



CENTRE FOR AMBITION
(An Institute for Civil Services)

BACKGROUNDER JUNE 2016

Skill India Mission

According to government estimates, more than 1.04 Crore youth have been trained under the Skill India Mission in the year 2015-16 which is 36.8% higher than the previous year's recorded data.

Key facts:

- In the current arrangement, 60% of the trainings are directly under Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship while 40% are across other Central Ministries.
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), which was launched on July 15, 2015, alone has witnessed more than 20 lakh people, of which 40% are women candidates, being trained in their choice of skills.

About the National Skill Development Mission:

- The National Skill Development Mission aims to provide a strong institutional framework at the Centre and States for implementation of skilling activities in the country.
- The Mission will have a three-tiered, high powered decision making structure. At its apex, the Mission's Governing Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, will provide overall guidance and policy direction.
- The Steering Committee, chaired by Minister in Charge of Skill Development, will review the Mission's activities in line with the direction set by the Governing Council. The Mission Directorate, with Secretary, Skill Development as Mission Director, will ensure implementation, coordination and convergence of skilling activities across Central Ministries/Departments and State Governments.
- The Mission will also run select sub-missions in high priority areas.
- The National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the Directorate of Training will function under the overall guidance of the Mission.
- The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) provides a natural home

for the Mission, organically linking all three decision making levels and facilitating linkages to all Central Ministries/Departments and State Governments.

India signs agreement with IBRD

The Government of India and the World Bank have signed a US\$ 9.2 million grant agreement under the World Bank-Global Environment Facility (GEF) Program for the Efficient and Sustainable City Bus Service Project to improve the efficiency and attractiveness of bus services in select Indian cities.

Key facts:

- The project will demonstrate low cost high impact initiatives in efficient bus operations by focusing on modernizing city bus services through modern depots for improving the maintenance of buses; introducing modern Intelligent Transport Systems and Management Information Systems for better planning and management of operations; and by providing technical support to vehicles and drivers for better fuel efficiency, among others.
- Demonstration cities where the various initiatives for improving city bus services will be undertaken are Mira Bhayandar in Maharashtra, Chandigarh, Jaipur, and Bhopal.
- This project will complement the Government of India's Bus Funding Scheme launched to promote public transport by supporting cities to modernize their bus services.
- The initiatives for modernizing city bus transport services under this project will also help select cities reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) while offering practical transport solutions.
- The project is designed to specifically focus on identifying regulatory, institutional and fiscal constraints to operation of sustainable city bus services and address the weak capacity in the urban bus sector and facilitate the development of a vibrant urban bus sector community through the development of a comprehensive capacity building program.

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Background:

The World Bank Group-Global Environment Facility (GEF) directly support actions to combat major environmental issues such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, polluted international waters, land degradation and desertification, and persistent organic pollutants, as well as stimulate green growth. The program supports an active portfolio of over 200 investments globally.

Shri Bhim Sain Bassi takes over as Member UPSC

Shri Bhim Sain Bassi recently took the Oath of Office and Secrecy as Member, Union Public Service Commission. The Oath was administered by Shri Deepak Gupta, Chairman, UPSC.

Key facts:

- Members of UPSC are appointed by the President.
- Under the Constitution, a member of the UPSC can have a maximum tenure of six years or till he attains the age of 65 years.
- The members of the commission are mainly experts drawn from various streams which include the IAS, IPS and other all India services.
- A member can submit his resignation at any time to the President of India.
- He may be removed from his office by the President of India on the ground of misbehaviour (only if an inquiry of such misbehaviour is made and upheld by Supreme Court) or if he is adjudged insolvent.
- A member may also be removed if he engages during his term of office in any paid employment outside the duties of his office, or in the opinion of the President unfit to continue in office by reason of infirmity of mind or body.

‘Don’t make binding concessions for APEC’

Union commerce ministry has conveyed to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) its concern over demands that India offer the concessions in lieu of consideration for APEC membership. It has cautioned the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) against ceding to demands that India offer binding concessions to secure an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) membership.

What is being demanded?

- An agreement to reduce industrial tariffs to very low levels or eliminate them over a specified time period.
- An early deal on a Bilateral Investment Treaty with the U.S.
- Participation in negotiations for a proposed Investment Facilitation Agreement at the World Trade Organisation-level.

Background:

India has applied for APEC membership in 1991 on the basis of its geographic location, potential size of the economy and degree of trade interaction with the Asia-Pacific. However, at the fifth APEC Leaders’ meeting in Vancouver in 1997, a decision was taken to place a ten-year moratorium on expanding membership, which continues informally till date.

Way ahead:

India is engaging with APEC member countries to develop a consensus on lifting the informal moratorium on accepting new members and to actively push for India’s candidature for membership of APEC.

Benefits for India:

- Membership in APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) would provide India a constructive forum to glean insight from other Asian countries that have already taken significant steps to advance their economies.
- India is also striving for major economic reforms to open India’s markets, improve trade volume, and facilitate its growing population’s need for continued job growth. Hence, APEC can be the right platform.

APEC:

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a regional economic forum established in 1989 to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific. It aims to create greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and secure growth and by accelerating regional economic integration.

