CURRENT AFFAIRS – OCTOBER 2017

POLITY, GOVERNANCE, NATIONAL AFFAIRS AND POLICIES

President Ram Nath Kovind has appointed new Governors to Tamil Nadu, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Assam and Meghalaya

Odisha government creating land bank for industrial allocation

EESL To Procure 10,000 Electric Vehicles From Tata Motors

Commission to Examine Sub Categorization of other Backward Classes

Why Exempt CBI from RTI, Asks Petition

Cleanest iconic place in the country

VAJRA Scheme: Government receives 260 applicants for visiting researcher programme

Tea board proposes Rs 100 crore package for Darjeeling estates

PM inaugurates Phase 1 of RO RO Ferry Service between Ghogha and Dahej

India’s First Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra for Skilling in Smart Cities inaugurated at Mandir Marg, New Delhi

Government sets up expert group for suggestions on artificial intelligence policy

BharatMala Project National Waterway-4

IWAI raises Rs660 crore through bonds

Universal social security plan

Paryatan Parv

A plan to stamp out animal TB

SANKALP & STRIVE Schemes to boost Skill India Mission

Call Swachh Bharat toilets ‘Izzat Ghar’: Centre to states

Boosting horticulture through remote sensing

Unprecedented community action in ‘Gram Samridhi Evam Swachhata Pakhwada’ from 1st to 15th October, 2017

Ministry of Railways may ask Finance Ministry to fund its share towards Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK)

CVC to develop Integrity Index of 25 Organizations

Raw Jute demand falls, Farmers sell crop below MSP

Start-up Programmes for entrepreneurs in Oil and Gas sector

Indian Railways to revise flexi-fares system on premium trains

NHAI to get power to speed up Bharatmala programme

International Conference on Green Initiatives & Railway Electrification

Phase 1 of Bharat Net project to be completed by December

Why finalisation of the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) for appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and the high courts is delayed – asks SC

Home Ministry eases Arms Rules to woo investments

India tops list of new TB cases in 2016: WHO Report

Scientists link new virus to kala-azar

Rajasthan passes bill increasing OBC quota to 26%

Centre eases norms for sewage plants

Do Not Deny Food To The Poor Due To Absence Of Aadhaar Says Center To States
Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) 30
Campaign on ‘women for women’: #IamThatWoman 31
SC criminalises sex with minor wife aged between 15 to 18 years 31
Bureau of Indian standards (BIS) Act 2016 brought into force 32
ACI-ASQ SurveyFive-judge statute Bench to decide on Aadhaar validity 32
Five-judge statute Bench to decide on Aadhaar validity 33
ISKCON’s Govardhan Eco Village wins Green Platinum Award 33
India inks MoC to send interns to Japan for training 34
Prime Minister dedicated first All India Institute of Ayurveda to nation 34
Center appoints Shri Dineshwar Sharma as its Representative in J&K 34
HRD Ministry pushes for cash-free campuses 35
APEDA to promote NE products in Bangladesh and Myanmar 35
Life term for government officials indulging in torture: Law CommissionPublic Finance Management System (PFMS) SC asks Centre to strike a balance on Rohingya issue 36
Public Finance Management System (PFMS) 37
SC asks Centre to strike a balance on Rohingya issue 38
BBBP Week Global 38
Wildlife Programme Conference held in New Delhi 39
India emerging as a leader among milk producing nations 39
SAATHI: EESL to provide powerloom equipment to small units 39
IISc & IIT Bombay among world’s top 200 for engineering 40
Cabinet approves MoU between India and Belarus for Cooperation in the field of Vocational Education and Training 41
Cabinet approves change of status for marine body IALA 42
Lawyers as Seniors: Supreme Court frames rules for itself, 24 High Courts 43
SC bans sale of crackers in Delhi 44
Telangana launches IoT, e-waste management policy 44
Sampoorna Bima Gram Yojana 45
India Water Week (IWW)-2017 46
APY subscribers to touch 1 crore by March 2018 46
Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) 47
WHO releases guidelines to address overweight and obesity in children 48
Passive euthanasia already a law, says govt. 49
Namami Gange Programme 50
Karnataka needs its own flag 51
Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan 51
China has pointed to an 1890 treaty between Sikkim and Tibet to bolster its claims to the Doklam plateau at the trijunction. 52
DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND ITS RELATED THINGS
Capacity building in dam safety areas ‘BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise - 2017’ 54
Government inks $65.5 Million Loan agreement with ADB to support Coastal Protection in Karnataka 54
BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise - 2017’ 54
Calamities displace 23 lakh every year in India 56
SECURITY AND RELATED ISSUES
Mitra Shakti 2017 56
Bi-annual Naval Commanders’ Conference
OPV Vikram: L&T handovers first defence vessel built in private shipyard to Coast Guard
INS Satpura, Kadmat participates in Passage Exercise in Japan
RUSSIAN TEAM IN VIZAG TO INSPECT DAMAGED SUBMARINE
INDRA 2017: First tri-services military exercise between India-Russia begins
INS kiltan
Sri Lankan Coast Guard commissions OPV SURAKSHA gifted by India
Navika Sagar Parikrama – Tarini Enters Fremantle
IAF show scorches Lucknow-Agra highway
INS Sukanya at Indonesia for Coordinated Patrol of IMBL
Centre plans new Integrated Check Posts
ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY
Graded plan to combat air pollution
Nepal, India to conduct first joint tiger count
Government launches wildlife action plan for next 15 years
SECURE Himalaya
CarbFix Project: World’s first negative emissions carbon-capture plant begins operations in Iceland
Pondicherry Shark, Red Sea Torpedo and Tentacled Butterfly Ray may have become extinct, fear scientists
Sawfish more threatened than tigers, say scientists
Pondicherry Shark, Red Sea Torpedo and Tentacled Butterfly Ray may have become extinct, fear scientists
Muddle over nod for GM mustard
Sawfish more threatened than tigers, say scientists
New species of large gecko discovered from Eastern Ghats
Turtle Sanctuary to be set up in Allahabad
Comments sought on draft guidelines for groundwater extraction
India to host UN Summit on Conservation of Migratory Species in 2020
SC bans dirty pet-coke, furnace oil in Haryana, Rajasthan, UP
Arctic sea ice waning faster than predicted, says study
Snow leopard photographed in Arunachal
El Nino caused record CO2 spike in 2015-16: NASA
India acts against bottom trawling
BILATERAL AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
Spain hit by constitutional crisis
First BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine meeting held in New Delhi
India starts on implementation of motor pact
International Conference on Consumer Protection
Cabinet approves MoC between India and Japan to establish Liquid, Flexible and Global LNG Market
India signs €300 million agreement with European Investment Bank for Bangalore Metro Phase II
India signs €300 million agreement with European Investment Bank for Bangalore Metro Phase II
China’s President Xi Jinping unveils new leadership line-up with no clear successor
14th SAARCLAW Conference held in Colombo, Sri Lanka
India and US Hold 11th Trade Policy Forum Meeting in Washington D.C.  
Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni visit to India  
Free movement’ along Myanmar border  
India ships wheat to Afghanistan via Chabahar U.S.,  
Israel quit UNESCO  
Bangladesh backs China’s OBOR  
India, Sri Lanka ink housing project deal in Hambantota  
New U.S. policy is a game changer: Ashraf Ghani  
India, Sri Lanka ink housing project deal in Hambantota  
Catalonia crisis: Spain moves to suspend autonomy  
Spain sacks Catalan government after independence declaration  
India seeks greater role for troops contributing countries in UN peacekeeping missions  
India invited to join SCO contact group meeting on Afghanistan  
Cabinet approves the Extradition Treaty between India and Lithuania  

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
Japan launches fourth Michibiki satellite for hi-tech GPS  
REPAIR: Scientists develop RNA editing tool to combat genetic disease  
Nobel prize for gravitational wave detection  
2017 Nobel Prize in Chemistry  
China launches world’s 1st hybrid electric tram powered by hydrogen fuel cells  
Anti-nuclear weapons group ICAN wins Nobel Peace Prize  
Embryo transfer technology to be used to carry out 440 embryo transfers in cattle in 9 days  

ECONOMY  
Fix deadline for PMJDY insurance claims  
ADB $500 million funding soon for private sector infrastructure in Asia and Pacific  
Inheritance tax on HNIs likely to be reintroduced  
RBI panel pushes new rules so lenders pass on rate cuts more quickly  
Government permits banks to sell more small savings schemes  
India imposes anti-dumping duty on some stainless steel imports  
Why do we need external benchmarks while pricing loans?  
Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme – Series-III  
Government constitutes Alternative Mechanism Panel for PSBs consolidation  
India could provide universal basic income of Rs 2,600 a year: IMF  
SIDBI revamps portal for easy credit access  
Nobel Economics Prize  
47.5 lakh domestic workers set to get legal status and minimum wages  
$300 Million Loan to Promote Further Fiscal Reforms in West Bengal  
Decision on removal of fishing subsidies certain in WTO’s Dec. Meet  
2.11 lakh crore for PSU banks to boost lending  
Uday Kotak Committee suggests changes in corporate governance rules  
Information utility under the IBC  
The Government of India and World Bank sign $200 Million Loan Agreement for the Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project.  
Centre proposes three-year licence for contractors  
MSME Delayed Payment Portal – MSME Samadhaan
NIIF gets first investor, Abu Dhabi fund brings in $1 bn

CULTURE
Government gives LoI to 7 companies for 14 monuments under Adopt a Heritage Scheme
Is the Devadasi system still being followed in southern India?
Ichthyosaur fossil discovered for first time in India
Eminent classical singer and Padma Vibhushan awardee Girija Devi passed away

IMPORTANT DAYS AND REPORTS
1 October: International Day of Older Persons
World Habitat Day: 2 October
International Day of the Girl Child
October 13: International Day for Disaster Reduction
October 14: World Standards Day
October 15: International Day of Rural Women World Food Day
World Food Day
October 17: The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty
24 October: United Nations Day
24 October: World Polio Day
27 October: Infantry Day
October 31: World Cities Day
India 100th on global hunger index
Man Booker Prize: George Saunders wins for Lincoln in the Bardo
Gauri Lankesh becomes first Indian to win Anna Politkovskaya Award

President Ram Nath Kovind has appointed new Governors to Tamil Nadu,
President appointed Banwarilal Purohit as the Governor of Tamil Nadu, Brig. (Dr.) B.D. Mishra (Retd.) as the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Satya Pal Malik as the Governor of Bihar, Jagdish Mukhi as the Governor of Assam and Ganga Prasad as the Governor of Meghalaya.

**Appointment and tenure of governors: Quick look:**

1) The governors and lieutenant-governors are appointed by the president for a term of 5 years.

2) Article 157 and Article 158 of the Constitution of India specify eligibility requirements for the post.

3) The term of governor’s office is normally 5 years but it can be terminated earlier by: Dismissal by the president on the advice of the prime minister of the country, at whose pleasure the governor holds office or Resignation by the governor.

4) There is no provision of impeachment, as it happens for the president.

**Odisha government creating land bank for industrial allocation**

The state government of Odisha is creating a **1.2 lakh acre land bank** across the state for allocation to the industrial sector to avoid a repeat of the Posco fiasco.

In order to cut red tape and wrangling with local issues in the land acquisition process, the state government is acquiring government land for industrial use and proposes to offer it with all facilities in place.

**Background:**
Odisha government has created a huge land bank and has identified areas across the state to bring under one umbrella for the industrial sector. Already, the land bank has reached 57,655 acres. With the creation of the landbank, the industry department is looking for investment in various sectors including steel, aluminium, agro and food processing based units, apparel, IT and plastic units that will further create employment potential.

**Significance of this move:**
It is a plug-and-play kind of model wherein the facilities related to water, power, roads and all clearances are
in place. The companies need to only make the payment of base premium upfront for the land and the annual rent for the rest of the 90 years (their lease).

**EESL To Procure 10,000 Electric Vehicles From Tata Motors**

State-run Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL) has decided to procure 10,000 electric vehicles from Tata Motors after a competitive bidding. Tata Motors will supply the electric vehicles (EVs) in two phases with 500 e-cars in the first phase in November 2017 and the remaining 9,500 EVs in the second phase.

EESL claimed that its tender was the world’s largest single electric vehicle procurement. The company (Tata Motors) was selected through an international competitive bidding aimed at increased participation.

**About EESL:**

Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) is a joint venture of NTPC Limited, Power Finance Corporation, Rural Electrification Corporation, and POWERGRID.

Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) was set up under Ministry of Power (India) to facilitate implementation of energy efficiency projects.

**Commission to Examine Sub Categorization of other Backward Classes**

The President of India, in exercise of the powers conferred by article 340 of the Constitution, has appointed a Commission to examine the sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes.

Former Delhi High Court Chief Justice G. Rohini has been appointed by President of India as the head of the Commission.

**Background:**

The decision to appoint the commission follows an August 23 Cabinet decision to examine the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among caste and communities included in the broad list of OBCs. At present, there is no sub-categorisation and 27% reservation is a monolithic entity.

**Need for subcategorization:**

Pragnya IAS Academy   +91 9880487071   www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore   +91 9880486671   www.pragnyaias.com
Sub categorization of the OBCs will ensure that the more backward among the OBC communities can also access the benefits of reservation for educational institutions and government jobs.

The terms of reference of the Commission are as under

✓ To examine the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among the castes or communities included in the broad category of Other Backward Classes with reference to such classes included in the Central List.
✓ To work out the mechanism, criteria, norms and parameters in a scientific approach for sub-categorisation within such Other Backward Classes.
✓ To take up the exercise of identifying the respective castes or communities or sub-castes or synonyms in the Central List of Other Backward Classes and classifying them into their respective sub-categories.

**Significance of this move:**
This decision reinforces, the Government’s efforts to achieve greater social justice and inclusion for all, and specifically members of the Other Backward Classes.

**Way ahead:**
The Commission is required to present their Report to the President within a period of twelve weeks of assumption of charge by the Chairperson of the Commission. On receipt of the Report of the Commission, the Central Government will consider ways and means for equitable distribution of the benefits of the reservation in Central Government jobs and admission in Central Government Institutions amongst all strata of the Other Backward Classes.

**Why Exempt CBI from RTI, Asks Petition**
A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court for an early hearing of a petition challenging a 2011 government notification, which includes the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on the list of “intelligence and security organisations” exempted from disclosing information to the public under section 24 of the Right to Information Act. CBI is only an investigating agency and not a security or intelligence organisation.

“Such an administrative decision has a profound impact on the citizens of India as it restricts their fundamental right to information. By this method the government could keep adding organisations to the
Second Schedule, which do not meet the express criteria laid down in Section 24(2) of the RTI Act and ultimately render the RTI Act ineffective,” the application said.

Section 24 of the RTI act is titled ‘act not to apply to certain organizations’. It provides exception to obtaining information from intelligence and security organisations specified in the second schedule to the RTI act or any information furnished by them to the government.

**Cleanest iconic place in the country**

Sri Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple in Madurai has been adjudged the cleanest iconic place in the country under Swachhta Hi Seva (cleanliness is service) programme. The temple earned the top slot from among 10 iconic places selected under the Swachh Bharath Mission in the country.

**Background:**
Meenakshi Temple is a historic Hindu temple located on the southern bank of the Vaigai River in the temple city of Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India. It is dedicated to Meenakshi, a form of Parvati, and her consort, Sundareswar, a form of Shiva. The temple forms the heart and lifeline of the 2,500-year-old city of Madurai.

**Swachhta Hi Seva campaign:**
It was a nation-wide, fortnight-long sanitation campaign launched to highlight the government’s flagship cleanliness initiative Swachh Bharat Mission. The campaign was coordinated by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, the convening Ministry for the Swachh Bharat Mission. The objective of the campaign is to mobilise people and reinforce the “Jan Aandolan” for sanitation to contribute to Mahatma Gandhi’s dream of a Clean India.

**VAJRA Scheme: Government receives 260 applicants for visiting researcher programme**

The Union Ministry of Science and Technology’s Visiting Advanced Joint Research (VAJRA) Faculty Scheme has received 260 applications from foreign scientists of whom 70 will be shortlisted. The scheme is meant to attract top international talent to country’s research and development (R&D) ecosystem. The applicants will be screened now and the shortlisted scientists will begin work by December 2017.

**VAJRA Scheme:**
The pilot project of the scheme was launched by Department of Science and Technology (DST) in May 2017. The Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB), a statutory body of DST is implementing the scheme. It intends to select 1,000 scientists every year. The DST will look for scientists with experience in fields of renewable energy, water and other technology in which Indian lack expertise. Public funded academic institutions and national laboratories are eligible to host VAJRA faculties. The residency period will be for minimum of month and maximum of three months. These institutions should appoint them as adjunct visiting faculty and involve them in co-guiding and mentoring students and developing collaborative programmes. The faculty can also be allowed to participate in other academic activities. The applications received from interested foreign researchers will be evaluated by Selection Committee of eminent scientists. The Committee will meet twice a year in January and July and make recommendations.
Tea board proposes Rs 100 cror package for Darjeeling estates

The Tea Board has proposed a Rs 100-crore relief package for tea estates in the Darjeeling hills, where production has resumed after nearly three months of shutdown due to an agitation for a separate state. The relief package, however, has failed to bring cheer to the industry.

**Background:**
Plucking and other operations at the 87 tea estates in the region had come to a halt after the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha’s strike call on June 9 demanding a separate state, called Gorkhaland. The growers of Darjeeling tea had sought Rs 325 crore as assistance to prune the overgrown bushes and prepare for production in April. But the demand was not accepted by the board which, on advice based on the Tea Research Association’s survey of the problem, cut it to Rs 100 crore.

The strike, the first time in the history of Darjeeling tea industry, has wiped out almost 70% of the annual tea production.

**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.
PM inaugurates Phase 1 of RO RO Ferry Service between Ghogha and Dahej

The Prime Minister, inaugurated Phase 1 of the RO RO (Roll on, Roll off) ferry service between Ghogha in Saurashtra, and Dahej in South Gujarat which shall reduce the travel time from eight hours to over an hour.

- At present passenger movement is enabled, vehicle movement is possible once the ferry service is fully operational.
- This ferry service is a first of sorts, will save a lot of time and fuel as many people commute between these two regions frequently.
- Government aims to develop coastal infrastructure, integrate transport sector and improve state-of-the-art to augment steps towards blue economy.

**What is Blue Economy:**

It is the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, and ocean ecosystem health. It encompasses many activities:

- Renewable Energy: Sustainable marine energy can play a vital role in social and economic development,
- Fisheries: More fisheries can generate more revenue, more fish and help restore fish stocks,
- Maritime Transport
- Tourism: Ocean and coastal tourism can bring jobs and economic growth
- Waste Management: Better management of land-based litter will help the ocean recover
- Climate Change: Oceans are an important carbon sink and can mitigate climate change

India’s First Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra for Skilling in Smart Cities inaugurated at Mandir Marg, New Delhi

India’s first Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK) has been set up under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in collaboration with New Delhi Municipal Council.

**Significance:**

Every year more than 13 million Indians enter the working age but the country has an annual training capacity of 3 million on adding up all the training and educational capacities. This gap of more than 10 million is very difficult to bridge considering long gestation training periods, capacity building lacunae etc. Addressing this issue is critical to realizing the demographic dividend potential of India.

PMKVY has a crucial role to improve productivity through creation of a pool of industry and

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)

It is an initiative of Indian government to make country’s youth employable and strengthen them economically by providing them meaningful, industry relevant, skill based training.

The beneficiaries under the scheme are successfully trained, assessed, certified and awarded financially by the government. PMKVY is being run by the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) while National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) is the implementing agency for the scheme.

At present there are 221 job roles available with 34 skill councils for which the courses are being offered across the nation. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK), Mandir Marg, New Delhi leverages NDMC infrastructure for skilling initiatives. Has a capacity of skilling 4,000 youth annually. Will be managed by Orion Edutech, which has an impeccable record of training nearly 3 lakh candidates through its network of over 275 skill development centres across the country.

Pragnya IAS Academy
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore
+91 9880487071 www.upsccivilservices.com
+91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com
National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) aligned skilled workforce. Over time, the scheme should provide a comprehensive and holistic workforce training interventions by catering to current and anticipated future employment ecosystem.

Government sets up expert group for suggestions on artificial intelligence policy

The Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeITY) has set up an internal expert committee to advise the government on a policy on artificial intelligence (AI). The expert committee will advise the IT ministry on the most apt technologies for India as government’s main focus is to reduce cyber-attacks with AI. Its recommendations will be used to frame the policy.

**Seven-point strategy on AI**
The government recently had drawn up a seven-point strategy that would form the framework for India’s strategic plan to use AI. The strategy includes developing methods for human machine interactions; creating a competent workforce in line with AI and R&D needs, ensuring safety and security of AI systems; understanding and addressing the ethical, legal and societal implications of AI, measuring and evaluating AI technologies through standards and benchmarks, among others.
Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence is a branch of computer science concerned with making computers behave like humans. In contrast to normal hardware and software, AI enables a machine to perceive and respond to its changing environment. The artificial intelligence market is estimated to touch $153 billion in 2020 and expected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate (cagr) of 45.4% from 2016 to 2022. It is also widely seen as major challenge in generation of employment as many companies are likely to depend more on it to cut down on human resources. Globally too, there is a growing interest in artificial intelligence. In 2016, White House had initiated work on Preparing for the future of artificial intelligence; in UK, the House of Commons committee on S&T had looked at robotics and artificial intelligence while in 2017, State Council of China had started work on next generation artificial intelligence development plan.

BharatMala Project

Cabinet approved 5.35 lakh crore to build 34,800 km of roads nationwide, including in border and coastal areas. The Centre had announced road construction, called BharatMala Pariyojana, in a bid to encourage the economy as private investment remains moribund.

Reasons:

- National Highways suffer from the deficiencies of inadequate capacity, weak pavement, poor riding quality, distressed bridges, unbridged level crossings, congested cities, lack of wayside amenities and other safety measures.
- There is very little participation of private sector in road development in India because of long gestation period and low-returns.
- Private investment in roads is not satisfactory.
- There was no stable policy on highway development in the country.
- There is shortage of funds for the construction and maintenance of roads.

BharatMala Pariyojana:

It is a government’s new umbrella programme to further optimise the efficiency of movement of goods and people across the country. The BharatMala Pariyojana, to be implemented on an outlay of ₹5,35,000 crore, will generate 14.2 crore mandays of jobs.

Bharat Mala Project:

Bharatmala is a name given to road and highways project of Government of India. The total investment for the Bharatmala plan is estimated at Rs10 trillion, which is the largest ever outlay for a government road construction scheme. The BharatMala project will include economic corridors (9,000 km), inter-corridor and feeder route (6,000 km), national corridors efficiency improvement (5,000 km), border roads and international connectivity (2,000 km), coastal roads and port connectivity (2,000 km) and Greenfield expressways (800 km). Bharat Mala will provide easier access to border areas for armed forces and boost trade via the land route.
Bharatmala will replace National Highways Development Project (NHDP) launched in 1998 as the scheme is expected to be completed by this year with just 10,000 km of highway construction left under it.

National Waterway-4

Vice president Venkaiah Naidu recently laid the foundation stone for the first phase of the 2,890-km National Waterway-4 (NW-4) at Amravati in Andhra Pradesh. The first phase involves development of a water channel from Muktyala to Vijayawada on Krishna river along with four floating terminals and three fixed terminals to handle cargo operations.

**Importance of National Waterway 4:**
The project will provide an efficient logistics solution to boost the economic growth of the region and facilitate the development of Amravati during its early development stage as substantial construction material is expected to be transported on this stretch. It will also improve connectivity to important tourist and pilgrimage spots.

**About National Waterway 4:**
The inland waterway was declared National Waterway-4 in November, 2008 with a total length of 1,078 km. Under the National Waterway Act, 2016, this was increased to 2,890 km. The NW-4 would be developed in three phases. In the first phase, the 82 km stretch from Muktyala to Vijayawada will be developed. This would be followed by the second phase where 233 km will be developed from Vijayawada to Kakinada and Rajahmundry to Polavaram on Godavari river. The third phase will connect Commamur canal, Buckingham canal and the balance stretches of river Krishna and Godavari across 573 km.
IWAI raises Rs660 crore through bonds

The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has raised Rs660 crore through a bond sale to finance the development of national waterways.

It is the second time that the authority has raised money through a bond sale. Last year, it was allowed to issue infrastructure bonds worth Rs1,000 crore but the authority raised only Rs340 crore.

The money raised from the bonds is intended to be used by IWAI for the development of national waterways.

Know about IWAI:

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

Universal social security plan

In an attempt to improve the life of the extremely poor people of India, the government has drafted a Rs 1.2 lakh crore plan to provide universal social security coverage for the poorest people of the country.

About the scheme:

✓ This broader programme envisages three categories — the poorest 20%, who will get a government payout; those who subscribe on their own and formal sector workers who will need to set aside a fixed proportion of income toward the scheme.

✓ The scheme will have two tiers. The first of these comprises mandatory pension, insurance (both death and disability) and maternity coverage and the second, optional medical, sickness and unemployment coverage.

✓ Funds collected under the universal social security scheme will be divided into sub-schemes and be ringfenced, meaning the benefits and the contribution will be commensurate.

Need for the scheme:

India’s total workforce currently stands at 450 million. Though the statistics make it sound that a large fraction of the Indian population is employed, it is rather saddening that only a little over 10% are in the organised sector and get to enjoy the basic social security.

In fact, among the 10 million people who add on to the workforce every year, most of them don’t receive the minimum wage and lack any kind of social security coverage, the reason being that most them belong to the unorganised sector.
Way ahead:
While funding the scheme will be a challenge for the government, which has pledged to stick to the deficit target, it is seen as one that will gain broad popular support. The new policy will be part of the social security code, one of four codes that the labour ministry is finalising and will subsume 17 existing items of legislation governing social security coverage in the country.

Paryatan Parv

‘Paryatan Parv’ of the Ministry of Tourism has begun across the country.

What is Paryatan Parv?
The Paryatan Parv will showcase the cultural diversity of the country, with cultural performances, crafts bazaar, food court showcasing folk and classical dance & music, handicrafts & handlooms and cuisine from all regions and States of the country.
The Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with other Central Ministries, State Governments and Stakeholders is organizing “Paryatan Parv” across the country.
The programme is being organized with the objective of drawing focus on the benefits of tourism, showcasing the cultural diversity of the country and reinforcing the principle of “Tourism for All”.

Paryatan Parv
**Paryatan Parv** will have three main components:

**Dekho Apna Desh:** To encourage Indians to visit their own country. This includes Video, Photograph and Blog Competitions of sites visited during the Event, Stories of India through Travelers’ Eyes, on Social Media, Tourism related Quiz, Essay, Debate and Painting Competitions for Students, Television Campaigns to promote travel to J&K and N.E. States.

**Tourism for All:** Tourism Events at sites across all States in the country. The activities at these sites include illumination in and around the Sites, Cultural Programmes of Dance, Music, Theatre, Story Telling, Sensitisation Programmes for Stakeholders around the Sites, Tourism Exhibitions etc. These will be “People’s Events” with large scale public participation.

**Tourism & Governance:** Interactive Sessions & Workshops with Stakeholders on varied themes.

---

A plan to stamp out animal TB
The first-ever road map to combat **animal tuberculosis** (bovine TB) and its transmission to humans, referred to as **zoonotic TB**, was recently launched at the 48th Union World Conference on Lung Health in Guadalajara, Mexico. The roadmap has been built on a ‘**One Health Approach**’, addressing health risks across sectors for the animal tuberculosis known as bovine TB and its transmission to humans.

Four partners in health, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) and the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) have joined forces to develop the road map and address the major health and economic impact of this disease.

**Concerns:**
- New data released by the WHO estimates that over 140,000 people fall ill and more than 12,000 people lose their lives each year to zoonotic TB – mostly in the African and the South-East Asian regions. In India, consumption of raw milk and living in close proximity to cattle has been attributed to high incidence rates of bovine TB in the central Indian populations.
- **There is no cure for bovine TB** and it threatens animal welfare and those with livelihoods based on livestock.

**About Zoonotic TB:**
It is a type of TB in people caused by *mycobacterium bovis*. The disease can affect many other species surrounding cattle and become established in wildlife reservoirs.

**Spread:**
Bovine TB is most often communicated to humans through food consumption, usually non-heat-treated dairy products or raw, or improperly cooked meat from diseased animals. Direct transmission from infected animals or animal products to people can also occur. There is no cure for bovine TB and it threatens animal welfare and those with livelihoods based on livestock.

**Way ahead:**
Preventing and controlling bovine TB at its animal source is crucial to avoid its transmission to humans, improve food safety and protect the livelihood of many rural communities. To this aim, the implementation of strategies based on international standards and a cross-sectoral approach will enable improved surveillance and diagnosis of the disease in animals and consequently reduce the risks for humans.
For countries to achieve the global TB elimination targets, interventions addressing zoonotic TB must be introduced in the national programmes.
SANKALP & STRIVE Schemes to boost Skill India Mission

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved two new World Bank supported schemes of Rs. 6,655 crore—Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion (SANKALP) and Skill Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement (STRIVE).

About SANKALP and STRIVE:

- SANKALP is Rs 4,455 crore Centrally sponsored scheme including Rs. 3,300 crore loan support from World Bank whereas STRIVE is a Rs. 2,200 crore—central sector scheme, with half of the scheme outlay as World bank loan assistance.
- SANKALP and STRIVE are outcome focused schemes marking shift in government’s implementation strategy in vocational education and training from inputs to results.
- SANKALP will provide market relevant training to 3.5 crore youth. STRIVE will focus to improve on the quality and the market relevance of vocational training provided in ITIs and strengthen the apprenticeship programme through industry-cluster approach.

Benefits of these schemes:
The schemes shall provide the required impetus to the National Skill Development Mission, 2015 and its various sub missions. The schemes are aligned to flagship Government of India programs such as Make in India and Swachhta Abhiyan and aim at developing globally competitive workforce for domestic and overseas requirements.

