Follow Our Three-Pronged Strategy Of “What”, “Why” And “Tell Me More” To Understand Everything You Need To Know In A Fun And Structured Way

BY: WWW.ANUJJINDAL.IN
CENTRE ASKS STATES TO BAN E-CIGARETTES

WHAT:
The health ministry has asked states to ban **Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS)** including e-cigarettes, Vape, e-Sheesha, e-Hookah etc.

States are asked to ensure that devices that enable nicotine delivery are not sold (including online sale), manufactured, distributed, traded, imported and advertised in their jurisdictions.

WHY:

Studies say ENDS **have cancer-causing properties**, are highly addictive and do not offer a safer alternative to tobacco-based products. Experts say e-cigarettes are just a mechanism to deliver nicotine in an attractive format.

TELL ME MORE:

**What are e-cigarettes?**
An electronic cigarette (or e-cig) is a **battery-powered vaporizer** that mimics tobacco smoking. It works by heating up a nicotine liquid, called “juice.”

**Why it’s hard to regulate them?**
As e-cigarettes contain nicotine and not tobacco, they do not fall within the ambit of the **Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products** (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (COTPA), which mandates stringent health warnings on the packaging and advertisements of tobacco products.

The current unregulated sale of e-cigarettes is dangerous for a country like India where the number of smokers is on the decline (WHO Global Report, 2015) as it increases the possibility of e-cigarettes becoming a gateway for smoking by inducing nicotine addiction and perpetuating smoking by making it more attractive, thereby encouraging persons to become users of tobacco as well as e-cigarettes.

As per the report, Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) (also known as e-cigarettes) emits nicotine, the addictive component of tobacco products.
VENEZUELA CRISIS

WHAT:
Venezuela, once a rich oil reserve country, is now battering an unprecedented economic crisis. Hyperinflation, mass migration, food shortage, increasing number of crimes and grinding poverty has pushed the nation into a deep turmoil.

Hyperinflation is the biggest problem faced by Venezuela. The inflation rate there is expected to reach a stunning one million per cent this year, putting it on par with the crises of Zimbabwe in the 2000s and Germany in the 1920s, according to the International Monetary Fund. The government claims that the country is the victim of an “economic war” and that the major issues are due to opposition “plots” and American sanctions.

WHY:
The plummeting oil prices since 2014 is one of the main reasons why Venezuela’s currency has weakened sharply. The country, which has rich oil reserves largely depended on it for its revenue. But when the oil price dropped drastically in 2014, Venezuela which received 96 per cent of its revenue from the oil exports, suffered a shortage of foreign currency. This made import of basic essentials like food and medicines difficult. With a shortage of the import goods, the black market has got a free hand in the country. Prices have been doubling every 26 days on average.

TELL ME MORE:
A survey from February this year found that almost 90% of Venezuelans live in poverty and more than 60% surveyed said that they had woken up hungry because they did not have enough money to buy food

As the country slips into poverty, many are turning towards crime to make money. A recent Gallup study placed Venezuela at the bottom of its 2018 Law and Order index, with 42 per cent of surveyed Venezuelans reporting they had been robbed the previous year and one-quarter saying they had been assaulted.
HORIZON 2020

WHAT:
The European Union and India will collaborate in research and innovation for developing a next generation influenza vaccine to protect people worldwide. The EU is funding it under its programme for research and innovation ‘Horizon 2020’.

WHY:
Improved Influenza vaccines would help the International community to better prepare in the event of an influenza pandemic.

The outcome of the project is expected to contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 3 to ensure health and well-being for all and boost the Indian National Health Mission.

TELL ME MORE:
Committed 15 million Euros each to fund this joint project

NTCA and Corbett tiger reserve

WHAT:
Pointing to an “alarming trend” of tiger deaths, the Uttarakhand High Court has asked if the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) could take over the management of the Corbett Tiger Reserve “as an interim measure”. The court also asked the NTCA if the tigers could be relocated “to save them from poaching”.

WHY:
The court expressed dissatisfaction with the state government’s inaction in dealing with tiger poaching incidents. It said the state government had failed to constitute a Special Tiger Protection Force despite the court’s order.

TELL ME MORE:
About Corbett tiger reserve:
- Corbett National Park is situated in the foothills of the Sub- Himalayan belt in Nainital district of Uttarakhand state in India.
- Established in the year 1936 as Hailey National Park, Corbett has the glory of being India’s oldest and most prestigious National Park. It is also being honored as the place where Project Tiger was first launched in 1973. This unique tiger territory is best known as the father who gave birth of the Project Tiger in India to protect the most endangered species and the Royal of India called Tigers.
Corbett National Park covers an area of 521 sq. km and together with the neighboring Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary and Reserve Forest areas, forms the Corbett Tiger Reserve.

Corbett is one of the richest bird regions of the Country and has been declared as an 'Important Bird Area' (IBA) by Birdlife International.

About NTCA:
The National Tiger Conservation Authority is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change constituted under enabling provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 2006, for strengthening tiger conservation, as per powers and functions assigned to it under the said Act. The National Tiger Conservation Authority has been fulfilling its mandate within the ambit of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for strengthening tiger conservation in the country.

TRADE MARGINS ON MEDICAL DEVICES

WHAT:
India is set to cap trade margins on medical devices, abandoning the current price control mechanism, as it seeks to curb profiteering as well as allay concerns of device makers, particularly importers of stents and knee implants, who have complained that price caps hurt innovation.

WHY:
To keep medical devices market profitable & innovative while keeping it affordable for patients at the same time.

TELL ME MORE:
The trade margin is the difference between the price at which the manufacturers/importers sell to stockists and the price charged to consumers. Therefore, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to accept government think tank NITI Aayog’s recommendation to cap trade margin at 65% for medical devices.

SWADESH DARSHAN SCHEME- HERITAGE CIRCUIT AND THEME BASED CIRCUIT
WHAT:

Ministry of Tourism (MoT) launched the Swadesh Darshan Scheme (Central Sector Scheme)– for integrated development of theme based tourist circuits in the country in 2014-15.
2 new circuits - heritage circuit of Punjab and north east (Tripura) have been launched.

**WHY:**
Objective to develop theme-based tourist circuits in the country. These tourist circuits will be developed on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner.

**TELL ME MORE:**

Features of Swadesh Darshan Scheme:
- The scheme is **100% centrally funded** for the project components undertaken for public funding.
- To leverage the voluntary funding available for **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector.

**NAFTA**

**WHAT:**
North American Free Trade Agreement, an agreement signed by Canada, Mexico, and the United States that reduced or eliminated trade barriers in North America. (Since the U.S. and Canada already had a free trade agreement (signed in 1988), NAFTA merely brought Mexico into the trade bloc.)
WHY:

- In 1993 the European Union (EU) created a “single market”—one territory without any internal borders or other regulatory obstacles to the free movement of goods and services. This allowed every country and business in the EU to have access to more than 500 million consumers.
- NAFTA, which was approved that same year, was designed to have a similar effect, providing a way to allow the exchange of goods and services to flow more freely across national borders without the artificial restrictions.
- NAFTA provided for progressive elimination of all tariffs on any goods qualifying as North American. The deal also sought to protect intellectual property, establish dispute-resolution mechanisms, and, through corollary agreements, implement labor and environmental safeguards.

TELL ME MORE:

Revised NAFTA Deal-

- The deal would require 75% of auto content to be made in the NAFTA region, up from the current level of 62.5%. A fact sheet describing the bilateral agreement specified the content would be made in the United States and Mexico.
- The deal improves labour provisions, in part by requiring 40% to 45% of auto content to be made by workers earning at least $16 per hour. That measure could move some production back to the United States from Mexico and should lift Mexican wages.
- The United States relented on its demand for an automatic expiration for the deal, known as a “sunset clause.” Instead, the United States and Mexico agreed to a 16-year lifespan for the deal, with a review every six years that can extend the pact for 16 years.

REGULATION FOR SATELLITES

WHAT:

The government has announced the Drone Regulations 1.0. These regulations will enable the safe, commercial usage of drones starting December 1, 2018. They are intended to enable visual line-of-sight daytime-only and a maximum of 400 ft altitude operations.

WHY:

To regulate flight of Drones in Indian Airspace

TELL ME MORE:
- All RPAS (remotely piloted aircraft system) except nano and those owned by NTRO, ARC and Central Intelligence Agencies are to be registered and issued with Unique Identification Number (UIN).
- For flying in controlled Airspace, filing of flight plan and obtaining Air Defence Clearance (ADC) /Flight Information Centre (FIC) number shall be necessary.
- No Drone Zones: The regulation defines “No Drone Zones”
  - There will be different colour zones visible to the applicant while applying in the digital sky platform, viz, Red Zone: flying not permitted, Yellow Zone (controlled airspace): permission required before flying, and Green Zone (uncontrolled airspace): automatic permission.

**LAKHWAR MULTIPURPOSE PROJECT**

**WHAT:**

The Centre has signed MOU with Uttarakhand, UP, HP, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi for Construction of Lakhwar Multipurpose Project on Yamuna Near Dehradun.