Functions:

- APEC works to help all residents of the Asia-Pacific participate in the growing economy.
- APEC projects provide digital skills training for rural communities and help indigenous women export their products abroad.
- Recognizing the impacts of climate change, APEC members also implement initiatives to increase energy efficiency and promote sustainable management of forest and marine resources.
- The forum adapts to allow members to deal with important new challenges to the region's economic well-being. This includes ensuring disaster resilience, planning for pandemics, and addressing terrorism.

Members:

- APEC's 21 member economies are Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; People's Republic of China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; The Philippines; The Russian Federation; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; United States of America; Viet Nam.
- APEC Members account for approximately 40% of the world's population, approximately 54% of the world's gross domestic product and about 44% of world trade.

In APEC, all economies have an equal say and decision-making is reached by consensus. There are no binding commitments or treaty obligations. Commitments are undertaken on a voluntary basis and capacity building projects help members implement APEC initiatives. The APEC process is supported by a permanent secretariat based in Singapore.

Facts for Prelims:

- A three day '**100 Smart Cities India**' Conference was recently inaugurated by the Minister of Urban Development Shri M.Venkaiiah Naidu in Berlin, Germany. Leading global companies, policy makers and experts are attending the conference being organized to highlight investment opportunities in smart city development set in motion in India.
- The Prime Minister has approved the proposal of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for enhancing the **age of superannuation of all doctors of the Central Health Service to 65**

years with effect from 31st May 2016. This will enable the Government to retain experienced doctors for a longer period, and to provide better services in its public health facilities, particularly to the poorest, who are entirely dependent on public facilities.

- The Centre has **achieved the fiscal deficit target of 3.9% of GDP in FY16**. The Centre's fiscal deficit stood at Rs 5.32 lakh crore or 3.9% of GDP in FY16, marginally lower than the revised estimate (RE) of Rs 5.35 lakh crore. This was the second year in a row that the government met the fiscal deficit target but it did not have to significantly cut spending to meet the projections. Fiscal deficit is the difference between the government's total spending and receipts, which includes tax, non-tax revenue as well as capital receipts such as proceeds from disinvestment.

Government firm on its rules for judges' selection

The government has decided to confront the higher judiciary by sticking to its proposed Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) that will guide the Supreme Court collegium on the appointment of judges to the apex court and high courts, notwithstanding the top judiciary rejecting almost all major suggestions made by the Centre.

Background:

Chief Justice of India (CJI) T S Thakur had sent back the MoP recently with a point-by-point rejection of the Centre's proposals. The government has referred the matter to attorney general (AG) Mukul Rohatgi and asked him to prepare a point-by-point rebuttal and give reasons why the collegium's rejection is not acceptable.

The SC had, after striking down the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act last year, agreed on framing of the MoP by the Centre in consultation with the collegium.

Proposed contentious rules in MoC:

- 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

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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.

Way ahead:

The government should send a response to the apex court as early as possible to avoid any further delay in filling vacancies in HCs. There are over 40% judges' positions lying vacant in HCs.

Einstein ring

Scientists have discovered an unusual astronomical object: an Einstein ring. These phenomena, predicted by Einstein's theory of **General Relativity**, are quite rare but scientifically interesting.

- The interest is sufficiently strong that this object has been given its own name: the "The Canarias Einstein ring".

What is it?

An Einstein ring is a distorted image of a very distant galaxy, which is termed "the source". The distortion is produced by the bending of the light rays from the source due to a massive galaxy, termed "the lens", lying between it and the observer. The strong gravitational field produced by the lens galaxy distorts the structure of space-time in its neighbourhood, and this does not only attract objects which have a mass, but also bends the paths of light. When the two galaxies are exactly aligned, the image of the more distant galaxy is converted into an almost perfect circle which surrounds the lens galaxy. The irregularities in the circle are due to asymmetries in the source galaxy.

India's NIIT to train 50,000 China students on 'Big Data'

The National Institute of Information Technology (NIIT) located in new industrial park in southwest China is gearing up to train 50,000 Chinese students over the next five years on Big Data.

Background:

The training contract was signed on the sidelines of China's 'Big Data' conference and exhibition at Guiyang recently. An agreement was also sealed with the provincial government to establish a Big Data Talent Research Centre in Guiyang "to enhance innovation and research".

What is Big Data?

'Big Data' refers to a massive accumulation of information, siphoned from multiple sources and domains, which can then be analysed to make informed decisions.

- It is an all-encompassing term for any collection of data sets so large and complex that it becomes difficult to process using traditional data processing applications. Big data "size" is a constantly moving target.
- It requires exceptional technologies to efficiently process large quantities of data within tolerable elapsed times.
- The use and adoption of Big Data within governmental processes is beneficial and allows efficiencies in terms of cost, productivity, and innovation.

Proposal to hire private sector talent in PSUs wins approval

The Cabinet has given an 'ex-post facto' approval for amending public sector recruitment rules to allow the selection of candidates from the private sector and state public sector enterprises.

Details:

The nod is for the selection of candidates from state public sector enterprises and the private sector as "non-internal candidates for a period of five years for appointment in Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs)."

Who will benefit?

The good talent at the top of the private sector will not migrate. Those not in the top rungs may see an advantage in PSUs.

Concerns:

The move is expected to bring in greater efficiency but there are some concerns that need to be addressed. There

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must be careful selection so that those who have not been able to make it in the private sector don't opt for a government job just because of higher job security. The selection process must be shielded from politics which is something difficult to do in India.