Call Swachh Bharat toilets ‘Izzat Ghar’: Centre to states

Every toilet constructed across the country under the Swachh Bharat Mission could now be called ‘Izzat Ghar’, or something equivalent in a local language that means house of dignity, following a directive from the Centre to the states.

The Centre has written to all states in this regard, advising Hindi-speaking states to call a toilet an ‘Izzat Ghar’ while urging other states to come up with other terms in the regional languages with the same meaning.

This move aims to instil a sense of dignity and pride in the entire family for their toilet, and will also have a positive impact on usage.

About SBM:
Swachh Bharat Mission was officially launched on 2 October 2014 and is India’s biggest ever cleanliness drive.

Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com
drive. It aims to eliminate open defecation by 2019. The goal also includes the elimination of open defecation, conversion of insanitary toilets to pour flush toilets, eradicating of manual scavenging and Municipal Solid Waste Management (MSWM).

**The components of the programme are:**

- Construction of individual sanitary latrines for households below the poverty line with subsidy (80%) where demand exists.
- Conversion of dry latrines into low-cost sanitary latrines.
- Construction of exclusive village sanitary complexes for women providing facilities for hand pumping, bathing, sanitation and washing on a selective basis where there is not adequate land or space within houses and where village panchayats are willing to maintain the facilities.
- Setting up of sanitary marts.
- Total sanitation of villages through the construction of drains, soakage pits, solid and liquid waste disposal.
- Intensive campaign for awareness generation and health education to create a felt need for personal, household and environmental sanitation facilities.

**Boosting horticulture through remote sensing**

Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh has announced March 2018 as the deadline to complete the ambitious project of developing the horticulture sector using remote sensing technology and geo-informatics.

**Background:**

In a bid to develop India’s horticulture sector and help states identify suitable areas and crop types, the CHAMAN, or Coordinated Horticulture Assessment and Management using geo-informatics, is being implemented by the Delhi-based Mahalanobis National Crop Forecast Centre and is likely to be completed by March.
The agriculture ministry is already working on a project which uses satellites and remote sensing technology. The project is known as CHAM.

Under the project, the ministry will use remote sensing and geoinformatics data to integrate information on weather, soil, land-use, and crop mapping to prepare horticulture development plans. The idea is to use space technology to identify crops suitable to different areas and raise production of horticulture crops. The project will help states develop horticulture clusters and related infrastructure like cold chains. Project will also help in accurate forecasting of area and production of seven major crops in about 185 districts across India. These crops are banana, mango, citrus, potato, onion, tomato, and chilli.

**Need for special focus:**
Driven by consumer demand, farmers across India have rapidly adopted horticulture crops which ensure a quicker cash flow and can be grown in very small plots. In 2016-17, production of horticulture crops like fruits, vegetables and spices touched a record high of 300 million tonnes, outstripping production of foodgrains for the fifth year in a row. Currently, India is the second largest producer of fruits and vegetables in the world, and a top producer of crops like banana, mango and lemons.

---

**Unprecedented community action in ‘Gram Samridhi Evam Swachhata Pakhwada’ from 1st to 15th October, 2017**

- In partnership with State Governments and other Departments, *Department of Rural Development* organized *Gram Samridhi Evam Swachhata Pakhwada* from 1st October to 15th October, 2017. Gram Sabhas were held in nearly all the Gram Panchayats of the Country on 2nd October.

During this period,

- **DISHA Monitoring Portal** and **Gram Samvaad App** were introduced on 11th October, 2017.
  - **Disha Monitoring Portal** would enable Members of Parliament to track progress in implementation of various centrally sponsored schemes in their constituency.
  - **Gram Samvaad Mobile app** allows a citizen to access information on and implementation of Rural Development schemes at Panchayat level.

As reported on the Swachh Gram Portal over 4.75 lakh cleanliness drives were taken up in villages.

- 38,283 villages were declared open defecation free,
- 5.98 lakh individual households latrines completed and initiatives for Solid and Liquid Waste Management undertaken across Gram Panchayats.

- Thrust was placed on skill development among youth and total of 1404 *Skill Raths* were launched in different parts of the country to register demand through the *Kaushal Panji App for skill training*.
- Public accountability thrust was seen at Panchayat offices, with complete disclosure of beneficiary lists and works under execution with details.
- Special efforts were made in the 50,000 Gram Panchayats that States have been selected purposively by State Governments for coverage under Mission Antyodya.

---

**Gram Samridhi Evam Swachhata Pakhwada**

It is an effort to prepare the Gram Panchayat Development Plan through extensive community participation especially of women and youth. The recommendations of this plan will be given top most priority in finalization of Annual Action Plan across schemes and programmes of various Ministries and Departments.
Ministry of Railways may ask Finance Ministry to fund its share towards Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK)

With earnings deficit, the Ministry of Railways may find it difficult to contribute its share towards Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK).

- It is a dedicated fund for critical safety-related works.
- In Budget 2017-18, Ministry had announced the setting up a special safety fund with a corpus of more than Rs. 1 lakh crore over a period of five years.
- Finance Ministry would contribute Rs. 15,000 crore annually towards the fund, the Ministry of Railways would fund the balance Rs. 5,000 crore every year.
- Finance Ministry advised the Ministry of Railways to prioritise deploying RRSK funds on areas that reduce chances of human error and ensure training of safety staff.

Significance:

- Safety measures taken on Indian Railways is a continuous process which envisage accident prevention and mitigation directed towards continuous reduction in risk level to its customers.
- This is done by adopting new technologies and bringing improvement in asset reliability to reduce human dependency.
- For example- Train Protection Warning System (TPWS)/Train Collision Avoidance System (TCAS) to prevent accident due to over speeding and passing signal at danger etc.
- RRSK funding is essential for carrying such safety works.

CVC to develop Integrity Index of 25 Organizations

- In line with the broader strategy and emphasis on preventive vigilance, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) believes that the next level of systemic change can be through the tool of Integrity Index.
- The CVC has therefore decided to go in for development of the Integrity Index-based on benchmarking of internal processes and controls within an organisation as well as management of relationships and expectations of outside stakeholders.

The main objectives of Integrity Index:

- Define what constitutes Integrity of Public Organizations.
- Identify the different factors of Integrity and their inter-linkages.
- Create an objective and reliable tool that can measure the performance of organizations along these above factors.
- Validate the findings over a period of time to improve upon the robustness of the tool that measures Integrity.
- Create an internal and external ecosystem that promotes working with Integrity where public organizations lead the way.
- CVC has adopted a research-based approach for creating an integrity index that various
Raw Jute demand falls, Farmers sell crop below MSP

West Bengal government has called for an urgent meeting this week to review the raw jute situation in the State. The meeting will also discuss the infrastructure gaps at the Jute Corporation of India (JCI) which is tasked with purchasing raw jute from farmers to raise the price.

Reason:
- Declining demand for the low grade TD-6 variety jute being grown by the farmers in West Bengal. Textile Ministry’s specifications to the jute mills to make lighter bags in order to tackle competition. However, lightweight jute bags of 560 grams (replacing the earlier 665 grams) necessitates the use of better quality.
- Poor agricultural practices and lack of facilities for retting (a process of washing raw jute to get better fibre), has led to the farmers resorting to production of this variety.

Conclusion:
The scenario could be changed if the mills were allowed to tweak the specifications for jute sacks, enabling higher use of TD-6 grade. Or else, the Jute Corporation could be asked to increase its purchases.

Start-up Programmes for entrepreneurs in Oil and Gas sector

Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship launched new Start-up Programmes for entrepreneurs in Oil and Gas sector and said that it is important to develop new business models, marketing plans, technology and innovations in the sector.
Steps Taken:
Oil and gas PSUs have setup venture capital funds to encourage start-ups based on innovative ideas in the energy sector.
10 public sector undertakings under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, including the IOCL, ONGC, EIL, OIL, NRL, BPCL, HPCL, GAIL and MRPL, have created a corpus of Rs. 320 crore to support start-up initiatives.
The 10 oil PSUs have together selected nearly 30 start-up projects for support in the first round of the scheme which include
1. Electronic leak detector for detecting body and bung leak of LPG cylinders
2. Self – sustaining low-maintenance toilets, or eco-toilets
3. Multi use Fuel from Agricultural Waste Biomass
4. Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) for underwater inspections
5. Converting waste plastics to high value petroleum fuels
6. Solar Stove - Revolutionary Day and Night Indoor Solar Cooktop System for all lifestyles

Significance:
- It will change the status of the youth of our country from job seeker to that of job provider.
- There has been a constant flow of applications and some extremely innovative ideas from a varying age group (from a fresh engineering graduate to a 70-year-old entrepreneur) from across the country.
- Business partnership between the start-ups and the PSUs of Petroleum Ministry will create a new benchmark for growth and job creation.

Indian Railways to revise flexi-fares system on premium trains

The Indian Railways is planning to revise its flexi-fare system on premium trains such as Rajdhani, Shatabdi and Duronto in such a way that it does not hurt people’s pockets and also meets Railways’ revenue target. In this regard, Railway Board is considering proposal of selling half the seats (i.e. 50% seats) from existing 10% seats without any surge pricing.
- The problem with present flexi-fare system having dynamic pricing is that fares rise soon after first 10% of tickets on a train are sold. The fares increase 10% with every 10% of seats sold with a maximum hike of 1.5 times normal fares in sleeper, air-conditioned chair car and two-tier AC classes and 1.4 times in three-tier AC.

Revised flexi-fare system:
The revised flexi-fare system aims to be passenger-friendly in such way that half of passengers who book early can get advantage of relatively cheaper fare. The Railways attempted to lower the fares of the train by allowing passengers to opt out, at the time of booking, of the meals served on board.

Flexi-fare system:
The flexi-fare system introduced in September 2016 aims to generate additional revenues and reduce cross-subsidisation from freight through dynamic pricing of fares based on the demand. Under the present model, the base fares increases by 10% with every 10% of berths sold subject to a prescribed ceiling limit as indicated in table. The system has generated additional revenue of Rs. 551 crore between September 2016 and June 2017 compared with collections during corresponding period in 2015-16.

NHAI to get power to speed up Bharatmala programme

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is set to get the power to approve projects with a construction cost of more than Rs 1,000 crore to ensure faster implementation of the Bharatmala programme. Currently, all highway projects that entail a construction cost of more than Rs 1,000 crore, excluding land, need to be approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA). Under the proposal, only public private partnership (PPP) projects under the build-operate-transfer (BOT) model, where viability gap funding (VGF) is to be provided by the government, will need CCEA clearance.

About Bharatmala project:
Bharatmala envisions 44 economic corridors across the country at a cost of at least Rs 5 lakh crore. The programme, along with the proposal to enhance NHAI’s powers, is likely to get Cabinet clearance soon.

The Bharatmala corridors have been mapped as per traffic density and economic relevance of the cities that will be connected with the help of the Bhaskaracharya Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics.

The project involves constructing 24,000 km of fresh highways.

The project is aimed at speeding up cargo movement and the development of multimodal logistics hubs and parks on the periphery of major commercial centres.

The project includes construction of feeder routes alongside national highways.

Around 80% of Bharatmala will be based on a government funded, engineering procurement and construction (EPC) model while the rest will be a hybrid-annuity public private partnership.

**International Conference on Green Initiatives & Railway Electrification**

Indian Railways shall lead the world by achieving 100% electrification with “an incentive cum penalty” framework scheme to transform Indian Railways truly into a world class, safe and modern transporter

**Context:**
Transport sector is the biggest consumer of energy, especially railway as the single largest consumer with share of about 2% of National energy consumption. Rail being the most energy efficient mode of transport is further working to change the energy mix towards greener sources. Electrification is a powerful measure to achieve cost effectiveness. It improves mobility by use of high power energy efficient Locomotives, facilitate shift of traffic from road to rail and also to reduce carbon footprints. In addition electrification will also reduce traction energy bill substantially

**Main objective:**
Bring green power project developers and other stakeholders on a common platform for making Indian Railways (IR) an efficient and Greener mode of transport. Green initiatives including use of renewable energy, shift towards electric traction, development of new locomotive technology, high speed rail traction system and development in generation of Solar/Wind power as well as use of energy in efficient ways.

**Action Plan:**
- Electrification of Railway Tracks
- Harnessing Renewable Energy on Indian Railways to reduce energy cost and carbon footprints
- Production of Energy Efficient High Horsepower Locomotives
- Head On Generation (HOG)—electrical loads of passenger coaches would be fed directly from electric
- power drawn by locomotive from grid.

**About IREE:**
Institution of Railways Electrical Engineer (IREE) registered at Nasik in 1995 is a professional body of Railway Electrical Engineers. It is a technical body under the auspices of Ministry of Railways sharing knowledge and experience of various Railway engineers and others connected with Electrical Engineering.

**Indian Railway’s first set of Solar Power Plant of 5MW capacity launched:**
Indian Railway’s first set of solar plants with total capacity of 5 megawatt peak (MWp) was launched on rooftop of Hazrat Nizamuddin, New Delhi, Anand Vihar and Delhi railway stations.

This project was launched under ambitious National Solar Mission in which Indian Railways plans to commission 1000 MWp solar plants across its network.

The first set of solar plant will generate 76.5 lakh units of solar power cumulatively per year and will meet about 30% of energy requirement of these stations.

The project was awarded in 2016 to the developer under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model. The developer will maintain it for 25 years and Railways will only pay energy consumed at Rs 4.14 per unit.

**Phase 1 of Bharat Net project to be completed by December**

Bharat Net project, which aims to deploy high-speed optical fibre cables across rural areas, will be
completed by December this year, thus providing internet access to 100,000 gram panchayats.

**Context:**
‘i-Bharat 2017’ conference held in the New Delhi, based on the theme of ‘ICT Elucidations for Unserved and Unsolved’, organised by industry body FICCI in association with the ministry of electronics and information technology.

**Challenges:**
- India being the highest consumer of mobile data throws up as many challenges as opportunities.
- Public and private sector need to join hands in achieving the objective of doubling the reach of telecom fibre network in the country by 2020.
- Issues such as cyber security, data protection & privacy, regulation of data and, importantly, data monetisation need to be addressed.
- How India will leverage its Aadhaar and Election Commission data base.
- How the country will tackle the privacy debate after the Supreme Court ruling on privacy being a fundamental right.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>Connect 1 lakh gram panchayats</td>
<td>March 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Connect 1.5 lakh gram panchayats</td>
<td>December 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>State-of-the-art Internet, future-proof network, including fiber between districts and blocks and for 5G services and internet of Things, with underground OFC in ring architecture</td>
<td>2023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BharatNet**
BharatNet is Union Government’s ambitious rural internet connectivity programme which is implemented by Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL). It is world’s largest rural broadband connectivity programme using Optical fibre. Bharat Net seeks to connect all of India’s households, particularly rural areas, through demand, affordable high-speed broadband connectivity of 2 Mbps to 20 Mbps to realise the vision of Digital India. The project is being funded by Universal service Obligation Fund (USOF).

**Why finalisation of the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) for appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and the high courts is delayed – asks SC**

Constitution Bench’s historic decision, in October 2015, to strike down the government’s National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) law. The NJAC law had given politicians an equal say in judicial appointments to constitutional courts. In December 2015, Apex Court directed the centre to iron out the do’s and don’ts of judicial appointments to the Supreme Court and the high courts.

**Issues:**
Delay in the appointment of regular Chief Justices in high courts despite the recommendation of the Supreme Court.
Six of the 24 high courts have been without regular Chief Justices for months.
Some High Courts like Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have acting Chief justice for more than a year now while such arrangement should not have continued for more than a month.
No further delay in finalisation of MoP in larger public interest.

**Home Ministry eases Arms Rules to woo investments**

The Union Home Ministry has liberalised Arms Rules to encourage investments in manufacture of arms, ammunition and weapons systems. The rules were liberalised with an aim of making India a regional leader in supplying small arms to neighbouring countries as well as become an export hub.

**Key Facts Under the new rules**

- licence granted for manufacturing will be valid for life-time of licensee company. It does away with requirement of renewal every five years.
Now, manufacturers will now be able to continue manufacturing on their old licence. Similarly, condition that small arms and light weapons produced by manufacturer should be sold to Central government or State governments with prior approval of Home Ministry also has been dispensed with.

Now, enhancement of capacity up to 15% will also not require any approval of government. Moreover, the licence fee also has been reduced and rules in connection have also been liberalised. Significance The liberalised rules will apply to licences granted by Home Ministry for small arms and ammunition and those granted by Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) for other defence equipment.

The liberalised rules will give boost to Centre’s ‘Make in India’ manufacturing policy and promote employment generation in this eld. It will facilitate availability of world-class weapons to meet requirements of armed forces and police forces in sync with country’s defence indigenisation programme.

**India tops list of new TB cases in 2016: WHO Report**

According to the Global TB Report 2017 released by World Health Organisation (WHO), India has topped list of seven countries, accounting for 64% of the over 10 million new tuberculosis (TB) cases worldwide in 2016. India was followed by Indonesia, China, Philippines, Pakistan, Nigeria and South Africa.

- The report said, an estimated 1.7 million people died from TB in 2016, including nearly 4 lakh people who were co-infected with HIV, recording a drop by 4% as compared to 2015. India along with China and Russia accounted for almost half of around 5 lakh multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) cases registered in 2016. There were estimated 60000 new cases with resistance to rifampicin, the most effective first-line drug, of which 49000 had MDR-TB.
- Despite global efforts to combat TB, which saved an estimated 53 million lives since 2000 and reduced TB mortality rate by 37%, the disease is still top infectious killer in 2016. The disease also has been reported to be main cause of deaths related to antimicrobial resistance and the leading killer of people with HIV.

### Estimates of TB burden, *2015*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number (thousands)</th>
<th>Rate (per 100,000 population)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mortality (excludes HIV+TB)</td>
<td>480 (380-590)</td>
<td>36 (29-45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortality (HIV+TB only)</td>
<td>37 (21-57)</td>
<td>2.8 (1.6-4.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidence (includes HIV+TB)</td>
<td>2,840 (1,470-4,650)</td>
<td>217 (110-355)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidence (HIV+TB only)</td>
<td>113 (58-86)</td>
<td>8.6 (4.4-14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidence (MDR/Rr-TB)</td>
<td>130 (88-180)</td>
<td>9.9 (6.7-14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Estimated TB incidence by age and sex (thousands), *2015*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0-14 years</th>
<th>&gt; 14 years</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>136 (78-193)</td>
<td>860 (112-1,910)</td>
<td>999 (191-800)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>119 (78-163)</td>
<td>1,730 (1,070-2,300)</td>
<td>1,850 (1,550-2,540)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>255 (181-328)</td>
<td>2,590 (1,750-3,420)</td>
<td>2,845 (1,470-4,650)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TB case notifications, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total cases notified</th>
<th>Total new and relapse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,740,435</td>
<td>1,667,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% with rapid diagnosis at time of diagnosis</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% with known HIV status</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% bacteriologically confirmed among pulmonary</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Main Challenges:**

- The biggest challenge was under reporting and under diagnosis of TB cases, especially in countries with weak health systems and large unregulated private sectors. Of estimated 10.4 million new cases, only 6.3 million were detected and officially notified in 2016, leaving a gap of 4.1 million.
- India, Indonesia and Nigeria accounted for 64% of the cases worldwide.

**Tuberculosis (TB)**

TB is **bacterial disease** caused by “Mycobacterium tuberculosis” bacteria that most often affect the lungs. The disease is spread from person to person through the air. It commonly affects the lungs but can also affect other parts of the body. It is the second biggest killer disease worldwide next only to HIV/AIDS. It can be completely cured with proper and regular medication.
almost half of this global gap. Half a million reported cases of HIV-associated TB, 15% were not on antiretroviral therapy (ART) as recommended by WHO.

- Most of gaps related to HIV-associated TB were in WHO African Region. TB preventive treatment is expanding in two priority risk groups—people living with HIV and children under 5 years.
- However, most people eligible for TB preventive treatment are not accessing it. Further, investments in low- and middle-income countries for TB care and prevention fall almost US 2.3 billion dollars short of the US 9.2 billion dollars needed in 2017.
- In addition, at least an extra US 1.2 billion dollars per year are required to accelerate development of new vaccines, diagnostics and medicines. It calls for more domestic funding in middle-income countries and more international donor support to support low-income countries.
- Further, to stop spread of TB epidemic action beyond health sector is required to address risk factors and determinants of disease.

**Scientists link new virus to kala-azar**

Parasite **Leishmania donovani** is believed to be responsible for the dreaded infection. People get infected when bitten by an insect called the sandfly, which harbours the disease-causing parasite.  

**Discovery:**  
Another parasite called Leptomonas seymouri may also be present. It’s still early to pointedly blame the virus but its discovery portends a new kind of treatment regime and may aid attempts to eradicate the disease.

**Kala-azar:**

Visceral leishmaniasis (VL), also known as kala-azar, black fever, and Dumdum fever, is the most severe form of leishmaniasis and, without proper diagnosis and treatment, is associated with high fatality. **Caused by protozoan parasites** of the Leishmania genus migrates to the internal organs such as the liver, spleen (hence “visceral”), and bone marrow. Signs and symptoms include fever, weight loss, fatigue, anemia, and substantial swelling of the liver and spleen.

Kala-azar is endemic to the Indian subcontinent in 119 districts in four countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal).

This disease is the **second-largest parasitic killer in the world**
Rajasthan passes bill increasing OBC quota to 26%

With the Rajasthan Special Backward Classes Act 2015, the state government had moved the five castes from OBC into a separate Special Backward Castes category. The Rajasthan High Court last year struck down five per cent reservation for these castes provided through The Rajasthan Special Backward Classes Act, 2015, pointing out flaws in the government’s process of granting reservation. Following an agitation by Gujjars, the Bharatiya Janata Party government had assured them that the revised OBC quota would be split to grant 5% quota to the “most backward classes.

Current Scenario:
The reservation in Rajasthan now stands at 54 per cent defying the set ceiling of 50 per cent by the Supreme Court.
The Bill created a new “most backward” category within the OBCs for providing the quota benefit to Gujjars and four other nomadic communities.
The Backward Classes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions in the State and of Appointment and Posts in Services under the State) Bill, 2017, has provided 5% reservation to the Gujjar, Banjara, Gadia-Lohar, Raika and Gadariya communities.
State debates in favour of the Bill saying that the reservation had been enhanced in proportion to the increase in the State’s OBC population, which was “legally permissible”.

Centre eases norms for sewage plants

Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has relaxed standards for upcoming sewage treatment plants (STP). Biochemical oxygen demand (Bod) had to be no more than 10 mg/litre according to 2015 CPCB proposal. STPs coming up after June 2019 — except in major State capitals and metropolitan cities — need only conform to 30 mg/litre of BoD. These include proposed STPS to treat sewage in stretches of the river downstream of Haridwar.

✅ Bod < 10mg/litre is difficult to achieve as it required advanced technology that was too costly for most States. However, it is a step forward, because now we have standards for faecal coliform, which was not part of standards earlier. Provisions of Rules

✅ One of the points of the government’s ₹20,000 crore push to clean the river was a 2015-proposal to have higher standards for STPs. That is, they would have to ensure that the biochemical oxygen demand (Bod) — a marker for organic pollutants — in the treated water had to be no more than 10 mg/litre. Existing laws permit BoD up to 30 mg/litre.

✅ However, a notification by the Union Environment Ministry this month has junked the 10 mg/litre target. It says that STPs coming up after June 2019

Biochemical oxygen demand (Bod):

Biochemical oxygen demand is the amount of oxygen required for microbial metabolism of organic compounds in water.

BOD value is most commonly expressed in milligrams of oxygen consumed per litre of sample during 5 days of incubation at 20 °C.

BOD can be used as a gauge of the effectiveness of wastewater treatment plants.

Pragnya IAS Academy
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore

+91 9880487071
www.upsccivilservices.com

+91 9880486671
www.pragnyaias.com
— except in major State capitals and metropolitan cities — need only conform to 30 mg/litre of BoD.

✓ These include proposed STPs to treat sewage in stretches of the river downstream of Haridwar, including Kanpur and Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh.

✓ New STPs in State capitals, have to cap BoD at 20 mg/litre. Plants in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep and Dadra and Nagar Haveli don’t need to stick to higher sewage-treatment criteria.

### Setting the bar low

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pH</td>
<td>6.5-9.0</td>
<td>6.5-9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biochemical oxygen demand</td>
<td>10 mg/l</td>
<td>&lt;30 or &lt;30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total dissolved solids</td>
<td>20 mg/l</td>
<td>≤50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faecal coliform</td>
<td>&lt;100</td>
<td>&lt;1,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*20 in major state capitals, five major cities, 30 in rest of country

**Reason for easing the norms:**
The 10 mg criteria would require advanced technology that was too costly for most States. That kind of quality can be achieved in a phased manner.

**Do Not Deny Food To The Poor Due To Absence Of Aadhaar Says Center To States**

**Background:**
As per the National Food Security Act, the States have been given time till December to link Aadhaar with ration cards. However the deadline for mandatory linking of Aadhaar for benefits of government schemes would be extended till March 31 next for those who do not have the biometric identification number. So far, 82% of the ration cards have been seeded with Aadhaar. The instruction was issued this week to all the States, after an 11-year-old Jharkhand girl allegedly died of starvation recently after she was denied PDS rations.

**Actions:**
Union Food Ministry clarified that deletion from the ration card database could happen only after a proper verification of the ration card holder establishes “beyond reasonable doubt” that an entry pertaining to the said ration card holder is not genuine. Until Aadhaar is assigned to the beneficiary, subsidised foodgrains will have to be given on production of ration card, enrolment slip and other stipulated documents. Even in the case of failure of biometric authentication due to a glitch or poor biometric quality, the...
beneficiary will have to be given the benefits on production of Aadhaar card along with the ration card. The States and the Union Territories will have to provide Aadhaar enrolment facilities to those without Aadhaar and link their Aadhaar numbers with ration cards.

**Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY)**

The government has launched promotion campaigns for its flagship scheme Mudra Yojana. 50 promotion campaigns will be organised in different parts of the country where the union ministers will be participating among others.

The promotion campaigns will be launched by the department of financial services and state level banking committee (SLBC) of different states will actively participate and coordinate all these campaigns.

**About the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) scheme:**
The PMMY Scheme was launched in April, 2015. The scheme’s objective is to refinance collateral-free loans given by the lenders to small borrowers. The scheme, which has a corpus of Rs 20,000 crore, can lend between Rs 50,000 and Rs 10 lakh to small entrepreneurs.

Banks and MFIs (Micro finance institutes) can draw refinance under the MUDRA Scheme after becoming member-lending institutions of MUDRA.

**Significance of this scheme:**
- It will greatly increase the confidence of young, educated or skilled workers who would now be able to aspire to become first generation entrepreneurs.
- Existing small businesses, too, will be able to expand their activities.
- Under the scheme, by floating MUDRA bank, the Centre has ensured credit flow to SMEs sector and has also identified NBFCs as a good fit to reach out to them.
- People will now be able to get refinance at subsidised rate and it would be passed on to the SMEs. Moreover, it would enable SMEs to expand their activities.

**There are three types of loans under PMMY:**
- Shishu (up to Rs.50,000).
- Kishore (from Rs.50,001 to Rs.5 lakh).
- Tarun (from Rs.500,001 to Rs.10,00,000).

---

**PM MUDRA Yojana**

The roles envisaged for MUDRA would include: (2/2)
- Promoting right technology solutions for the last mile
- Formulating and running a Credit Guarantee Scheme for providing guarantees to the loans/portfolios which are being extended to micro enterprises
- Support development and promotional activities in the sector
- Creating a good architecture of Last Mile Credit Delivery to micro businesses under the scheme of “Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana”

*Courtesy: pib.nic.in*
Campaign on ‘women for women’: #IamThatWoman

In an attempt to end Gender bias in women against women, the Ministry of Women and Child Development is undertaking an online campaign #IamThatWoman.

✓ Through the campaign, the Ministry seeks to highlight the various aspects of women standing ‘by’ and ‘for’ women.

✓ Ministry of WCD has urged people to shun stereotypes associated with women harming other women. Twitter and Facebook users have been encouraged to tag and share stories of women helping women with a photograph and post online with the hashtag #IamThatWoman.

Significance of this campaign:
When a woman has the support of her womanhood, she can be unstoppable. Through this campaign, the government aims to shed light on the enormous contributions made by women for women.

SC criminalises sex with minor wife aged between 15 to 18 years

The Supreme Court has criminalised sex between man and his underage wife below 18 years provided the woman files a complaint within a year. The landmark order fixes the age of consent at 18 for all girls. The apex court gave its order on a petition filed by NGO Independent Thought which had challenged exception clause (2) in Section 375 IPC (which deals with rape).

What is the issue?
The clause (2) of Section 375 IPC had created dichotomy over age of consent as it says intercourse or sexual act by a man with his wife, not below 15 years, is not rape. According to NGO Independent Thought’s petition, this exception clause was against objectives of Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (which sets 18 years as statutory marriageable age for girls) and also violation of international conventions to which India was a signatory.
SC Verdict
The Supreme Court held that age of marriage was 18 in all laws and exception given in rape law under clause (2) of Section 375 of IPC was arbitrary and was violates the rights of a girl child. It violates Article 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution. Moreover it was contrary to the philosophy of other statutes and violates the bodily integrity of a girl child. It asked the Centre and states to take proactive steps to prohibit child marriage across the country. The apex court asked the Centre and states to take proactive steps to prohibit child marriage across the country.

Bureau of Indian standards (BIS) Act 2016 brought into force

A new Bureau of Indian standards (BIS) Act 2016 which was notified on 22nd March, 2016, has been brought into force with effect from 12th October, 2017. Parliament had in March 2016 passed the law to replace the BIS Act of 1986.