**WHY:**

Irrigation potential

**TELL ME MORE:**

- Project Will Generate 300 MW of Power
- Uttarakhand Will Bear the Cost of Power Component, Get the Total Benefit of Power Generation.
- Centre will Fund 90% of Irrigation Component, the Six States to the Fund Remaining 10% and Share Water Proportionately.

**ARTICLE 35 A OF INDIAN CONSTITUTION**

**WHAT:**

It is the provision incorporated in the Constitution in 1954. It gives the Jammu and Kashmir Legislature a carte blanche to decide, who are all ‘Permanent Residents’ of the State.

**WHY:**
TELL ME MORE:

Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and such other states also have laws which say that no outsider can buy land.

G20 DIGITAL ECONOMY MINISTERIAL MEETING

WHAT:

The 2018 edition of Digital Economy ministerial meeting is being held in Salta, Argentina. The ministerial meeting was preceded by the second meeting of the G20 Digital Economy Task Force.

The Digital Economy Task Force (DETF) was established under the 2017 German presidency, based on the decision adopted in Hangzhou in 2016 under the Chinese Presidency.

WHY:

In Antalya, under the Turkish presidency in 2015, G20 leaders recognized the modern period as a critical era of digital transformation, influenced by the advent of new technologies as key elements for economic development.

TELL ME MORE:

Important challenges include providing high-speed internet for all by 2025, creating inclusive growth and new jobs through digital trade, promoting lifelong digital learning, and closing the gender gap.

The G20 is made up of 19 countries and the European Union. The 19 countries are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, France, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

BIS STANDARDS FOR SERVICE SECTOR

WHAT:
The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has kicked off the process to set **new standards to measure quality of services** offered to consumers across different sectors, including telecom, aviation, e-commerce and healthcare. In this regard, BIS had recently called for a meeting of industry bodies to “persuade them to be part of the process and give their inputs.”

**WHY:**

Service sector is one of the key sectors of the Indian economy with a huge potential to grow into one of the largest markets of the world. Standards can play a major facilitative role in this regard. It is important that the standardisation needs and priorities of the sector are determined. The process was initiated after concerns over lack of standardisation, particularly with regards to after-sales service, in their feedback to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs.

**TELL ME MORE:**

- NONE -

**CHEETAH REINTRODUCTION PROJECT**

**WHAT:**

The Madhya Pradesh forest department has written to the National Tiger Conservation Authority to revive the plan to **reintroduce cheetahs in the State’s Nauradehi sanctuary**.

The cheetah — which is the fastest land animal — was declared extinct in India in 1952.

**WHY:**

The reintroduction of cheetahs will help restore India’s open forests and grassland ecosystems, which have been suffering. Having cheetahs will result in greater biodiversity, and biodiversity is the hallmark of healthy ecosystems. India is also home to the world’s largest free-roaming populations of livestock. Bringing back the cheetah will focus attention on pastoralism, and in doing so, help restore India’s natural heritage.
LEPROSY- THE PERSONAL LAWS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2018

WHAT:
The WHO asked South-East Asian countries, including India which accounted for 60% of such cases worldwide in 2015, to focus on preventing disabilities in children caused due to leprosy. India is among the 22 countries considered as having a “high burden for leprosy” along with high transmission by WHO.

WHY:
According to WHO, leprosy affected 2,12,000 people globally in 2015. India alone reported 1,27,326 new cases, accounting for 60% of new cases globally.

TELL ME MORE:
It attempts to end the discrimination against leprosy persons in various central laws. The Bill eliminates leprosy as a ground for dissolution of marriage or divorce. The amendments introduced in the Bill omit the provisions which stigmatise and discriminate against leprosy-affected persons.

Anti-Leprosy Day was celebrated all over India on 30th of January. On this event, a campaign named as the ‘Sparsh’ Leprosy Awareness Campaign, is being organized in all the Gram sabhas all through the nation.

SWEDEN LAUNCHES “FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY” HANDBOOK (ESSAY)

WHAT:
Sweden has released a handbook of its “feminist foreign policy” for rights groups and foreign governments, showcasing lessons from the Scandinavian nation’s flagship approach to promoting women’s rights globally.

WHY:
To increase awareness about discrimination of women in the world.
TELL ME MORE:

Highlights of the manual:

- The manual is derived from four years of work to place gender equality at the heart of the country’s international agenda.
- Sweden began its feminist foreign policy “in response to the discrimination and systematic subordination that still mark the daily lives of countless women and girls around the world”.
- Its goals include the promotion of economic emancipation, fighting sexual violence and improving women’s political participation.
- Projects cited in the manual include an action plan for five war-torn and post-conflict nations — Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and the Palestinian Territories — building in targets for women’s rights and empowerment for the first time.
- The handbook highlights Sweden’s work in Congo to promote “positive masculinity” in the country, where it is has run initiatives such as promoting social media debate on men’s role in society.

PMAY

WHAT:
The Centre has approved construction of nearly 1.12 lakh more affordable houses for urban poor in eight states under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna, with Andra Pradesh bagging the largest share of over 37,000 housing units.

According to the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, which is mandated to implement the scheme, the total number of houses being funded under the PMAY (Urban) is close to 55 lakh across the country so far.

WHY:
The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) Programme launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MoHUPA), in Mission mode envisions provision of Housing for All by 2022, when the Nation completes 75 years of its Independence.

TELL ME MORE:

Details on PMAY are being discussed in government schemes PDF
SCO PEACE MISSION EXERCISE

**WHAT:**

The 2018 SCO Peace Mission Exercise is being held in Russia.

**WHY:**

- As part of the SCO initiatives, the SCO Peace Mission Exercise is conducted biennially for the SCO member states.
- The exercise will involve tactical level operations in an international counter insurgency or counter-terrorism environment under the SCO Charter.

**TELL ME MORE:**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, also known as the Shanghai Pact, is a Eurasian political, economic, and military organisation which was **founded in 2001 in Shanghai** by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Apart from Uzbekistan, the other five countries have been a part of the Shanghai 5 since 1996. The cooperation was renamed to Shanghai Cooperation Organisation after Uzbekistan joined the organisation in 2001. **India and Pakistan are latest members of SCO**

REPORT, TITLED ‘THE URBAN COMMUTE AND HOW IT CONTRIBUTES TO POLLUTION AND ENERGY’

**WHAT:**

compiled by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)

The report is an analysis of 14 cities in India on how they fare when it comes to pollution and energy consumption from urban commuting.

**WHY:**

How they fare when it comes to pollution and energy consumption from urban commuting.

Motorization in India is explosive. Initially, it took 60 years (1951-2008) for India to cross the mark of 105 million registered vehicles. Thereafter, the same number of vehicles was added in a mere six years (2009-15).

**TELL ME MORE:**
- Kolkata is the top-performing megacity.
- Bhopal leads the list on the lowest overall emissions.
- Delhi ranked at the bottom of the table for overall emission.

**POSHAN MAAH (NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH)**

**WHAT:**

Celebrated in the month of September
As a part of Jan Andolan under POSHAN Abhiyaan

**TELL ME MORE:**

About Poshan Maah (National Nutrition Month):
- The primary objective of the celebration of Poshan Maah is to take the messages of POSHAN to the grass root level.
- The programme - an initiative of WCD Ministry and NITI Aayog is supported by 18 line Ministries/Departments/Government Organizations.
- It seeks to synergise all efforts by leveraging technology and intends to take nutrition awareness to the level of Jan Andolan or People’s Movement.
- The programme focuses on 8 themes – Antenatal Care, Optimal Breastfeeding (Early & Exclusive), Complementary Feeding, Anemia, Growth Monitoring, Girls-education, diet, right age of Marriage, Hygiene & Sanitation, Food Fortification.

**NATIONAL LOGISTICS PORTAL**

**WHAT:**

Ensure ease of trading in the international and domestic markets. The portal will link all the stakeholders of EXIM, domestic trade & movement and all trade activities on a single platform.

**WHY:**

India’s logistics sector is highly defragmented and the aim is to reduce the logistics cost from the present 14% of GDP to less than 10% by 2022.

**TELL ME MORE:**
In 2018-19 budget speech, Union Finance Minister had announced that Department of Commerce will create portal which will be single window online market place for trade and will connect business, create opportunities and bring together various ministries, departments and private sector.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN INDIAN HIMALAYAN REGION

WHAT:
NITI Aayog has launched 5 Thematic Reports on Sustainable Development in Indian Himalayan Region. The reports from the five working groups discuss the significance, the challenges, the ongoing actions and a future roadmap.

WHY:

TELL ME MORE:

- Nearly 30% of springs crucial to water security of people are drying and 50% have reported reduced discharge.
- Himalayan Tourism growing annually at 6.8% has created huge challenge related to solid waste, water, traffic, loss of bio-cultural diversity etc.
- Setting up of a Himalayan Authority for coordinated and holistic development of entire Himalayan region.

WORLD BANK LAUNCHES WORLD-FIRST BLOCKCHAIN BOND

WHAT:
dubbed a “Bondi” bond – standing for Blockchain Operated New Debt Instrument as well as a reference to Australia’s most famous beach

WHY:

This issue of World Bank bond will be the first time that capital is raised from public investors through a legally valid bond issuance that uses blockchain from start to finish.