Govt. mulls 'outcome-linked' incentive for NIIF chief

The government is considering an 'outcome-linked' payment package as part of incentives for the recruitment of a chief executive of India's first sovereign wealth fund, the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF).

- However, negotiations on the incentive payment, which will be paid for every \$10 billion the fund succeeds in raising, are still on.

Background:

The Cabinet had given its approval in July for setting up NIIF. The Finance Ministry, in October 2015, constituted a search-cum-selection committee for selecting a chief executive. The governing council of the fund, chaired by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, had decided to complete the selection process by January-end.

About NIIF:

National Infrastructure and Investment Fund (NIIF) was set up as a trust with a corpus of Rs 20,000 crore.

- The Fund aims to attract investment from both domestic and international sources.
- The government's contribution would be limited to 49% of the subscribed capital.
- The government will seek participation from strategic investors such as sovereign fund, quasi sovereign funds and multilateral or bilateral investors, which can help leverage this fund to many times.
- Cash-rich PSUs, pension funds, provident funds, National Small Saving Fund will be able to pick up stake in the fund.
- The objective of NIIF is to maximize economic impact mainly through infrastructure development in commercially viable projects, both greenfield and brownfield, including stalled projects, NIIF would solicit equity participation from strategic anchor partners.
- Sovereign funds and pension funds from a number of countries, including the U.K., UAE, Russia and

Singapore, have already expressed interest in investing in NIIF. India and the UAE signed a pact to mobilise up to \$75 billion long-term investment.

Facts for Prelims:

- The Supreme Court, in its recent verdict, has observed that **mere possession of assets disproportionate to known sources of income is not an offence** and a person can be held guilty only if it is proved that the assets were acquired through **illegal** means.
- The world's **longest tunnel** has officially been opened. The 57-kilometre (35-mile) **Gothard Base Tunnel (GBT)** is longest tunnel now. It runs from Erstfeld in the central canton of Uri, to Bodio in the southern Ticino canton. With its official opening, the GBT has surpassed Japan's 53.9-kilometre Seikan tunnel as the world's longest train tunnel. The 50.5-kilometre Channel Tunnel that links England and France has been bumped into third place.
- The government has set up the **Financial Sector Search and Recruitment Committee** headed by cabinet secretary P K Sinha to decide on members and heads of financial regulatory agencies. The head of the regulatory body, whose members are to be selected, will be a special invitee to the panel.
- The Cabinet has approved the decision that the chairperson and members of the public enterprises selection board (**PESB**) should hold office for a period of three years from the assumption of charge or until they turn 65 years of age, whichever is earlier.
- The Cabinet has approved the signing of three memoranda of understanding (MoU) between India and Qatar for cooperation in skill development and 'recognition of qualifications.' It will strengthen ties in the field of tourism, and provide cooperation and mutual assistance in matters related to customs.
- Cabinet has approved the MoU between the United States of America and India to enhance cooperation in wildlife conservation and combating **wildlife trafficking**. The pact seeks cooperation in various areas including wildlife forensics and conservation genetics which is useful in species conservation efforts and better scientific evidence collection in wildlife crimes leading to better enforcement. Both the countries, under the pact, will also cooperate in the area of natural world heritage conservation which includes facilitating the institutional capacity of the

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existing UNESCO Category -2 centre at Wildlife Institute of India. The pact also seeks cooperation in nature interpretation and conservation awareness which involves use of information technology in strengthening interface of forest managers with the people to sensitise people.

- The Union Cabinet has approved the setting up of India Post's payments bank at a total project cost of Rs 800 crore. The India Post Payment Bank (IPPB), which will generate employment opportunities for about 3,500 skilled banking professionals, will set up 650 branches and 5,000 ATMs across the country. The total fund requirement for the proposal is Rs 800 crore, which will be split up as Rs 400 crore equity and Rs 400 crore as grant. IPPB will start operations in March 2017 in about 50 districts and will cover the entire country by the end of FY 2018-19.

Hindus from Pakistan, Bangladesh will get to claim Indian citizenship

The home ministry has prepared draft amendments to citizenship law that will exempt minority citizens of Pakistan and Bangladesh who have come to India out of fear of religious persecution from being tagged as "illegal migrants".

Details:

- The changes to the **Citizenship Act, 1955**, will give a legal path to the refugees to remain in India and even claim citizenship.
- As per the proposed amendments to Citizenship Act, **December 31, 2014 will be designated as the cut-off date for refugees** to be eligible to apply for citizenship.
- Also, Section 2 (1)(b) of the Act will have a provision that will exempt such citizens from being deemed "illegal migrants".
- Besides, the government is also looking at simultaneous amendments to the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 and Foreigners Act, 1946.

Way ahead:

The draft will shortly be sent to the cabinet for its approval.

Implications:

The move stands to benefit nearly 2 lakh Hindus from Pakistan and Bangladesh who often complain they are

treated as "second-class citizens" and are vulnerable to violence. They have also often found themselves at the receiving end of blasphemy laws.

PM Modi releases country's first National Disaster Management Plan

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently released the **National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP)**. This is the **first ever national plan prepared in the country**.