Highlights of the act:
- National standards body: The Act establishes the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) as the National Standards Body of India.
- Compulsory certification: The Act has enabling provisions for the Government to bring under compulsory certification regime any goods or article of any scheduled industry, process, system or service which it considers necessary in the public interest or for the protection of human, animal or plant health, safety of the environment, or prevention of unfair trade practices, or national security.
- Hallmarking: Enabling provisions have also been made for making hallmarking of the precious metal articles mandatory.
- Simplified conformity: The new Act also allows multiple type of simplified conformity assessment schemes including self-declaration of conformity against a standard which will give simplified options to manufacturers to adhere to the standards and get certificate of conformity.
- Authority for verification: The Act enables the Central Government to appoint any authority/agency, in addition to the BIS, to verify the conformity of products and services to a standard and issue certificate of conformity.
- Repair or recall: There is also a provision for repair or recall, including product liability of the products bearing Standard Mark but not conforming to the relevant Indian Standard.

Significance of the new law:
The new Act will further help in ease of doing business in the country, give fillip to Make In India campaign and ensure availability of quality products and services to the consumers.

ACI-ASQ Survey

The Jaipur and Srinagar Airport are ranked First and Second respectively in the category of 2-5 million passengers in ACI-ASQ Survey.
This is for the second consecutive time that Jaipur Airport has been rated the Best Airport in the World in the traffic volume of 2 to 5 million passengers per year. Jaipur was ranked as the Best Airport in the World catering to a traffic volume of 2 to 5 million passengers per year in 2016 also.

About ASQ awards:
- The Airport Service Quality (ASQ) Awards are the aviation industry’s most prestigious accolades.
- The awards recognize the airports which have achieved the highest passenger satisfaction ratings in the ASQ Survey – the world’s benchmark measure of airport excellence. It is the only worldwide programme to survey passengers at the airports on their day of travel.
- Every year, the programme delivers some 600,000 individual surveys in 41 languages in 84 countries. It measures passengers’ views on 34 key performance indicators, including airport access, check-in, security screening, restrooms, stores and restaurants.
- Each airport uses the exact same survey, creating an industry database that allows airports to compare themselves to other airports around the world.
- The ASQ programme also has a feature that facilitates sharing of best practices among airport operators.

Five-judge statute Bench to decide on Aadhaar validity

A nine-judge bench unanimously ruled that right to privacy was a fundamental right and formed an intrinsic part of right to life guaranteed under Article 21.

Key Facts:
- Several petitioners challenging the validity of Aadhaar had raised the issue that the scheme violates privacy rights.
- The court issued notice to the Centre on a separate plea filed by an individual challenging the linking of mobile phone numbers with Aadhaar for availing the benefits of social welfare schemes.
- The Supreme Court decided to constitute a five-judge Constitution Bench to hear petitions from November against the validity of the Aadhaar scheme.

ISKCON’s Govardhan Eco Village wins Green Platinum Award

The Govardhan Eco Village, set up by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in Wada taluka of Palghar district, Maharashtra has won the Green Platinum Award. The award was received by village’s director, Gauranga Das during the Green Building Congress- 2017 held at Jaipur in Rajasthan.

Govardhan Eco Village
The village is a farm community and retreat centre spread over a scenic landscape of 100 acres at Galtare in Wada taluka. Since its inception in 2003, it has made steady progress in Organic farming, Cow protection, Rural Education, Rural development, alternative energy, eco-friendly constructions and Sustainable living etc.

Green Platinum Award
Green Platinum Award is instituted by Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) of Confederation of Indian Industry.

Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com
Industry (CII). The IGBC was established by the CII to enable sustainable built-environment for all.

### India inks MoC to send interns to Japan for training

India and Japan have signed memorandum of cooperation (MoC) on Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP) to significantly expand the bilateral cooperation in the field of skill development. India is the third country with which Japan has signed the MoC. Under it, **India will send youngsters to Japan as technical interns for on-the-job training for a period of three to five years.**

- TITP will serve as an ideal platform through which complementary strengths of India and Japan will be leveraged for mutual benefit. The technical interns trained in Japan under TITP will be an asset for the Skill India initiative upon their return to India. It will significantly contribute of Government’s vision of making India as largest provider of skilled workforce to the world.

- **Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP)**

  It was launched by Japan under Technical Intern Training Act scheduled to come into force in November 2017. By 2016-end, approximately 2,30,000 technical intern trainees from multiple countries were trained in Japan under it. In 2016, about 1,08,709 technical interns entered Japan from various partner countries such as China, Vietnam and Indonesia that account for large numbers.

### Prime Minister dedicated first All India Institute of Ayurveda to nation

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on dedicated first All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) in New Delhi to the nation on the occasion of National Ayurveda Day observed on the occasion of Dhanwantari Jayanti (17 October 2017). Prime Minister also released Ayurvedic Standard Treatment Guidelines framed by Ministry of AYUSH. He also presented Yoga Award to Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute, Pune which was announced on the occasion of International Day of Yoga.

**All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA)**

The first ever AIIA is an apex institute under Ministry of AYUSH. It aims to bring synergy between the traditional wisdom of Ayurveda and modern diagnostic tools and technology. It has been set up on lines of AIIMS. It is NABH (National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers) Accredited Hospital and an Academic Block. It has been set up with a total campus area of 10.015 acres in New Delhi. The hospital block of the AIIA will provide Out Patient Services along with free medicines. Neurological Disease Care Unit, Yoga, Panchakarma Clinic, Kriya Kalpa, Diabetic Retinopathy Clinic, Kshara Evum Anushastra Karma and Infertility Clinic. It also has pathology, microbiology, biochemistry and radiology laboratories and diagnosis facilities. The indoor patient department of AIIA has provision for 200 beds.

### Center appoints Shri Dineshwar Sharma as its Representative in J&K

Former Intelligence Bureau (IB) chief Dineshwar Sharma is appointed as Representative of Government of India to initiate and carry forward a dialogue with the elected representatives, various organizations and concerned individuals in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

**Background:**

J & K Valley’s prolonged anti-india protest, rising insurgency in Kashmir, intense counter-insurgency operation has caused acute distress in the region. Demand for the political outreach emerged to prevent radicalisation of local youth which is the topmost concern for the Indian security establishment.

**Tasks ahead for the Interlocutor:**

- He will have rank equivalent to a Cabinet Secretary and complete independence in deciding who to hold talks with.
- He is likely to hold talks with mainstream local political workers of the PDP, National Conference and Congress, heads of various religious seminaries in the Valley, local student unions etc.
- He would try to know how things are panning out on the ground for and against India and try to understand the legitimate aspirations of the people of the state.

**About Dineshwar Sharma:**

- He has worked as mediator for talks with various insurgent groups based in Assam.
- He has worked as director of the IB include 2015 Gurdaspur attack, Uri attack in 2016, rise of ISIS recruitment in Kerala.
He has served as DIG of the Border Security Force (BSF) and as the IG of CRPF in charge of Jammu and Kashmir.

Significance:
If a political dialogue, towards a lasting solution, were to begin between all the stakeholders, it would help in confidence-building measures between the government, civil society and dissidents.

**HRD Ministry pushes for cash-free campuses**

The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) is aiming to make financial transactions completely digital in all higher education institutions. Under this initiative, all public and private institutions including Central and State universities will be fully digitised. The HRD Ministry is aiming to fully digitise all campus processes including admissions, assessments, result declaration. Moreover, all canteens and business establishments on campus are also encouraged to resort to digital modes using e-wallets by linking the bank accounts with Aadhaar.

- The higher education regulators like All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and University Grants Commission (UGC) have been taken on board to help facilitate this transition.
- The HRD Ministry has asked universities to appoint nodal officer for this purpose and send a monthly report to the UGC. The work of developing modules for the internal process is also given to an agency.
- Under this digitisation initiative, the complete digitisation target will be achieved within six to eight months.

**Vittiya Saksharta Abhiyan (VISAKA):**
The HRD Ministry had launched Vittiya Saksharta Abhiyan (VISAKA), a digital financial literacy campaign aimed to actively engage youth and students of Higher Education Institutions to encourage and motivate all payers and payees to use a digitally enabled cashless economic system for transfer of funds. So far, it has enrolled lakhs of volunteers from among students to train families in their neighbourhood to conduct financial transactions digitally through BHIM app. They also helped shopkeepers, vendors and merchants’ associations in major markets, talk to shift to digital transactions. Around 2000 higher education institutions were made digital as part of this initiative.

**APEDA to promote NE products in Bangladesh and Myanmar**
The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) has taken up a programme for promotion of north eastern products in Bangladesh and Myanmar. In this regard, it has proposed to organise promotional programmes in Bangladesh and Myanmar in association with the High Commission of India in Dhaka and its Embassy in Yangon. The export of APEDA scheduled products to Bangladesh during 2016-17 was of US $396.44 million. The major products exported to Bangladesh include rice, fruits, wheat, vegetables, maize, dairy products and pulses. The export of APEDA scheduled products for Myanmar during 2016-17 was of US $24.15 million. The major products exported to Myanmar include rice, cereal preparations, maize, rice, fruits, and vegetable seeds.

### Life term for government officials indulging in torture: Law Commission

The Law Commission in latest report has recommended government to ratify Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and also recommended life in jail for public servants convicted of torture. In July 2017, Union Government had asked Law Commission of India to examine issue of ratifying the convention after a writ petition was led in court. Key Recommendations

- **UN convention**: Government should ratify UN convention on torture and other inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment as it leading to difficulties in extraditing criminals from foreign countries due to the absence of a law preventing harsh treatment by authorities.

- **Prevention of torture bill, 2017**: It has proposed legislation to amend various laws to prevent torture by government officials. The bill proposes “stringent punishment” to perpetrators to curb menace of torture and to have deterrent effect on acts of torture. It could extend up to life imprisonment and also be.

- **Compensation**: It suggested amendments to Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, and Indian Evidence Act, 1872 to accommodate provisions regarding compensation and burden of proof. It recommended an amendment to section 357B to incorporate payment of compensation in addition to payment of ne provided in Indian Penal Code. For compensation to victims, courts should decide upon justiciable compensation after taking into account various facets of individual case, such as nature, purpose, extent and manner of injury, including mental agony caused to the victim. The courts should also bear in mind socio-economic background of the victim and ensure that compensation will help victim bear expenses on medical treatment and rehabilitation.

- **Burden of proof**: It held that state own responsibility for injuries caused by its agents on citizens and held that principle of sovereign immunity cannot override rights assured by Constitution. It calls for effective mechanism must be put in place to protect victims of torture, complainants and witnesses against possible threats, violence or ill treatment. New section 114B should be inserted in Indian Evidence Act to ensure that in case person in police custody sustains injuries, it is presumed that those injuries have been inflicted by police, and burden of proof shall lie on authority concerned to explain such injury.

### UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

It is commonly known as United Nations Convention against Torture (UNCAT). It is an international human
rights treaty, under review of UN that aims to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment around the world. It requires states to take effective measures to prevent torture in any territory under their jurisdiction and forbids states to transport people to any country where there is reason to believe they will be tortured.

Public Finance Management System (PFMS)

Mandatory use of Public Finance Management System (PFMS) will help monitor the flow of funds to beneficiaries of different government welfare schemes.

Advantages:

- The actual status of utilization of funds by the multiple implementing agencies of the Central and the State Governments can be known.
- There will not be much paper work and it would go a long way in monitoring and tracking of any unnecessary parking of funds by the implementing agencies.
- Minimizes the cases of delay and pending payments to a large extent.
- PFMS will progress towards a Government wide Integrated Financial Management System (GIFMIS) – as a comprehensive Payment, Receipt and Accounting System.
- PFMS would not only help in complete tracking of funds but would also **ensure just in time transfer of funds**. PFMS, with the capability of providing real time information on resource availability, flows and actual utilization has tremendous potential to improve programme/financial management, reduce the flow in the financial systems by enabling ‘just in time’ releases and also the Government borrowings with direct impact on interest costs to the Government.

Objectives of a PFM System

1. Macro economic stability
2. Strategic allocation of resources to foster economic development
3. Timely and effective funding of public services
4. Aggregate fiscal discipline
5. Financial compliance
6. Social justice, fiscal fairness, income redistribution

Public Financial Management System (PFMS):

Public Financial Management System (PFMS) initially started as a Plan scheme named CPSMS of the Planning Commission in 2008-09 as a pilot in four States of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab and Mizoram for four Flagship schemes e.g. MGNREGS, NRHM, SSA and PMGSY. After the initial phase of establishing a network across Ministries/Departments, it has been decided to undertake National rollout of CPSMS (PFMS) to link the financial networks of Central, State Governments and the agencies of State Governments. The scheme was included in 12th Plan initiative of Planning Commission and Ministry of Finance.
SC asks Centre to strike a balance on Rohingya issue

The Supreme Court has asked the government to strike a balance between humanitarian concern for the Rohingya community staying in India and the country’s national security and economic interests. With this, the status quo continues even though the court gave the community the liberty to approach it in case of “any contingency.”

**Background:**

- A plea was filed in the supreme court by Rohingyas for protection of the life and liberty of their community. Petitioners say, the Centre’s move to deport them violated the constitutional guarantee that the Indian state should “protect the life and liberty of every human being, whether citizen or not.”
- As per the petitioners, “The proposed deportation is contrary to the constitutional protections of Article 14 (equality), Article 21 (right to life) and Article 51(e) (respect for international law and treaty obligations) of the Constitution.”
- According to estimate, there are around 40,000 Rohingyas in India, of which around 5,700 are in Jammu. Of these, only 16,000 are said to be registered with the U.N. Body.

**Who are the Rohingya?**

Few years ago, religious and ethnic tensions between the Rohingya Muslims and the Rakhine Buddhists (who make up the majority of the population in Myanmar) escalated into widespread, deadly rioting. Hundreds of thousands were forced to flee. Since then, ongoing violent attacks have forced even more people to leave their homes.

The Myanmar Government says that Rohingya people are not Burmese citizens – but the Rohingya have been living in Myanmar for generations. Today, they are a people with no home or citizenship. Rohingya people are being widely abused and exploited. They are one of the most persecuted minorities in the world.

**BBBP Week**

The Ministry of Women and Child Development will be celebrating the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Week from 09th to 14th October, 2017. The week is being celebrated in view of the International Girl Child Day on 11th October, 2017. The theme of the program will be “Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Week- The Daughters of New India“.
The week-long celebration will witness various awareness generation activities and community engagement programmes such as Oath ceremonies, prabhat pherries, rallies, nukkad natraks, street plays, campaigns by AWWs and ASHAs, etc.

At the National level, the occasion will also be marked by a Panel Discussion coinciding with the theme for this year’s International Day of the Girl — “Girls Progress=Goals Progress: What Counts for Girls” to engage key sport influencers and women and girls role models from the field, to generate support through their voice and reach.

About BBBP:
Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme was launched in January, 2015 at Panipat in Haryana. The scheme is aimed at promoting gender equality and the Significance of educating girls. The Scheme is targeted at improving the Child Sex Ratio through multi-sectoral interventions including prevention of gender biased sex selection and promoting girls’ education and her holistic empowerment.

It is a tri-ministerial effort of Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health & Family Welfare and Human Resource Development.

Performance of the scheme:
The collective and coordinated efforts undertaken at national, state and districts level has been successful in establishing a substantial improvement in the number of girls being born in the target districts.

As per the HIMS data for the 161 districts of BBBP, an increasing trend in Sex Ratio at Birth is visible in 104 BBBP Districts during 2016-17 as compared to the period 2015-16. Similarly, 119 districts have reported progress in registration of pregnancies in the first trimester during 2016-17 as compared to 2015-16. During the same period, Institutional deliveries against the total reported deliveries have improved in 146 districts in comparison to the previous year.

#BetibachaoBetipadhao

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) initiative

Objectives:

i) Prevention of gender biased sex selective elimination

ii) Ensuring survival & protection of the girl child

iii) Ensuring education and participation of the girl child
Global Wildlife Programme Conference held in New Delhi

The Global Wildlife Programme (GWP) Conference was recently held in New Delhi. It was jointly hosted by Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), World Bank and United Nations Development Programme. Theme of the Conference was – “Peoples’ participation in wildlife conservation”.

GWP Conference:
The GWP Conference held discussions on management of wildlife habitat, securing sustainable community livelihood, enhancing enforcement, monitoring, cooperation to reduce wildlife crimes such as poaching and related threats. It also provided an opportunity for India to showcase its conservation efforts through joint forest management, eco-development committees, vana sanrakshan samitis, in and around protected areas.

Global Wildlife Programme (GWP):
The GWP is World-Bank led global partnership of 19 countries in Asia and Africa to promote the conservation and sustainable development by combating trafficking in wildlife. It was initiated in 2015 by the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

It serves as a platform to exchange knowledge and coordinate on-ground action for combating illegal poaching of wildlife and improve governance on wildlife conservation. It seeks to reduce both supply and demand that drives illegal wildlife trade, and protect species and habitats through integrated landscape planning.

India emerging as a leader among milk producing nations

Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister said India is emerging as a leader among milk producing nations at Pashu Arogya Mela in Semwapur, Motihari. India produces 163.7 million tonne milk in 2016-17 worth over Rs.4 lakh crore. There are 19 crore cattle in the country, which amounts to 14% of the total cattle population of the world.

Rashtriya Gokul Mission:
Rashtriya Gokul Mission, 2014 is a focussed project under National Programme for Bovine Breeding and Dairy Development. It’s objective is to conserve and propagate indigenous breeds in an organized and scientific manner.

Progress update:
1250 MAITRI centres are being set up to facilitate artificial insemination for cattle on the doorstep. One Gokul Gram (Integrated Indigenous Cattle Centres) will have 500 animals with high genetic quality, out of which 300 will be reproductive animals. The Gokul Grams will rear Lal Sindhi, Sahiwal and Gir breeds along with Bachaur.

Indigenous animals:
Indigenous animals are more suitable for the country particularly suitable for climate and environment of their reproductive areas. They are endowed with qualities of heat tolerance, resistance to diseases and the ability to thrive under extreme climatic stress and less than optimal nutrition.

Conclusion:
Dairy farming has been a traditional source of livelihood and it has a deep connection with the agricultural economy. It is essential to increase productivity of Indigenous breeds in the country through commercial far management and balanced nutrition.

SAATHI: EESL to provide powerloom equipment to small units

The Ministry of Power along with the Ministry of Textiles have launched its new initiative named Sustainable and Accelerated Adoption of efficient Textile technologies to help small Industries.

Background:
The Powerloom sector in India is predominantly an unorganized sector and has a large number of micro and small units which produce 57 percent of the total cloth in the country. Most of Powerloom units in this country, use obsolete technology. Upgradation of Powerlooms as part of Power Tex India will lead to higher productivity, better quality and more than 50 percent additional value realisation.

Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.UPSCCivilServices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com
Key Points:

- Under the initiative, Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), a public sector entity under the administrative control of Ministry of Power, would **procure energy efficient powerlooms, motors and repair kits** in bulk and provide them to the small and medium powerloom units at no upfront cost.
- The SAATHI initiative of the Government will be jointly implemented by EESL and the office of the Textile Commissioner on a pan-India basis.
- To kick start the implementation, cluster wise demonstration projects and workshops will be organized in key clusters such as Erode, Surat.

Benefits:

- The government expects that the efficient equipment would result in energy savings and cost savings to the unit and the unit would repay in installments to EESL over a 4 to 5 year period.
- Unit owner neither has to allocate any upfront capital cost to procure these equipment nor does it have to allocate additional expenditure for repayment as the repayments to EESL are made from the savings that accrue as a result of higher efficiency equipment and cost savings.

IISc & IIT Bombay among world’s top 200 for engineering

The Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bangalore and IIT Bombay are among the world’s top 200 institutions for engineering and computer science, the Times Higher Education subject-wise rankings have found.

Background:

TIMES rankings scored 500 institutions worldwide, as opposed to 100 last year, on performance parameters such as industry income, international outlook, teaching and research. It highlights the educational institutions that are leading in electrical, mechanical, civil, chemical and general engineering courses.

Performance of various institutions:

While IISc occupied the 89th spot, IIT Bombay was pegged in the 126-150 category, globally.
IITs in Delhi, Kanpur and Kharagpur were placed in the 201-250 band, in that order, and IIT Madras and IIT Roorkee in the 251 – 300 category.
IIT Guwahati was among institutes in the 301 – 400 ranks and Jadavpur University, NIT Rourkela and Tezpur University were pegged in the 401 to 500 band.
Overall, Stanford University is number one, followed by California Institute of Technology, Oxford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Cambridge University.
While India has a total of eleven institutions in the rankings, China has 35 institutions, which is more than any other country in Asia. China’s Peking University and National University of Singapore are among the top ten and top performers from Asia.

Cabinet approves MoU between India and Belarus for Cooperation in the field of Vocational Education and Training

- The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval for a Memorandum of Understanding between India and Belarus for cooperation in the field of Vocational Education and Training (VET).
- This is for the first time an MoU for cooperation in area of vocational education, training and skill development has been signed with Eurasian country.

Significance of this MoU:
Belarus has a large concentration of industries, mainly into manufacturing and heavy industries, which draw their strength from available skilled manpower and a highly developed skill training system. The transfer of knowledge of their skilling methodology will immensely help in our initiatives like “Make in India” and “Skill India”. This MoU would pave the way for systematic transfer of their expertise and knowhow in skilling the manpower specially in manufacturing sector.

The areas of cooperation are as under:
- The Belarusian side shall provide comprehensive transfer of know-how of emerging technologies, training and evaluation methodologies, content development for regular / distance learning / e-learning/training of master trainers, competency building of the assessors in area of their competency and network building & industry linkage.
- Vocational education services for Indian citizens for skill development in the field of construction, electricpower production and distribution, manufacturing industry, trade, auto service and household goods repair and maintenance, transport, communication, hotels and restaurants as well as other fields being in high demand in India.
- Retraining, up-skilling, internship for Vocational Education and Training managers, teachers and trainers of India by the Belarusian Side.
- Advisory services in order to enhance planning, management and delivery of Vocational Education and Training and Skill Development.

Background:
Belarus is a landlocked country in Eastern Europe bordered by Russia to the northeast, Ukraine to the south, Poland to the west, and Lithuania and Latvia to the northwest.

Cabinet approves change of status for marine body IALA

Union Cabinet has given its approval for International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities (IALA) to change its status from Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) to Inter-Governmental Organization (IGO).
The move will facilitate “to foster the safe, economic and efficient movement of vessels”. It will bring IALA

About IALA:
The IALA, having headquarters at St. Germainen Laye (France) was established in 1957 under French law. It is governed by a General Assembly having 83 National members, with its Council as the executive body.
The IALA council consists of 24 National Members and India is one of the council members represented through the Directorate General of Lighthouses and Lightships (DGLL), Ministry of Shipping. DGLL establishes and maintains Aids to Navigation in general waters along coast of India including A&N and Lakshadweep group of islands, as per Lighthouse Act 1927.
The Supreme Court of India has laid down guidelines for itself and 24 High Courts to govern the exercise of designating lawyers as seniors and has ordered setting up of a permanent committee headed by the Chief Justice of India assisted by a secretariat. The direction came based on a petition challenging the designation process.

**Composition of the permanent committee:**
In the case of the Supreme Court, the permanent committee will comprise the Chief Justice of India and two seniormost companion judges, Attorney General of India and a representative from the bar nominated by the first four members.

For the HCs, it will have the Chief Justice of the respective HC and the Advocate General of the state in lieu of CJI and Attorney General.

**Selection procedure:**
- A permanent secretariat will be set up to which applications including proposals from the judges will be submitted. On receipt of such applications or proposals from Hon’ble Judges, the Secretariat will compile the relevant data and information with regard to the reputation, conduct, integrity of the Advocate(s) concerned including his/her participation in pro bono work; reported judgments in which the concerned Advocate(s) had appeared; the number of such judgments for the last five years.
- The Secretariat will publish the proposal of designation of a particular Advocate in the official website of the Court concerned inviting the suggestions and views of other stakeholders in the proposed designation.
- The cases will then be put up before the Permanent Committee for scrutiny. The Committee will interview the candidate and make an overall evaluation on the basis of his/her number of years of practice, judgments (reported and unreported) which indicate the legal formulations advanced by the Advocate concerned in the course of the proceedings of the case, pro bono work done by him/her, domain expertise of the applicant in various branches of law and publications by the advocate.
- The candidates will also have to take a personality test. After a name is considered and approved by the permanent committee, it will be put before the Full Court (involving SC/HC judges as the case may be) which will decide to accord senior designation to an advocate either unanimously or by majority, through secret ballot. The Full Court may also recall the senior designation of a lawyer if it feels he is guilty of conduct that disentitles him to the same.

**Background:**
Section 16(1) of the Advocates Act, 1961 recognises senior advocates. Section 16(2) says that “an advocate may, with his consent, be designated as senior advocate if the Supreme Court or a High Court is of opinion that by virtue of his ability (standing the Bar or special knowledge or experience in law) he is deserving of such distinction.”

Supreme Court rules say “the Chief Justice and the judges may with the consent of the advocate, designate an advocate as senior advocate if in their opinion by virtue of his ability; standing at the Bar or special knowledge or experience in law the said advocate is deserving of such distinction.” It was contended that this was not transparent.
SC bans sale of crackers in Delhi

The Supreme Court has suspended the sale of firecrackers in Delhi and NCR till November 1, 2017 in a bid to test whether a Deepavali without firecrackers this year will have a “positive effect” on the health of citizens and a steadily deteriorating air quality.

**Background:**
There are evidences of deterioration of air quality at alarming levels in Delhi. Burning of these firecrackers during Deepavali in 2016 had shot up pm [particulate matter] levels by three times, making Delhi the worst city in the world, insofar as air pollution is concerned. Direct and immediate cause thereof was burning of crackers during Deepavali.

**Opposing view:**
Few experts see court’s decision to re-impose a ban on the sale of firecrackers in Delhi and surrounding towns till November 1 as extreme, unjustified and, perhaps, inadequately thought move. To begin with, the ban is on the sale of firecrackers, not their use. So those who already have firecrackers, or, presumably, are able to obtain them from outside Delhi would be free to let them off. Equally importantly, the Supreme Court decision only applies to Delhi and nearby towns. The rest of India is exempt. For now Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad are not of equal concern. Also, has the court considered what this will do to the firecracker industry and, more importantly, to the livelihood of thousands of shopkeepers and traders, many of whom are small roadside vendors or corner shops? It could very well bankrupt and impoverish them. This raises the moral question: Is the court right to experiment with Diwali? Firecrackers do create an environmental and health hazard. For those with asthma and other breathing problems, this can be very serious. Therefore, the case for controlling and restricting is undeniable. But the Supreme Court has gone further and attempted a ban.

Why not have a blanket ban on firecrackers’ sale in Delhi?
However, a total ban on firecrackers’ sale in Delhi NCR is too “radical a step” and a graded, gradual approach to a complete ban should be adopted — would be effective from November 1.

**What can be done?**
The problem of firecrackers in Delhi has been around for decades. That’s ample time for the Court to have devised a more thoughtful response than a last minute arbitrary ban. It could have imposed a stricter timeframe, reducing the 10 pm limit to 9 or even 8 pm. It could have asked the government to stage firework displays in a handful of strategic locations, broadcast by TV channels, so people can do without their own. London does this on New Year’s Eve. Finally, it could have asked the government to pay for those who suffer from firecracker displays to leave the city for 48 hours and add the cost as an additional tax on firecrackers.

Telangana launches IoT, e-waste management policy

The Telangana government has announced two new policies focussing on Internet of things and e-waste, which are part of the 10 major focus areas of the state’s IT policy launched last year.

**IoT policy:**
- The IoT policy is designed to attract Rs 10,000 crore worth of investments and the creation of five clusters each in three districts.
- The IoT policy is focussed on developing smart city solutions, medical health IoT, smart logistics
and agritech. These will be propelled by TWorks, a hardware prototyping centre being developed by the state government.

- The centre will partner with corporates and laboratories to access testing tools and other prototyping equipment specific to IoT.

**E waste policy:**

- E-Waste generation in India is rising at an alarming annual rate of 25%, with Hyderabad currently recording 25,000 MT per annum, the 6th largest generator in the country. The state’s e-waste policy calls for earmarking industrial space or sheds for dismantling and recycling e-waste in existing and upcoming industrial parks, estates and industrial clusters.

- The government aims to promote management of e-waste through collaborations with bulk consumers of electronic products, major industry organisations and other stakeholders. The government would also provide incentives to boost refurbishing and recycling centres. A subsidy of Rs 1 crore will be provided for a minimum investment of Rs 5 crore for the first five recyclers and refurbishers.

- Apart from that, it also plans to give 25% subsidy on lease rentals for every company for the first three years of operation and provide Rs 1,000 as training subsidy per person every month for 1,000 people. With this, the government aims to provide employment for 50,000 people in five years.

**Sampoorna Bima Gram Yojana**

In a bid to provide affordable life insurance services to people, particularly those living in rural areas of the country, the government has launched Sampoorna Bima Gram (SBG) Yojana and expanded the coverage of Postal Life Insurance (PLI). With this, apart from government employees, PLI will now cover professionals also. The decision has been taken to enlarge the cover of social security and bring the maximum number of people under the protection of Postal Life Insurance (PLI).

**About the Sampoorna Bima Gram (SBG) Yojana:**

- Under the Sampoorna Bima Gram (SBG) Yojana, at least one village (having a minimum of 100 households) will be identified in each of the revenue districts of the country, wherein endeavour will be made to cover all households of that identified village with a minimum of one RPLI (Rural Postal Life Insurance) policy each. Coverage of all households in the identified Sampoorna Bima Gram village is the primary objective of this scheme.

- Rural Postal Life Insurance (RPLI), introduced on March 24, 1995 on the recommendations of the Malhotra Committee, provides insurance cover to people residing in rural areas, especially weaker sections and women living in rural areas.

**Postal Life Insurance:**

- Postal Life Insurance (PLI) was introduced on 1st February 1884. In the beginning, the upper limit

Pragyna IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com
of life insurance was only Rs 400, which has now increased to Rs 50 lakh.