TELL ME MORE:
The World Bank, whose bonds carry a AAA rating, regularly uses its borrowing power to help develop new bond markets as well as pioneering new means for selling and trading the securities.

**FSSAI NOTIFIES STANDARDS FOR HONEY & ITS PRODUCTS TO CURB ADULTERATION**

**WHAT:**

At present, there are no separate quality standards for honey and its products. The move comes in the wake of government promoting farmers to venture into the beekeeping business to increase their income. The standards will help fetch farmers better prices for their products.

**WHY:**

To curb adulteration and promote bee keeping among farmers

**TELL ME MORE:**

**Limits and standards:** The FSSAI has fixed *maximum 5% limit for sucrose content in the honey, while 10% for carviacallosa and Honeydew honey*. The moisture percentage should be maximum 20% and pollen count should be 25,000 per gram. With regard to by-products, the FSSAI has fixed standards for ‘Bees wax’ and ‘royal jelly’ also.

**Pollen content:** In the case of ‘Monofloral Honey’, the regulator said the minimum pollen content of the plant species concerned should not be less than 45 per cent of total pollen content. In case of ‘Multi Floral Honey’, the pollen content of any of the plant species should not exceed 45 per cent of the total pollen content.

**QUAD GROUPING**

**WHAT:**

A report on the policy recommendations on Indian Ocean security by four think tanks from the Quad countries has been unveiled.

**WHY:**

- Aim of “free and open Info-Pacific region”
- Australia, Japan, India and the US should work with countries in the IOR to help maintain independent security and economic policies
- The four countries should work to oppose the establishment of permanent Chinese military bases in the IOR
TELL ME MORE:

- Regional coalition known as the ‘Quad’, the quadrilateral formation includes Japan, India, United States and Australia.
- The idea was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007.

THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES (ICOMOS)

WHAT:

- The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is a prestigious non-government organisation.
- It promotes the application of theory, methodology and scientific techniques for conservation of architectural and archaeological heritage across the world.
- ICOMOS is also an advisory body to the UNESCO for cultural heritage, in particular for implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

WHY:

Launched an initiative to assess the damage to the rich cultural and built heritage in flood-devastated Kerala and set up an emergency response platform.

TRADE RECEIVABLES DISCOUNTING SYSTEM (TREDS)

WHAT:

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), despite the important role played by them in the economic fabric of the country, continue to face constraints in obtaining adequate finance, particularly in terms of their ability to convert their trade receivables into liquid funds.

The scheme for setting up and operating the institutional mechanism for facilitating the financing of trade receivables of MSMEs from corporate buyers through multiple financiers will be known as Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS).

The TReDS will facilitate the discounting of both invoices as well as bills of exchange. TReDS could deal with both receivables factoring as well as reverse factoring so that higher transaction volumes come into the system and facilitate in better pricing.
WHY:

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), despite the important role played by them in the economic fabric of the country, continue to face constraints in obtaining adequate finance, particularly in terms of their ability to convert their trade receivables into liquid funds.

TELL ME MORE:

- Reverse factoring (or supply chain financing) is a financing solution initiated by the ordering party (the customer) in order to help its suppliers to finance its receivables more easily and at a lower interest rate.

- Reverse factoring is at its simplest, where a supplier receives finance in relation to their receivables (money for goods/services delivered) by a process that is started by the ordering company. It allows the supplying company to receive better finance terms than it would otherwise be able to receive from a lender.

CERT-IN REPORT ON CYBER ATTACKS

WHAT:

- It has been observed that China continues to “intrude” Indian cyberspace in a “significant” way. The cyber attacks from China made up 35% of the total number of cyber attacks on official Indian websites, followed by US (17%), Russia (15%), Pakistan (9%), Canada (7%) and Germany (5%).

WHY:

Cyber-attacks are increasing for data collection and stealing purposes

TELL ME MORE:

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

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

**KOWSAR**

**WHAT:**

It is a new domestically-produced fighter jet unveiled recently by Iran.

**WHY:**

**TELL ME MORE:**

Designed and manufactured solely by Iranian military experts, the Kowsar is described as a fourth-generation fighter jet, which classifies it among military fighters in service from approximately 1980 to the present day.

**International Buddhist Conclave 2018**

**WHAT:**

With an aim to encourage the prominent Buddhist heritage and pilgrim sites in the state of Maharashtra, Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation in association with Ministry of Tourism recently organized the 6th International Buddhist Conclave 2018 in Aurangabad.

**WHY:**

*Theme:* ‘Buddha Path – The Living Heritage’.

**NCRB TO TRACK COMPLAINTS ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

**WHAT:**

- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) would be the designated nodal agency for monitoring the complaints received on a government portal that records child pornography and sexual violence videos.
- The NCRB would coordinate with service providers such as Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp and ask them to block malicious videos and contents.

**WHY:**
- Bureau is implementing & monitoring agency for implementation of Crime & Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS), a Mission Mode Project under the National e-Governance Plan of Government of India. The project aims at creating a comprehensive and integrated system for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of policing in the country.
- NCRB also imparts training in Information Technology (IT) and Finger Print Science for Indian Police Officers as well Foreign Police officers. Central finger print bureau is under the administrative control of NCRB.

NOTA IN RAJYA SABHA

WHAT:

The Supreme Court has overruled an Election Commission notification, saying that NOTA (None Of The Above) option cannot be allowed in Rajya Sabha elections.

WHY:

- NOTA option is meant only for universal adult suffrage and direct elections and not polls held by the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote as done in the Rajya Sabha.
- NOTA in indirect elections, such as in the Rajya Sabha, would lead to horse-trading, corruption and use of extra constitutional methods to defeat a party candidate.

TELL ME MORE:

The option of NOTA for Lok Sabha and assembly elections was prescribed by the SC in 2013. The option of NOTA in RS polls was introduced by the EC in 2014. Thus, India became the 14th country to institute negative voting.

ILO REPORT- WAGE INEQUALITY IN INDIA- “INDIA WAGE REPORT”

WHAT:

In 2009-10, a third of all of wage workers were paid less than the national minimum wage, which is merely indicative and not legally binding. That includes 41% of all casual workers and 15% of salaried workers.

Between 1994- 2011, average labour productivity (as measured by GDP per worker) increased more rapidly than real average wages.
TELL ME MORE:

The rise in average wages was more rapid in rural areas, and for casual workers. However, these groups started at such a low base that a yawning wage gap still remains. Thus, the average wage of casual workers — who make 62% of the earning population — was only ₹143 a day.

Daily wages in urban areas (₹384) also remain more than twice as high as those in rural areas (₹175). Regional disparities in average wages have actually increased over time, with wages rising more rapidly in high-wage States than in low-wage ones.

The gender wage gap decreased from 48% in 1993-94 to 34% in 2011-12, but still remains high by international standards. And of all worker groups, the average wages of casual rural female workers was the lowest, at just ₹104 a day.

UDAN SCHEME FOR INTERNATIONAL ROUTES

WHAT:

draft International Air Connectivity (IAC) scheme- The scheme envisages to increase the international ticketing to 20 crore by 2027.

The scheme is to be made operational only for states, which demonstrate their commitment to implement and provide the requisite support for promoting operations under the scheme.

The scheme has proposed to set up an International Air Connectivity Fund (IACF) — a dedicated fund for providing subsidy support under the scheme. It will be created through the contributions of state governments.

TELL ME MORE:

The Airport Authority of India will be the implementing agency of the scheme.

INDIA-BHUTAN RELATIONS

WHY:
The National Assembly of Bhutan was dissolved and an interim government was appointed this month ahead of the election, which will be completed by October-end, marking 10 years of democracy in Bhutan.

The Border Roads Organisation, which helps build Bhutanese roads under Project Dantak, decided in July to make reflective stickers on the road sides and railings, in shades of the Indian tricolour, it raised red flags among the Bhutanese on social media.

Citizens were worried that this was an attempt by India to impose its flag on their countryside. Eventually, the stickers were changed to blue and white.

**INTERLINKING OF RIVERS (ESSAY)**

**WHY:**

The interlinking project aims to link India’s rivers by a network of reservoirs and canals that will allow for their water capacities to be shared and redistributed. According to some experts, this is an engineered panacea that will reduce persistent floods in some parts and water shortages in other parts besides facilitating the generation of hydroelectricity for an increasingly power hungry country.

**TELL ME MORE:**

**Benefits:**
- Enhances water and food security of the country
- surplus water available in Himalayan Rivers is transferred to the areas where water supply is not adequate in the Peninsular India
- Boost to agriculture- better irrigation
- Disaster mitigation
- Transportation

**Concerns:**
- distortion in the existing environment
- Usually rivers change their course and direction in about 100 years and if this happens after interlinking, then the project will not be feasible for a longer run.
- there will be decrease in the amount of fresh water entering seas
- Due to the creation of Canals and Reservoirs, huge amount of area which is occupied by the people will be submerged
NASA’S INSIGHT SPACECRAFT

WHAT:

Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport (InSight)

WHY:

- It will be the first mission to peer deep beneath the Martian surface, studying the planet’s interior by measuring its heat output and listening for marsquakes, which are seismic events similar to earthquakes on Earth.
- It will use the seismic waves generated by marsquakes to develop a map of the planet’s deep interior.