Key facts:

- The plan **aims to make India disaster resilient and reduces loss of lives**.
- The plan is based on the **four priority themes of the "Sendai Framework,"** namely: understanding disaster risk, improving disaster risk governance, investing in disaster risk reduction (through structural and non-structural measures) and disaster preparedness, early warning and building back better in the aftermath of a disaster.
- The plan covers all phases of disaster management: Prevention, Mitigation, Response and Recovery.
- It provides for **horizontal and vertical integration among all the agencies** and departments of the Government.
- The plan also spells out the **roles and responsibilities of all levels of Government right up to Panchayat and Urban local body level in a matrix format**.
- The plan has a regional approach, which will be beneficial not only for disaster management but also for development planning.
- It is designed in such a way that it can be implemented in a scalable manner in all phases of disaster management.
- It also identifies major activities such as early warning, information dissemination, medical care, fuel, transportation, search and rescue, evacuation, etc. to serve as a checklist for agencies responding to a disaster.
- It also provides a generalised framework for recovery and offers flexibility to assess a situation and build back better.

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- To prepare communities to cope with disasters, it emphasises on a greater need for Information, Education and Communication activities.
- It even calls for **ethical guidelines for the media for coverage of disasters as well as self-regulation**. The plan wants the media to respect the dignity and privacy of affected people.
- Also, in a move aimed to stop rumours and spread of panic, the plan directed the authorities to schedule regular media briefing (depending on the severity of the disaster) and designate a **nodal officer for interacting with the media on behalf of the government**.

India joins The Hague Code of Conduct

India has joined The **Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCoC)**.

- India's joining the Code signals its readiness to further strengthen the global non-proliferation regimes.
- The government has also made it clear that this joining will not have any impact on the national security as well as country's missile programmes.

About HCoC:

HCoC is a global ballistic missile proliferation regime established in 2002. It is a **voluntary legally non-binding multilateral body** aimed at preventing the spread of ballistic missiles that can deliver weapons of mass destruction.

- It is the **only multilateral code in the area of disarmament** which has been adopted over the last years. It is the only normative instrument to verify the spread of ballistic missiles.
- The HCoC **does not ban ballistic missiles**, but it does call for restraint in their production, testing, and export. Presently, there are 137 signatories.
- The Code is meant to **supplement the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)** but its membership is not restricted. Under the Code, States make politically binding commitments to curb the proliferation of WMD-capable ballistic missiles and to exercise maximum restraint in developing, testing, and deploying such missiles.
- Given the similarities between the technologies used in ballistic missiles and civilian rockets, the Code also introduces transparency measures such as annual declarations and pre-launch notifications

regarding ballistic missile and space launch programs.

- **Austria is the administrative Central Contact of the Code**, coordinating the information exchange under HCoC.

Crucial meetings await Parrikar on sidelines of Shangri-La Dialogue

Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar is in Singapore to attend the 15th **Shangri-La Dialogue**. On the sidelines, he will also be holding crucial meetings with his counterparts from France and the U.S.

- The Shangri-La Dialogue **hosted annually by independent think-tank International Institute for Strategic Studies**, is being held from June 3-5.
- It is attended by defence ministers and military chiefs of 28 Asia-Pacific countries besides those of other countries.

What is the Shangri-La Dialogue?

The dialogue, also called as IISS Asia Security Summit, was launched in 2002 by British think tank the International Institute for Strategic Studies and the Singaporean government. This annual dialogue brings together defence ministers and military chiefs from 28 Asia-Pacific countries to talk about security in the region. It gets its name from the location of the meeting, the Shangri-La hotel in Singapore.

Why is the Shangri-La Dialogue important?

- The dialogue gathers military representatives from some of the world's most powerful countries to discuss pressing and significant defence and security issues.
- The meeting is a chance for defence ministers, military chiefs and high-ranking defence officials to hold bilateral meetings on its sidelines.
- It is also attended by legislators, academic experts, journalists and business delegates from around the globe, making it a vehicle for public policy development and discussions on defence and security in the Asia-Pacific.

Singapore Arbitration Centre to open India office

The Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) is all set to establish a **representative office at the**

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Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City) to resolve international commercial disputes. **Key facts:**

Background:

SIAC has signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with Gujarat International Finance Tec-City Company Limited (GIFTCL) and GIFT SEZ Limited (GIFT SEZ).

Details:

- SIAC will establish a representative office at GIFT City to promote its international arbitration services to Indian users. Indian parties are among the top five foreign users of SIAC in the last five years. It was the top foreign user of SIAC in 2013 and 2015.
 - As per the terms of the agreement, GIFTCL, GIFT SEZ and SIAC will collaborate to promote the use of arbitration, mediation and other dispute resolution mechanisms, including the innovative ‘**Arb-Med-Arb**’ service offered by the SIAC and the Singapore International Mediation Centre (SIMC).
- According to the RBI, the policy should elucidate the strategy containing an appropriate approach to combat cyber threats given the level of complexity of business and acceptable levels of risk.
 - The policy would also include setting up an adaptive incident response, management and recovery framework to deal with adverse incidents/ disruptions, if and when they occur.
 - Banks have also been asked to formulate a Cyber Crisis Management Plan (CCMP) which should be a part of the overall board-approved strategy.
 - According to the central bank, CCMP should address the following four aspects—Detection, Response, Recovery and Containment.
 - The regulator has emphasised that the cyber security policy should be distinct and separate from the broader IT policy/IS Security policy so that it can highlight the risks from cyber threats and the measures to address or mitigate these risks.