- It covers employees of Central and state governments, Central and state public sector undertakings, universities, government-aided educational institutions, nationalized banks, local bodies, autonomous bodies, joint ventures having a minimum of 10% Govt./PSU stake, credit co-operative societies etc.
- PLI also extends the facility of insurance to the officers and staff of the Defence services and para-military forces. Apart from single insurance policies, Postal Life Insurance also manages a **group insurance scheme** for the extra departmental employees (Gramin Dak Sevaks) of the Department of Posts.

### India Water Week (IWW)-2017

The India Water Week 2017 is going to be held between October 10 – 14, 2017 at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi. Various conferences and exhibitions involving stakeholders will be held during this week.

**Based on the theme “Water and Energy for Inclusive Growth,”** India Water Week-2017 is a platform to elicit ideas and opinions from global-level decision makers, politicians, researchers and entrepreneurs in the field of water resources development and management for mutual benefit and goodwill.

**Need for conservation of water:**
Water is the harbinger and sustainer of all life on the planet, especially the humankind. With the growing population and improvement in economic status, the demand for available water resources is also increasing. As a result, there is an urgency to conserve and utilize the limited availability of water resources in an optimum and efficient manner to satisfy larger needs.

**Background:**
India water week is a unique platform for deliberating all the related issues and better management of water resources created by the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation. The government has involved all stakeholders including decision makers, politicians, researchers and entrepreneurs of water resources from India as well as abroad to discuss strategies for managing the demands and supplies in the right manner.

The first event was organised in New Delhi in 2012 and the theme was ‘Water, Energy and Food Security: Call for Solutions’

**APY subscribers to touch 1 crore by March 2018**
According to the estimates by Finance Ministry, the subscriber base of Atal Pension Yojana (APY), a guaranteed pension scheme for unorganised sector, is expected to increase to 1 crore by March next year.

**About APY:**

The Atal Pension Yojana became operational from June 1, 2015 and is available to all the citizens of India in the age group of 18-40 years. Under the scheme, a subscriber would receive a minimum guaranteed pension of Rs 1,000 to Rs 5,000 per month, depending upon his contribution, from the age of 60 years. The same pension would be paid to the spouse of the subscriber and on the demise of both the subscriber and the spouse, the accumulated pension wealth is returned to the nominee. The Central Government would also co-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.

APY is being used as an important instrument for inclusion. Within three years, the scheme has been able coverage is very low in the country.

**Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI)**

The government has launched Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI). Through this programme, the Government aims to reach each and every child under two years of age and all those pregnant women who have been left uncovered under the routine immunisation programme. The special drive will focus on improving immunization coverage in select districts and cities to ensure full immunization to more than 90% by December 2018.

- Intensified Mission Indradhanush will have inter-ministerial and inter-departmental coordination, action based review mechanism and intensified monitoring and accountability framework for effective implementation of targeted rapid interventions to improve the routine immunization coverage.
- IMI is supported by 11 other ministries and departments, such as Ministry of Women and Child Development, Panchayati Raj, Ministry of Urban Development, Ministry of Youth Affairs among others. The convergence of ground level workers of various departments like ASHA, ANMs, Anganwadi workers, Zila preraks under National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM), self-help groups will be ensured for better coordination and effective implementation of the programme.

**Monitoring of the scheme:**

- Intensified Mission Indradhanush would be closely monitored at the district, state and central level at regular intervals. Further, it would be reviewed by the Cabinet Secretary at the National level and will continue to be monitored at the highest level under a special initiative ‘Proactive Governance and Timely Implementation (PRAGATI)’.
- Under IMI, special strategies are devised for rigorous monitoring of the programme. States and districts have developed coverage improvement plans based on gap self-assessment.
- These plans are reviewed from state to central level with an aim to reach 90% coverage by December 2018. An appreciation and awards mechanism is also conceived to recognize the districts reaching more than 90% coverage.
- The criteria includes best practices and media management during crisis. To acknowledge the contribution of the

**About Mission Indradhanush:**

Mission Indradhanush aims to immunize all children under the age of 2 years, as well as all pregnant women, against seven vaccine preventable diseases. The diseases being targeted are diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, poliomyelitis, tuberculosis, measles and Hepatitis B. In addition to these, vaccines for Japanese Encephalitis and Haemophilus influenzae type B are also being provided in selected states. In 2016, four new additions have been made namely Rubella, Japanese Encephalitis, Injectable Polio Vaccine Bivalent and Rotavirus.
partners/Civil Society Organization (CSOs) and others, Certificate of Appreciation will be given.

**Background:**
The achievement of full immunisation under Mission Indradhanush to at least 90% coverage was to be achieved by 2020 earlier. With the launch of IMI, achievement of the target has now been advanced.

---

**WHO releases guidelines to address overweight and obesity in children**

*As part of its response to the global epidemic of obesity, WHO has released guidelines to support primary healthcare workers identify and help children who are overweight or obese.*

**Need for intervention:**
Assessing and managing children at primary health-care facilities to prevent overweight and obesity in the context of the double burden of malnutrition is part of a concerted effort to tackle the global epidemic in obesity including among children. This global epidemic affects all world regions. It is rising most rapidly in low- and middle-income countries.

In 2016 an estimated 41 million children under 5 were affected by overweight or obesity. Of this, one half of all children overweight or obese lived in Asia and one quarter lived in Africa. Paradoxically, overweight and obesity is found in populations where undernutrition remains common – the term ‘double-burden of malnutrition’ is sometimes used to describe these settings.

Without effective treatment, they are very likely to remain overweight and obese throughout their lives, putting them at risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and premature death, as well as suffering physical and psychological consequences in childhood.
Important guidelines:

✔ WHO recommends that all infants and children aged less than 5 years presenting to primary health-care facilities should have both weight and height measured in order to determine their weight-for-height and their nutritional status according to WHO child growth standards. Comparing a child’s weight with norms for its length or height is an effective way to assess for both wasting and overweight.

✔ Where infants and children are identified as overweight, WHO recommends providing counselling to parents and caregivers on nutrition and physical activity including promotion and support for exclusive breastfeeding in the first 6 months and continued breastfeeding until 24 months or beyond. If children are obese, they should be further assessed and an appropriate management plan should be developed. This can be done by a health worker at primary health-care level, if adequately trained, or at a referral clinic or local hospital.

✔ Additionally, moderate wasting and stunting are potential risk factors for children becoming overweight or obese. Within these populations, and until there is a more definitive evidence base, to avoid increasing the risk of overweight and obesity WHO recommends not to provide formulated supplementary foods on a routine basis to children who are moderately wasted or stunted.

Significance of this move:
As well as helping Member States and their partners in their efforts to make evidence-informed decisions on assessing and managing children at primary health-care facilities, the guideline aims to support their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the global targets set by the Comprehensive implementation plan

Passive euthanasia already a law, says govt.

More than six years after sanctioning passive euthanasia as a legitimate option to end lives of people in a permanent vegetative state, the Supreme Court has decided to examine the more complex concept of a “living will” where removal of life support is authorised in case of an irreversible coma. SC was hearing a plea by NGO Common Cause to declare ‘right to die with dignity’ as a fundamental right within the fold of right to live with dignity, which is guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.

What is a “Living Will”?
A “living will” is a document prepared by a person in a healthy state of mind specifying that if s/he slides into a vegetative state because of an irreversible terminal

Active and passive euthanasia:

Active euthanasia, the intentional act of causing the death of a patient in great suffering, is illegal in India. It entails deliberately causing the patient’s death through injections or overdose.

But passive euthanasia, the withdrawal of medical treatment with the deliberate intention to hasten a terminally ill patient’s death is “partially” allowed.

The patient, family, friends and legal guardians can’t take the decision on their own, but need a high court’s approval bill for stopping treatment.
illness, the debilitated existence should not be prolonged with the help of life support systems or other medical interventions.

In such a case, relatives will be spared the agonising decision of removing life support and doctors will be guided solely by the “living will”. In several cases, the reluctance to pull the plug on a loved one even when s/he is in a vegetative state prolongs the pain of the patient.

**Euthanasia in law:**
The government told the court on Tuesday there was already a law on passive euthanasia and it had drafted a “management of patients with terminal illness-withdrawal of medical life support bill”. The issue of euthanasia was first examined by the health ministry in consultation with the experts in 2006, based on the 196th Law Commission of India report. However, it was decided to not make any laws on euthanasia.

**Aruna Shanbaug case:**
In 2011, the Supreme Court, while hearing the case of Aruna Shanbaug, who was in a vegetative state for nearly 30 years, had legalised passive euthanasia partially.

A nurse at KEM Hospital in Mumbai, Shanbaug was in a vegetative state since 1973 after a brutal sodomisation and strangling with a dog-chain during a sexual assault. She died in 2015 while on a ventilator for several days after suffering from pneumonia.

SC gave patients living in a vegetative state the **right to have treatment or food withdrawn**, and laid down guidelines to process passive euthanasia in the case of incompetent patients. The guidelines include seeking a declaration from a high court, after getting clearance from a medical board and state government.

**Medical experts on euthanasia:**
Doctors have a mixed reaction to legalising euthanasia. They say the government needs to take a careful approach before legalising passive euthanasia when the measures to prolong the life of the patient are withdrawn.

Most doctors, however, agree that euthanasia should be made legal in cases where there is no scope of a patient recovering. But many feel that India is not yet ready for a decision like this which requires a mix of sensitivity and maturity.

A major concern is the misuse of the law. If it is legal to passively allow or actively hasten death, what’s to say an aged parent won’t be hastened in favour of an inheritance, or a spouse have treatment withdrawn for the sake of a hefty insurance payout?

**Euthanasia in other countries:**
Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide have been legal in The Netherlands and Belgium since 2001 and 2002. In the US, Switzerland and Germany, euthanasia is illegal but physician-assisted suicide is legal. Euthanasia remains illegal in the UK, France, Canada and Australia.

---

**ACTIVE EUTHANASIA**
- It is when death is brought by an act. For example, taking a high dose of drugs.
- To end a person's life by use of drugs, either by oneself or by the aid of physician.

**PASSIVE EUTHANASIA**
- When death is brought by an omission. For example, when someone lets the person die, this can be done by withdrawing or withholding treatment.
- Withdrawing treatment: For example, switching off a machine that keeps the person alive.
- Withholding treatment: For example, not carrying out a surgery that will extend life of the patient for a short time.

---

Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com
National Mission for Clean Ganga has approved eight projects worth Rs. 700 crore, out of which four pertain to sewage management in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, three are related to treatment of drains through bio-remediation and one of inventory and surveillance of river Ganga.

**About Namami Gange Programme:**
Namami Gange programme was launched as a mission to achieve the target of cleaning river Ganga in an effective manner with the unceasing involvement of all stakeholders, especially five major Ganga basin States – Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal.

**The programme envisages:** River Surface Cleaning, Sewerage Treatment Infrastructure, River Front Development, Bio-Diversity, Afforestation and Public Awareness.

**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 mechanisms between various Ministries/Agencies of Central and State governments.

**Karnataka needs its own flag**
Chief minister of Karnataka Siddaramaiah has once again invoked Kannada pride, saying the government is firm on Karnataka having a state flag.

**Background:**
Some activists had urged the government to design a separate flag for Karnataka and accord statutory standing for that. Following this, the Karnataka State government had constituted a nine-member committee headed by Principal Secretary, Department of Kannada and Culture, to study and submit a report to the government on the possibility of “designing a separate flag for Karnataka and providing it a statutory standing.”

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

**Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan**
Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently launched the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) at Gandhinagar in Gujarat.

**About PMGDISHA:**
- PMGDISHA is government initiative with an objective to impart digital literacy among the people residing in rural areas. It is an important initiative under Modi’s vision of ‘Digital India’ that intends at making one person in every family digitally literate.
- This scheme will focus on making at last six crore people in rural areas digitally literate. By March 31, 2019, it is expected to reach around 40 per cent rural households in the country.
- Under free of cost PMGDISHA scheme, people in the rural area will be trained to operate a computer, tablet, smartphones, etc. They will be taught how to access the Internet, government services, undertake digital payment, compose e-mails, etc.
- The citizens of rural India will be taught to use applications related to digital payments so they can
participate in the process of nation-building. This scheme will help to connect the digital divide.

- The marginalised sections of society like Scheduled Castes (SC)/Scheduled Tribes (ST), Minorities, Below Poverty Line (BPL), differently-abled, all will be a part of this scheme. The scheme aims to empower women in the rural India.

- **Illiterate people between the age group 14-60 years, nominated from every eligible rural household, are qualified for the scheme.**

**Significance of this programme:**

As per the 71st NSSO Survey on Education 2014, only 6% of rural households have a computer. This highlights that more than 15 crore rural households (at 94% of 16.85 crore households) do not have computers and a significant number of these households are likely to be digitally illiterate. The PMGDISHA being initiated under Digital India Programme would cover 6 crore households in rural areas to make them digitally literate. This would empower the citizens by providing them access to information, knowledge and skills for operating computers digital access devices.

---

**China has pointed to an 1890 treaty between Sikkim and Tibet to bolster its claims to the Doklam plateau at the trijunction.**

China has pointed to an 1890 treaty between Sikkim and Tibet to bolster its claims to the Doklam plateau at the trijunction. However, India believes Beijing is misrepresenting Delhi's position as well as prior agreements between the two countries acknowledging differences at the India-China-Bhutan trijunction.

**About 1890 UK- China treaty:**

- The Convention was signed between Great Britain and China on March 17, 1890, at Cakcutta. As per Article (1) of Convention of 1890, it was agreed that the boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Teesta and its affluents, from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu and northwars into other rivers of Tibet. The line commences at Mount Gipmochi, on the Bhutan frontier, and follows the above-mentioned water-parting to the point where it meets Nepal territory.

- However, Tibet refused to recognise the validity of Convention of 1890 and further refused to carry into effect the provisions of the said Convention. In 1904, a treaty known as a Convention between Great Britain and Tibet was signed at Lhasa.

- As per the Convention, Tibet agreed to respect the Convention of 1890 and to recognise the frontier
between Sikkim and Tibet, as defined in Article (1) of the said Convention. On April 27, 1906, a treaty was signed between Great Britain and China at Peking, which confirmed the Convention of 1904 between Great Britain and Tibet.

**Is it recognised by India?**
The Convention of 1890 was entered by the King of Great Britain on behalf of India before independence and around the time of independence, the Indian Independence (International Arrangement) Order, 1947 was notified by Secretariat of the Governor-General (Reforms) on August 14, 1947. The Order provided, inter alia, that the rights and obligations under all international agreements to which India is a party immediately before the appointed day will devolve upon the Dominion of India. Therefore, in terms of Order of 1947, the government of India is bound by the said Convention of 1890. However, India’s affirmation of the Convention of 1890 was limited to the alignment of the India-China border in Sikkim, based on watershed, and not with respect to any other aspects.
Capacity building in dam safety areas

Central Water Commission (CWC) has signed MoUs with IIT Roorkee and MNNIT Allahabad to support dam rehabilitation efforts of various implementing agencies and CWC.

**Background:**
Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation has taken on board selected premier academic and research institutes, for capacity building in the areas of dam safety through World Bank assisted Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP). The scope includes strengthening the testing laboratories, enhancing analytical capabilities, exposure visits to best global institutions, and on ground exposure to dam safety concerns to the faculty of these institutions.

CWC has already signed MoUs with IIT Madras, IISc Bangaluru, NIT Calicut and NIT Raurkela for supporting these institutes for the procurement of specified equipment and software for enhancing their testing and modeling capabilities. The project will also promote new technologies and improve institutional capacities for dam safety evaluation and implementation at the Central and State levels and in some identified premier academic and research institutes of the country.

The Central Dam Safety Organisation of Central Water Commission, assisted by a Consulting firm, is coordinating and supervising the Project implementation. The project development objectives of DRIP are: (i) to improve the safety and performance of selected existing dams and associated appurtenances in a sustainable manner, and (ii) to strengthen the dam safety institutional setup in participating states as well as at central level.

**About DRIP:**
The Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Government of India, with assistance from the World Bank, is implementing the DAM REHABILITATION AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (DRIP) which would be a six-year project.

The project originally envisaged the rehabilitation and improvement of about 223 dams within four states namely, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu and later Karnataka, Uttarakhand (UNVNL) and Jharkhand (DVC) joined DRIP and total number of dams covered under DRIP increased to 250.

**Government inks $65.5 Million Loan agreement with ADB to support Coastal Protection in Karnataka**

The Union Government has inked $65.5 million loan agreement with Asian Development Bank (ADB) to continue interventions to check coastal erosion on the Western Coast in Karnataka. The loan is second tranche of $250 million financing facility under Sustainable Coastal Protection and Management Investment Program for 20-year term. It will be used for to address immediate coastal protection needs and for strengthening institutional capacity of Karnataka’s Inland Water Transport Department and Public Works, Ports.

**Sustainable Coastal Protection and Management Investment Program:**
It consist of eight coastal protection sub projects to address issues of medium to severe coastal erosion resulting in protection of about 54 km of coastline in Karnataka. It has already demonstrated benefit of adoption of softer options such as artificial reefs, beach nourishments, and dune management for coastal protection. State Department of Public Works is responsible for implementation of overall program which is due for completion by September 2020.

**Background:**
Karnataka’s coast supports state’s major economic sectors, which include agriculture, fisheries, tourism, ports and other major transport and communication sectors. Coastal erosion in state poses high risk to human wellbeing, economic development, and ecological integrity through loss of land, infrastructure, and business opportunities. Under increasing threat from climate change impacts, coastal protection and management has
evolved as major challenge to development. This project is mainly focused for effective and sustainable management of shoreline which is vital for sustainable economic and social development of coastal regions in state.

‘BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise- 2017’

India is all set to hold the first ‘BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise- 2017’. BIMSTEC DMEx-2017 will be conducted by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) as the lead agency. Delegates from all seven nations of the ‘Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation’ (BIMSTEC) grouping, – namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand, representatives from Embassies/High Commissions of BIMSTEC nations in Delhi, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), and Senior Officers from the Nodal Ministries will participate in the event.

- This Exercise will be a platform for sharing Best Practices on all aspects of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), strengthening regional response and coordination for Disaster Management among the BIMSTEC member countries.
- The main focus of the BIMSTEC DMEx-2017 will be on testing the region’s preparedness and resilience towards effective activation of inter-Governmental interaction/dialogue/agreements for immediate deployment of regional resources for disaster response.
- It will help create synergy and synchronize efforts to institutionalize regional cooperation among the member countries.
- The exercise will help strengthen the effective utilization of the Search & Rescue Teams for Disaster Relief & Emergency Response, including Emergency Rapid Assessment Teams and Management of mass casualties especially in situations involving breakdown of infrastructure and communication.

Background:
India has been at the forefront of DRR efforts by hosting the South Asian Annual Disaster Management Exercise (SAADMEEx) and the Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR). India has also offered its expertise and capabilities in DRR such as the South Asia satellite, GSAT-9, and the Tsunami Early Warning Centre to other countries. Disaster Management was one of the important Agenda items the BIMSTEC leaders deliberated upon during the Goa BRICS Summit in October last year where BIMSTEC leaders were the Special Invitees.

The BIMSTEC region is home to around 1.5 billion people, constituting around 22% of the global population with a combined GDP of US $2.7 trillion economy. Majority of the BIMSTEC countries are situated in the South Asian Region (SAR), prone to natural disasters such as floods, cyclones, earthquakes, avalanches and drought.
Calamities displace 23 lakh every year in India

According to the study, ‘A Global Disaster Displacement Risk Model’, conducted by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre of the Norwegian Refugee Council and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), calamities displace 23 lakh people every year in India.

Highlights of the report:

- India ranks the highest among the world’s most disaster-prone countries for displacement of residents, with 23 lakh, on average, uprooted due to calamities such as floods, cyclones and earthquakes. Rise in homelessness will continue, according to the report.
- The report however notes that the estimation of displaced people in India may be on the lower side considering that, in the recent Bihar floods alone, about 1.75 crore were affected and 8.55 lakh evacuated. Floods hit at least half a dozen other states this year.
- Most of this displacement is being driven by flooding, which is on the increase in a warming world where population growth in hazard-prone parts of the globe has increased exposure.

About UNISDR:

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

It was established to ensure the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

It is part of the United Nations Secretariat and its functions span the social, economic, environmental as well as humanitarian fields.

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

UNISDR’s vision is anchored on the four priorities for action set out in the Sendai Framework:

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

Mitra Shakti 2017

The fifth India-Sri Lanka Joint Training Exercise MITRA SHAKTI 2017 is being held in Pune.

- The exercise is based on Counter Terrorist Operations and an Infantry company from both the countries is participating in the same.
- The aim of the joint training is to exchange the best of military practices of the two countries and build a strong military-to-military relation between the two armies.
- The exercise, the fifth in the series, also aims at developing joint strategies by sharing the expertise of conducting operations, especially in the counter-insurgency and counter terrorism (CI and CT) environment.
- The fourth chapter of the exercise was held at the Sinha Regimental Centre in Ambepussa, Sri Lanka, in 2016, when the main focus was to enhance inter-operability in CI and CT operations under
the UN mandate.

**Significance of this exercise:**
The training exercise is considered an important effort in India’s response to China’s growing influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region. It is expected to send a strong signal to the world that both India and Sri Lanka understand the emerging threat of terrorism and stand shoulder to shoulder in countering this menace.

---

**Bi-annual Naval Commanders’ Conference**

Hon’ble Raksha Mantri complimented all personnel of the Indian Navy for securing the maritime interests of the nation.

**Achievements mentioned:**
- Regular deployment of ships, submarines and aircraft in all directions (South China Sea, Sea of Japan, Persian Gulf, the Atlantic Ocean and Australia shores)
- Deter piracy attempts off the Gulf of Aden.
- Participation in a number of bilateral exercises
- Success of the Exercise MALABAR with the US and the Japanese Navy.
- Lead taken by Indian Navy in indigenisation and self-reliance.
- Engagement with the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) littorals to build their capacities and enhance their capabilities through practical training of Naval personnel on regular basis

**Issues to be addressed:**
- Indian Navy is facing shortfalls in ship-borne multi-role helicopters, conventional submarines and mine counter measure vessels, which need urgent redressal.
- Govt and Industry should encourage development of equipment and systems in India and to reduce import dependence in the Defence sector.

**Upcoming Programmes:**
- Goa Maritime Conclave - Institutionalising a full-fledged regional forum to help find collective solutions to matters maritime in the IOR and facilitate projection of India’s and Indian Navy’s strategic and operational vision to a wider regional and global audience through MILAN 2018 at Port Blair early next year would be an excellent forum to get the littoral Navies on a common platform to discuss regional maritime issues and security challenges.

**Indian Ocean Region (IOR):**
The IOR, a large maritime area that extends from coastal Africa through the Middle East and South Asia and on to Australia, is a major conduit for global trade, a littoral zone of developing powers.

**Conclusion:**
Indian Navy – to be strong at sea, and be ever ready and vigilant to counter any challenges in the maritime domain. Maritime interests of a nation have a vital relationship with its economic growth and these shall be protected at all costs by ensuring a strong and credible Indian Navy.
OPV Vikram: L&T hand overs first defence vessel built in private shipyard to Coast Guard

comments Larsen and Toubro (L&T) handed over offshore patrol vessel (OPV) named “Vikram” to the Indian Coast Guard. It is country’s first-ever such defence vessel to be built in a private shipyard The vessel was indigenously developed in-house at L&T’s Kattupalli shipyard. Its entire design and construction processes have undergone dual certification from American Bureau of Shipping and Indian Registrar of Shipping. OPV Vikram is first of seven vessels for which by Ministry of Defence had awarded Rs. 1,432-crore contract to L&T in March 2015. It will be inducted into service by April 2018 after completion of extensive trials of equipment and machineries.

➡️ The OPV Vikram is 97 metres long, 15 metre wide and has 2,140 tonne displacement capacity with range of 5,000 nautical miles and can reach speed of up to 26 knots (One knot is 1.852 km/hr).
➡️ It is equipped with state-of-the-art radars, navigation and communication systems capable of operating in tropical conditions. About 60% components of the ship were sourced from domestic suppliers.
➡️ The ship is fitted with one 30 mm automatic gun with Fire Control System (FCS) and two 12.7 mm gun with FCS. It has integral twin-engine helicopter and backend helipad which enhances its operational, surveillance, search and rescue capabilities.
➡️ It will be deployed for day and night surveillance patrols, search and rescue and in pollution response operations in exclusive economic zones (EEZ) of the country.

INS Satpura, Kadmatt participate in Passage Exercise in Japan

➡️ Indian Naval Ships Satpura and Kadmatt participated in Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with Japanese Marine Self Defence Force (JMSDF) held at Sasebo, Japan.
➡️ These ships are participating in the exercise in pursuance of India's Act East Policy and demonstration of India’s commitment to peace and stability in Indo-Pacific Region.
➡️ The visiting Indian Naval ships engaged with JMSDF in formal calls and also professional, social and sporting interactions.

Comment
The visit of these ships is part India’s initiatives to strengthen long standing, mutually supportive and strong relationship between Japan and India which spans across wide spectrum of cultural, spiritual, economic and security relations.
Naval ties between India and Japan have reached new heights with bilateral and multilateral exercises since first ‘Navy to Navy Staff Talks’ between two nations in November 2008. Since then, naval ties have enhanced to cooperation in information sharing, meteorology and oceanography, disaster management and military training. The defence and security interaction also expanded to encompass Defence Policy Dialogue and a Maritime Affairs Dialogue. Regular bilateral and multilateral maritime exercises are foundation for strong naval relations between both countries. The erstwhile Japan–India Maritime Exercise (JIMEX) led to Japan participating in ‘MALABAR’ exercise (a tripartite naval exercise between India, US and Japan) since 2014.

RUSSIAN TEAM IN VIZAG TO INSPECT DAMAGED SUBMARINE

A Russian technical team is in Vizag for a joint investigation into the mysterious damage suffered by INS Chakra, the nuclear submarine leased to India in 2011.

Context:
Russia had leased the submarine to India for a 10-year period in 2011. There has been a speculation that the submarine met with an accident while negotiating the narrow channel to enter the harbour. Sources say nuclear reactor on INS Chakra is intact; Russia not fully convinced of Indian findings. Damage to the submarine was not very serious, and did not impact the nuclear reactor, because it was all contained to the outer hull.

INS Chakra:
⇒ INS Chakra is a Russia-made, nuclear-propelled, hunter-killer submarine.
⇒ The Akula class submarine is an SSN, and is to provide escort to INS Arihant, the indigenously constructed ballistic missile submarine that would carry nuclear missiles.
⇒ INS Chakra has been taken on lease from Russia for 10 years to provide the Navy the opportunity to train personnel and operate such nuclear-powered vessels.
⇒ India is already engaged in negotiations for the second nuclear submarine from Russia, which could join service when INS Chakra returns after its 10-year lease.

INDRA 2017: First tri-services military exercise between India-Russia begins

The first tri-service armed Forces (Army, Navy, & Air Force) exercise INDRA 2017 between India and Russia began at the 249th Combined Army Range Sergeevisky and in Sea of Japan near Vladivostok. It is overall 10th edition of INDRA exercise and India’s first bilateral military exercise with any country involving all three services.

INDRA 2017:
The scope of 11-day exercise includes professional interactions, establishment of joint command and control structures between Indian and Russian forces and elimination of terrorist threat in multinational environment under UN mandate. The Indian contingent comprises 350 personnel from Army, 80 from Air Force, two IL 76 aircraft and one frigate and corvette each from the Navy. Russia is represented by approximately 1000 troops of 5th Army, marines and ships of Pacific Fleet and aircraft from Eastern Military District. Comment: Exercise INDRA in its previous nine avatars was conducted as single service exercise alternately between

Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com
two countries. For India, the major emphasis during exercise is to enhance inter-service cooperation and synergizing jointness. Moreover it is inlines with India’s armed forces focus on complete and effective inter-operability with countries, big and small in order to effectively conduct military operations overseas. In 2016, INDRA exercise was held in December 2016 at Visakhapatnam and Bay of Bengal.

INS kiltan

INS Kiltan (P30), third Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) stealth corvettes built under Project 28 (Kamorta Class) was recently commissioned into the Indian Navy.

- The ship gets her name from old INS Kiltan (P79), a Petya class ASW ship that served the nation for 18 years before being decommissioned in June 1987. It is named after the coral island belonging to the Lakshadweep group of islands. Regarded as a very prestigious acquisition, INS Kiltan is one of the most potent warships to have been constructed in India.
- More than 80 % of the ship is indigenous with state of the art equipment & systems to fight in Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) warfare conditions.
- INS Kiltan is the first major warship with superstructure entirely of composite material.

Main features:
- The sleek and magnificent ship is propelled by ‘Combination of Diesel and Diesel (CODAD)’ propulsion system of four diesel engines to achieve speeds in excess of 25 knots and has an endurance of around 3,500 Nautical Miles.
- The ship has enhanced stealth features resulting in a reduced Radar Cross Section (RCS) achieved by Xform of hull and superstructure along with optimally sloped surfaces.
- The very low under water acoustic signature makes it a ‘silent killer on the prowl’. The ship’s advanced stealth features make her less susceptible to detection by the enemy and help in effective employment of soft kill measure like the Chaff.

Sri Lankan Coast Guard commissions OPV SURAKSHA gifted by India

Sri Lankan Coast Guard has commissioned Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) SURAKSHA gifted by India at Colombo port. It is first OPV of Sri Lankan Coast Guard. Sri Lankan Coast Guard Ship (SLCGS) Suraksha earlier belonged to Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and was known as Varuna. It was officially handed over to Sri Lanka Navy at ceremony held at Kochi Port in India in September 2017.