WORLD’S LARGEST 3D-PRINTED REEF INSTALLED IN MALDIVES TO HELP SAVE CORALS

WHAT:

The world’s largest 3-D printed reef has been submerged at Summer Island Maldives, in what is hoped could be a new technology-driven method to help coral reefs survive a warming climate.

The artificial reef, assembled with hundreds of ceramic and concrete modules, was submerged at Summer Island’s ‘Blue Lagoon’ — a sandy part of the lagoon, where the resort hopes to create a new coral reef ecosystem.

WHY:

The experiment was aimed at increasing their resilience and longevity against the ongoing environmental rampage. The ceramic structures built closely resemble the original structures found in the Maldives. Ceramic itself is made of calcium carbonate, the same inert substance that occurs in abundance in corals.

NATIONAL DISASTER

WHAT:

As per the Disaster Management Act, 2005, “disaster” means a catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence in any area, arising from natural or man-made causes, or by
accident or negligence which results in substantial loss of life or human suffering or damage to, and destruction of, property, or damage to, or degradation of, environment, and is of such a nature or magnitude as to be beyond the coping capacity of the community of the affected area. A natural disaster includes earthquake, flood, landslide, cyclone, tsunami, urban flood, heatwave; a man-made disaster can be nuclear, biological and chemical.

TELL ME MORE:

When a calamity is declared to be of “rare severity”/”severe nature”, support to the state government is provided at the national level. The Centre also considers additional assistance from the NDRF. A Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) is set up, with the corpus shared 3:1 between Centre and state. When resources in the CRF are inadequate, additional assistance is considered from the National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF), funded 100% by the Centre.

NCAER STATE INVESTMENT POTENTIAL INDEX (N-SIPI) REPORT

WHAT:

Six major pillars—land, labour, infrastructure, economic climate, political stability and governance.

To measure perceptions of entrepreneurs

WHY:

The Indian economy is now growing at over 7% per year despite an uncertain external environment.

That growth has remained high despite this mixed environment has much to do with the fact that a large part of the economy, particularly relating to agriculture and the public services segment, is supply-driven and independent of demand-side market sentiments.

TELL ME MORE:

- The six states ranked as the best performers according to this pillar are, respectively, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra.
NABARD- ALL INDIA RURAL FINANCIAL INCLUSION SURVEY 2016-17

WHAT:
The survey covered a sample of 1.88 lakh people from 40,327 rural households. 48% of these are defined as agricultural households, which have at least one member self-employed in agriculture and which received more than ₹5,000 as value of produce from agricultural activities over the past year, whether they possessed any land or not.

TELL ME MORE:
Outstanding debt:
- More than half the agricultural households in the country have outstanding debt, and their average outstanding debt is almost as high as the average annual income of all agricultural households.
- NABARD found that 52.5% of the agricultural households had an outstanding loan on the date of the survey, and thus were considered indebted. For non-agricultural households in rural India, that figure was 10 percentage points lower, at only 42.8%.
- Agricultural households reporting any outstanding debt also had a higher debt liability compared with non-agricultural ones.
- The average debt of an indebted agricultural household stood at ₹1,04,602 in comparison to ₹76,731 for indebted non-agricultural households.

Reasons for taking loans:
- The biggest reason for taking loans among agricultural households was capital expenditure for agricultural purposes, with a quarter of all loans taken for this purpose.
- While 19% of loans were taken for meeting running expenses for agricultural purposes, another 19% were taken for sundry domestic needs. Loans for housing and medical expenses stood at 11% and 12%, respectively.

TELL ME EVEN MORE:
- the highest incidence of indebtedness came from those owning more than two hectares of land. In that category, 60% of households are in debt.
- Among small and marginal farmers owning less than 0.4 hectares, slightly less than 50% of the households were in debt. Those with more land were more likely to have multiple loans.
- This may be attributed to the fact that these economically better-off households are more eligible for taking loans as they have enough assets to serve as security against the loans taken.

State- wise variation:
The southern States of Telangana (79%), Andhra Pradesh (77%), and Karnataka (74%) showed the highest levels of indebtedness among agricultural households, followed by Arunachal Pradesh (69%), Manipur (61%), Tamil Nadu (60%), Kerala (56%), and Odisha (54%).

Looking at loans taken between July 2015 and June 2016, the survey found that farm households took less than half their loans from commercial banks. While 46% of the loans were taken from commercial banks, and another 10% from self-help groups, almost 40% were taken from non-institutional sources such as relatives, friends, moneylenders and landlords.

The average annual income of an agricultural household is ₹1.07 lakh.

POOR NUTRITION IN INDIA (ESSAY)

WHAT:

India is home to the largest number of malnourished children in the world. The Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2017 ranks India at 100 out of 119 countries, with a low overall score of 31.4

- Among children less than 5 years, wasting (low weight for height), continues to be 21% in the 2017 index — it was 20% in 1992.
- There has been a reduction in stunting (height for age) – from 61.9% in 1992 to 4% in 2017, reported in the GHI 2017.
- Mortality among children less than 5 years old has declined to around 5% from 11% during the same period, according to both the GHI and the NFHS. However, 25% of India’s children less than 5 years old are still malnourished.

CASPIAN SEA AGREEMENT

WHAT:

Leaders from Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have finally signed a legal convention on ways to manage Caspian sea and its surrounding areas.

WHY:

The Caspian Sea is a geopolitically strategic body of water, both in terms of its location and its resources. Situated in a transcontinental zone between Europe and Asia, it has historically been a key trade and transit corridor between eastern and western powers.
TELL ME MORE:
The primary issue has been whether to legally classify the Caspian as a sea or a lake. The former would require the division of the Caspian to extend from the shoreline of each littoral state to the body of water’s midway point, while the latter would divide the Caspian equally.

P NOTES

WHAT:
These are used by overseas market participants that don’t want to get registered as FIIs. P-notes are not issued in India, rather these are issued by an India registered FII to other overseas investors.
The FII will be the entity to initiate a transaction in our stock markets, which could be on behalf of foreign clients. P-notes are then issued by the FII to the client, underlining that the securities are held on behalf of the client albeit in the name of the FII. The P-note holder is entitled to all the dividends, capital gains and other payouts on the underlying securities. FIIs have to periodically report to Sebi on P-note issuance without the need to name the final beneficiary.

WHY:
Investments through participatory notes into Indian capital markets have plunged to over nine-year low of Rs 80,341 crore till July-end amid stringent norms put in place by the watchdog Sebi to check misuse of these instruments.

TELL ME MORE:
- These are a popular way to invest in Indian markets as not only do these save the investor from regulatory hassles of registration, but also allow the final beneficiary to remain anonymous.
- Large hedge funds and high net worth individuals find this a hassle-free and simple way to get exposure to Indian markets.
- Reports also suggest that P-notes may aid in movement of black money or unaccounted funds. Such funds leave the country through various routes and can easily re-enter via investments aided by P-notes, which won’t reveal the identity of the beneficiary. Given that P-notes are issued outside India to overseas investors, they are not regulated and are open to misuse.
GLOBAL LIVEABILITY INDEX 2018

WHAT:

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has released the Global Liveability Index 2018. The index ranks 140 global cities based on their living conditions.

TELL ME MORE:

The liveability index quantifies the challenges that might be presented to an individual’s lifestyle in 140 cities worldwide, and assesses which locations provide the best living conditions.

Factors, including:

- Political and social stability.
- Crime
- Education
- Access to healthcare.

Best city according to GLI - Vienna
Worst City- Damascus

For India, only New Delhi and Mumbai could make it to the list with:

- New Delhi at 112th position.
- Mumbai at 117th position.

NPCI LAUNCHES UPI 2.0

WHAT:

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has launched UPI 2.0, an upgraded and renewed version of Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

WHY:

The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is a system developed by the NPCI and the RBI to aid instant transfer of money using a cashless system. Using UPI services, one just requires a smartphone and a banking app to send and receive money instantly or to pay a merchant for retail purchase. In the long run, UPI is likely to replace the current NEFT, RTGS, and IMPS systems as they exist today.
TELL ME MORE:

Here are key features of UPI 2.0:

1. **Linking of overdraft account**: In addition to current and savings accounts, customers can link their overdraft account to UPI. Customers will be able to transact instantly and all benefits associated with overdraft account shall be made available to the users. UPI 2.0 will serve as an additional digital channel to access the overdraft account.

2. **One-time mandate**: UPI mandate could be used in a scenario where money is to be transferred later by providing commitment at present. UPI 2.0 mandates are created with one-time block functionality for transactions. **Customers can pre-authorise a transaction and pay at a later date. It works seamlessly for merchants as well as for individual users.**

3. **Invoice in the inbox**: According to NPCI, this feature is designed for customers to check the invoice sent by merchant prior to making payment. It will help customers to view and verify the credentials and check whether it has come from the right merchant or not. Customers can pay after verifying the amount and other important details mentioned in the invoice.