What is IAC?

An international arbitration centre or IAC is a centre where disputes arising out of commercial agreements from sectors like insurance, shipping, construction, private equity and other trades are handled. Arbitration is different from court litigation and is typically less time-consuming as it is done in private between the lawyers representing the aggrieved parties.

Arb-Med-Arb:

Arb-Med-Arb is a process where a dispute is first referred to arbitration before mediation is attempted. If parties are able to settle their dispute through mediation, their mediated settlement may be recorded as a consent award. The consent award is generally accepted as an arbitral award, and, subject to any local legislation and/or requirements, is generally enforceable in approximately 150 countries under the New York Convention. If parties are unable to settle their dispute through mediation, they may continue with the arbitration proceedings.

Reserve Bank tells lenders to expedite cyber security policy

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has asked the commercial banks to ‘immediately’ put in place a cyber security policy, duly approved by the board, in the wake of increasing cyber attacks in the financial system.

Why this is necessary?

With the use of technology by banks gaining momentum, the number, frequency and impact of cyber incidents/ attacks has increased manifold in the recent past.

Facts for Prelims:

- Using the **Very Large Array (VLA), located in New Mexico, US**, an international team of scientists has detected a faint signal emitted by hydrogen gas in a galaxy more than five billion light years away. This incredible measurement is almost **double the previous record of distance**. According to scientists, these signals would have begun their journey before our planet even existed. As the **most abundant element in the universe**, and the raw fuel for creating stars, hydrogen is **used by radio astronomers to detect and understand the makeup of other galaxies**.
- For the road project of widening of the Madhya Pradesh/Maharashtra border – Mansar section of the existing NH-7 which cuts across the tiger corridor in the state of Maharashtra, NHAI has approved Rs. 186 Crore for wildlife mitigation measures to take care of any possible adverse impact on the **tiger population in the Pench – Kanha Tiger Corridor**. This is only a part of the amount to be spent for the purpose. As per the recommendations

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of the Wildlife Institute of India and the National Tiger Conservation Authority, also endorsed by the Hon'ble High Court at Nagpur, NHAI is providing elaborate mitigation measures on the stretch. The measures include three elevated sections of 750m, 750m and 300m length, so that wildlife can move across the highway alignment following their natural paths. Besides these, 6 other wildlife crossings of different dimensions are also being provided.

- Mega Luxury Cruise Vessel **“M.V.Ovation of the Seas”** has reached the Cochin Port for a 2-day stop-over in its circuit of Dubai-Muscat-Kochi-Penang-Singapore. “M.V.Ovation of the Seas” is a brand new ship of the Royal Caribbean Lines which was floated out in April this year. It is 348 m long and is in the 2nd largest class of cruise vessel.
- **V.O. Chidambaranar Port, Tamil Nadu has bagged National Award for Excellence in Cost Management for the year 2015 from The Institute of Cost Accountants of India under the category of Public Service Sector-Small.** The port participated in the 13th National Awards for Excellence in Cost Management-2015, organised by The Institute of Cost Accountants of India. This is the third time this port is receiving the award, the earlier years being 2008 and 2012. The award has been given for exemplary performance of V.O. Chidambaranar Port towards optimization of manpower, savings in electricity, implementation of Solar Energy Systems, reduction of overall cost of handling by mechanization and improvising efficiency and logistics support. **The Institute of Cost Accountants of India, a statutory body under an Act of Parliament,** presents awards for excellence in Cost Management to promote and recognize Cost Management practices in the Corporate Sector.
- The Home Ministry has signed an agreement to join the **global terror database maintained by the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) of the U.S.** The U.S. has already finalised such agreements with 30 countries and the Terrorist Screening Center has details of 11,000 terror suspects on its database, including nationality, date of birth, photos, fingerprints (if any) and passport number. Under this arrangement, both sides will give each other access to terrorism screening information through designated contact points, subject to domestic laws and regulations.

Good country index

In the **‘Good Country’ 2015 index, Sweden has been voted as the best country in the world when it comes to serving the interests of its people and contributing to the common good of humanity.**

- The index ranks a total of 163 countries taking 35 different UN and World Bank indices into account, including global contributions to science, culture, peace and security, climate change and health and equality.

Key facts:

- The top ten best countries included Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, the UK, Germany, Finland, Canada, France, Austria and New Zealand.
- **Libya was ranked as the least “good” country in the world.**
- **India figured at 70th position overall,** three places below China, with the best ranking (27th) in International peace and security and the worst (124th) in prosperity and equality category.
- India stood at 37th position in health and wellbeing and 62nd in science and technology, it was ranked 119th in culture, 106th in climate and 100th in world order.

About the index:

The **biannual index** was founded by Simon Anholt, a British government adviser whose aim is “to find ways of encouraging countries to collaborate and co-operate a lot more, and compete a bit less”.

- The Good Country Index is pretty simple: to measure what each country on earth contributes to the common good of humanity, and what it takes away, relative to its size.
- The index seeks to measure how countries contribute to the global good.
- In 2014, Ireland had topped the first Good Country Index, outranking 130 other countries.

Ordinance on enemy property promulgated for third time

The Centre has for the third time promulgated an ordinance related to enemy properties. The ordinance amends a nearly 50-year-old law to guard against claims

of succession or transfer of properties left by people who migrated to Pakistan and China after the wars.