SLCGS Suraksha:
SLCGS Suraksha is 74.10m in length and 11.4m in breadth. It has displacement of 1,160 tons. It can sail at speed of 22 nautical miles per hour. It can cover 8,500 nautical miles maintaining speed of 16 nautical miles per hour. It is manned by crew of 14 officers and 86 sailors.
It will be used by Sri Lanka Coast Guard for patrolling and surveillance in Sri Lanka waters, humanitarian assistance and disaster response operations, prevention of maritime pollution as well as training purposes. Besides it play a crucial role in strengthening the Sri Lanka’s naval capabilities.

INCG Varuna:
It was inducted into Indian Coast Guard in February 1988 and provided three decades of service in India. It was fourth of its class of OFV built by the Mumbai-based Mazagon Dock. It has numerous operational

Pragnya IAS Academy                             +91 9880487071                      www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore                   +91 9880486671                      www.pragnyaias.com
achieved and had recorded a number of arrests of smugglers with gold worth several crore in the late 1980s. It was used as a cadet training ship for the last 10 years and was part of the 1st Training Squadron (1 TS) of the Indian Navy which trains officer sea trainees of both the Navy as well as the Coast Guard.

### Navika Sagar Parikrama – Tarini Enters Fremantle

INSV Tarini entered Fremantle (Australia) port today during its maiden voyage to circumnavigate the globe. This is the first-ever Indian circumnavigation of the globe by an all-women crew.

**INSV Tarini:**
INSV Tarini is a 56 foot sailing vessel built in India by M/s Aquarius Shipyards Pvt Ltd, Goa. It was inducted into the Indian Navy recently in February 2017. It has Raymarine navigation suite and an array of satellite communication systems for perfect navigation anywhere in the world. It showcases the ‘Make in India’ initiative on the International forum.

**Navika Sagar Parikrama:**
- The voyage of Navika Sagar Parikrama began from Goa coast in September 2017 and will be finishing around March 2018.
- The expedition will be covered in five legs, with stop-overs at 4 ports: Fremantle (Australia), Lyttleton (New Zealand), Port Stanley (Falklands), and Cape Town (South Africa).
- The project is considered essential towards promoting Ocean Sailing activities in the Indian Navy along with showcasing the Government’s support for empowering women.

**Significance:**
- It also aims to showcase ‘Nari Shakti’ on the world platform and help revolutionise societal attitudes and mindset towards women in India by raising visibility of their participation in challenging environs.
- The voyage aims to show case the ‘Make in India’ initiative by sailing onboard the indigenously built INSV Tarini.
- The crew would monitor and report marine pollution on the high seas.

### IAF show scorches Lucknow-Agra highway

A major touchdown exercise of the Indian Air Force was held on the Agra-Lucknow expressway at Bangarmau in Unnao district of Uttar Pradesh today. As many as 20 fighter aircraft took part in the special exercise.
- The drill witnessed the participation of a C-130J transport aircraft with Garud commandos for assault landing as well as three Jaguars, six Mirages, six SU 30s in touch down and take off operations.
- This is the second time that a touchdown exercise was held at Agra Lucknow expressway.

**Objective of this exercise:**
The exercise was conducted to test the capability of the Indian Air Force to land its fighter jets and transport aircrafts on highways in the event of an emergency or in a war-like situation.
- This operation has boosted the IAF’s capability to undertake unhindered operations even during nonavailability of standard runways.
- It has demonstrated the expert flying skills of its fighter and transport aircrew, and the capability of its ground crew in activating such expressway airstrips on short notice.

**C-130J Super Hercules:**
- The C-130J Super Hercules, which is of U.S. origin, is utilised for special operations and relief work during HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief) operations.
- They supply relief material during calamities such as floods and earthquakes, and are also used for evacuation.

### INS Sukanya at Indonesia for Coordinated Patrol of IMBL

INS Sukanya arrived at Belawan Indonesia to participate in the 30th edition of CORPAT (Coordinated Patrol) and 3rd bilateral exercise between the Indian Navy and the Indonesian Navy. The exercise is aimed to foster closer maritime ties with countries located on the rim of the Indian Ocean.

**CORPAT:**
Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaiias.com
CORPAT is a bilateral maritime exercise between India and Indonesia.
Both countries have been carrying out maritime exercise twice a year since 2002.
The CORPAT exercise between the two navies aims to enhance mutual understanding and interoperability between the navies, carries search and rescue operations, institutes measures for vessels indulged in unlawful activities as well as control pollution.

**Significance:**
- It demonstrates India’s commitment to its ties with Indonesia and to the maritime security in the Indian Ocean region.
- The exercise seeks to strengthen the existing bonds of friendship between India and Indonesia.
- As part of the Indian Government’s vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), Indian Navy has also been involved in assisting countries in the Indian Ocean Region with EEZ surveillance, Search and Rescue and other capability enhancement activities.

---

**Centre plans new Integrated Check Posts**

A Cabinet proposal to set up 13 new Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) is being mooted by the Union Home Ministry to encourage India’s engagement with its neighbours belonging to SAARC region.
- Among the 13 ICPs, seven will be along the India-Bangladesh border, apart from the three already operational there.
- The ICPs planned along the Bangladesh border will be at Hili, Changrabandha, Ghojadanga, Mahadipur, Fulbari in West Bengal, Koirchipuichhuah in Mizoram and Sutarkandi in Assam.
- Among the new ICPs, only one will be on the India-Pakistan border while four will be on the India-Nepal border and one on the India-Myanmar border.
- Some of the other ICPs are at Dawki (Meghalaya), Akaura, (Tripura) Kawarpuchiah (Mizoram), Jobganj (Bihar), Sunauli (UP) and Rupaidiha/Nepalganj (UP).
- The cost of setting up 13 ICPs will be Rs 3,000 crore. The setting up of new ICPs was first proposed by the UPA government, which set up a separate body, Land Port Authority of India (LPAI), in 2011 for their management.

**What constitutes an integrated check post?:**
An ICP not only provides various services under one roof but is also equipped with cargo process building, cargo inspection sheds, warehouse, cold storage, currency exchange counters, Internet hubs, clearing agents, banks, vehicle scanners, isolation bay and parking.

**Need for ICPs:**
The borders need to be secured against interests hostile to the country. Putting in place systems that are able to interdict such elements while facilitating legitimate trade and commerce are among the principal objectives behind setting up the new ICPs. It is therefore necessary to undertake integrated development of infrastructure at the entry points on our land borders.

---

**Home Ministry set to take over Bureau of Civil Aviation Security**

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is set to move a proposal before Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) for taking over Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS). BCAS, currently under the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) is responsible for laying down standards, policies and measures with regard to security of all commercial flights. Multiple security agencies working at airports, including immigration officials, Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) security personnel, local police and Intelligence Bureau (IB) are bound by regulations passed by BCAS.
- The decision is based on security audit conducted by team of experts from MHA, IB, CISF and BCAS which had recommended change.
- Once CCS gives its approval, CISF will assume larger role in airport security.
- The new set-up will help in better coordination and monitoring, since CISF, IB and state intelligence all report to MHA.
- It will also speed up issue of security clearances for airlines and airports as in the past, there have been inordinate delays in granting clearances due to differences between MHA and MoCA on grounds that airlines and airports have not complied with norms despite guidelines.
The move may also result in increase in passenger security fee since CISF will be deployed at all 98 airports across country.

Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS)
It was set up as a cell in Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) in 1978, after an Indian Airlines flight was hijacked in September 1976. BCAS was reorganised as an independent department under MoCA in April 1987, as follow-up to Kanishka bombing in June 1985. It is currently headed by a commissioner of security.

Graded plan to combat air pollution

The Graded Response Action Plan, Delhi-NCR’s answer to combat air pollution that assumes apocalyptic proportions during this time of the year, will come into force for the first time from October 17th.

How it will be implemented?
- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) will monitor air quality from various stations located across Delhi-NCR. Daily reports will be sent to the Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA), the implementing authority of the plan, which will take a decision on the future course of action.
- If data of any station shows a sudden spike in pollution level, a team will rush to the spot and try to analyse the reason. Accordingly, action would be taken and instructions issued.
- The CPCB has directed all state pollution control boards of NCR states to form teams that will fan out and flag violations. The CPCB has formed around 40 teams that are visiting various parts of Delhi alone.
- The chief secretaries of NCR states have been designated as nodal officers. We will direct them to take immediate action if any particular area shows a spike in air pollution.

Background:
As per a Supreme Court order, the Graded Response Action Plan for the NCR involves stringent measures against burning of waste, industrial pollution and transport sector emissions. Notified by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest in January.

Nepal, India to conduct first joint tiger count

For the first time, Nepal and India will undertake a joint tiger census next month in their national parks, forests and protected areas adjoining the two countries using a globally-recognised method.
- This is the first time that both countries are counting tiger heads using the same method that is recognised globally.
- Conservation authorities and experts would install cameras in various locations in tiger habitats as well as in buffer zones to capture and track the movements of the big cat.

Background:
The last tiger count conducted by Nepal in 2013 puts the number of adult tigers around 200 in the Himalayan country. Recent figures showed that since 2010, the estimated number of tigers across 13 tiger range countries including India and Nepal stood at 3,900.
At the International Tiger Conference in Russia in 2010, participating countries including Nepal had made a commitment to double the tiger population by 2022. This means Nepal would have at least 250 tigers, 100%
increase from its 2010 tiger count which had put the number of the big cat at 125. **Tiger range countries (TRCs)** are those where the big cat roams freely. The 13 tiger range countries include Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

**Tiger is an endangered animal listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES):**

According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), tigers have lost 93% of their historical range. Human and wildlife conflict, climate change and poaching and illegal wildlife trade are among the major reasons that has pushed the feline into the endangered category — facing risk of extinction in the wild — over the years.

### Government launches wildlife action plan for next 15 years

The government has released the **third National Wildlife Action Plan (NWAP) for 2017-31**. The plan was released at the recently held meeting of Global Wildlife Program (GWP) that involves 19 Asian and African countries, United Nations, World Bank and other leading global organisations to deal with the wildlife crime.

**Highlights of the plan:**

- The NWAP 2017-31, under which there are 250 projects, is India’s road map to conserve wildlife for the next 15 years. The plan is woven around the **agenda of the United Nations’ 15th Sustainable Developmental Goal (SDG)** — “Life on Land”.
- The key strategic changes in the new plan is adopting a “landscape approach” in conservation of all the wildlife — uncultivated flora (plants) and undomesticated fauna (animals) — rather than the areas where they occur.
- This means that while till now programmes and plans related to wildlife were focused on and around national parks and sanctuaries, **now the strategies would be based on the landscape of the region that may not be limited to a reserve forest system alone**.
- The plan has been divided into five components, which are further divided into 17 themes carrying 103 conservation actions. Each theme has a set of conservation actions and projects — 250, in all.
- Man-animal conflict mitigation, adapting to the climate change, managing eco-tourism, ensuring public participation in the conservation, developing human resources, strengthening research and monitoring through modern technology like radio collars and drones and ensuring funds for the wildlife sector have been given special thrust in the planning.
- **The plan adopts a “landscape approach” in conservation of all wildlife — uncultivated flora and fauna — that have an ecological value to the ecosystem and to mankind irrespective of where they occur.**
- **It gives special emphasis to recovery of threatened species of wildlife while conserving their habitats.** The government has also underlined an increased role of private sector in wildlife conservation. The plan lays down that the Centre would ensure that adequate and sustained funding including Corporate Social Responsibility funds are made available for the National Wildlife Action Plan implementation.

**Background:**

India is jointly hosting the Global Wildlife Programme (GWP) with **World Bank and United Nations Development**. The GWP will address issues related to illegal wildlife trade across 19 countries in Asia and Africa. It will act as a platform to exchange knowledge and coordinate on-ground action for combating illegal poaching of wildlife and improve governance on wildlife conservation.

**SECURE Himalaya**

The Centre has launched a **six-year project called SECURE Himalaya** — to ensure conservation of locally and globally significant biodiversity, land and forest resources in the high Himalayan ecosystem spread over India.
four states in India.

Key facts:

- The project – called SECURE Himalaya – was launched by the Union environment ministry in association with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- The SECURE – securing livelihoods, conservation, sustainable use and restoration of high range Himalayan ecosystems – is meant for specific landscapes. It includes Changthang (Jammu and Kashmir), Lahaul – Pangi and Kinnaur (Himachal Pradesh), Gangotri – Govind and Darma – Byans Valley in Pithoragarh (Uttarakhand) and Kanchenjunga – Upper Teesta Valley (Sikkim).
- Protection of snow leopard and other endangered species and their habitats is one of the key components of the project which will also focus on securing livelihoods of the people in the region and enhancing enforcement to reduce wildlife crime.
- Enhanced enforcement efforts and monitoring under the project will also curb illegal trade in some medicinal and aromatic plants which are among the most threatened species in these landscapes.

CarbFix Project: World’s first negative emissions carbon-capture plant begins operations in Iceland

The world's first negative emissions plant under the CarbFix Project to turn atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO2) into stone has begun operations in Hellisheiði, Iceland. It is intended to lock away carbon dioxide by reacting it with basaltic rocks. Work on the project began in 2007.

CarbFix Project

In it, the CO2 is captured from ambient air, bound to water, and sent to more than 700 meters underground. There, the CO2 reacts with the basaltic bedrock using enhanced weathering process and forms solid minerals, creating a permanent storage solution. Currently, the system captures only 50 metric tons CO2 each year, about same emitted by a single US household. It can remove an estimated 50 metric tons of CO2 from the air in a year. It pumps the collected gas deep into the island’s volcanic bedrock, where it reacts with basalt and essentially turns into limestone.

Pondicherry Shark, Red Sea Torpedo and Tentacled Butterfly Ray may have become extinct, fear scientists

Three marine species, the Pondicherry Shark, the Red Sea Torpedo and the Tentacled Butterfly Ray might have become possibly extinct in the oceanic waters of the Arabian Seas Region (ASR) since no evidence of its existence has surfaced in the last three decades. Scientists are also worried about the possible disappearance of other species from the region even before they were known to science.

Status:

- The first ever assessment of the conservation status of sharks, rays, and chimaeras (collectively called chondrichthyans) in the region has left the scientists grim-faced as 78 of the 153 species revived were found fighting for survival.
- The Guitar Fish found in coastal waters of Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the Ganges Shark found in Arabian Sea were classified as Critically Endangered, among others.
- The assessment also revealed that 27 species were Near Threatened and 19 others were of least conservation concerns. It was also known that less was known about 29 to evaluate their risk of extinction.

Threats:

By-catch was found to be the biggest threat to the majority of chondrichthyan fishes besides the “pressure from artisanal and industrial fisheries.” Also, increasing decline in the extent and quality of habitat as a result of coastal development and other anthropogenic disturbances, particularly for those critical habitats that many species depend on coral reefs, mangroves, sea grasses pose a serious threat to the survival of many species.

ASR:

The ASR covers the waters of the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, Sea of Oman, and the Gulf. The region is also bordered by 20 countries including India, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel and Pakistan.
Muddle over nod for GM mustard

In May, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) cleared the controversial transgenic mustard, DMH-11, for commercial cultivation. However, the records of that meeting, held on May 12 and now made public, do not record any such approval.

Though cleared by the GEAC, a full release is contingent on approval by the Environment Minister.

GM Mustard

- The GM mustard in question (DMH-11) has been developed by the Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants of Delhi University.
- If it gets the green light from the environment ministry’s Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), it will be the first GM food crop to be commercially cultivated in India.
- Right now, only GM cotton is allowed.
- GEAC is the environment ministry’s regulator for GMOs and transgenic products.

What is Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)?

It is established under Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
It is the apex body for approval of activities involving large scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinants.
It is also responsible for approval of genetically engineered organisms and products including experimental field trials.

Sawfish more threatened than tigers, say scientists

World Sawfish day was observed on October 17th. The sawfish have been sighted off the Indian coast less than 10 times in over a decade and they appear to be more threatened than tigers and elephants, as per the scientists.

The sawfish today may be the most endangered fish species in India. Anecdotal evidence suggested they were once common along the Indian coast.

- The sawfish has been included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 enacted to save them from exploitation.
- There are only five species of the sawfish ever identified — dwarf sawfish, knifetooth sawfish, smalltooth sawfish, largetooth sawfish and green sawfish.
- **Sawfish are elasmobranchs**, meaning their skeleton is made of cartilage. They are closely related to sharks and have shark-shaped bodies and, hence, are also called flat sharks.
- The sawfish family has been assessed either ‘Endangered’ or ‘Critically Endangered’ in the International Union for Conservation of Nature Global Red List, considering their threatened status, high extinction risk and observed population decline.
New species of large gecko discovered from Eastern Ghats

- Scientists have discovered new species of large gecko from Eastern Ghats. The **Kanger valley rock gecko Hemidactylus kangerensis** is the newest addition to India’s lizard species.
- The gecko was discovered from Chhattisgarh’s Kanger Ghati National Park. Though named after this park, the species is also found in Jagdalpur and Sukma in Chhattisgarh and in Khamman in the adjoining State of Telangana, which are part of the Eastern Ghats.
- Growing to over eight inches long, the adult Kanger valley rock gecko is fairly large.
- The distinct black-bordered beige bands that the new species sports right from its neck to its tail tip and specific scales on its thighs (which are visible only on closer inspection) set the Kanger valley rock gecko apart from the commonly-found rock gecko.
- According to the researchers, the discovery highlights the need for dedicated surveys across the Eastern Ghats, where biodiversity has not been quantified too well. Most areas here also need protection from various anthropogenic pressures.

Turtle Sanctuary to be set up in Allahabad

In order to protect the rich aquatic biodiversity of river Ganga from escalating anthropogenic pressures, development of a **Turtle sanctuary in Allahabad along with a River Biodiversity Park at Sangam** have been approved under Namami Gange programme.

- The project at an estimated cost of Rs 1.34 crore would include development of River Biodiversity Park at Sangam (confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Sarasvati), establishment of a Turtle Rearing Centre (Permanent nursery at Triveni Pushp and makeshift annual hatcheries) and awareness about the importance of river Ganga and imperativeness of its conservation has been approved.
- This project will provide much needed platform to make the visitors aware of their place in the
ecosystem, their roles and responsibilities, improve their understanding of the complexity of co-existence with the environment and help generate awareness for reducing the impact of human activities on critical natural resources.

- The task of dissipating knowledge about river Ganga will be taken up ardently in this project, which is 100% centrally funded.

**Background:**

Rivers Ganga and Yamuna at Allahabad are home to some of the most endangered fauna like turtles (Batagur kachuga, Batagur dhongoka, Nilsonia gangetica, Chitra indica, Hardellathurjii etc.), the National Aquatic Animal – Gangetic dolphin (Platanista gangetica), the Gharial (Gavialis gangeticus) and numerous migratory and resident birds. The sustenance of more than 2000 aquatic species including threatened gharials, dolphins and turtles in river Ganga exemplifies the rich biodiversity of this lifeline to over 40% of the country’s population.

**Comments sought on draft guidelines for groundwater extraction**

The Central Groundwater Authority (CGWA) has sent Draft guidelines for “issuance of NOC” for ground water withdrawal and draft “Public Notice” to the Chief Secretaries of all the State and Administrators of Union Territories for their comments within 60 days.

**Reasons for coming up with draft guidelines**

Due to the increasing number of litigations in the National Green Tribunal, various branches of Tribunal are directing CGWA to ensure that the groundwater withdrawal in the country should be in accordance with law. These guidelines will ensure a uniform regulatory framework across the country so that the discriminatory practices in regulation are either mitigated or minimized.

**Major Revisions**

The major revisions in the guidelines are pan India coverage, decentralization of the No Objection Certificate (NOC) issuing authorities, dispensing with the provisions relating to submission of artificial recharge proposals and construction of artificial recharge structures by project proponents introduction of a water conservation fee in lieu of recharge mechanism. Funds raised through the water conservation fee to be used by States for effective groundwater management.

**Central Groundwater Authority**

The CGWA constituted by Government of India under Section 3(3) of the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986 has been regulating groundwater development and management in the country. The authority has been granting NOC for withdrawal of ground water by industries/infrastructure/mining projects.

**India to host UN Summit on Conservation of Migratory Species in 2020**

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has announced that India will host next Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) Conference of Parties 13 (CMS COP13) in year 2020. CMS COP is also known as a Global Wildlife Conference.

**Key Facts**

An announcement in this regard was made on the last day of the week-long 12th session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals or CMS COP12.
the only international treaty devoted exclusively to migratory animal species held in Philippines.
- They were among 34 species which were awarded highest protection during CMS Summit held in Manila in submissions made by 24 countries from Asia, Africa, Americas, Europe and Oceania.

**Species awarded highest protection are:**
- Asian vultures are red-headed vulture, white-rumped vulture, Indian vulture, and slender-billed vulture. They are faced with threats such as poisoning, hunting, collision with electricity cables and habitat degradation. A subspecies of black noddies, yellow bunting and lesser and great grey shrikes are other avians listed on CMS protected list.
- Whale shark, which inhabits the Indian Ocean also got global protection. Blue shark and common guitarfish also was awarded highest protection. Widespread over-fishing is driving many shark species, including whale shark to extinction. India is among 121 nations whose waters are home to sharks threatened with near extinction. The major threats are bycatch in nets and vessel strikes.
- Caspian seal also has been identified for conservation. It is the only marine mammal found in the world’s largest inland sea, where its migration is prompted by ice formation and foraging. Central Asia’s rarest species, Przewalski’s horse and Gobi bear also received highest degree of protection.

**Outcomes of last summit (COP12)**
- Governments agreed to cooperate on reducing the negative impacts of marine debris, noise pollution, renewable energy and climate change on migratory species.
- A vulture multi-species action plan to better protect 15 species of Old World Vulture in more than 120 countries, comprising four that are critically endangered in.

---

**SC bans dirty pet-coke, furnace oil in Haryana, Rajasthan, UP**

Supreme Court banned the use of dirty furnace oil and pet-coke in Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh from November 1, 2017. This ban is already in place in Delhi. Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) lauds this directive as a big win for Delhi and NCR as well as the rest of the country fighting a tough battle against toxic pollution.

**Context:**
The order comes in response to the recommendations of the Environment Protection (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) that has found very high sulphur levels more than 20,000 PPM to 74,000 PPM as opposed to only 50 PPM sulphur in BSIV (Bharat Stage-IV) transport fuels.

**Highlights:**
- It has further directed the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change (MOEFCC) to notify the standards for nitrogen oxide (NOx) and sulphur oxides (SOx) for the industry sector and the industry has to comply with the standards by December 31, 2017.
- MOEFCC will have to pay a fine of Rs 200,000 to the Supreme Court delaying the process of setting and notifying emissions standards.
Significance:
It eliminates dirtiest industrial fuels in Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and mandates first ever stringent NOx and SOx standards for the industry sector nationwide. It has enormous pollution reduction potential from the industrial sector. Order will have nationwide impact as the entire industrial sector will have to comply with the new standards for SOx and NOx that are not regulated currently in India.

Arctic sea ice waning faster than predicted, says study

- Arctic sea ice, a key indicator of climate change, could be dwindling faster than predicted. Research undertaken by the Cryosphere Climate Research Group, Canada found that satellite measurements over the years have overestimated the thickness of Arctic sea ice by as much as 25% because of the presence of salty snow.
- Salty snow formed, when brine is expelled upward from the ice surface, does not allow radar waves from satellites to penetrate, leading to skewed measurements.

Significance:
- Dwindling ice cover hastens the warming of oceans, and has an impact on weather phenomena like the El Nino that influences the Asian monsoon.
- The thinning ice would make it difficult for animals like polar bears and seals and organisms like phytoplankton to survive.

Snow leopard photographed in Arunachal

Scientists have obtained the first evidence of the elusive snow leopard in Arunachal Pradesh. Camera traps have captured images of the big cat at The mbang village’s Community Conserved Area, a community-owned reserve, in West Kameng district.

The presence of the species outside protected areas highlights the importance of community support for conservation as well as landscape-scale planning.

Background:
Arunachal Pradesh is one of the 22 priority landscapes of the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Program and while locals and researchers knew that there were snow leopards in the area, scientists had not been able to get photographs thus far.

What is a Community Conserved Area (CCA)?
In 2004, WWF-India introduced the concept of CCAs in the State to empower local communities to become active decision-makers and implement conservation initiatives. Local communities in these CCAs form committees to undertake wildlife monitoring, patrolling and community-based tourism activities.

Snow Leopards – Quick Facts:
- The conservation status of snow leopard was recently improved from “endangered” to “vulnerable”.
- They inhabit alpine and subalpine zones at elevations from 3,000 to 4,500 m (9,800 to 14,800 ft).
- In the northern range countries, they also occur at lower elevations.
- Their habitat extends through twelve countries: Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- China contains as much as 60% of all snow leopard habitat areas.
- In India, their geographical range encompasses a large part of the western Himalayas including the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh in the eastern Himalayas. The snow leopard, like all big cats, is listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), which makes trading of animal body parts (i.e., fur, bones and meat) illegal in signatory countries.
- It is also protected by several national laws in its range countries.
El Nino caused record CO2 spike in 2015-16: NASA

Scientists have found that the impact of the 2015-16 El Nino-related heat and drought occurring in tropical regions of South America, Africa and Indonesia was responsible for the largest annual increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO2) concentration seen in at least 2,000 years.

The findings are based on analysis of the first 28 months of data from NASA's Orbiting Carbon Observatory-2 (OCO-2) satellite.

**Findings:**
- In 2015 and 2016, OCO-2 recorded atmospheric carbon dioxide increases that were 50% larger than the average increase seen in recent years preceding these observations.
- That increase was about three parts per million of carbon dioxide per year — or 6.3 gigatonnes of carbon. In recent years, the average annual increase has been closer to two parts per million of carbon dioxide per year — or four gigatonnes of carbon.
- These record increases occurred even though emissions from human activities in 2015-16 are estimated to have remained roughly the same as they were prior to the El Nino.
- South America, Africa and Indonesia released 2.5 gigatonnes (a billion tonnes) more carbon into the atmosphere than they did in 2011. In 2011, weather in the three tropical regions was normal and the amount of carbon absorbed and released by them was in balance.

**Way ahead:**
Understanding how the carbon cycle in these regions responded to El Nino will enable scientists to improve carbon cycle models, which should lead to improved predictions of how our planet may respond to similar conditions in the future. These findings imply that if future climate brings more or longer droughts, as the last El Nino did, more carbon dioxide may remain in the atmosphere, leading to a tendency to further warm Earth.

India acts against bottom trawling

During the recently held meeting of the Joint Working Group, India informed Sri Lanka that it has taken measures to stop bottom trawling by its fishermen in the waters near the Sri Lankan coastline.

**Background:**
Bottom trawling by Indian fishermen had emerged as a major issue because of the disruptive impact it left on
the coastal communities of Sri Lanka. **Earlier in July, Sri Lanka banned bottom trawling**, increasing the chances of interception of more Indian bottom trawlers.

**Measures taken by India:**

- The launch of a programme on diversification of bottom trawlers into **deep-sea fishing** vessels for tuna long lining under the Blue Revolution Scheme.
- Construction of Mookiyur and Poompuhar fishing harbours, and capacity-building programmes for fishermen of the Palk Bay area in deep sea tuna long lining.
- Fresh registration for bottom trawlers in the Palk Bay area has been banned by the Government of Tamil Nadu.

**What is bottom trawling?**

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

**Committee for proper management of water resources in North Eastern Region**

The Government has constituted a high-level committee for proper management of the water resources in the North Eastern Region (NER) under the Chairmanship of Vice-Chairman, Niti Aayog.

- The Committee would facilitate optimising benefits of appropriate water management in the form of hydroelectric power, agriculture, bio-diversity conservation, reduced flood damage erosion, inland water transport, forestry, fishery and eco-tourism.
- Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) will serve as the coordinating point. The Committee will submit its report, including Plan of Action, by June, 2018.

**The terms of reference of the Committee include:**

- Appraisal of existing mechanism/institutional arrangements for management of water resources of the North Eastern Region.
- Identification of gaps in the existing mechanism/institutional arrangements for optimal management of water resources of the NER.
- Suggest policy interventions required for optimally harnessing the water resources for accelerating development in the NER Spelling out of actionable measures required for optimizing the management of water resources in the North-East.
- Chalking out a Plan of Action for dovetailing of the schemes/programmes of concerned Union Ministries, their attached offices and autonomous bodies as well as the schemes of the respective North-Eastern State Governments.
Spain hit by constitutional crisis

Referendum on independence for Catalonia was recently held. Catalan officials have claimed that preliminary results of its referendum have shown 90% in favour of independence in the vote vehemently opposed by Spain.

- The referendum, declared illegal by Spain’s central government, has thrown the country into its worst constitutional crisis in decades and deepened a centuries-old rift between Madrid and Barcelona.
- The ballot will have no legal status as it has been blocked by Spain’s Constitutional Court and Madrid for being at odds with the 1978 constitution.

Why does the referendum matter?

- Catalonia, an area in northeastern Spain of 7.5 million people, accounts for 15% of Spain’s population and 20% of its economic output. About 1.6 million people live in Barcelona, Catalonia’s capital, which is a major tourist destination.

Demand for independence:

- Catalonia has a distinct history, culture and language. First referenced in the 12th century, a defined region of Catalonia had existed for more than 250 years before it joined Spain during the country’s formation in the 16th Century. As such, identity plays a large role in the debate surrounding independence. Under the military government of Francisco Franco, from 1939-1975, Catalan culture was suppressed.
- Symbols of Catalan identity such as the castells, or human towers, were prohibited and parents were forced to choose Spanish names for their children. The Catalan language was also restricted.
- The push for full autonomy appears to have gathered pace in recent years, most notably since Spain’s 2008 debt crisis. In that moment, people in Catalonia demanded more self-government and control over what is done with their money.
- Pro-independence supporters claim Catalonia, which is one of Spain’s wealthiest regions, offers more financial support to Spain than it receives from the central government in Madrid.
- Many view the region’s strong economy as an indicator that it would be viable as a sovereign state. Following a ruling by Spain’s constitutional court in 2010, which stated there is no legal basis for recognising Catalonia as a nation, independence appears to have taken preference over reform for a portion of the region’s population.