4. **Signed intent and QR**: This feature is designed for customers to check the authenticity of merchants while scanning QR or quick response code. **It notifies the user with information to ascertain whether the merchant is a verified UPI merchant or not.** This provides an additional security. Customers will be informed in case the receiver is not secured by way of notifications, said NPCI.

**UPI was launched on 11 April 2016** and in the last two years the platform has emerged as a popular choice among users for sending and receiving money. **BHIM UPI recorded transactions** worth Rs 45,845 crore and 235 million in terms of value and volume in the month of July 2018.

ODISHA TO SHOWCASE ITS BIODIVERSITY

**WHAT:**
The Odisha government is setting up a world-class interpretation centre at Dangamal near Bhitarkanika National Park to showcase its efforts in protecting crocodiles and preserving its rich mangrove diversity. The centre will be developed both as a tourist attraction and a place for students to learn about the environment.

**WHY:**

**Bhitarkanika and the need for conservation:**
- Bhitarkanika, one of the State’s finest biodiversity hotspots, receives close to one lakh visitors every year. The tourist inflow has seen an increase lately.
The park is famous for its green mangroves, migratory birds, turtles, estuarine crocodiles and countless creeks. It is said to house 70% of the country’s estuarine or saltwater crocodiles, conservation of which was started way back in 1975.

GLOBAL FINDEX DATA

WHAT:

The World Bank’s latest Global Findex data proves that India has made rapid strides in improving access to formal financial services.

In 2014, just 53% of adults had a formal account. Today, more than 80% do. At the same time, it has cut its gender gap in financial access from 20 percentage points to six.

WHY:

Financial inclusion

TELL ME MORE:

- The government has made financial inclusion and expanding the formal sector a top priority.
- The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) programme—launched in 2015 with a mission to provide a basic account to every adult—has enrolled more women than men.
- Before that, millions of women were deterred from going to banks because of the long distances involved. In general, women have a more restricted “economic geography” than men, making brick-and-mortar banks harder to access.
- Under the PMJDY, banks went door-to-door enrolling customers, and held camps in villages. It also increased the number of banks’ business correspondents (BCs or bank mitras), bringing services closer to more households.
- The government has also mandated that certain defined benefit schemes, such as Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY), distribute payments to accounts in a woman’s name—with benefits being deposited directly in the recipients’ Aadhaar-linked accounts.
KANYASHREE SCHEME

WHAT:
Kanyashree is a conditional cash transfer scheme aiming at improving the status and well being of the girl child by incentivising schooling of teenage girls and delaying their marriages until the age of 18. It received the United Nations Public Service Award last year.

Performance of the scheme: Through the initiative, cash was deposited into the bank account of girls for every year they remained in school and were unmarried. This initiative led to a “drastic reduction in child marriage, increase in female education and female empowerment.”

WHY:

West Bengal government has announced that there would not be any ceiling for a family’s annual earnings to be a beneficiary under the UN award winning Kanyashree scheme.

BIJU SWASTHYA KALYAN YOJANA

WHAT:
Odisha government has launched Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana, a health for all scheme,

TELL ME MORE:

Highlights of the scheme:

- Will provide Rs. 5 lakh per family per annum for all Secondary and Tertiary Cashless Health Care Assistance. Women beneficiaries can get health cover upto Rs. 7 lakh.
- This scheme will benefit 3.5 crore people (70 lakh families) at any govt. and private empanelled hospitals.
- All beneficiaries currently enrolled under the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), as well as other low-income families, are covered under the BSKY.

POSTAL HIGHWAY

WHAT:
The Indian government has handed over a cheque amounting Rs 33 crore to the Nepal Government for construction of a Postal Highway.

**WHY:**
Support Infrastructure development in Nepal by India

**TELL ME MORE:**

**About the Postal Highway project:**
- Postal Highway also called Hulaki Rajmarg runs across the Terai region of Nepal, from Bhadrapur in the east to Dodhara in the west, cutting across the entire width of the country.
- It is the Oldest highway in Nepal constructed by Juddha Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana & Padma Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana to aid transportation and facilitate postal services throughout the nation.

**RUCO (REPURPOSE USED COOKING OIL) INITIATIVE**

**WHAT:**
The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has launched **RUCO (Repurpose Used Cooking Oil)**, an initiative that will enable collection and conversion of used cooking oil to bio-diesel.

64 companies at 101 locations have been identified to enable collection of used cooking oil. For instance: McDonald’s has already started converting used cooking oil to biodiesel from 100 outlets in Mumbai and Pune.

**WHY:**
FSSAI believes India has the potential to recover 220 crore litres of used cooking oil for the production of biodiesel by 2022 through a co-ordinated action.

**UTTARAKHAND HIGH COURT APPOINTS ITSELF LEGAL GUARDIAN OF COWS IN STATE**

**WHAT:**
The Uttarakhand high court would henceforth act as the legal guardian of cows in the state. It has also issued some directions to the state government in this regard.

Parenthood in Latin means ‘parent of the country’ and is a doctrine that grants the court inherent power and authority to act as guardian for those who are unable to take care for themselves.

**WHY:**
The judgment came as a response to a public interest litigation claiming that stray cattle were being slaughtered and waste from a slaughter house was flowing into water bodies, posing a health threat to the villagers.
The court cited animal welfare law, national and international documents and Hindu religious texts to say that animal welfare was part of “moral development of humanity”.

**MAHADAYI VERDICT**

**WHAT:**
The Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal which has been hearing the tussle over sharing of the Mahadayi or Mandovi river between Goa, Karnataka and Maharashtra, has delivered its final verdict.

**WHY:**
The Mahadayi river basin drains an area of 2032 square kilometres of which 375 square km lies in Karnataka, 77 sq km in Maharashtra and the remaining in Goa.
The dispute arose since Goa was opposed to Karnataka’s plans to divert waters from the tributaries of the river, which Karnataka justified was for drinking water purposes. The tribunal was constituted in November 2010.

**NITI AAYOG LAUNCHES “PITCH TO MOVE”**

**WHAT:**
**NITI Aayog has launched “Pitch to MOVE”** – a mobility pitch competition that aims to provide budding entrepreneurs of India a unique opportunity to pitch their business ideas to a distinguished jury.

**WHY:**

The competition aims to identify and reward the start-ups offering innovative solutions for shared, connected, and environment friendly mobility.

**TELL ME MORE:**

“Pitch to MOVE” is organised by NITI Aayog in collaboration with Invest India and Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM).

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**HAGUE CONVENTION AND CARA**

**WHAT:**

**What is the Hague Convention?**

The Hague Convention protects children and their families against the risks of illegal, irregular, premature or ill-prepared adoptions abroad.

To do this, the Hague Convention puts:

- Safeguards in place to make sure that all intercountry adoptions are in the best interests of the child and respects their human rights,
- A system in place of cooperation among countries to guarantee that these safeguards are respected, and to prevent the abduction of, sale of, or traffic in children.

**About CARA:**

- Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is a statutory body of Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India.
- It functions as the nodal body for adoption of Indian children and is mandated to monitor and regulate in-country and inter-country adoptions.
- CARA is designated as the Central Authority to deal with inter-country adoptions in accordance with the provisions of the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 1993, ratified by Government of India in 2003.

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**COMMON SERVICE CENTRES TO IMPLEMENT AYUSHMAN BHARAT**

**WHAT:**
• **Common Service Center (CSC) and National Health Accounts (NHA)** have signed a memorandum of understand to implement the Ayushman Bharat scheme through three-lakh CSCs across the country.

• Common Services Centers (CSCs) are a strategic cornerstone of the Digital India programme. They are the access points for delivery of various electronic services to villages in India, thereby contributing to a digitally and financially inclusive society.

• **Ayushman Bharat** is the National Health Protection Scheme, which will cover over 10 crore poor vulnerable families (around 50 crore beneficiaries) providing coverage of up to ₹5 lakh (per family per year) for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation. It will be an entitlement based scheme with entitlement decided on the basis of deprivation criteria in the SECC database.

• The different categories in rural area include families having only one room with kucha walls and kucha roof; families having no adult member between age 16 to 59; female headed households with no adult male member between age 16 to 59; disabled member and no able bodied adult member in the family; SC/ST households; and landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour.

• Also, automatically included families in rural areas having any one of the following: households without shelter, destitute, living on alms, manual scavenger families, primitive tribal groups, legally released bonded labour. For urban areas, 11 defined occupational categories are entitled under the scheme.

• **It will subsume the on-going centrally sponsored schemes** —Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS)

**WHY:**

• The scheme has the benefit cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year. To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and elderly) there will be no cap on family size and age in the scheme. The benefit cover will also include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses.

• The target beneficiaries of the proposed scheme will be more than 10 crore families belonging to poor and vulnerable population based on SECC database. Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country and a beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospitals across the country.

**TELL ME MORE:**

• For giving policy directions and fostering coordination between Centre and States, it is proposed to set up Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Council (AB-NHPMC) at apex level Chaired by Union Health and Family Welfare Minister.