Background:

The first ordinance was issued on January 1, and another one was issued on April 2. The promulgation of the ordinance for the third time was necessitated as **'The Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2016'**, to replace the ordinance, is pending in the Rajya Sabha and to give continuity to the second executive order issued in April.

The bill was passed by Lok Sabha on March 9. However, it could not get Rajya Sabha nod from where it was referred to a Select Committee. The Committee has recently submitted its report. An **ordinance lapses after 42 days from the day a session begins unless a bill to replace it is approved by Parliament.**

Enemy Properties Bill:

Enemy Properties Bill includes amendments to plug the loopholes of the Enemy Property Act, 1968. The amendments ensure that the enemy properties that have been vested in the Custodian remain so and do not revert to the enemy subject or enemy firm.

The amendments include:

- Once an enemy property is vested in the Custodian, it shall continue to be vested in him as enemy property irrespective of whether the enemy, enemy subject or enemy firm has ceased to be an enemy due to reasons such as death and others.
- The law of succession does not apply to enemy property. There cannot be transfer of any property vested in the Custodian by an enemy or enemy subject or enemy firm and that the Custodian shall preserve the enemy property till it is disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the Act.
- A new section has been inserted in the Bill to say that "the Custodian, may, after making such inquiry as he deems necessary, by order, declare that the property of the enemy or the enemy subject or the enemy firm described in the order, vests in him under this Act and issue a certificate to this effect and such certificate shall be the evidence of the facts stated therein".

Enemy properties act:

The Enemy Property Act was enacted in the year 1968. It provided for the continuous vesting of enemy property in the custodian. The **Union Government through**

the Custodian of Enemy Property for India is in possession of enemy properties spread across many states in the country.

- To ensure that the enemy property continues to vest in the Custodian, appropriate amendments were brought in by way of an Ordinance in the Enemy Property Act, 1968 by the then Government in 2010.
- However, the ordinance lapsed on 6 September 2010. Later on 22 July 2010, it was introduced in Lok Sabha in form of a Bill but was withdrawn and another bill with modified provisions was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 15 November, 2010. This bill was thereafter referred to the Standing Committee. However, the said bill could not be passed during the 15th term of the Lok Sabha and it lapsed.

Enemy properties:

In the wake of the Indo-Pak war of 1965 and 1971, there was migration of people from India to Pakistan. Under the Defence of India Rules framed under the Defence of India Act, the Government of India took over the properties and companies of such persons who had taken Pakistani nationality. These enemy properties were vested by the Union Government in the Custodian of Enemy Property for India.

After the 1965 war, India and Pakistan signed the Tashkent Declaration on 10 January 1966. The Tashkent Declaration inter alia included a clause, which said that the two countries would discuss the return of the property and assets taken over by either side in connection with the conflict. However, the Government of Pakistan disposed of all such properties in their country in the year 1971 itself.

WTO welcomes TFA proposal: Sitharaman

World Trade Organisation (WTO) Director General Roberto Azevedo has welcomed India's proposal for a Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) in Services.

Background:

The proposed TFA in Services envisages, among other things, easier temporary movement of skilled workers, to boost global services 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.

NASA finds 39 unreported sources of pollution

Using a new satellite-based method, NASA scientists have located 39 unreported and major **human-made sources of toxic sulphur dioxide emissions**.

Key facts:

- The unreported emission sources, found in the analysis of satellite data from 2005 to 2014, are clusters of coal-burning power plants, smelters, oil and gas operations – found notably in West Asia, but also in Mexico and parts of Russia.
- In addition, reported emissions from known sources in these regions were, in some cases, two to three times lower than satellite-based estimates.
- Altogether, unreported and under-reported sources account for about 12% of all human-made emissions of sulphur dioxide.

Sulphur dioxide is a known health hazard and cause of acid rain. Currently, sulphur dioxide-monitoring activities include the use of emission inventories that are derived from ground-based measurements and factors, such as fuel usage.

Citizens have right to safe water, say draft legislation

The proposed draft **National Water Framework Bill** promises to give every person the right to a minimum amount of “safe water”, while making the state “obliged” to “protect” and conserve water.

- The law is prepared by the Water Resources Ministry. The draft law is being proposed as a model legislation that can be adopted by states, **since water**

is in the jurisdiction of the state governments.

Details:

- The draft National Water Framework Bill says every person would be entitled to “water for life” that shall not be denied to anyone on the ground of inability to pay.
- The Bill defines this “water for life” as that basic requirement that is necessary for the “fundamental right of life of each human being, including drinking, cooking, bathing, sanitation, personal hygiene and related personal and domestic uses”. This would also include the additional requirement for women “for their special needs” and the water required by domestic livestock.
- This minimum water requirement would be determined by the “appropriate” governments from time to time.

Background:

There is a need for a broad national consensus on issues related to water. Divergences of policies on water are inevitable and acceptable at the level of states, but these need to be within reasonable limits set by this national consensus.