What powers does Catalonia already have?

In 1931, when Spain became a republic, Catalonia was given greater political autonomy within the confines of the state. However, by 1939 its powers had been revoked following the Nationalists’ victory in the Spanish Civil War.
In 1979 a new Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia was issued, which restored the Catalan parliament. Elections for the 135-member body were held the following year.

The region, which forms one of Spain’s 17 “autonomous communities”, has its own police force and powers over affairs such as education, healthcare and welfare. There are also provisions in place to protect Catalan identity, including joint language status for Catalan and Castilian and a law that requires teachers, doctors and public sector employees to use the Catalan language in their places of work.

First BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine meeting held in New Delhi

The first-ever meeting of BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine (BITFM) was held at Parvasi Bhartiya Kendra in New Delhi.

- It was organized by Union Ministry of AYUSH
- India being a major stakeholder in the field of Traditional Medicine plays an important role in influencing the policies and strategies related to the Traditional Medicine in the BIMSTEC Forum

Important Agenda:

- Implementation of Strategies of BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicines
- Identification of priority areas in traditional medicine for technical and research collaboration among member states
- Regional Strategy for protection of Genetic Resource associated with Traditional Medicine Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights
- Human Resource Development and Capacity Building among the BIMSTEC Member States New Initiative, proposals and programmes for cooperation on Traditional Medicine among the BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine.

BIMSTEC:
Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is an international organisation involving a group of countries in the South Asia and South East Asia namely, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal.

India starts on implementation of motor pact

India has embarked on the implementation of the BBIN motor pact with Bangladesh and Nepal.

Background:
India in June 2015 had signed the major sub-regional transport project, Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA), for the seamless transit of passenger and cargo vehicles among them. However, Bhutan could not get public and parliamentary support for it. However, Bhutan has suggested that Bangladesh, India and Nepal may consider the implementation of the MVA.

About BBIN MVA:
- The four SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) countries had in June 2015
signed the Motor Vehicle Agreement.

- The pact aims at allowing motor vehicles of all categories registered in three countries to move freely in the region.
- The pact aims to realise the ultimate objective of free movement of people and goods in the region and said that this would be supplemented through the building and upgrading roads, railways and waterways infrastructure.

**International Conference on Consumer Protection**

PM inaugurates International Conference on Consumer Protection for East, South and South-East Asian Countries with the theme of “Empowering Consumers in New Markets” in New Delhi

**About Conference:**

- International Conference on Consumer Protection is being organised by the Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of India in association with UNCTAD.
- This is the first time an international conference on consumer protection is being organised by India for 22 countries from East, South and South-East Asia which account for a majority of the global consumers and share common challenges and experiences.

**New Consumer Protection Bill:**

- Main Objective is to Protect the rights of the consumers. It will replace the Consumer Protection Act of 1986 by incorporating the amended 2015 UN guidelines on consumer protection.
- It proposes to have Consumer Dispute Redressal Commissions, which will be set up at the district, state and national levels
- Central Consumer Protection Authority with executive powers will be constituted for quick remedial action.
- New BIS Act with specific emphasis on Hallmarking Scheme for ornaments.
- Provision of high quality ICT infrastructure at affordable prices Consumer safety from hazardous goods, complete disclosure of all information for guidance of consumers Regulations against identity theft and provision for data privacy protection.
- crack down on misleading advertisements

**Some Measures Taken:**

- Increased competition among companies due to the GST will lead to moderation in prices and this will directly benefit poor and middle class consumers.
- Bureau of Indian Standard Act – commodity or service is brought under compulsory certification. The Act has provisions to order recall of substandard products from the market.
- Ujala scheme – use of energy-efficient LED bulbs has not just brought down their prices but also helped save Rs. 20,000 crore in electricity bills
- Jan Aushadhi Parivaj – affordable medicines to people, brought down prices of life-saving heart stent implants as well as knee implants
- “Give it up” campaign under which more than one crore beneficiaries surrendered their LPG subsidy. The saved subsidy amount have been used to give free gas connections to 3 crore households
- Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Scheme transferred transferring the money directly into the beneficiaries’ prevented leakage of more than Rs. 57,000 crores.
- Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act has been enacted to protect home buyers and the government is working to achieve the target of housing for all by 2022.

**UNCTAD:**

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) was established in 1964. UNCTAD is the principal organ of the United Nations General Assembly dealing with trade, investment, and development issues. The primary objective of UNCTAD is to formulate policies relating to all aspects of development including trade, aid, transport, finance and technology. The conference ordinarily meets once in four years; the permanent secretariat is in Geneva.
Cabinet approves MoC between India and Japan to establish Liquid, Flexible and Global LNG Market

The Union Cabinet approved signing of Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) between India and Japan on establishing a liquid, flexible and global Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Market. The MoC provides a framework to cooperate in facilitating flexibility in LNG contracts, explore possibilities of cooperation in establishing reliable LNG spot price indices reflecting true LNG demand and supply and abolition of Destination Restriction Clause.

The MoC aims to promote bilateral relationship between India and Japan in the energy sector. It also seeks to contribute to the diversification of gas supplies for India to strengthen energy security and provide more competitive prices for consumers. Background — India and Japan are major consumers of energy in the world. In the LNG sector, Japan is the world’s largest importer and India is the 4th largest importer. Under the Japan-India Energy Partnership Initiative signed in January 2016, both countries had agreed to work together in promoting well-functioning energy markets and affirmed to promote a transparent and diversified LNG market through relaxation of Destination Restriction Clause.

India signs €300 million agreement with European Investment Bank for Bangalore Metro Phase II

Government has signed Finance Contract with European Investment Bank (EIB) for lending of €300 million for Bangalore Metro Rail Project Phase II Line R6. The Phase II of metro project is jointly financed by EIB (€500 million) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (€300 million). The project envisages extension of East-West & North-South lines for Bangalore Metro Rail which includes a total length of 72.095 km (13.79 km underground) and 61 stations with 12 underground stations.

Bangalore Metro Phase II

The objective of project is to bring in quantum improvement in transportation sector in city in tandem with Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) and other modes of urban transport. It aims to ensure modern transport facility for the commuters. The spinoffs of the project will include employment opportunities, reduction of number of vehicles on road, benefits to economy, less fuel consumption, reduction in air pollution, reduction in passenger travel time and also improvement in aesthetic value of city.

China’s President Xi Jinping unveils new leadership line-up with no clear successor

- Premier Li Keqiang stays on, while additions to the top echelon are Li Zhanshu, Wang Yang, Wang Huning, Zhao Leji and Han Zheng.
- Given the ages of those now on the top committee, there’s no clear successor to Xi in the new leadership lineup.

Xi Jinping:
- The Chinese president has emerged as the country’s strongest leader for a generation, due to a corruption campaign that has seen him defeat potential rivals in the party.
- He has silenced internet and media critics by cracking down on free speech, and has waged a war on civil society.
- He is seen elevated to the political level of Mao Tse-tung, after his ideology was enshrined into the constitution.

Significance:
China’s two centenary goals — a moderately prosperous society by 2021 and an advanced socialist country by 2050 — would guide policy and political conduct in the coming decades. Chinese investors are hoping that a stronger Xi will now be able to push through bold economic and financial reforms that will prevent the economy from a shock. Ongoing efforts for sweeping changes have been hindered by concerns about social stability and conflicts of interest. Xi’s policies could benefit from leadership continuity. Goals such as improving the environment and transitioning the economy to a higher-value and serviced based economy will take years to see through.
14th SAARCLAW Conference held in Colombo, Sri Lanka

The 14th South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation in Law (SAARCLAW) Conference was held in Colombo, capital city of Sri Lanka along with 11th SAARC Chief Justices Conference. The three-day conference was inaugurated by Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and saw participation from South Asia’s top Judges, legal practitioners and academics.

- The SAARCLAW Conference provided platform for legal professionals to meet and discuss issues of mutual interests and emerging legal trends in the South Asian countries.
- It also discussed issues like artificial intelligence, human trafficking, Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) and environmental protection concerns. Besides, 11th Chief Justices conference was held in a closed-door session and was attended only by Chief Justices or their representatives. It provided Chief Justices of SAARC countries opportunity to consider relevance of judiciaries within South Asia.
- It was established in Sri Lanka in 1991. Since then conference has provided a platform for legal professionals from South Asian region to meet and discuss issues of mutual interests pertaining to justice, legal reforms, good governance and enforcement over a span of 25 years.

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)
SAARC is regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union of nations in South Asia. Its member states include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It comprises 3% of world’s area, 21% of world’s population and 3.8% of global economy as of 2015.

India and US Hold 11th Trade Policy Forum Meeting in Washington D.C

The Minister for Commerce and Industry noted that the Trade Policy Forum serves as a robust platform that contributes towards promoting bilateral trade and investment between India and the US. During the meeting, discussions were held on issues related to bilateral trade, areas of mutual cooperation, market access in agriculture, non-agricultural goods and services and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).

Issues Discussed:
- **US concerns:**
  - Market access issues ground handling operations, import regulations relating to poultry, export of pork to India.
  - Price controls on medical devices.

- **India concerns:**
  1. Easing of procedure for export of Indian mangoes and pomegranates and market access for table grapes from India.
  2. Problems faced by Indian services companies in obtaining H-1B and L-1 visas. It requested the US to ease the movement of skilled professionals as Indian IT companies contribute significantly to the American economy.
  3. Issue of mismatch between U.S. visa and U.S. social security regimes, wherein Indian professionals making social security contributions do not receive their due benefits upon their return to India.

Greater opportunities for US exports to India:
- Draft Pharmaceutical Policy addresses many of the US concerns and sought comments from industry stakeholders on the draft policy.
- National IPR Policy 2016, lays down the roadmap for future development in the field of IPRs, and is a major step towards strengthening the IPR ecosystem in India, including improvements in procedures, timelines and resolution of disputes.
- India desires to address the concerns of providing affordable healthcare to its citizens and balancing it with the need to introduce high end technology. American manufacturers of medical devices are encouraged to establish manufacturing facilities in India.

Current Scenario:
Trade between the two counties increased to USD 64.51 billion in 2016-17, from USD 62.11 billion in the previous fiscal. However, foreign direct investment from the US into India dipped to USD 2.37 billion in 2016-17 from USD 4.19 billion in 2015-16. **India has already started to import crude oil** and new Liquefied Natural Gas exports are expected to commence early next year. Indian aviation companies such as Spicejet and Jet Airways have placed orders for over 300 aircrafts valued at several billions of dollars.

Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upscivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com
Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni visit to India

The period from 2012 to 2016 marked a difficult bilateral phase as the marines issue - fatal shootings of two Indian fishermen in 2012 by Italian marines became a national debate in Italy. The case is now with the International Court of Justice is expected to be completed by 2018.

Issues to be discussed:

- India’s global push for the Nuclear Suppliers Group membership and bilateral trade are likely to be on the agenda
- Italy’s support for India’s candidature at the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) in 2016
- Italian support at the FATF (Financial Action Task Force) meeting that held in Buenos Aires, where India has been pushing for stringent measures against Pakistan on terror funding issues.

Signed Agreements are:

1. MoU on cooperation in field of Energy.
2. Executive Protocol on Cultural Cooperation.
4. MoU for promoting mutual investments between Italian Trade Agency and Invest India.
5. MoU on 70 years of diplomatic relations between Indian Council of Cultural Relations and Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation of Italy.
6. MoU between Training Unit of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Government of Italy and Foreign Service Institute of the Ministry of External Affairs, India.

India-Italy Relations:

India and Italy are ancient civilizations and have known, interacted and traded with each other for over 2000 years. Political relations between India and Italy were established in 1947. The two countries enjoy cordial relationship. Italy is India’s fifth largest trading partner in EU with a bilateral trade of US $8.79 billion in 2016-17. India’s exports to Italy were at US $4.90 billion, while its imports were at US $3.89 billion, a trade imbalance of about US $1 billion in favour of India. In the first four months of fiscal 2017-18, bilateral trade had reached US $3.22 billion. India-Italy diplomatic ties took a hit after two Italian marines — Salvatore Girone and Latorre Massimiliano on board ship named Enrica Lexie, were arrested for allegedly killing two Indian fishermen off coast of Kerala in 2012.

Significance:

Italian supportive role in the EU and NSG will help our cause with the EU-India FTA (Free Trade Agreement) and our bid for NSG membership.

Free movement’ along Myanmar border

The Centre is putting in measures to facilitate free movement of Indian and Myanmarese citizens within 16 km along the Myanmar border. In this regard, the Home Ministry recently held consultations with four States — Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh — on the Free Movement Regime (FMR). The move comes in the wake of large-scale displacement of Rohingya people from Rakhine State in Myanmar.

Background:

In June, the Ministry had constituted a committee to examine various methods to curb the misuse of free movement along the Myanmar border, a friendly country, with which it shares unfenced borders and unhindered movement of people across the border.

Free movement regime:

Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upscivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com
India has a 1,643-km border with Myanmar and it is unique in many ways as it has a visa-free movement regime for people living within 16 km on either side of the border.

“Free movement regime” is a bilateral agreement with Myanmar that allows free movement of Indian and Myanmarese citizens within 16 km of the border.

They can stay up to 72 hours with effective and valid permits issued by the designated authorities on either side.

This regime has been in place keeping in view the traditional social relations among the border people. It helps genuine people living in close proximity of the border.

This regime has been in place keeping in view the traditional social relations among the border people.

It helps genuine people living in close proximity of the border. However, it is misused by militants and criminals who smuggle weapons, narcotics, contraband goods and Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN).

India ships wheat to Afghanistan via Chabahar

The Iranian port of Chabahar processed a maiden shipment of wheat from India’s western seaport of Kandla to Afghanistan. Chabahar port lies outside the Persian Gulf on the Gulf of Oman and can be easily accessed from India’s western coast.
The shipment is a part of commitment made by India to supply 1.1 million tons of wheat for free to the people of Afghanistan and is the first shipment to Afghanistan through the Chabahar port since the Trilateral Agreement on Establishment of International Transport and Transit Corridor was signed during a visit to Iran by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in May 2016.

**Significance:**
The use of Chabahar port is seen as a major boost to India’s efforts to connect with Central Asia and Russia, and it could facilitate Indian imports of iron ore, sugar and rice as well as crude oil from Iran. India’s development of Chabahar port has been seen as a move to counter China’s presence in the Arabian Sea. China is working with Pakistan to develop Gwadar port which is less than 100 nautical miles from Chabahar by road. India to play a larger role in stabilizing war-torn Afghanistan

**INSTC:**
International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), the Chabahar-Zahedan-Zaranj corridor would connect South Asia on one hand and Europe on the other hand. INSTC is an ambitious multimodal transport system established in 2000 by Iran, Russia and India to promote transportation cooperation. It is planned to connect the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea through Iran and then onwards to St. Petersburg and northern Europe through Russia.

---

**U.S., Israel quit UNESCO**

The U.S. has announced its withdrawal from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), accusing it of “continuing anti-Israel bias.” Besides the US, Israel has also decided to pull out of UNESCO. As required by law, the U.S. has stopped funding UNESCO. The U.S. withdrawal will take effect on December 31, 2018. Until then, it will remain a full member.

**Why the US is withdrawing?**
- The US and UNESCO have actually been at loggerheads since 2011. The key issue now, as with many US-UN disputes, is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In October 2011, UNESCO admitted the Palestinian territories to the organization as an independent member-state called Palestine. This triggered a US law which cut off American funding for any organization that recognized an independent Palestine. The US had previously paid for 22 percent ($80 million) of UNESCO’s annual budget.
- Finally, in 2013, after the US missed several rounds of payments to UNESCO, the organization suspended US voting rights in its core decision-making bodies. So the US hasn’t been a real UNESCO member for a while.

**About UNESCO:**
UNESCO is a United Nations organization that helps preserve historical and cultural sites worldwide. It is a special multi-country agency, formed in 1945 and based in France, that promotes sex education and literacy as well as improving gender equality in countries around the world. It is also known for its work to preserve cultural and heritage sites such as ancient villages, ruins and temples, and historic sites such as the Great Mosque of Samarra in Iraq.
Bangladesh backs China’s OBOR

Bangladesh has come out in support of China’s ‘One-Belt-One-Road’ (OBOR) initiative, also known as the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI). This is in absolute contradiction to India’s stand on OBOR which it boycotted on grounds of violating India’s territorial integrity as it runs through the disputed territory of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and because China has not been transparent leading to compromise on sovereignty. Bangladesh defends its move saying that small countries need to overcome few limitations by weaving themselves with the rest of the world with the help of projects such as OBOR.

**Background:**
China’s $4 trillion OBOR initiative will span 65 countries with 70% of the world’s population. Bangladesh formally declared joining China’s OBOR initiative during the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2016.

What is One Belt, One Road initiative

The One Belt One Road initiative is the centrepiece of China’s foreign policy and domestic economic strategy. It aims to rejuvenate ancient trade routes—Silk Routes—which will open up markets within and beyond the region. Through this initiative, China’s plan is to construct roads, railways, ports, and other infrastructure and beyond to bind its economy more tightly to the rest of the world.

New U.S. policy is a game changer: Ashraf Ghani

**Highlights of the visit:**
Regional counter-terror efforts and enhancing India’s defence assistance to Kabul were discussed New South Asia policy of the U.S was appreciated by both the countries. It is viewed as an opportunity for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan & South Asia.

**New US South Asia policy:**
- Deployment of additional US troops soldiers to train and buttress Afghan forces with gradual pull out plans at apt period as a hasty withdrawal would create a vacuum for terrorists.
- Strong focus on Pakistan to make sure it abides by its commitments. Pakistan being watched closely by his administration to keep check on the country becoming safe havens for terrorist organizations.
- US administration’s South Asia policy is to further develop the US’s strategic partnership with India. India was viewed as part of the problem and now Trump is arguing that India should be viewed as part of a solution to the Afghan imbroglio.

**India – Afghanistan recent developments:**
- Training of Afghan personnel at Indian military academies.
- India-Afghanistan Trade and Investment Show in New Delhi generated business worth over US $ 200 million.
- Opening of the air freight corridor between Kandahar and Kabul and Delhi.
- Afghan cities of Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat have been connected directly by air to Delhi.

India, Sri Lanka ink housing project deal in Hambantota

Sri Lanka signed an agreement with India to build 1,200 houses in the southern port city- Hambantota. Of the 1,200 houses to be built, 600 will be constructed in the Southern Province, while the remaining would be built across Sri Lanka, through one model village in each of the country’s 25 districts.

**Background:**
The coastal city of Hambantota gained strategic significance after President Rajapaksa built a massive port and an airport with huge Chinese loans. In July this year, his successor government sold a majority stake of the port to China to service an outstanding $8-billion debt it owes China, fanning concerns of countries with competing strategic interests, particularly India and the U.S. Local residents protested the selling of “national assets to foreign entities” leading to violent clashes.

Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com
**Significance:**

- Hambantota is right in the middle of vital energy supply lines in the Indian Ocean, connecting the Middle East and East Asia.
- The signing of the MoU in Hambantota assumes significance not only in its timing, but also in taking India’s housing project to the Sinhala-majority Southern Province.
- India has been taking steps to protect itself in the Indian Ocean by allying itself with the United States and Japan in a clear bid to counter growing Chinese influence.

**Hambantota:**

Hambantota is the main town in Hambantota District, Southern Province, Sri Lanka. This underdeveloped area was hit hard by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and is undergoing a number of major development projects including the construction of a new sea port and international airport.

---

**Catalonia crisis: Spain moves to suspend autonomy**

- Spain is planning to suspend Catalonia’s autonomy, as the region’s leader threatens to declare independence. The Spain government would soon meet to activate Article 155 of the constitution, allowing it to take over running of the region.
- **Article 155 of the constitution**, which cemented democratic rule three years after the death of dictator General Francisco Franco in 1975, allows Madrid to impose direct rule in a crisis but it has never been invoked.

**Where is Catalonia?**

- Catalonia is an autonomous community of Spain in the north-east end of the Iberian Peninsula, designated as a nationality by its Statute of Autonomy.
- It has four provinces: Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona. The capital and largest city is Barcelona, which is the second most populated city in Spain.

**What is the history of the secession movement?**

- Catalonia was historically an autonomous region of the Iberian peninsula, which encompasses Spain and Portugal. However, it was never a disparate part of the region despite having its own language, laws, and customs.
- The marriage of Petronilia, the Queen of Aragon, and Ramon Berebguer IV, Count of Barcelona in 1150, led to the formation of a dynasty.
- All regions of the peninsula spanning Aragon and Catalonia were brought under unified rule which lasted until the reign of King Philip V.
- The war of Spanish Succession created modern Spain with the defeat of Valencia in 1707, and of Catalonia in 1714. Subsequent sovereigns tried to impose the Spanish language and laws in order to culturally unify the kingdom, but their attempts were abandoned in 1931 when the Generalitat (the national Catalan government) was restored.
- Catalan separatism was crushed under the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco who took control.
of the region, killing 3,500 people and forcing many more into exile. Franco was ousted in 1977 and democracy was restored.

- Calls for complete independence continued to grow. In July 2010, the Constitutional Court in Madrid overruled part of the 2006 autonomy statute, stating that there is no legal basis for recognising Catalonia as a separate country in the framework of the Spanish nation state.
- The economic crisis which has embattled the Spanish economy with rising unemployment and spiralling inflation, only served to amplify separatist sentiments as the wealthy Barcelona region is seen as propping up the poorer provinces.

**How would a secession affect the Spanish economy?**

- The Catalan region has long been the industrial heartland of Spain, with textile and shipbuilding, and more recently, finance, services, and technology. Barcelona has a thriving start-up culture, and plays host to the annual Mobile World Congress, where the bleeding edge of technology is on display.
- Catalonia is one of the wealthiest regions of Spain. **It accounts for 20.07% of the Spanish GDP.** Secession would therefore cost Spain almost a fifth of its economic output, and trigger a row on how to carve up the €836 billion of national debt.
- If Catalonia were to secede from Spain, it would have a GDP of $314 billion, according to calculations by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). That would make its economy larger than Singapore and South Africa, and on a par with Israel. Its GDP per capita would be $35,000, which would make the average citizen of the Catalonian state wealthier than his counterparts from South Korea or Italy.

**Spain sacks Catalan government after independence declaration**

**Background:**
Catalonia is one of Spain’s most prosperous regions and already has a high degree of autonomy. But it has a series of historic grievances, exacerbated during the 1939-1975 Franco dictatorship, when its culture and politics were suppressed.

Catalonia held an Independent referendum on Oct. 1, 2017 which was declared illegal by Madrid and marred by heavy handed national police tactics to stop it.

**Highlights:**
- The Catalan parliament had voted to make a unilateral declaration of independence.
- Shortly afterwards the Spanish Senate in Madrid approved the imposition of direct rule.
- It sacked Carles Puigdemont, as head of the autonomous region, also fired its police chief and said central government ministries would take over the Catalan administration.
- A new regional election will be held in Catalonia on Dec. 21
- Several European countries, including France and Germany, and the United States also rejected the independence declaration and said they supported Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy’s efforts to preserve Spain’s unity.

**India seeks greater role for troops contributing countries in UN peacekeeping missions**

India has sought enhanced role for troops contributing countries in the decision-making process of UN peacekeeping missions. Also, India has asked the UN Security Council to **revisit the way mandates are designed.** It is because, according to India, the current system of excluding the troop and police-contributing countries (T/PCCs) from the process of framing the mandates is not sustainable.

**Background:**
India is one of the largest contributors of troops and police to UN peacekeeping missions. However, it has no say in the process of formulation of the mandate.

**Way ahead:**
- The current approach is not sustainable. It is hence an inescapable requirement to incorporate the troop and police-contributing countries (T/PCCs) in the decision making and mandate formulation from the very onset. There is also a need to ensure more effective triangular cooperation between the T/PCCs, Secretariat and Security Council on important policy and doctrinal issues being formulated.
Today’s peacekeeping operations pose complex challenges. Non-state actors have become the major players in many of these conflicts. Today’s peacekeeping requires a political consensus among Security Council members, Troop Contributors and Secretariat on the cost, limits and dangers of operations in high-risk environments.

About UN Peacekeeping:
United Nations Peacekeeping was created in 1948. Its first mission involved the establishment of the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), which served to observe and maintain ceasefire during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

UN Peacekeeping maintains three basic principles: Consent of the parties, impartiality and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.

The UN Peacekeepers are led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DKPO). There are currently 17 UN peace operations deployed on four continents.
UN Peacekeepers are from diverse backgrounds, from areas all around the world. They include police, military and civilian personnel. They are often referred to as Blue Berets or Blue Helmets because of their light blue berets or helmets. The UN Peacekeeping Force won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1988.

The United Nations Charter gives the United Nations Security Council the power and responsibility to take collective action to maintain international peace and security. For this reason, the international community usually looks to the Security Council to authorize peacekeeping operations.

India invited to join SCO contact group meeting on Afghanistan

India following its rising profile in Afghanistan for the first time ever has been invited to join Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) contact group meeting on Afghanistan to discuss prevailing security situation and economic potential of the landlocked country.
The meeting is being held in Moscow and comes as a feather in the cap for India’s Afghan strategy after successful US backed Indo-Afghan trade and investment show in Delhi. The development is viewed as acknowledgement of India’s stake in the war-torn country.

Background:
The SCO contact group on Afghanistan that became defunct in 2009 has been revived following intervention by Russian President Vladimir Putin from this year. India was invited to join maiden SCO contact group meeting on Afghanistan after it became a SCO member this June.

India’s increasing engagement with Afghanistan:
India is working with both US and Russia to contribute to stability of Afghanistan. SCO membership that put India into the heart of Eurasian geo-politics enabling a larger say in Afghanistan that has direct bearing on security situation here. However, India’s deeper engagement with Afghanistan has been opposed by Pakistan.
and its Army. Pak-backed Taliban and Haqqani network continue to target Indian interests and assets in the landlocked country as it strives to achieve “strategic depth”.

About SCO:
The SCO was established on June 15, 2001 in Shanghai by six countries. At the 2016 summit held in Uzbekistan, the SCO leaders signed memorandums on the accession of India and Pakistan to the organization.

Cabinet approves the Extradition Treaty between India and Lithuania

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the signing and ratification of the Extradition Treaty between India and Lithuania.

Benefits of this treaty:

- The Treaty would provide a legal framework for seeking extradition of terrorists, economic offenders and other criminals from and to Lithuania.
- The Treaty would help in extradition of fugitive criminals including terrorists for criminal prosecutions from Lithuania who may have committed crimes against India.
- It will bring the criminals to justice, with a view to ensure peace and tranquility to public at large.

What is extradition?

Extradition is the surrender of a criminal to one country by another. It also helps in maintaining the territoriality of the penal code which says that a country should not apply its criminal law to a person who committed an offence outside its territories except when the crime is related the countries national interest. The process is regulated by treaties between the two countries.

What are the internationally accepted conditions for extradition?

There is a general consensus about few conditions of extradition. The crime should fulfill the criterion of dual criminality, i.e. it is a punishable offence in both the countries. For instance homosexuality might be a crime in country A while it is accepted in B. The country A can not request B to extradite a person who is charged with a homosexuality related offence. Persons charged for political reasons are generally not extradited. Some countries refuse to extradite if the kind of expected punishment is abolished or is not administered in their own territories. For instance Australia, Canada, Macao, Mexico, and most of the European nations refuse to extradite a criminal if the person in question might get capital punishment after his extradition.

What are the extradition laws of India?

- In India the Extradition Act, 1962 regulates the surrender of a person to another country or the request for arrest of a person in a foreign land.
- The act specifies that any conduct of a person in India or in a foreign state that is mentione in the list of extradition offence and is punishable with minimum one year of imprisonment qualifies for extradition request.
- The process has to be initiated by the central government.
- In the case of countries with which India does not have such a treaty, the central government can by notified order treat any convention to which India and the foreign country is a party as the extradition treaty providing for extradition with respect to the offences specified in that convention.
- If the extradition request has come from two or more countries then the government has the rights to...
decide which of them is the fittest for the request.

**In what conditions can the government deny extradition?**

- If the government finds the case is **trivial** and if it thinks that the surrendering of the person is not being made in good faith or in the interests of justice or for political reasons, it can deny the request.
- If the surrender according to the requesting country's own law is barred by time then also the person cannot be extradited from India.
- If the government can also stop the process if it feels that the person will be charged with **an offence not mentioned in the extradition treaty.**
- The government can put the extradition on hold if it feels that the person will be charged for a lesser offence, which is disclosed by the requesting authorities so that they can have the possession of the person.
- Apart from this, if the person is serving a jail term or he/she is accused of an offence in Indian soil, which is different from the offence for which the person is wanted abroad, then also the extradition process can be stopped.
- Similarly if a fugitive criminal has committed an offence which is punishable with death in India while the laws of foreign state do not provide death for the same offence then criminal will get life imprisonment in India also.
Japan launches fourth Michibiki satellite for hi-tech GPS

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) successfully launched Michibiki-4 satellite (QZSS-4) onboard of H-IIA rocket from Tanegashima Space Centre. It was fourth satellite in Michibiki series i.e. Quasi-Zenith Satellite System (QZSS), which is a satellite-based high-precision global positioning system similar to US operated GPS. Moreover, it was 36th HIIA vehicle to be launched so far and fifth launch of an H-IIA rocket in 2017. QZS-4 (Michibiki-4) Michibiki-4 is third QZSS satellite to be launched in 2017 and once operational it will bring the constellation of QZSS to its operating capacity of four until a planned expansion to 8 satellites occurs around 2023.