• State Governments will be allowed to expand AB-NHPM both horizontally and vertically. States will be free to choose the modalities for implementation. They can implement through insurance company or directly through Trust/ Society or a mixed model.

**MAA PROGRAMME**

**WHAT:**

• To intensify the efforts for promotion of breastfeeding, the Health Ministry has initiated a nationwide programme called “**MAA-Mother’s Absolute Affection**” to bring undiluted
focus on promotion of breastfeeding and provision of services towards supporting breastfeeding, along with ongoing efforts of routine health systems.

- **The key components of the MAA programme** are awareness generation, promotion of breastfeeding & interpersonal counselling at community level, skilled support for breastfeeding at delivery points and monitoring and Award/recognition of health facility.

**WHY:**
Breastfeeding is an important efficient and cost-effective intervention promoting child survival and health.
- Breastfeeding within an hour of birth could prevent 20% of the newborn deaths.
- Infants who are not breastfed are 15 times more likely to die from pneumonia and 11 times more likely to die from diarrhoea than children who are exclusively breastfed, which are two leading causes of death in children under-five years of age.
- In addition, children who were not breastfed are at increased risk for diabetes, obesity, allergies, asthma, childhood leukemia, sudden infant death syndrome etc. Apart from mortality and morbidity benefits, breastfeeding also has tremendous impact on improved IQ.

**TELL ME MORE:**
- Under this programme, **ASHA has been incentivized** for reaching out to pregnant and lactating mothers and provide information on benefits and techniques of successful breastfeeding during interpersonal communication. ANMs at all sub-centres and health personnel at all delivery points are being trained for providing skilled support to mothers referred with issues related to breastfeeding.
- Under NHM, funding support has been recommended for all States and UTs for successful implementation of the MAA programme.

**HEALTH IMPACT OF SWACHH BHARAT MISSION GRAMIN (SBM-G)**

**WHAT:**
- **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Gramin**, launched on October 2, 2014 is the largest behaviour change campaign ever attempted in the field of sanitation in the world.
- **Aim:** It aims to build an ODF (Open Defecation Free) and Swachh Bharat by October 2, 2019 as a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary.
- **Focus:** SBM-Gramin mainly focuses on ensuring the use of toilets, besides their construction. The States and their implementing agencies will be given incentives for meeting performance standards: reducing open defecation, sustaining their open defecation-free status and improving solid and liquid waste management in rural areas.

**WHY:**
- In Rural India, this would mean improving the levels of cleanliness through Solid and Liquid Waste Management activities and making villages Open Defecation Free (ODF), clean and sanitised.
TELL ME MORE:
World Health Organisation has released the progress report on potential health impact from increased sanitation coverage through the Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin (SBM-G).
- Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin (SBM-G) will result in preventing more than three lakh deaths due to diarrhoea and protein-energy malnutrition between 2014-October 2019.
- India’s rural sanitation coverage has escalated to 89.07% till August 2. Under the SBM-G, 19 States and Union Territories were declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) and 7.9 crore toilets were built, while 421 districts were declared ODF. Also, more than 4.9 lakh villages in the country were declared ODF.
- The WHO study showed that before the initiation of SBM-G, unsafe sanitation caused 199 million cases of diarrhoea annually and that by 2019, the initiative aims to achieve 100% sanitation coverage.

HOMOEOPATHY CENTRAL COUNCIL (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2018

WHAT:
- Lok Sabha has passed the Homoeopathy Central Council (Amendment) Bill 2018. It seeks to replace the Central Council of Homoeopathy (CCH) with a board of governors and is aimed at bringing accountability and quality in homeopathy education system.

Key features of the Bill:

- **Supersession of the Central Council**: It amends the 1973 Act to provide for the supersession of the Central Council with effect from May 18, 2018. The Central Council will be reconstituted within one year from the date of its supersession. In the interim period, the central government will constitute a Board of Governors, which will exercise the powers of the Central Council.
- **The Board of Governors will consist** of up to seven members including: (i) persons of eminence in the field of homoeopathy education, and (ii) eminent administrators, appointed by the central government. The central government will select one of these members as the Chairperson of the Board. With regard to policy decisions, the directions of the central government will be final.
- **Permission for existing homoeopathy colleges**: It states that: (i) if any person has established a homoeopathy medical college, or (ii) if an established homoeopathy medical college has opened new courses or increased its admission capacity before the Ordinance was promulgated, it will have to seek permission from the central government within one year. If the person or homoeopathy medical college fails to seek such permission, then any medical qualification granted to a student from such medical college will not be recognised under the Act.

CABINET CLEARS BILL TO RESTORE THE PROVISIONS OF SC/ST ACT

WHAT:
The cabinet has given its nod to introduce a Bill to restore the original provisions of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, which the Supreme Court had struck down in a March ruling.

**The Amendment Bill seeks to insert three new clauses after Section 18 of the original Act:**

- The first stipulates that for the purposes of the Act, “preliminary enquiry shall not be required for registration of a First Information Report against any person.”
- The second stipulates that the arrest of a person accused of having committed an offence under the Act would not require any approval.
- The third says that the provisions of Section 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure — which deals with anticipatory bail — shall not apply to a case under this Act, “notwithstanding any judgment or order of any Court.”

**WHY:**

- On March 20, the Supreme Court issued a slew of guidelines to protect people against arbitrary arrests under the Act, directing that public servants could be arrested only with the written permission of their appointing authority, while in the case of private employees, the Senior Superintendent of Police concerned should allow it. A preliminary inquiry should be conducted before the FIR was registered to check if the case fell within the ambit of the Act, and whether it was frivolous or motivated, the court ruled.
- The ruling was greeted by a storm of protest from Dalit groups, which said the order diluted the law. However, the court refused to stay its ruling, leading to the demand from Dalit groups that the government introduce an ordinance or an Amendment Bill to restore the provisions.

**TELL ME MORE:**

- The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act is popularly known as POA, the SC/ST Act, the Prevention of Atrocities Act, or simply the Atrocities Act. The SC/ST Act was enacted on September 9, 1989. The rules for the Act were notified on March 31, 1995.
- The SC/ST Act lists 22 offences relating to various patterns or behaviours inflicting criminal offences and breaking the self-respect and esteem of the scheduled castes and tribes community. This includes denial of economic, democratic and social rights, discrimination, exploitation and abuse of the legal process.
- According to the SC/ST Act, the protection is provided from social disabilities such as denial of access to certain places and to use customary passage, personal atrocities like forceful drinking or eating of inedible food sexual exploitation, injury etc, atrocities affecting properties, malicious prosecution, political disabilities and economic exploitation.
- For speedy trial, Section 14 of the SC/ST Act provides for a Court of Session to be a Special Court to try offences under this Act in each district.
- The prime objective of the SC/ST Act is to deliver justice to marginalised through proactive efforts, giving them a life of dignity, self-esteem and a life without fear, violence or suppression from the dominant castes.
POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORATION AND EXPLOITATION OF UNCONVENTIONAL HYDROCARBONS

WHAT:
• The Union Cabinet has approved the policy to permit exploration and exploitation of unconventional hydrocarbons such as Shale oil/gas, Coal Bed Methane (CBM) etc.
• It will be carried out under the existing Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs), CBM contracts and Nomination fields to encourage the existing Contractors in the licensed/leased area to unlock the potential of unconventional hydrocarbons in the existing acreages.
• Coal Bed Methane (CBM) is an unconventional form of natural gas found in coal deposits or coal seams. CMB is formed during the process of coalification, the transformation of plant material into coal. It is considered a valuable energy resource with reserves and production having grown nearly every year since 1989. Varied methods of recovery make CBM a stable source of energy.
• Shale gas is a natural gas formed from being trapped within shale formations. It is an unconventional source of methane, like coal-bed gas (in coal seams) and tight gas (trapped in rock formations). It is colourless, odourless gas, lighter than air. It is cheaper than natural gas, releases 50% less CO2, hence better source for generating electricity. It also provides feedstock for petrochemicals industry, which is turned into fertilizer, plastics and other useful stuff.

WHY:
• With the approval of this policy, there will be complete shift from ‘One hydrocarbon Resource Type’ to ‘Uniform Licensing Policy’ which is presently applicable in Hydrocarbon Exploration & Licensing Policy (HELP) and Discovered Small Field (DSF) Policy.

TELL ME MORE:
• This policy will enable the realization of prospective hydrocarbon reserves in the existing Contract Areas which otherwise would remain unexplored and unexploited.
• With this policy dispensation, new investment in Exploration and Production (E&P) activities and chances of finding new hydrocarbon discoveries and resultant increased domestic production thereof is expected.
• Exploration and exploitation of additional hydrocarbon resources is expected to spur new investment, impetus to economic activities, additional employment generation and thus benefitting various sections of society.
• This will lead to induction of new, innovative and cutting-edge technology and forging new technological collaboration to exploit unconventional hydrocarbons.