Facts for Prelims:

- Work on a **China-backed nuclear power plant in Karachi will shortly begin**. This move is expected ease power shortages in Pakistan’s port city. The reactor is supplied by the state-owned China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC). Known as **K1**, this is one of the 30 nuclear plants that China plans to establish by 2030 along its planned Silk Road. This will be the **second nuclear power project in Pakistan to use China’s ‘Hualong One’ technology**. CNNC is also promoting this technology in other countries such as **Algeria and Sudan**.
- Astronomers have produced the most detailed radio map yet of the atmosphere of Jupiter, **unveiling massive movement of ammonia gas** under the colourful bands, spots and whirling clouds visible to the naked eye. The planet’s thermal radio emissions are partially absorbed by ammonia gas. Based on the amount of absorption, the researchers could determine how much ammonia is present and at what depth. By studying these regions of the planet’s atmosphere, **astronomers hope to learn how global circulation and cloud formation are driven by Jupiter’s powerful internal heat**

source. These studies also will shed light on similar processes occurring on other giant planets in our solar system and on newly discovered giant exoplanets around distant stars.

- A team of scientists from Harvard University has created a unique “**bionic leaf**” that uses solar energy to split water molecules into oxygen and hydrogen, and hydrogen-eating bacteria to produce liquid fuels from CO₂. Dubbed “**bionic leaf 2.0,**” the new system can convert **solar energy to biomass with 10 percent efficiency** – a number far higher than the one per cent seen in the fastest growing plants. While the study shows the system can be used to generate usable fuels, its potential doesn’t end there. In many ways, the new system fulfills the promise of his “**artificial leaf**” which used solar power to split water and make hydrogen fuel. Scientists used a new **cobalt-phosphorous alloy catalyst for this experiment.**
- **Desert Eagle II**, which was the second in the series of bilateral exercises between Indian Air Force (IAF) and United Arab Emirates Air Force (UAE AF) was recently concluded. This was a ten-day air combat exercise in which the IAF and the UAE Air Force undertook air exercises from Al-Dhafra Air Base, Abu Dhabi.
- The **Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India** have signed an agreement for \$200 million new loan to upgrade 176 Kilometers of **State roads in State of Jharkhand.**
- Asia’s first ‘**Gyps Vulture Reintroduction Programme**’ was recently launched by Union Environment Minister Shri Prakash Javadekar. As part of this programme, the minister jointly released two Himalayan Griffons into the wild from the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre, Pinjore. The Himalayan Griffon is closely related to the critically endangered resident Gyps species of vultures but is not endangered. The **Himalayan vulture or Himalayan griffon vulture is an Old World vulture in the family Accipitridae. It is one of the two largest Old World vultures and true raptors. Himalayan griffons do not breed in the first three years, and hence juvenile birds of the species do not remain in breeding grounds to avoid competition. The species has been listed as Near Threatened by the IUCN. It is also found in Kazakhstan, China, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Thailand, Burma, Singapore and Cambodia.**

RBI, govt. make peace over appointment panel

In a departure from the past, government has asked the Cabinet Secretary to head the **search-cum-selection panel for the appointment of its Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank.** However, RBI has opposed the government’s move to have Cabinet Secretary P.K. Sinha as the head and has communicated its reservations. Following this a compromise has been worked out.

What’s the compromise?

Under the compromise, the RBI Governor will have a greater say in the short-listing of the names. However, technically, the Cabinet Secretary remains the head of the panel.

Practice so far:

As per the established practice, the interview panel for the appointment of deputy governors had always been headed by the RBI Governor.

Background:

The government had set up a Financial Sector Search and Recruitment Committee – headed by Mr. Sinha – to decide on the members and heads of financial sector regulators like the RBI, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA). The committee would have a permanent member from the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), while representatives from the Finance Ministry, an economist, and the head of the regulatory body whose members are to be selected will be special invitees.

About Deputy Governors of RBI:

- The RBI has four deputy governors and typically two are from the outside, of which traditionally one is a commercial banker and the other an economist. The two others are promoted from within the central bank’s ranks.
- A central bank Deputy Governor can be appointed for a term with a maximum of five years or till the age of 62, whichever is earlier.

Odisha wages a literary struggle to claim rasagulla as its own

The bitter contest over the Intellectual Property Rights to an iconic sweet, the ‘rasagulla’ has moved into a new phase with Odisha citing ‘literary evidence’ to buttress its claim over West Bengal.

Odisha's Department of Science and Technology has been poring over literary evidence and has decided to study it in depth, to reinforce the State's demand for a Geographical Indication for the famous cottage cheese balls in sugary gravy. Odia litterateurs say the sweet is found in many works well before 1868.

Background:

- A bitter-war broke out last year over the origins of the Rasgulla. The fight is between Odisha and West Bengal, with each one claiming ownership of rasagolla.
- Odisha has staked claim to have 'invented' years ago, the sweet associating it with a centuries old ritual of Lord Jagannath. West Bengal always thought of rasagolla as its own.

GI tag:

The GI tag is an indication which is definite to a geographical territory. It is used for agricultural, natural and manufactured goods. For a product to get GI tag, the goods need to be produced or processed or prepared in that region. It is also essential that the product has special quality or reputation.

IIT Madras researchers dissolve silver using glucose water

IIT Madras researchers have found that **silver can slowly dissolve in water if heated to about 70 degree C in the presence of glucose.**

- Like gold, **silver is a noble metal.** So far, it was supposed to be inert (resistant to chemical corrosion, especially to chemical reagents used in daily life).