Quasi-Zenith Satellite System (QZSS):
It is an own version of GPS and is dubbed as Michibiki system. Michibiki means guidance in Japanese. It is intended for civilian use, with a claimed positioning accuracy down to mere centimetres. The QZSS constellation of 8 satellites will trace out a pattern over Japan, the Western Pacific, and Australia. The Michibiki system can cover the Asia-Oceania region and works with the US-operated GPS to provide higher level of precision than previously possible with fewer satellites in visible range. It will become operation in 2018 with four satellites focusing on country and wider region. It will provide global positioning and timing services across frequencies ranging from 1575.42 MHz to 2 GHz. H-IIA rocket The H-IIA rocket is Japanese large-scale launch vehicle. It was manufactured by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. The vehicle stands 53 meters tall and generates 1.7 million pounds-force (7,628 kilonewtons) of thrust at liftoff.

REPAIR: Scientists develop RNA editing tool to combat genetic disease

Scientists from The Broad Institute and Massachusetts Institute of Technology in US have developed RNA Editing for Programmable A to I Replacement (REPAIR), a new gene editing tool therapies that can reverse disease-causing mutations in humans. REPAIR gene editing tool can tweak an individual RNA ‘letters’ in human cells without making changes to entire genome and can have profound potential as a tool for both research and disease treatment.

REPAIR:
- REPAIR is based on gene editing tool CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) that can be used to modify DNA in cells. The new tool can change single RNA nucleosides in mammalian cells in a programmable and precise fashion. To create REPAIR, scientists had systematically probed CRISPR-Cas13 enzyme family for potential editor candidates.
- They had selected enzyme called PspCas13b from Prevotella bacteria which was most effective at inactivating RNA. Scientists had engineered deactivated variant of PspCas13b enzyme that binds to specific stretches of RNA but lacks its scissor-like activity and fused it to a protein called ADAR2, which changes nucleoside adenosine to inosine in RNA transcripts.

Significance

Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com
REPAIR has ability to reverse disease-causing mutations at RNA level, as well as other potential therapeutic and basic science applications. It paves way for therapies that can reverse mutations and has profound potential as tool for both research and disease treatment. **REPAIR has ability to target individual RNA letters or nucleosides**, switching adenosines to inosines. These letters are involved in single-base changes which are known to regularly cause genetic disease in humans. For ex, in human disease, a mutation from G to A is extremely common and these alterations have been implicated in for cases of focal epilepsy, Parkinson’s disease and Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Thus, it can reverse impact of any pathogenic G-to-A mutation regardless of its surrounding nucleotide sequence, with potential to operate in any cell type.

**Comment**
RNA editing using REPAIR offers safer, more exible way to make corrections in cell unlike permanent changes to genome required for DNA editing using CRISPRCas9 gene editing technology. REPAIR can also fix mutations without tampering with genome as RNA naturally degrades making it potentially reversible x

---

**Nobel prize for gravitational wave detection**

Three AmerICAN scientists from the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) have won the Nobel Prize in Physics for their contribution to detecting gravitational waves — ripples in the fabrics of spacetime which were predicted by Albert Einstein a hundred years ago. The scientists were awarded the Nobel prize “for decisive contributions to the LIGO detector and the observation of gravitational waves”.

The 9 million Swedish kronor (825,000 British pounds) prize will be divided. One half was awarded to Rainer Weiss of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the other half jointly to Barry C. Barish and Kip S. Thorne — both from California Institute of Technology (Caltech).

**What are gravitational waves?**
In simple terms, gravitational waves can be explained as ripples in the fabric of space-time which can only be caused by massive astronomical events such as neutron stars or black holes orbiting each other so that these waves would finally radiate from them.

---

**About LIGO:**
The observatory, described as “the most precise measuring device ever built,” is actually two facilities in Livingston, Louisiana, and Hanford, Washington. They were built and operated with funding from the National Science Foundation, which has spent $1.1 billion on LIGO over the course of several decades. The project is led by scientists from the California Institute of Technology and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and is supported by an international consortium of scientists and institutions.

Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upscivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com
2017 Nobel Prize in Chemistry

The 2017 Nobel prize in Chemistry has been awarded to Jacques Dubochet (University of Lausanne, Switzerland) Joachim Frank (Columbia University, New York) and Richard Henderson (MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge, U.K.) “for developing cryo-electron microscopy for the high-resolution structure determination of biomolecules in solution“.

What is cryo-electron microscopy?

“Cryo”, short for cryogenic refers to very low temperatures. Though the actual temperature is not well defined, it is below minus 150°C. In the context of electron microscopy, it refers to the fact that the object to be imaged is frozen to such low temperatures to facilitate being studied under the beam of the electron microscope.

This method is so effective that even in recent times, it has been used to image the elusive Zika virus: When researchers began to suspect that the Zika virus was causing the epidemic of brain-damaged newborns in Brazil, they turned to cryo-EM to visualise the virus. Over a few months, three dimensional (3D) images of the virus at atomic resolution were generated and researchers could start searching for potential targets for pharmaceuticals.

China launches world’s 1st hybrid electric tram powered by hydrogen fuel cells

The world’s 1st hybrid electric tram powered by hydrogen fuel cells was launched in China’s Tangshan city, north China’s Hebei Province to give big boost to green energy in public transport. The 1st of its kind ecologically-friendly tram was domestically developed by China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation (CRRC) in 2015.

⇒ The ecologically-friendly tram emits only water without any pollutants.
⇒ It does not produce any nitrogen oxides (NOx), as the temperature of the reaction inside the fuel cell is kept under 100 degrees Celsius.
⇒ The tram, having three carriages with 66 seats and can run for 40 kilometers at a maximum speed of 70 kilometers per hour after being refilled with 12 kilograms of hydrogen.
⇒ The tram coach rides on a 136-year-old railway line and connects several industrial heritage sites of Tangshan, one of China’s oldest industrial cities not far from the capital Beijing.
It has latest low-oor technology which has kept the distance between carriage oor of tram and rail line only 35 centimeters and remove need for station platforms and making boarding easy for passengers.

**Anti-nuclear weapons group ICAN wins Nobel Peace Prize**

The Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to the **International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)**. ICAN has been chosen for its “groundbreaking efforts to achieve a treaty prohibition” on nuclear weapons. The group will receive nine million Swedish kronor ($1.1 million, £846,000) along with a medal and a diploma at a ceremony in December.

**Significance of this decision:**

- The Nobel Committee’s decision provides a powerful and timely reinforcement of the opprobrium and concern attached to nuclear weapons. It comes at a moment when North Korea is actively developing its nuclear programme, the fate of the Iran nuclear deal is in the balance, and the US and Russian are both actively seeking to modernise their nuclear forces.
- There is of course already the Non-Proliferation Treaty under which most countries agreed never to develop nuclear weapons and those that already had them agreed progressively to disarm. But campaigners have long been unsatisfied with this process insisting that the nuclear “haves” have no intention of giving up their arsenals.

**About ICAN:**

ICAN, a coalition of hundreds of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), is 10 years old and is based in Geneva, Switzerland. ICAN set about an alternative approach – to raise popular awareness of the issue and to pressure governments to open up a new treaty for signature earlier this year that would seek an outright ban on nuclear weapons. In July, after pressure from ICAN, 122 nations backed a UN treaty designed to ban and eventually eliminate all nuclear weapons. But none of the nine known nuclear powers in the world – including the UK and the US – endorsed it.

**Embryo transfer technology to be used to carry out 440 embryo transfers in cattle in 9 days**

In a bid to conserve indigenous breed of cattle, the government has undertaken a **Mass Embryo Transfer programme in Indigenous Breeds** under the scheme, National Mission on Bovine Productivity.

- The Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, in co-operation with 12 states has planned to carry out 440 embryo transfers during October 2 to 10, 2017 throughout the country.
- The programme is implemented with the objective of conservation and development of indigenous breeds under the Rashtriya Gokul Mission.
- Under this programme, embryos of higher genetic merit indigenous bovines are being transferred into surrogate cows.
- Embryos of indigenous breeds such as Sahiwal, Gir, Red Sindhi, Ongole, Deoni and Vechur have been proposed to be transferred under this programme.
**About ETT:**
Embryo transfer technology (ETT) has revolutionized the breeding strategies in bovines as a tool to optimise the genetic improvement in cattle.

**Benefits of using ETT:**
A farmer can get a 5-6 fold increase in the number of offsprings. The calves so born will be of high genetic merit. The offsprings born will be free from diseases.

---

**About Rashtriya Gokul Mission:**
To conserve and develop indigenous bovine breeds, government has launched ‘Rashtriya Gokul Mission’ under the National Programme for Bovine Breeding and Dairy Development (NPBBD).

**The Mission is being implemented with the objectives to:**

a) development and conservation of indigenous breeds
b) undertake breed improvement programme for indigenous cattle breeds so as to improve the genetic makeup and increase the stock;
c) enhance milk production and productivity;
d) upgrade non descript cattle using elite indigenous breeds like Gir, Sahiwal, Rathi, Deoni, Tharparkar, Red Sindhi and
e) distribute disease free high genetic merit bulls for natural service.
Fix deadline for PMJDY insurance claims

Reviewing the performance of PMJDY, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently asked the finance ministry to fix a time limit for payment of insurance claims of Rs 30,000 to the family of the deceased who opened a bank account under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) in 2014-15. Although most claims so far have been given out expeditiously, the idea is to fix a time limit so that the poor do not have to wait without any certainty of time for getting the insurance amount.

**Background:**
Under the PMJDY, any person who opened his first bank account between August 15, 2014, and January 26, 2015, along with a RuPay card, is eligible for a life cover of Rs 30,000 on death due to any cause. The idea is to provide security to poor families in both urban and rural areas who cannot afford direct insurance and are not covered under any social security scheme. According to the government, crores of new bank accounts were opened in 2014-15 after the PM launched the scheme.

**About PMJDY:**
The primary aim of this scheme is to provide poor people access to bank accounts. The scheme covers both urban and rural areas of India. All bank accounts will be linked to a debit card which would be issued under the RuPay scheme. RuPay is India's own unique domestic card network owned by National Payments Corporation of India and has been created as an alternative to Visa and Mastercard.

Under this scheme, every individual who opens a bank account becomes eligible to receive an accident insurance cover of up to Rs 1 Lakh for his entire family. The scheme also provides incentives to business and banking correspondents who serve as link for the last mile between savings account holders and the bank by fixing a minimum monthly remuneration of Rs5000.

**ADB $500 million funding soon for private sector infrastructure in Asia and Pacific**

Asian Development Bank (ADB) is actively processing USD 500 million (about Rs 3,275 crore) as debt and equity funding for private infrastructure projects in countries. This includes potential projects in India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand.

◆ ADB has already approved two projects worth over USD 210 million in debt financing from the cofinancing arm Leading Asia's Private Infrastructure Fund (LEAP) in its first year of operation.

**About Leading Asia’s Private Infrastructure Fund (LEAP):**
The Leading Asia’s Private Sector Infrastructure Fund (LEAP) was established in March 2016. The fund is an infrastructure co-financing fund, expected to leverage and complement ADB’s existing non sovereign platform to fill financing gaps and increase access to finance for infrastructure projects in the region. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has made a contribution to the fund.

Pragyna IAS Academy  +91 9880487071  www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore  +91 9880486671  www.pragnyaias.com
What are the priorities?

- The fund will provide cofinancing to nonsovereign infrastructure projects at different stages of development, including early stage, growth stage, and greenfield and brownfield projects. It will support projects with strong anticipated development impacts and alignment with the strategies of ADB and JICA.
- The fund will undertake project finance (nonrecourse or limited recourse) and corporate finance transactions, and will seek to support a range of private sector participation modalities including public–private partnerships, joint ventures, private
- finance initiative projects, and privatizations, as well as conventional project finance.

What kind of activities are eligible for the fund?

Eligible project types will include the following infrastructure subsectors:

- Energy, including renewable energy generation, energy efficiency and conservation, and natural gas transmission and distribution.
- Water and other urban infrastructure and services, including water, wastewater, and solid waste management.
- Transport, including road transport, water transport, rail transport, air transport, multimodal logistics, urban roads and traffic management, and urban public transport.
- Information and communication technology and health.

The fund will extend ADB’s operations by deploying both commercial and concessional capital from the same fund, and cofinancing will be provided in the form of loans, equity investments, and mezzanine finance transactions.

Who is eligible to receive the fund?

The fund will provide financing to companies and projects, as well as to financial intermediaries (e.g., holding companies and local currency vehicles) where there is a link to infrastructure (with the exclusion of private equity funds).

Eligible countries include ADB developing member countries that are also eligible for official development assistance (ODA) from Japan.

Inheritance tax on HNIs likely to be reintroduced

The government is considering the levy of an inheritance tax on high net worth individuals (HNIs), some of whom are already preparing to insulate themselves from such a liability by forming family trusts. The tax could range from 5% to 10% and would apply only to families with a certain net worth.

The government has sought feedback, including recommendations, on the proposed reintroduction of inheritance tax, also known as estate duty.

Background:

- Also popularly known as estate tax or estate duty, inheritance tax was a tax that was levied against a particular asset during the time of its inheritance. For example, the inheritance of ancestral land. Inheritance tax is no longer levied in India and was abolished during the time of the Rajiv Gandhi Government in 1985.
- Though its intentions were noble, the then finance minister, V.P. Singh was of the opinion that it had failed to bring about an equilibrium in society and reduce the wealth gap. During its stay, inheritance tax or estate duty was levied from the period between 1953 and 1985.

There are certain countries that practice this form of taxation. Countries like USA, UK, Netherlands, Spain, and Belgium all follow inheritance tax and China had gone to the extent of introducing rules for inheritance tax back in 2002 but was met with heavy opposition to the idea and were not able to implement it.

RBI panel pushes new rules so lenders pass on rate cuts more quickly

A RBI set-up panel has come out with a set of new rules to make lenders pass on rate cuts more quickly. The panel submitted its report recently to the RBI.

What’s the issue?

Pragnya IAS Academy     +91 9880487071     www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore     +91 9880486671     www.pragnyaias.com
The RBI has cut its policy rate by a total of 200 basis points from January 2015 to August 2017 to support economic growth, but to its frustration banks have lowered their lending rates by only about 120 bps.

**Suggestions made by the panel:**

- **Remove some of the leeway that banks have enjoyed, including allowing lenders to use only one of three benchmarks to set their lending rates:** the policy repo rate, Treasury bill rates or certificate of deposit rates. Currently, banks can use multiple market rates and each one is free to set its own benchmark.

- **Adjust the key criteria used to set their lending rates once a quarter,** rather than the current once a year.

**Why are banks not willing to reduce lending rates?**
Indian banks are struggling with a record $140 billion in stressed assets, and have sought to protect their margins by trying to avoid lowering their lending rates.

**What has RBI done so far in this regard?**

The RBI last year unveiled the so-called marginal cost of funds-based lending rates (MCLR), which sought to remove much of the discretion commercial banks have to set lending rates and force them to base borrowing costs on prevailing money market rates. Banks were instructed to follow a specific formula in setting lending rates, although the RBI has since made some tweaks.

**Government permits banks to sell more small savings schemes**

The Union Finance Ministry has allowed banks, including top three private sector lenders to accept deposits under various small savings schemes in order to encourage savings. **Until now, most of the small savings schemes were sold through post offices.** This decision will allow increase outlets for selling small savings scheme that will result in higher mobilisation under scheme.

- Now banks are eligible to sell National Savings Time Deposit Scheme 1981, National Savings (Monthly Income Account) Scheme 1987, National Savings Recurring Deposit Scheme 1981 and NSC VIII issue.

- All public sector banks (PSBs) and top three in the private sector viz. ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank can receive subscription from the expanded portfolios. So far, these banks were allowed to receive subscription under Public Provident Fund (PPF), Kisan Vikas Patra-2014, Sukanya Samriddhi Account, Senior Citizen Savings Scheme-2004. Small saving schemes Small Savings Schemes are government run social welfare schemes that provide higher interest rate. These schemes are meant for small investors backed by a sovereign guarantee and tax benefits

**India imposes anti-dumping duty on some stainless steel imports**

The Union Finance Ministry (Department of Revenue) has imposed anti-dumping duty on some coldrolled flat products of stainless steel from China, United States, South Korea and European Union to curb the influx of cheaper imports and help local producers. The duty will be in effect till December 2020 and exempts certain grades of stainless steel. However, government has allowed import of product as long as end use of the import is in same form. Earlier in October 2017, Government had imposed anti-dumping duty on import of some flat steel products from China and EU for five years. In September 2017, Government had imposed additional 18.95% countervailing duty on some hot-rolled and cold-rolled stainless steel flat products, a first such levy on a steel product.

**Anti-dumping Duty:**

Anti-dumping measures are taken by Government to ensure fair trade and provide level-playing field to domestic industry. They are not measure to restrict imports or cause unjustified increase in cost of products. Countries initiate anti-dumping probes to determine if domestic industry has been hurt by surge in below-cost imports. As a counter-measure, they impose antidumping duties under multilateral WTO regime. In India, it is recommended by Commerce Ministry’s Directorate General of AntiDumping and Allied Duties (DGAD) and imposed by Finance Ministry.
Why do we need external benchmarks while pricing loans?

An internal Study Group constituted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recommended that banks should set interest rates based on an external benchmark and not as per internal benchmarks as is the practice now.

What is the need for external benchmarks?
The present loan pricing regime, that is, the marginal cost of fund based lending rate (MCLR) or the base rate under the previous regime were both calculated based on banks’ internal factors such as cost of funds. They are insensitive to changes in the policy interest rate or repo rate. Also, banks deviated in an ad hoc manner from the specified methodologies for calculating the base rate and the MCLR to either inflate the base rate or prevent the base rate from falling in line with the cost of funds.

What external benchmarks are available?
The study group has cited 13 possible candidates as external benchmarks including the weighted average call rate (WACR), collateralised borrowing and lending obligation (CBLO) rate, market repo rate. However, the report also said that no instrument in India met all the requirements of an ideal benchmark. The group has shortlisted 3 candidates from these 13— one of which could be selected by RBI as external benchmarks after receiving feedback from all stakeholders. The Study Group is of the view that the T-Bill rate, the CD rate and the RBI’s policy repo rate are better suited than other interest rates to serve the role of an external benchmark.

Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme–Series-III

The government has launched the Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme 2017-18 – Series-III, which will be issued by the Reserve Bank India on behalf of the Government of India.

About the Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme:
The sovereign gold bond was introduced by the Government in 2015. While the Government introduced these bonds to help reduce India’s over dependence on gold imports, the move was also aimed at changing the habits of Indians from saving in physical form of gold to a paper form with Sovereign backing.

Eligibility: The bonds will be restricted for sale to resident Indian entities, including individuals, HUFs, trusts, universities and charitable institutions.

Denomination and tenor: The bonds will be denominated in multiples of gram(s) of gold with a basic unit of 1 gram. The tenor will be for a period of 8 years with exit option from the 5th year to be exercised on the interest payment dates.

Minimum and Maximum limit: The minimum permissible investment limit will be 1 gram of gold, while the maximum limit will be 500 g for individual, 4 kg for HUF and 20 kg for trusts and similar entities per fiscal (April- March) notified by the government from time to time.

Joint Holder: In case of joint holding, the investment limit of 4 kg will be applied to the first applicant only.
Collateral: Bonds can be used as collateral for loans. The loan-to-value (LTV) ratio is to be set equal to ordinary gold loan mandated by the Reserve Bank from time to time.

**Government constitutes Alternative Mechanism Panel for PSBs consolidation**

The Union Government has constituted Alternative Mechanism Panel headed by Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley to oversee merger proposals of public sector banks (PSBs). The other members of the panel include Railway and Coal Minister Piyush Goyal and Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

- This alternative mechanism has been set up by the government to fast-track consolidation among public sector banks to create strong lenders. The mechanism will oversee the proposals coming from boards of PSBs for consolidation.
- The decision comes after government had announced Rs. 2.11 trillion bank recapitalisation plan for public sector banks weighed down by bad loans, seeking to stimulate flow of credit to spur private investment.
- It was also announced that recapitalisation plan will be accompanied by series of banking reforms over next few months. The constitution of an Alternative Mechanism is move in that direction.
- The Union cabinet in August 2017 had decided to set up Alternative Mechanism to fast-track PSU bank consolidation.

**Purpose of PSBs consolidation:**

- The move to create large banks through consolidating PSBs aims at meeting credit needs of growing Indian economy and building capacity in PSB space to raise resources without dependence on the state exchequer.
- The banking entities formed after merging PSU banks will be able to absorb shocks. Background: The idea of bank mergers was around since 1991, when former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor M. Narasimham had recommended the government merge banks into three-tiered structure, with three large banks with an international presence at top.
- In 2014, PJ Nayak Committee also had suggested that government either merge or privatize state-owned banks.
- Significance of PSBs consolidation: Reduce their dependence on government for capital. Open up more capital generation avenues, both internally and from market, for the merged entity.
- From a government point of view, it will increase stream of dividends which forms part of their non-tax revenue.
- Increase the role of internal and market resources and thus reduce dependence of merged bank on government for the future capital infusion. It will lead to greater concentration of payment and settlement flows as there will be fewer parties in the financial sector.
- Operational risks could increase post-merger as size of operations grows and distance between management and operational personnel is greater as the administrative systems become more complex.
- It will help to deal better with their credit portfolio, including stressed assets. Consolidation will also prevent multiplicity of resources being spent in the same area and strengthens banks to deal with shocks.
India could provide universal basic income of Rs 2,600 a year: IMF

In its ‘Fiscal Monitor – Tackling Inequality’, the IMF has discussed UBI, “a proposal that has been widely debated recently and is being tested in several countries”, devoting extensive space to its case for India.

**IMF’s observations on the idea of providing a UBI:**
- IMF estimates India could provide a universal basic income (UBI) of Rs 2,600 a year to every person if it eliminates food and energy subsidies.
- Even such a modest level of UBI will incur a fiscal cost of about 3% of GDP, but would outperform the public food distribution and fuel subsidies on three counts.
- It will address the under coverage of the near 20% lower income groups in the PDS, address the issue of higher income groups cornering bigger subsidies and increase generosity benefits received by the lower income groups.
- In case of fuel subsidies, the IMF simulation goes beyond budget subsidy of cost-price difference to the extent prices are “below efficient levels that would internalize the negative externalities associated with fossil fuel consumption”.
- The flip side of this is that eliminating the wider subsidies would require a sharper increase in prices than the case when budget subsidies are removed. The IMF cites a 2016 study that pegs the order of increase at gasoline (67%), diesel (69%), kerosene (10%), LPG (94%) and coal (455%).

**What is UBI?**
A basic income is an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement.

**Why UBI is needed?**
- Can address poverty and inequality more effectively.
- Address income uncertainty due to impact of tech on jobs.
- Help garner support for unpopular structural reforms.

**Arguments against UBI:**
- Unnecessary benefits to higher income groups.
- High fiscal costs crowding out other spending.
- Discourages labour supply.
SIDBI revamps portal for easy credit access

Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has revamped its portal www.udyamimitra.in with enhanced features to provide easy access to credit and hand-holding services for micro small medium enterprises (MSME).

**Key Features:**
- The portal brings transparency and competition among lenders
- It removes the need to approach several banks individually
- The portal is mobile-enabled and provides a self-assessment module.
- It sends various information on registered MSMEs from time to time.
- It also allows loan applications to be perused and picked up by multiple lenders.

Nobel Economics Prize

US economist Richard Thaler won the 2017 Nobel Economics Prize for his contributions in the field of behavioural economics.

The economics prize, officially called the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel, was established in 1968. It was not part of the original group of awards set out in dynamite tycoon Nobel’s 1895 will.

**Contributions of Richard Thaler:**
- His empirical findings and theoretical insights have been instrumental in creating the new and rapidly expanding field of behavioural economics, which has had a profound impact on many areas of economic research and policy.
- By exploring the consequences of limited rationality, social preferences, and lack of self-control, he has shown how these human traits systematically affect individual decisions as well as market outcomes.
- In total, Richard Thaler’s contributions have built a bridge between the economic and psychological analyses of individual decision-making.

what is behavioural economics?

The field of behavioral economics blends insights of psychology and economics, and provides some valuable insights that individuals are not behaving in their own best interests. Behavioral economics provides a framework to understand how and why people make errors. Systematic errors or biases recur predictably in particular circumstances. Lessons from behavioral economics can be used to create environments that nudge people toward wiser decisions and healthier lives.

This branch looks at the impacts of social, psychological and emotional factors in making decisions about money that aren’t in a person’s best interest. **It’s kind of the opposite to the rational decision makers that are usually described in economic theory.**

Thaler’s research has expanded economic analysis by considering three psychological traits: limited rationality, perceptions about fairness and lack of self-control.

47.5 lakh domestic workers set to get legal status and minimum wages

Ministry of labour and employment is considering to formulate a national policy for domestic workers under which part-time, full-time and live-in workers, employers, private placement agencies will be clearly defined. With this, the ministry is set to give legal status to domestic workers in the country by formulating a national policy that will ensure minimum wages and equal remuneration for around 47.5 lakh domestic workers in India including 30 lakh women.
The policy aims to promote right to fair terms of employment relating to minimum wages, protection from abuse/harassment and violence, access to social security benefits such as health insurance, maternity benefits and old age pensions as provided by existing and upcoming schemes of central and state government, which may include contribution from employer/workers.

An institutional mechanism will be set up to provide for social security cover, fair terms of employment, grievance redressal and dispute resolution for domestic workers. Besides, the policy will seek to regulate recruitment and placement agencies to avoid any harassment.

Placement agencies charge a certain proportion of domestic workers’ salary every month, over and above onetime fees they charge from the employer for providing such help. The new policy, though, is likely to make it mandatory for placement agencies to charge a one-time 15-day salary from domestic workers and in turn provide them with social security cover, including medical and health insurance.

$300 Million Loan to Promote Further Fiscal Reforms in West Bengal

The first ADB policy-based loan of $400 million was sanctioned in 2012 for the first West Bengal Development Finance Program. It aimed to create the fiscal space necessary to sustain higher public investment in the state. The state government achieved full compliance on all policy actions under the first program, received several awards for e-governance in tax administration.

Objective:

- While the first program focused on augmenting public investment, the Second West Bengal Development Finance Program will support private investments more directly by creating an infrastructure facility to support project preparation, development, and appraisal, with emphasis on public-private partnerships in health and education.
- It also seeks to simplify the registration and licensing procedure for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises. It will carry forward reforms such as linking medium term expenditure plans to actual budgets, supported by strengthening internal audit system, and enhancements in the integrated financial management system (IFMS).
- The program include improved tax monitoring and continued support for information technology systems in strengthening tax and land administration.

Asian Development Bank (ADB):
Asian Development Bank (ADB) ADB is a regional development bank which aims to promote social and economic development in Asia. It was established on 19 December 1966. It is headquartered in Manila, Philippines. The ADB has been modelled closely on the World Bank. It has 67 members, of which 48 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.

Decision on removal of fishing subsidies certain in WTO’s Dec. meet

WTO’s Ministerial Conference meeting at Buenos Aires (Argentina) to be held in December 2017. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General, UN Conference on Trade and Development
**Reason:**
Addressing government incentives that drive unsustainable fisheries practices is not just an environmental imperative. Government subsidies in the fisheries sector can have severe negative social and economic impacts for the most vulnerable countries and communities. Subsidies Weaken The Sustainability Of Global Fisheries While Increasing Inequality Among Fishers Harmful fishing subsidies (globally) that contribute to overfishing are estimated to be as high as $35 billion.

**Other issues:**
- Permanent solution to the issue of public stockholding for food security purposes’ would be a part of the outcomes ‘No’ to e-commerce talks as many developing countries are not ready to allow e-commerce to be negotiated.
- They want to ensure that e-commerce is an enabler for development, without going into rulemaking at the WTO.

---

**₹2.11 Lakh Crore for PSU Banks to Boost Lending**

The Centre unveiled an ambitious plan to infuse ₹2.11 lakh crore capital over the next two years into public sector banks (PSBs).

**Context:**
- PSBs are burdened with high, non-performing assets (Asset Quality Review, RBI)
- Twin-Balance Sheet Problem
- Private investment is cut down

**Steps Taken:**
- Govt has taken massive step to capitalise PSBs in a frontloaded manner, to support credit growth and job creation.
- Govt plans to fund through budgetary provisions of 18,139 crore and the sale of recapitalisation bonds worth 1.35 lakh crore.
- The balance would be raised by the banks themselves by diluting the government’s equity share.
- Cabinet also approved 5.35 lakh crore for massive road infrastructure investment under Bharat Mala Programme.

**Conclusion:**
These steps will boost flagging economic growth and create jobs. The effect of recapitalisation on the fiscal deficit would be determined by the type of bonds and as to who the issuing authority would be.

---

**Twin-Balance Sheet Problem:**
- The balance sheets of both public sector banks (PSBs) and some corporate houses are in terrible shape and it has been seen as a major obstacle to investment and reviving growth.
- The problems faced by the Public Sector Banks are linked directly to that of the corporate sector. Companies borrowed a lot of money from banks to invest in infrastructure and commodity-related businesses, such as steel, power, infrastructure etc.
- But now, due to slump in both these sectors, the corporate profits have hit new lows. With low profitability?

**Bharat Mala Project:**
The Bharat Mala project will include economic corridors (9,000 km), inter-corridor and feeder route (6,000 km), national corridors efficiency improvement (5,000 km), border roads and international connectivity (2,000 km), coastal roads and port connectivity (2,000 km) and Greenfield expressways (800 km). Further, the remaining road projects of 10,000 km under the National Highways Development Project will form a part of the programme.

**Pragya Delhi:**
The government has identified new routes between economically important cities that would be 20% longer in terms of distance but take relatively less travel time.
the corporates are not able to repay their loans and their debts are rising and in turn cut down on investments.

**Uday Kotak Committee suggests changes in corporate governance rules**

A corporate governance committee was formed by the SEBI in June 2017, under the chairmanship of Uday Kotak, MD, Kotak Mahindra Bank, with a view to enhance the standards of this regime of listed entities in India. The committee recently submitted its report.

In an attempt to support and enable sustainable growth of enterprise, while safeguarding interests of various stakeholders, the committee has come out with various recommendations.

