarships every year @ Rs.80,000/- each for undertaking Bachelor and Masters level education in the Natural & Basic sciences

- Since the scheme's inception in 2010, around 13.85 lakh students have been funded according to the INSPIRE website
- The awards component – directed at school children between 10-15 years – consists of selecting 100,000 school students with the best science ideas.
- Each of the 100,000 will be given Rs. 5,000 each to build a model or prototype that showcases a practical use of technology or science
- emphasised science-fair models rather than take students through the innovation chain
- the Political Council, which authorises a nuclear attack if need be.
- The Political Council is chaired by the Prime Minister and advised by the Executive Council
- This mechanism is meant to ensure that the nuclear weapons are under civilian control. A Command and Control (C2) mechanism prevents their accidental or unauthorised use
- The NCA's directives are executed by the Strategic Forces Command headed by a Commander-in-Chief of the rank of Air Marshal

What is New?

- best ideas would be worked upon by professional engineers and designers and taken up for potential commercial development with intellectual property rights for the children
- the top 60 ideas will also get incubation support...professionals will work on these and the children will share the intellectual property

Strategic Forces Command exempted from RTI ambit

The Strategic Forces Command, which forms part of the National Command Authority (NCA), has been added to the Second Schedule of the Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005, which exempts security and intelligence establishments from its purview.

Strategy Forces Command was being brought under sub-section (2) of Section 24 of the RTI

What is National Command Authority(NCA) ?

- The NCA's Executive Council, chaired by the National Security Adviser, gives inputs to

What is Section 24 of RTI Act?

- Section 24 says the Act is not applicable to the intelligence and security organisations specified in the Second Schedule.
- The only exception is for information on allegations of corruption and human rights violations
- Among the organisations included in the Second Schedule are the Intelligence Bureau, the Research and Analysis Wing of the Cabinet Secretariat, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, the Special Frontier Force, the Border Security Force, the National Security Guards and the Assam Rifles.

What is Section 8 of RTI Act?

- Section 8 deals with exemption from disclosure of information
- It says that there shall be no obligation to provide any citizen information, disclosure of which will affect
- India's sovereignty and integrity
- the security

- strategic, scientific or economic interests of the state
- relations with foreign States or
- will lead to incitement of an offence.

Saving the Tiger

- The number of wild tigers has gone up globally by 22 per cent to 3,890, from the earlier 2010 estimate of 3200, based on the best available data, according to the World Wildlife Fund and the Global Tiger Forum (GTF)
- WWF Tx2 Tiger Initiative
- According to the WWF, hundred years ago there were 100,000 wild tigers. By 2010, there were as few as 3,200.
- In 2010, tiger range governments agreed to act to double wild tigers by the next Chinese Year of the Tiger in 2022. This goal is known as Tx2.
- the manner in which tigers have dwindled over the past century, with 97% of their population dying out, shows how much work remains to be done
- Statistics from TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, show that a minimum of 1,590 tigers were seized by law enforcement officials between January 2000 and April 2014, which feed a multi-billion dollar illegal wildlife trade.
- 29 July, International Tiger Day

India

- As per latest official count, India is home to 2,226 tigers, representing 70 per cent of the global population of the endangered big cat species
- increase in the budget for Project Tiger from Rs 185 crore to Rs 380 crore, adding that,

with the 60:40 participation of states, this increase translates to Rs 500 crore in one year for tiger protection

Background

- The Government of India has taken a pioneering initiative for conserving its national animal, the tiger, by launching the 'Project Tiger' in 1973.
- From 9 tiger reserves since its formative years, the Project Tiger coverage has increased to 47 at present, spread out in 18 of our tiger range states
- The tiger reserves are constituted on a core/buffer strategy.
- The core areas have the legal status of a national park or a sanctuary, whereas the buffer or peripheral areas are a mix of forest and non-forest land, managed as a multiple use area.
- The Project Tiger aims to foster an exclusive tiger agenda in the core areas of tiger reserves, with an inclusive people oriented agenda in the buffer.
- Project Tiger is an ongoing Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change providing central assistance to the tiger States for tiger conservation in designated tiger reserves.
- The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is a statutory body of the Ministry, with an overarching supervisory / coordination role, performing functions as provided in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Wild tigers are found in 18 States in India
- The All India tiger estimation is carried out once in every four years. Based on the Tiger Task Force approval, a refined double sampling method using camera traps in a

statistical framework was first used in 2006 country level tiger assessment.

Why save Tigers? Does spending crores worth the money?

- Tigers are terminal consumers in the ecological food pyramid, and their conservation results in the conservation of all trophic levels in an ecosystem
- The allocation for Project Tiger during the XII Plan is Rs 1245 crore. The expenditure during 2012-13 and 2013-14 are Rs 163.87 crore and 169.48 crore respectively

Challenges in Tiger conservation

- protection against poaching,
- fragmentation of habitat,
- securing inviolate space for tiger to facilitate its social dynamics,
- addressing tiger-human interface,
- restoration of corridors and eliciting public support of local people by providing ecologically sustainable options.