123rd CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT BILL
WHAT:
- The Lok Sabha has passed the **123rd Constitutional Amendment Bill** providing for a National Commission for Backward Classes as a constitutional body.
- The bill provides for the **grant of constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)** on par with the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.
- **Powers of the President**: It states that the President may specify the socially and educationally backward classes in the various states and union territories. He may do this in consultation with the Governor of the concerned state.
- **The duties of the NCBC** include investigating and monitoring how safeguards provided to the backward classes under the Constitution and other laws are being implemented and probe specific complaints regarding violation of rights.
- **Report**: The NCBC will be required to present annual reports to the President on working of the safeguards for backward classes. These reports will be tabled in Parliament, and in the state legislative assemblies of the concerned states.
- **Powers of a civil court**: Under the Constitution Amendment Bill, the NCBC will have the powers of a civil court while investigating or inquiring into any complaints. These powers include: (i) summoning people and examining them on oath, (ii) requiring production of any document or public record, and (iii) receiving evidence.

Present status of NCBC:
- The Supreme Court, in its final verdict in the Indira Sawhney (Mandal Commission) case, had directed the establishment of the NCBC as a statutory body. Based on this, a law was passed in 1993 to set up the commission. The NCBC has been examining cases for inclusion in the BC lists for the Central government since then.

**BENAMI TRANSACTIONS (PROHIBITION) ACT**

WHAT:
- A benami transaction is one where a property is held by one person and the amount for it is paid by another person. Therefore, in a benami transaction, the name of the person who paid the money is not mentioned. Directly or indirectly, the benami transaction is done to benefit the one who pays.
- The Act provides that the **Central government, in consultation with the Chief Justice of the respective High Courts, will establish special courts through notification**. Such courts are to be constituted to ensure that the trials are conducted “as expeditiously as possible”.
- However, the required special courts have not been set up yet. Therefore, despite the fact that investigations in almost 100 cases have been completed by the I-T Department in different States, including confirmation of attachment of properties by the Adjudicating Authority, the prosecution of accused persons has not started.
- The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2016, designed to curb black money and passed by parliament in August, came into effect on November 1, 2016. The new law amends the 1988 Benami Transactions Act.
- The law provides for up to seven years’ imprisonment and fine for those indulging in such transactions.
• The law **prohibits recovery of the property held benami from benamdar by the real owner.** As per the Act, properties held benami are **liable for confiscation** by the government, without payment of compensation.

• An appellate mechanism has been provided under the act, in the form of an adjudicating authority and appellate tribunal. According to the government, the four authorities who will conduct inquiries or investigations are the Initiating Officer, Approving Authority, Administrator and Adjudicating Authority.

**MUKHYA MANTRI-YUVA NESTHAM**

**WHAT:**

- **Andhra Pradesh government** has launched ‘Mukhya Mantri-Yuva Nestham’.
- Under the scheme, **an allowance of Rs 1000 per month** will be provided to unemployed youth in the state.
- About 12 lakh youths in the **age group of 22-35 years** will get the benefit of the scheme.
- The registration for the scheme will start mid-August.
- The scheme will be extended to all those eligible even if there are more than one beneficiary in a family.
- The money will be credited directly into the bank accounts through biometric authentication.
- The government will not only provide financial help to the unemployed youth but also **provide training and help them develop their skills.**
- The data of unemployed youth in the state will be made available for industries and companies searching for young talent.

**JAL MARG VIKAS PROJECT**

**WHAT:**

- The Jal Marg Vikas Project seeks to **facilitate plying of vessels with capacity of 1,500-2,000 tonnes in the Haldia- Varanasi stretch of the River Ganga.** The major works being taken up under JMVP are development of fairway, Multi-Modal Terminals, strengthening of river navigation system, conservancy works, modern River Information System (RIS), Digital Global Positioning System (DGPS), night navigation facilities, modern methods of channel marking etc.
- The JMVP, which is expected to be completed by March, 2023, is being implemented with the financial and technical support of the World Bank. The project will enable commercial navigation of vessels with the capacity of 1500-2,000 tons on NW-I.

**WHY:**

- Alternative mode of transport that will be environment friendly and cost effective. The project will contribute in bringing down the logistics cost in the country. Mammoth Infrastructure development like multi-modal and inter-modal terminals, Roll on – Roll off (Ro-Ro) facilities, ferry services, navigation aids. Socio-economic impetus; huge employment generation.

**TELL ME MORE:**
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.

IWAI recently held a large public outreach along Ganga for Jal Marg Vikas Project. Two-Day long advocacy meetings were held in Jharkhand leg of Ganga.

**CRIMINAL LAW (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2018**

**WHAT:**
- Parliament has passed the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2018. The main highlight of the bill is that it seeks to amend the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Evidence Act, the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act to introduce a new provision to sentence convicts of such crimes punishment of death.
  - It provides for **stringent punishment** including death penalty for those convicted of raping girls below the age of 12 years.
  - The minimum punishment in case of rape of women has been increased from rigorous imprisonment of seven years to 10 years, extendable to life imprisonment.
  - In case of rape of a girl under 16 years, the minimum punishment has been increased from 10 years to 20 years, extendable to imprisonment for rest of life, which means jail term till the convicts’ “natural life”.
  - The punishment for gang rape of a girl below 16 years will invariably be imprisonment for the rest of life of the convict.
  - Stringent punishment for rape of a girl under 12 years has been provided with the minimum jail term being 20 years which may go up to life in prison or death sentence. Gang rape of a girl under 12 years of age will invite punishment of jail term for the rest of life or death.

**WHY:**
- The number of reported cases of rapes of children increased in India by 82% in 2016 compared to 2015. A climate of violence, social and economic insecurity, alienation, and a progressive undermining of the status of women and children seem to have given an impetus to carry out crimes against women and children.
- Therefore, the legal system must give a clear signal that we as a nation consider the rape of children below the age of 12 as among the most heinous of offences. Making such crimes punishable by capital punishment certainly gives such a signal.

**TELL ME MORE:**
- The measure also provides for speedy investigations and trial. The time limit for investigation of all cases of rape has been prescribed, which has to be mandatorily completed within two months.
- The deadline for the completion of trial in all rape cases will be two months. A six-month time limit for the disposal of appeals in rape cases has also been prescribed.
- There will also be no provision for anticipatory bail for a person accused of rape or gang rape of a girl under 16 years. It has also been prescribed that a court has to give notice
of 15 days to a public prosecutor and the representative of the victim before deciding bail applications in case of rape of a girl under 16 years of age.

- Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have passed a Bill providing for death penalty to those convicted of raping girls of 12 years and below.

RESTRICTED AREA PERMIT (RAP)

WHAT:
- RAP regime was notified under the Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963.
- Under it, foreign nationals are not normally allowed to visit protected or restricted area unless Government is satisfied that there are extra-ordinary reasons to justify their visit.
- Every foreigner, except citizen of Bhutan, who desires to enter and stay in protected or restricted area, is required to obtain special permit from competent authority having power to issue such permits to foreigner, seeking it.
- Citizens of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan and foreign nationals of Pakistani origin are exception and are not allowed to enter such areas.

WHY:
- For protecting the strategic locations of India.
- For protection of vulnerable sections residing in these areas.

TELL ME MORE:
- The Union government has decided to exclude 29 inhabited Andaman & Nicobar Islands from the Restricted Area Permit (RAP) regime, subject to certain conditions, to boost tourism and overall development of Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- Foreigners will also be allowed to visit 11 uninhabited Islands, to be notified by Andaman and Nicobar Islands Administration, only for day visits.
- Citizens of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan and foreign nationals having their origin in these countries would continue to require RAP to visit Andaman & Nicobar Islands. In such cases, RAP may be granted only after obtaining prior approval of the ministry of home affairs.
- For visiting Mayabunder and Diglipur, citizens of Myanmar will continue to require RAP which shall be issued only with the prior approval of the MHA.

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF RAJYA SABHA

WHAT:
- The Deputy Chairman is a constitutional position created under Article 89 of the Constitution, which specifies that Rajya Sabha shall choose one of its MPs to be the Deputy Chairman as often as the position becomes vacant. The office becomes vacant either by resignation or removal from office or when the Rajya Sabha member’s term gets over.
- Harivansh Narayan Singh has been elected as the new deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha.
WHY:
- The Deputy Chair is the *one position that is elected solely by members of Rajya Sabha*. It is a critical position not just because s/he steps in when there is a vacancy in the office of Chairperson/Vice President but also because s/he plays a critical role in ensuring the smooth running of the House.

TELL ME MORE:
- The election of a Deputy Chairman shall be held on such date as the Chairman may fix and the Secretary-General shall send to every member notice of this date.
- At any time before noon on the day- preceding the date so fixed, any member may give notice in writing addressed to the Secretary-General of a motion that another member be chosen as the Deputy Chairman of the Council, and the notice shall be seconded by a third member and shall be accompanied by a statement by the member whose name is proposed in the notice that he is willing to serve as Deputy Chairman if elected: Provided that a member shall not propose or second more than one motion.
- A member in whose name a motion stands in the list of business may, when called, move the motion or not move the motion, in which case he shall confine himself to a mere statement to that effect.
- The motions which have been moved and duly seconded shall be put one by one in the order in which they have been moved and decided if necessary by division. If any motion is carried, the person presiding shall, without putting later motions, declare that the member proposed in the motion which has been carried, has been chosen as the Deputy Chairman of the Council.
- The Deputy Chairman or other member competent to preside over a sitting of the Council under the Constitution or these rules shall, when so presiding, have the same power as the Chairman when presiding over the Council and all references to the Chairman in these rules shall in these circumstances be deemed to be, references to any such person so presiding.