Highlights of the study:

- The researchers observed that as much as 0.5 weight per cent of a silver plate can get dissolved in glucose water within a week.
- The study shows that silver atoms gets released from a plate in a simple, two-step mechanism — silver ions are first formed at the metal surface, which later form specific metal complexes with sugar. Atoms are highly reactive on the surface of the metal as they less connected and less bound and this allows the atoms to be released.
- Metal dissolution leads to corrosion of the plate and nanoscale pits get formed on the plate. Further dissolution occurs at the pits and as a result the pits get bigger, making a polished silvery metal appear

black. Under favourable conditions, up to 10% of the metal can get dissolved in 90 days.

- Dissolution of silver by glucose directly from the metallic state gets enhanced in the presence of ions such as carbonate and phosphates. The study found that enhancement of silver dissolution in glucose was about 10 and 7 times in the presence of 50 ppm of phosphate and carbonate respectively. But in the absence of glucose, phosphate and carbonate were found to have no significant effect on silver dissolution.

Significance of this study:

- This is helpful in studying the effect of metals in food and how toxic metals get into our food chain from soil, water and fertilizers. Silver foils are used to decorate sweets and often such foils are eaten along with the sweets. Silver vessels are also used for cooking.
- An offshoot of the study is that the method can be used for developing novel and green extraction processes for noble metals. In general, toxic chemicals such as cyanide are used for extracting silver. The newly developed method can extract silver effectively by a simple and green method. It does not require any harmful chemicals or high temperature or expensive set-up.

J&K militants use app to evade Army snooping

Indian intelligence agencies have found a new app called "Calculator" which is used by terrorists.

- This application is found on the smartphones of terrorists. It helps them remain in touch with their handlers in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) without being detected by the Army's technical surveillance.

Details:

The technology is based on the concept of '**cognitive digital radio**' that enables users to turn their smartphones into peer-to-peer, off-grid communication tools.

- The technology was first used by a U.S.-based company during Hurricane Katrina so that the affected residents could remain in touch with each other. Terror outfits have modified this technology and created the application "Calculator", which can be downloaded on smartphones attached to the off-air network created specifically for them.

- The network generates its own signal through proprietary ad hoc networking protocols and automatically coordinates with other units within range which enables users to send and get text messages, share their GPS locations on offline maps regardless of access to WiFi or cellular service.

What is Cognitive radio (CR)?

It is a form of wireless communication in which a transceiver can intelligently detect which communication channels are in use and which are not, and instantly move into vacant channels while avoiding occupied ones. This optimizes the use of available radio-frequency (RF) spectrum while minimizing interference to other users.

Govt to come out with updated IIP, WPI indices by year-end

Government is all set to come out with revised IIP and WPI indices by the end of this year with a new base year of 2011-12 in order to make them more representative of the changing economic scenario. Both IIP and WPI are due for revision.

- The National Statistical Commission has recommended to revise the base year of all economic indices every five years.

Key facts:

- As part of the revision, the basket of items and weightage assigned to different entries on the basis of which indices is computed will be updated. **The present indices of IIP and WPI have base year of 2004-05.**
- With the new series in place, both the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and Wholesale Price Index (WPI) will become more comparable with the GDP numbers than it is currently.
- Government had last revised these indices in 2011 with the base year of 2004-05.

Facts for Prelims:

- The Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has been conferred with **Amir Amanullah Khan Award**, Afghanistan's highest civilian honour. The Amir Amanullah Khan medal is highest civilian honor of Afghanistan. The award is named after the Afghan national hero, Amanullah Khan (Ghazi), who championed the cause of Afghanistan's freedom. He was the ruler of the Emirate of Afghanistan from 1919-1929 who led Afghanistan to independence. This award was instituted by the Afghanistan

government in 2006. Previous recipients include: US President George Bush, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, NATO General James Jones, former Afghan President spiritual leader Sibghatullah Mujaddedi, and Afghan Chief Justice (CJ) Abdul Salam Azimi.

PAC slams DoT, FinMin units on revenue loss to Govt

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has slammed telecom and finance Ministries for "inefficient functioning" of some units. PAC examined a CAG audit showing Rs 12,488 crore loss to exchequer due to under-reporting of revenue by six firms including Airtel, Vodafone and RCOM.

- PAC has observed that the lack of proper supervision of Controllers of Communications Accounts (CCAs) in Department of Telecom (DoT) and the Financial Wing in the Finance Ministry has "contributed to significant financial loss to the exchequer".

Background:

In its report, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) had said that Reliance Communications, Tata Tele, Vodafone, Airtel, Idea and Aircel under-reported their adjusted gross revenue by Rs 46,045.75 crore, leading to a loss of Rs 12,488.93 crore to the exchequer from 2006 to 2010.

The CAG had said adjustment of one-time entry fee paid by telecom firms, whose licences were quashed by the Supreme Court, deprived exchequer of Rs 5,476.3 crore.

Facts- Public Accounts Committee:

- The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is a committee of selected members of Parliament, constituted by the Parliament of India, for the **auditing of the expenditure of the Government of India.**
- The Committee is formed **every year** with strength of not more than 22 members of which **15 are from Lok Sabha and 7 from Rajya Sabha.**
- The **Chairman is appointed by the Speaker of Lok Sabha.** Since 1967, the chairman of the committee is selected from the opposition. Earlier, it was headed by a member of the ruling party.
- Its chief function is to **examine the audit report of Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)**