**Important recommendations made by the committee:**

**Minimum number of board of directors:** The Committee has proposed that now board of directors shall comprise not less than six directors. Also board of directors shall have an optimum combination of executive and non-executive directors with at least one woman as an independent director and not less than 50% of the board of directors shall comprise of non-executive directors.

**Minimum number of board meetings:** These board shall meet at least 4-5 times a year, with a maximum time gap of one hundred and twenty days between any two meetings and at least once a year. Under this meeting, the board shall specifically discuss strategy, budgets, board evaluation, risk management, ESG (environment, sustainability and governance) and succession planning. Listed entity shall, at least once every year, undertake a formal interaction between the non-executive directors and the senior management.
Minimum compensation and remuneration: Top 500 listed entities by market capitalisation shall pay compensation to each independent director as Rs 5 lakh per annum, whether through sitting fees or profit linked commissions. Provided that, this provision will not apply in case of inadequacy of profits in accordance with Section 197 of Companies Act, 2013 – minimum sitting fees for every board meeting of Rs 50,000 for top 100 entities by market capitalisation and Rs 25,000 for next 400 entities.

Way ahead:
If these proposals are implemented, at least 256 companies on NSE will need to increase their board size and 637 will have to appoint a woman director. Also, the ministry of corporate affairs (MCA) has opposed 12 out of the 24 key proposals and said the changes are not feasible and in many instances will cause a regulatory overlap and unnecessarily make the functioning of boards tougher.

Information utility under the IBC

National e-Governance Services Ltd (NeSL) has become India’s first information utility (IU) for bankruptcy cases under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016. NeSL is owned by State Bank of India and Life Insurance Corporation Ltd., among others. Recently, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) eased ownership norms for setting up such utilities.

What is an information utility?
Information utility is an information network which would store financial data like borrowings, default and security interests among others of firms. The utility would specialise in procuring, maintaining and providing/supplying financial information to businesses, financial institutions, adjudicating authority, insolvency professionals and other relevant stakeholders.

Why is it important? How useful is it?

- The objective behind information utilities is to provide high-quality, authenticated information about debts and defaults. Information utilities are expected to play a key role as they allow storage of financial information of registered users and expeditiously process and verify information received.
- Moreover, the database and records maintained by them would help lenders in taking informed decisions about credit transactions. It would also make debtors cautious as credit information is available with the utility. More importantly, information available with the utility can be used as evidence in bankruptcy cases before the National Company Law Tribunal.

What are the rules governing these utilities?
Information utilities are governed by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 and IBBI (Information Utilities) Regulations 2017. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) oversees aspects such as registration and cancellation of these entities, their shareholding and governance among others. Recently, IBBI eased norms for information utilities, allowing Indian firms listed on stock exchanges to hold 100% in such firms. It also allowed individuals to hold 51% in the utility for a period of three years.

How will the utilities help stakeholders in the insolvency process?
It is mandatory for financial creditors to provide financial information to the information utility. When they initiate insolvency proceedings against the defaulting firm (known as corporate debtor), the utilities may help as they would act as a centralised platform for accessing data. Unlike financial creditors, it is optional for the operational creditor to provide financial information to the utility.

What are the key challenges for these utilities?
While the onus is on financial creditors, operational creditors and corporate debtors to provide the required information, procuring authentic information might be a challenge due to the sensitivity involved. There may also be resistance in sharing information. Since it is a digital database, there is the risk of exposure to data piracy and data theft.

The Government of India and World Bank sign $200 Million Loan Agreement for the Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project.
The Project will support the Government of Assam to facilitate agri-business investments. Increase agriculture productivity and market access. Enable small farm holders produce crops that are resilient to recurrent floods or droughts in the state. Fulfils the State’s vision of an agriculture-based rural transformation.

**Use of geographic clustering of the production base:**

- The focus on geographic clustering of the production base for certain commodities will help agroenterprises take advantage of existing and future market opportunities that they may not necessarily achieve alone.
- The cluster approach will allow for combining efforts, making use of synergies, and pooling resources to increase the competitive advantage of these products, while at the same time share the risks involved in introducing improved products or entering previously untapped markets.
- Successful clusters will also continuously innovate and adapt ‘best practices’ across agricultural value chains.

**Centre proposes three-year licence for contractors**

The government has proposed a major overhaul in the contract labour law. It has proposed changes to the **Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970.** The proposed law is in line with International Labour Organisation Convention 181 (on private employment agencies).

**Proposed changes:**

- Contractors will no longer require a licence for undertaking each project. No individual permits required for each project.
- A three-year licence will be given for contractors to work across the country instead of a separate one for new work orders.
- If the contractor wants to work in a single State for up to three years, the permit needs to be obtained from the State Government. However, the contractor will need to inform the government whenever it receives a work order from a company, failing which the licence may be cancelled.
- The proposed law also seeks to make a distinction between contractors who provide services and those who provide human resources. Contractors who provide human resources to a company will no longer be responsible for providing canteen and restroom facilities to the workers.
- If a work order is given to a contractor who has hired employees on payroll, then the workers will not be treated as contract workers under the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act. The government has also proposed to make wage payment “primarily” through electronic mode instead of cash payment.

**MSME Delayed Payment Portal – MSME Samadhaan**

Delayed Payment Portal – **MSME Samadhaan** was launched for empowering micro and small entrepreneurs across the country to directly register their cases relating to delayed payments by Central Ministries/Departments/CPSEs/State Governments.

**Utility:**

The portal will greatly facilitate the monitoring of the delayed payment in a more effective manner. The information on the portal will be available in public domain, thus exerting moral pressure on the defaulting parties.

Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com

**IBRD:**

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) is an international financial institution that offers loans to middle-income developing countries.

The IBRD is the first of five member institutions that compose the World Bank Group.

It was established in 1944 with the mission of financing the reconstruction of European nations devastated by World War II.

The IBRD provides commercial-grade or concessional financing to sovereign states to fund projects that seek to improve transportation and infrastructure, education, domestic policy, environmental consciousness, energy investments, healthcare, access to food and potable water, and access to improved sanitation.
organisations. The MSEs will also be empowered to access the portal and monitor their cases.

**Background:**
The Portal will give information about the pending payment of MSEs with individual CPSEs / Central Ministries, State Governments, etc. The CEO of PSEs and the Secretary of the Ministries concerned will also be able to monitor the cases of delayed payment and issue necessary instructions to resolve the issues. The **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development (MSMED) Act, 2006** contains provisions to deal with cases of delayed payment to Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs).

---

**NIIF gets first investor, Abu Dhabi fund brings in $1 bn**

- The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) of India has signed an investment agreement worth $1 billion with a wholly owned unit of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA).
- As part of the partnership agreement, ADIA will become the first institutional investor in NIIF’s Master Fund and a shareholder in National Investment and Infrastructure Ltd, NIIF’s investment management company.
- This agreement marks the culmination of an extensive process of collaboration with ADIA to develop an investment structure that is attractive to international investors, while remaining closely aligned with NIIF’s objectives.

**About NIIF:**

NIIF was set up in 2015 as an investment vehicle for funding commercially viable greenfield, brownfield and stalled projects in the infrastructure sector. NIIF will invest in areas such as energy, transportation, housing, water, waste management and other infrastructure-related sectors in India.

The corpus of the fund is proposed to be around Rs40,000 crore, with the government investing 49% and the rest to be raised from third-party investors such as sovereign wealth funds, insurance and pension funds, endowments etc.
The Union Ministry of Tourism gave Letters of Intent (LoI) to access, illumination and night viewing facilities for inclusive tourist experience to increase both domestic and foreign tourists footfall under Adopt a Heritage Scheme at the closing ceremony of ‘Paryatan Parv’ held in New Delhi.

The shortlisted companies will be future ‘Monument Mitras’ who would associate pride with their Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) activities.

14 adopted monuments include:
- Jantar Mantar, Purana Quila, Safdarjung Tomb, Agrasen ki Baoli, and Qutub Minar (Delhi), Hampi (Karnataka), Ajanta Caves (Maharashtra), Sun Temple, Raja Rani Temple and Rathnagiri Monuments (Odisha), Leh Palace and Mt. Stok Kangri (Jammu & Kashmir), Mattancherry Palace Museum (Kerala), Gangotri Temple Area and Trail (Uttarakhand).

**Background**

These companies were selected by Inter-Ministerial Oversight and Vision Committee of Ministry after detailed scrutiny of 57 responses ranging from travel industry, hospitality industry and banking industry for adopting monuments under the Adopt a Heritage Scheme.

**Adopt a Heritage Scheme (Apni Dharohar Apni Pehchan Project):**
- The scheme was launched by Union Ministry of Tourism on World Tourism Day (27th September).
- Under it, Private, Public Sector Companies and Corporate individuals were invited to adopt heritage sites and to take up responsibility for making them and promote sustainable tourism through conservation and development under their CSR activities.
- This scheme was launched by Tourism Ministry in close collaboration with Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).
- It envisions at developing monuments, heritage and tourist sites across India and making them tourist friendly and enhance their tourism potential and cultural importance in planned and phased manner.
- The project primarily focuses on development and maintenance of world-class tourist infrastructure and amenities including basic civic amenities and advanced amenities like cleanliness, public conveniences, secure environment, ease of access, illumination and night viewing facilities for inclusive tourist experience to increase both domestic and foreign tourists footfall.

*Is the Devadasi system still being followed in southern India?*
Few media reports about a peculiar temple ritual of “offering” girl children to Goddess Mathamma in Chittor district of Andhra Pradesh have raised questions about the prevalence of the ancient Devadasi system, an oppressive practice of women and young girls being regarded as temple property and sexually exploited.

Concerns:
- Social activists say the girls are exploited, and forced to live as sex workers. Many die old and lonely and sick as they are forced to sleep in the Mathamma temples or outside the temples. Besides, the state authorities have not been able to take up scientific rehabilitation measures due to lack of proper data and non-cooperation from the victims and village elders.
- As it is linked with the sentiments of the community, the official machinery and the political parties shy away from taking on the tradition. Moreover, the victimised community is largely viewed as a minority group, with no influence on vote-bank politics.

What is Devadasi system?
Devadasi system is a religious practice whereby parents marry a daughter to a deity or a temple. The marriage usually occurs before the girl reaches puberty. In recent decades, the practice has been used to push young girls into prostitution. While various state governments have enacted laws to stop such practices, the tradition remains entrenched in some parts of the country, especially some southern states.

Laws prohibiting its practice:
The practice of Devadasi system in any form is in total contravention of the provisions of Section 370 and

About the ritual:
As part of the ritual, girls are dressed as brides and once the ceremony was over, their dresses are removed by five boys, virtually leaving them naked. They are then forced to live in the Mathamma temples, deemed to be public property, and face sexual exploitation.

The Mathamma system has its equivalent in other regions of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The system is called ‘Basivi’ in Kurnool and Anantapur districts, ‘Saani’ in Krishna, East and West Godavari districts, and ‘Parvathi’ in Vizianagaram and Srikakulam districts.

Women are unable to leave the exploitative system due to social pressures.
370A as amended through Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 as well as Section 372 of Indian Penal Code. It is also against Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act.

### Ichthyosaur fossil discovered for first time in India

Scientists in India have discovered a 152 million-year-old fossil of an Ichthyosaur – an extinct marine reptile – in the western state of Gujarat.

**Key Facts:**
The fossil (5.5 m) was found inside rocks from the Mesozoic Era, which ran between 252 and 66 million years ago, in the Kutch desert. Specimen can be identified with Ophthalmosauridae, a family of ichthyosaurs that lived in the oceans between 165 and 90 million years ago. Examination of the teeth of the fossil suggests that it was a top-tier predator in its ecosystem.

**Ichthyosaur:**
Often misidentified as “swimming dinosaurs”, they first appeared in the early Triassic period. The name means fish-lizard, although the creature has been classified as a reptile since the mid-19th Century. The creature was noted for its sharp, robust teeth. Ichthyosaurs became extinct before the dinosaurs, dying out in the early part of the late Cretaceous period.

**Significance of the discovery:**
It throws light on the evolution and diversity of ichthyosaurs in the Indo-Madagascan region and India’s biological connectivity with other continents in the Jurassic. Identification of the new specimen may further throw light on whether there was any marine connection between India and South America about 150 million years ago.

![Ichthyosaur fossil](image)

### Eminent classical singer and Padma Vibhushan awardee Girija Devi passed away

A legendary singer of the Benaras gharana, Girija Devi was awarded the Padma Shri in 1972, the Padma Bhushan in 1989 and the Padma Vibhushan in 2016.

**Thumri:**
- Thumri is a common genre of semi-classical Indian music.
- The term ‘thumri’ is derived from the Hindi verb *thumakna* which means “to walk with dancing steps so as to make the ankle-bells tinkle.”
- The form is, thus, connected with dance, dramatic gestures, mild eroticism, evocative love poetry and folk songs of Uttar Pradesh, though there are regional variations.
- The text is romantic or devotional in nature, and usually revolves around a girl's love for Krishna.

Thumri is characterized by its sensuality, and by a greater flexibility with the raag.
GIRIJA DEVI

May 8, 1929—Oct. 24, 2017

BIRTHPLACE
Varanasi

GHARANAS
Seniya & Banaras

ALSO KNOWN AS
Queen of Thumri Appaji

SPECIALISATIONS
Thumri
Khayal
Toopia
Dadra
Hoji
Rafi
Chahi
Jhalla

GURUS
Pandit Sarju Prasad Misra
Shriramkishore Mishra

FIRST PERFORMANCE
1949 (radio) in Allahabad

MAJOR AWARDS
- Padma Shri (1972)
- Padma Bhushan (1988)
- Padma Vibhushan (2016)
- Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1977)
- Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship (2010)
- Moha Sangeet Samman Award (2012)
- Sangeet Samman Award (Dover Lane Music Conference)
- GIMA Awards (Lifetime Achievement, 2012)
- Sangeet Puraskar
- Banga Bibhushan 2015
1 October: International Day of Older Persons

The International Day of Older Persons (IDOP) is observed every year on October 1 to raise awareness about issues affecting elderly and to appreciate contributions that older people make to society. It also seeks to raise awareness about issues affecting elderly, such as senescence and elder abuse. The theme for this year is “Stepping into the Future: Tapping the Talents, Contributions and Participation of Older Persons in Society”. It aims to explore effective means of promoting and strengthening the participation of older persons in various aspects of social, cultural, economic and civic and political life.

Background:
The International Day of Older Persons was instituted by United Nations General Assembly by adopting resolution 45/106 in December 1990 for raising awareness about issues affecting the elderly, such as senescence and elder abuse. It is also a day to appreciate the contributions that older people make to society. The observance of the day is also focus of ageing organizations and the United Nations Programme on Ageing.

World Habitat Day: 2 October

The United Nations designated the first Monday of October of every year as World Habitat Day to reflect on the state of our towns and cities, and on the basic right of all to adequate shelter. It is also intended to remind the world that we all have the power and the responsibility to shape the future of our cities and towns.

2017 theme: “Housing Policies: Affordable Homes”
Each year, World Habitat Day takes on a new theme to promote sustainable development policies that ensure adequate shelter for all. These themes often promote one of UN-Habitat’s focal areas such as:

- Inclusive housing and social services.
- A safe and healthy living environment for all — with particular consideration for children, youth, women, elderly and disabled.
- Affordable and sustainable transport and energy.
- Promotion, protection, and restoration of green urban spaces.
- Safe and clean drinking water and sanitation.
- Healthy air quality.
- Job creation.
- Improved urban planning and slum upgrading.
- Better waste management.

International Day of the Girl Child

The International Day of the Girl Child was celebrated by countries across the world on October 11. This year the theme of the International Day of the Girl is ‘EMPOWER girls: Before, during and after conflict’ in humanitarian emergencies gender-based violence increases which means girls are more likely to be subjected to sexual and physical violence, child marriage, exploitation and trafficking.

Background:
The United Nations established the day to bring attention to the needs and difficulties that girls face around the world. It also calls for empowerment and improved rights of the girls. Since 2012, 11 October has been
marked as the International Day of the Girl.

**Issues and challenges:**
- Child marriage is one of the most pressing issues facing the girl worldwide as an estimated one in three girls are married before they are 18, one in seven before they turn 15. There are 700 million women alive today who were married before 18 to men much older than themselves.
- Female genital mutilation is another problem that UNICEF estimates has affected 130 million girls worldwide.
- Sexual assault is another issue tackled by International Day of the Girl as up to 50% of all sexual assaults target girls under 16-years-old.

**October 13: International Day for Disaster Reduction**

The International Day for Disaster Reduction (IDDR) is observed every year on October 13 to promote a global culture of risk-awareness and disaster reduction. The observance of day seeks to encourage citizens and governments to take part in building more disaster resilient communities and nations. It also celebrates how people and communities around world are reducing their exposure to disasters and raising awareness about the importance of reinig in risks that they face. It also seeks to spread awareness about reinig risks of disasters around world and also reduce exposure of people and communities to disasters.

The 2017 theme is “Home Safe Home: Reducing Exposure, Reducing Displacement”. It seeks to raise global awareness about effective actions, policies and practices taken to reduce exposure to disaster risk at community level, thereby contributing to saving homes and livelihoods.

**Background**
The International Day for Disaster Reduction was instituted by UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 1989 to promote a global culture of risk-awareness and disaster reduction. Earlier, this day was celebrated annually on the second Wednesday of October. But in 2009, the UNGA formally designated 13 October as the annual date by adopting Resolution 64/200.

**October 14: World Standards Day**
The World Standards Day is observed every year on 14 October across the globe to mark the development of voluntary engineering and scientific standards. The theme for year 2017 is “Standards make cities smarter”. Significance of the day Observance of the day honours contributions of all those who have developed technical agreements that are published as international standards. It also seeks to raise awareness regarding significance of standardization in global economy, among regulators, industry and consumers. This day is mainly celebrated by members of organisations like ISO (International Organisation for Standardization), IEC (International Electrotechnical Commission), ITU (International Telecommunication Union) and IETF (Internet Engineering Task Force).
Background
The first World Standards Day was celebrated on 14 October, 1970. On this day in 1946, representatives from 25 countries gathered in London for the first time with the aim of creating an international organization solely focused on facilitating standardization. The ISO was formed a year later in 1947.

October 15: International Day of Rural Women

The International Day of Rural Women is observed every year on October 15 to recognize the crucial role and contribution of rural women. The 2017 theme of the day is “Challenges and opportunities in climate-resilient agriculture for gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”. The observance of day highlights the role and contribution of rural women, including indigenous women, in enhancing rural and agricultural development, eradicating rural poverty and improving food security and ensuring sustainability of rural households and communities, improving rural livelihoods and overall wellbeing.

Background
The International Day of Rural Women was instituted by the UN General Assembly by passing resolution 62/136 in December 2007. It was first observed on 15 October 2008. According to UN, empowerment of rural women is pre-requisite for fulfilling the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) which aims at ending poverty and hunger, achieve food security and empower all women and girls. Rural women, make up over a quarter of the total world population. Majority of them depend on natural resources and agriculture for their livelihood. They produce, prepare and process much of the food available, thereby giving them primary responsibility for food security. Thus, International Day of Rural Women recognises contribution and significant role played by these rural women in food security and poverty elevation.

World Food Day
World Food Day is celebrated on October 16 every year to raise awareness on the issues of poverty and hunger. World Food Day was established by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in November 1979 and since then the day is celebrated worldwide by many organisations that are concerned with food security.

Theme: “Change the future of migration. Invest in food security.”

Significance of this event:
- World Food Day is a chance to show our commitment to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 – to achieve Zero Hunger by 2030.
- It’s also a day for us to celebrate the progress we have already made towards reaching #ZeroHunger.

October 17: The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP) is observed every year on October 17 to raise people’s awareness of the need to eradicate poverty and destitution worldwide, particularly in developing countries.

The 2017 theme ‘Answering the Call of October 17 to end poverty: A path toward peaceful and inclusive societies’. It seeks to remind importance of the values of dignity, solidarity and voice underscored in the Call to Action to fight to end poverty everywhere. This year’s celebration also marks 25th anniversary of declaration of IDEP by UN General Assembly (UNDP). It also marks 30th anniversary of “Call to Action” by Father Joseph Wresinski which had inspired observance of October 17 as World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty and recognition by UN day as the IDEP

Background:
The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP) was instituted by UNGA by adopting a resolution on 22 December 1992 to promote awareness among people to eradicate poverty and destitution around the world particularly in developing countries. It was observed for the first time in 1993.

24 October: United Nations Day

The United Nations Day is observed every year on 24th October to mark anniversary of entry into force of UN Charter in 1945. With ratification of this founding document by majority of its members, including five permanent members of UN Security Council, United Nations officially came into existence. Since then, 24th October is celebrated as UN Day. On this day all member states of UN contribute finances to its operation to help further its goals.

United Nations:
UN is successor of ineffective League of Nations and was established in 1945 after World War II in order to prevent another such conflict. Now, it has become world’s only truly universal global organization and is foremost forum to address issues that transcend national boundaries and cannot be resolved by any one country acting alone. Its prime role is to maintain world peace, human rights, promote social and economic development and provide aid around the world in cases of famine, natural disaster and armed conflict.

The main organs of UN are: General Assembly (UNGA), Security Council (UNSC), Economic and Social Council (UNESOC),International Court of Justice (ICJ), UN Secretariat, Trusteeship Council.

League of Nations (LoN):

Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upscivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com

About FAO:
The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is a specialised agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy. FAO is also a source of knowledge and information, and helps developing countries in transition modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices, ensuring good nutrition and food security for all.
LoN was founded in January, 1920 as a result of Paris Peace Conference that ended World War I. LoN was first international organisation whose principal mission was to maintain world peace. But onset of World War II, demonstrated that LoN failed in its primary purpose of preventing another world war.

24 October: World Polio Day

The World Polio Day is observed annually across world on 24 October to create awareness about the hazards of the crippling Polio disease. The day was established by Rotary International to commemorate birth of Jonas Salk who had led the first team of researchers which had developed a vaccine against poliomyelitis (polio virus). This development had led to widespread use of this inactivated poliovirus vaccine and subsequently use of the oral poliovirus, developed by Albert Sabin. It also had led to establishment of Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) in 1988 which has helped to reduce polio worldwide by 99%.

Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI)

GPEI launched in 1988 has played pivotal role in eradication of wild poliovirus. When it was launched wild poliovirus existed in 125 countries. Now, it exists in two countries Pakistan and Afghanistan. Till 2012, Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country was reservoir of more than half of the Polio cases in the world. But in 2015, it was removed from list of Polio endemic countries by World Health Organization (WHO).

Poliovirus:

Poliomyelitis (polio) is a highly infectious viral disease, which mainly affects young children below age of 5. The virus is transmitted from person-to-person. It mainly spreads through the faecal-oral route (e.g. contaminated water or food). After entering body, it multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and can cause paralysis. Its initial symptoms include fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness in the neck, and pain in the limbs. In some cases, it causes permanent paralysis. There is no cure for polio, however it can only be prevented by immunization. Polio vaccine is given multiple times, almost always protects a child for life.

27 October: Infantry Day

The Infantry Day in observed every year in India on 27 October to commemorate supreme sacrifices made by Indian Army’s infantry against Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in 1947. It was rst infantry action by
Indian Army after independence. Observance of the day also commemorates infantry’s exceptional courage and dedicated service to nation.

**Background**

On this day in 1947, Indian Army from 1st Battalion of SIKH Regiment had taken bold action to thwart nefarious designs to invade J&K by Pakistani Army supported tribals. The infantry of Indian Army was airdropped after troops were airlifted from Delhi and landed at Srinagar to liberate Kashmir from invaders in order to protect sovereignty and territorial integrity of nation. The operation was undertaken following orders of then Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru after Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler of princely state of J&K signed Instrument of Accession on 26 October 1947 to accede or merge state with India.

**October 31: World Cities Day**

The United Nations’s World Cities Day (WCD) is observed every year on October 31 to promote international community’s interest in global urbanization, push forward cooperation among countries in meeting opportunities and addressing challenges of urbanization, and contributing to sustainable urban development around the world. The theme selected for this year is “Innovative Governance, Open Cities”. It highlights important role of urbanization as a source of global development and social inclusion. The general theme of day is ‘Better City, Better Life’.

**India 100th on global hunger index**

Global Hunger Index for the year 2017 has been released.

**Key facts on GHI:**

- The report is released by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).
- The hunger index ranks countries based on undernourishment, child mortality, child wasting (low weight for height) and child stunting (low height for age).
- The GHI ranks countries on a 100-point scale. Zero is the best score (no hunger), and 100 is the worst, although neither of these extremes is reached in practice.

**Performance of India:**

- India has a “serious” hunger problem and ranks 100th out of 119 countries on the global hunger index.
- India stood at 97th position in last year’s rankings.
- The country’s serious hunger level is driven by high child malnutrition and underlines need for stronger commitment to the social sector.

However, India has made considerable improvement in reducing its child stunting rate, down 29% since 2000, but even that progress leaves India with a relatively high stunting rate of 38.4.

India’s relative performance:

India ranks below many of its neighbouring countries such as China (29th rank), Nepal (72), Myanmar (77), Sri Lanka (84) and Bangladesh (88). It is ahead of Pakistan (106) and Afghanistan (107). India ranked behind North Korea, Bangladesh and Iraq but ahead of Pakistan. North Korea ranks 93rd while Iraq is at 78th position.

India has the third highest score in all of Asia — only Afghanistan and Pakistan are ranked worse.

**Concerns:**

Pragnya IAS Academy +91 9880487071 www.upsccivilservices.com
Delhi, Hyderabad & Bangalore +91 9880486671 www.pragnyaias.com
India’s high ranking on the Global Hunger Index again this year brings to the fore the disturbing reality of the country’s stubbornly high proportions of malnourished children.

More than one-fifth of Indian children under five weigh too little for their height and over a third are too short for their age.

Even with the massive scale up of national nutrition-focused programmes in India, drought and structural deficiencies have left large number of poor in India at risk of malnourishment in 2017.

Way ahead:
The on-going efforts are expected to make significant changes in improving the existing situation. India has developed and launched an action plan on ‘undernourishment free India’ by 2022. The plan shows stronger commitment and greater investments in tackling malnutrition in the coming years.

Man Booker Prize: George Saunders wins for Lincoln in the Bardo

George Saunders has won the Man Booker prize for his novel Lincoln in the Bardo – becoming the second US author to take home the £50,000 fiction award. The book tells the story of Abraham Lincoln’s grief after the death of his young son, and his visits to his tomb.

About Man Booker Prize:
- The leading literary award in English, The Man Booker Prize was launched in 1969.
- It aims to promote the ‘finest in fiction’ and is awarded each year to the book adjudged as the best novel of the year written in English and published in the United Kingdom.
- The winner of The Man Booker Prize receives £50,000. Sponsored by Man Group, the foundation also awards £2,500 and a designer bound copy of their book to each of the six shortlisted authors.
- The winner and shortlisted authors are also guaranteed a worldwide readership as well as a dramatic spike in book sales. The judges of The Man Booker Prize are chosen from a wide range of disciplines including critics, writers, academics, poets, politicians, actors and ‘all with a passion for quality fiction’. Subject to widespread speculation before the official announcement, the prize usually brings the winner a huge boost in sales and profile.

Gauri Lankesh becomes first Indian to win Anna Politkovskaya Award

Late Kannada journalist Gauri Lankesh awarded a prestigious Reach All Women in WAR (RAW in WAR) Anna Politkovskaya Award. She will share this award with Gulalai Ismail, a Pakistani peace activist who has faced death threats for speaking out against Taliban. With this Gauri Lankesh becomes first person from India to receive this prestigious honour. She was a strident critic of religious extremism and was shot dead on September 5, 2017 in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

Gauri Lankesh Lankesh had worked as an editor in Lankesh Patrike, a Kannada weekly started by her father P. Lankesh, and ran her own weekly called Gauri Lankesh Patrike. She was an outspoken newspaper editor and often wrote about religious violence, malaise of India’s hierarchical caste system and criticised the rise of hardline Hindu groups.
Anna Politkovskaya Award:

Anna Politkovskaya Award is given in memory of slain Russian reporter and political activist Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian investigative reporter and activist who uncovered state corruption and rights abuses, especially in Chechnya. It is presented annually by Reach All Women in War (the RAW in WAR organisation) and honours women human rights defenders from around the world. This year marks 11th anniversary of killing of Anna Politkovskaya who was shot dead in lobby of her Moscow apartment block at age of 48 on October 7, 2006. RAW in WAR is a London-based, non-governmental organisation (NGO) supporting women human rights defenders and victims of war.
PRAGNYA IAS ACADEMY

Key Features

- No.1 Institute
- Classroom infrastructure
- High success rate
- Experience faculty - Retired IAS & IPS officers

Air conditioned classrooms equipped with latest audio-visual system

Not just teaching, but effective study practices

Well acclaimed study material

Extended support even after the completion of the course

Pioneer
- The concept of answer writing
- Regular Test Series Programme
- Postal Test Series Programme

Serious and concentrated study in comfortable environment

COURSES OFFERED

- GENERAL STUDIES (PRELIMS CUM MAINS)
- OPTIONAL SUBJECT FOR MAINS
- INTERVIEW GUIDANCE PROGRAMME
- ALL INDIA TEST SERIES (OFFLINE/ONLINE)

Optional Offered for Mains

- Optional Paper - 1
- Optional Paper - 2 (Public Administration / Sociology / Economics / Political Science / Geography / History)

All the courses are also offered online through our state of art “LIVE STREAMING” of classroom lectures. “RECORDED VIDEOS” of all the live lectures will be available to all the registered users for further references.

Jasmeet Singh Sandhu
AIR - 3

Yogesh Kumbhejkar
AIR - 08

Anurag Chander Sharma
AIR - 11

13 in top 100 - 41 in top 500
93 in the final list

Pragnya IAS Academy
Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore

+91 9880487071
+91 9880486671

www.upscivilservices.com
www.pragnyaias.com