ONE DISTRICT ONE PRODUCT (EK ZILA – EK UT PADAN) SCHEME

WHAT:
- Uttar Pradesh government had recently organized ‘One District One Product’ Summit to promote traditional industries in every district of the state.
- The ODOP Summit is stated to be the first of its kind in the country and is expected to give a big boost to the MSME and handicraft in the state.
- The summit, which aims to give boost to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME), will be a corollary of the UP Investors Summit held in the state capital in February this year, followed by the groundbreaking ceremony for the launch of 81 projects in July.

WHY:
- ODOP is aimed at giving a major push to traditional industries synonymous with the respective districts of the state.
- The objective of the ODOP is to optimise production, productivity and income, preservation and development of local crafts, promotion of art, improvement in product quality and skill development.
• Under this, one product indigenous to every district would be showcased at the three-day UP Diwas event. This will boost economic development of the state, and also help in generation of five lakh new jobs annually.

TELL ME MORE:
• ODOP is basically a Japanese business development concept, which gained prominence in 1979. It is aimed at promoting a competitive and staple product from a specific area to push sales and improve the standard of living of the local population. Over time, it has been replicated in other Asian countries as well.

INDECENT REPRESENTATION OF THE WOMEN (PROHIBITION) ACT, 1986

WHAT:
• After taking into account of the recent technological advancement in the field of communications such as social media platforms, etc, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has decided to move fresh Bill to broaden the scope of the Indecent Representation of the Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 to cover the audio-visual media and content in electronic form.

WHY:
• The Government of India has enacted the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (IRWA), 1986 to prohibit indecent representation of women through advertisements, publications, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner.
• Since the enactment of the Act, technological revolution has resulted in the development of new forms of communication, such as internet, multi-media messaging, cable television, over-the-top (OTT) services and applications e.g. Skype, Viber, WhatsApp, Chat On, Snapchat, Instagram etc.
• Therefore, these technological advancements make it necessary to widen the scope of the law so as to cover such forms of media on one hand and to strengthen the existing safeguards to prevent indecent representation of women through any media form on the other.

TELL ME MORE:
• Amendment in definition of term advertisement to include digital form or electronic form or hoardings, or through SMS, MMS etc.
• Amendment in definition of distribution to include publication, license or uploading using computer resource, or communication device or in.
• Insertion of a new definition to define the term publish.
• Amendment in section 4 to include that No person shall publish or distribute or cause to be published or cause to be distributed by any means any material which contains indecent representation of women in any form.
• Penalty similar to that provided under the Information Technology Act, 2000
• Creation of a Centralised Authority under the aegis of National Commission of Women (NCW). This Authority will be headed by Member Secretary, NCW, having representatives from Advertising Standards Council of India, Press Council of India,
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and one member having experience of working on women issues.

- **Functions:** This Centralised Authority will be authorized to receive complaints or grievances regarding any programme or advertisement broadcasted or publication and investigate/examine all matters relating to the indecent representation of women.

### REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2017

**WHAT:**
- Lok Sabha has passed *Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 2017* to extend the facility of ‘proxy voting’ to overseas Indians, on the lines of service voters.
- The Bill seeks to amend Representation of People Act (RPA), 1950 and Representation of People Act (RPA), 1951 to allow for proxy voting and make certain provisions of these Acts gender-neutral.
- The Bill proposes to **allow non-resident Indians (NRIs) to emerge as a decisive force in the country’s electoral politics on their own terms.** The amendment paves the way to remove an “unreasonable restriction” posed by Section 20A of the Representation of the People Act, which requires overseas electors to be physically present in their electoral constituencies to cast their votes.

**WHY:**
- If the Bill is passed, overseas voters can appoint a proxy to cast their votes on their behalf, subject to certain conditions to be laid down in the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961. This would considerably mitigate the difficulties presently faced by overseas electors in exercising their franchise.

**TELL ME MORE:**
- According to the provisions of ‘Representation of the People Act (Amendment) Bill, 2017 overseas Indians, who are entitled to vote in India, can appoint a proxy voter to cast their votes on their behalf. Also, the overseas Indians would be allowed to use the option of proxy, which till now was only available to service personnel.
- Section 20A of the Act provides for registration and inclusion of overseas electors in the electoral rolls. The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 provide for overseas electors to register themselves in the electoral rolls of their respective constituencies on the basis of self-attested copies of their passport and valid visa, and exercise their franchise in person on production of the original passport at the time of voting at the specified polling booth.
- Thus, the rules demand for the physical presence of overseas electors in their respective polling stations in India on the day of polling. This causes hardship to the overseas electors. This amendment proposes facilitating an external mode of voting, that is, voting by proxy, whereby such electors can exercise their franchise from their places of residence abroad.

### TRIPLE TALAQ BILL
WHAT:
- There are three forms of talaq (divorce) in Islam: Ahsan, Hasan and Talaq-e-Biddat (triple or instant talaq). Ahsan and Hasan are revocable but Biddat is irrevocable. Biddat is considered sinful but is permissible in Islamic law. It has been banned in more than 20 Muslim countries, including Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Original Bill
- If a Muslim man resorts to triple talaq then he will face a jail term of three years, as instant triple talaq will now be considered a non-bailable, cognisable offence.
- Opting for triple talaq could also attract fine and the amount would be the magistrate’s call who would be hearing the case.
- A Muslim wife can also approach a magistrate and ask for subsistence allowance for herself and her minor children.
- A victim of triple talaq can seek the custody of her minor children from the magistrate who will take the final decision on the issue. Only Jammu and Kashmir will be out of the ambit of the proposed law.

WHY:
- To empower the status of women, especially in Muslim community.

TELL ME MORE:
- In December, the Lok Sabha passed the Muslim Women (Protection Bill, 2017), which criminalises the practice of talaq-e-bidda. This came after the Supreme Court on August 22, 2017, struck down triple talaq, calling the Islamic practice unconstitutional.

The Cabinet made three amendments to the triple talaq law

One- provision for bail:
- While the proposed law will remain “non-bailable” offence, the accused can approach a magistrate even before the trial to seek bail. Under a non-bailable offence, bail cannot be granted by police at the police station. A provision has been added to allow the magistrate to grant bail ‘after hearing the wife’. “But the offence of instant triple talaq under the proposed law remains non-bailable.
- The magistrate would ensure that bail is granted only after the husband agrees to grant compensation to the wife as provided in the bill. The quantum of compensation will be decided by the magistrate, as per the bill.

Two- check misuse:
- Another amendment makes it clear that the police would lodge FIR only if approached by the victim (wife), her blood relations or people who become her relatives by virtue of her marriage. This would settle fears that even a neighbour can file FIR as is the cases in any cognisable offence. This would check misuse.

Third- A compoundingable offence:
- The third amendment makes the offence of instant triple talaq “compoundingable”. Now, a magistrate can use his powers to settle the dispute between a husband and his wife. Under a compoundingable offence, both parties have the liberty of withdrawing the case. However, the jail term for a Muslim man who resorts to triple talaq remains three years and only a magistrate, and not a local police officer, can release the accused on bail.
ARBITRATION & CONCILIATION (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2018

WHAT:
- Arbitration is a settlement of dispute between two parties to a contract by a neutral third party i.e. the arbitrator without resorting to court action. The process can be tailored to suit parties’ particular needs.
- Arbitrators can be chosen for their expertise. It is confidential and can be speedier and cheaper than court. There are limited grounds of appeal. Arbitral awards are binding and enforceable through courts.
- The Lok Sabha has passed the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2018. It will amend the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996. The Act contains provisions to deal with domestic and international arbitration, and defines the law for conducting conciliation proceedings.

WHY:
- It is felt that a reliable and responsive alternative dispute resolution system is essential for rapidly developing countries like India. While business disputes need speedy resolution, litigation is the least favoured method for that. The Indian judicial system is marred by delays because of which businesses suffer as disputes are not resolved in a reasonable time period. Therefore, need for alternative dispute resolution processes like negotiation, mediation conciliation and arbitration is felt from time to time.

TELL ME MORE:
Key features of the Bill are:
- **Arbitration Council of India:** The Bill seeks to establish an independent body called the Arbitration Council of India (ACI) for the promotion of arbitration, mediation, conciliation and other alternative dispute redressal mechanisms.
- **Its functions include:** (i) framing policies for grading arbitral institutions and accrediting arbitrators, (ii) making policies for the establishment, operation and maintenance of uniform professional standards for all alternate dispute redressal matters, and (iii) maintaining a depository of arbitral awards (judgments) made in India and abroad.
- **Composition of the ACI:** The ACI will consist of a Chairperson who is either: (i) a Judge of the Supreme Court; or (ii) a Judge of a High Court; or (iii) Chief Justice of a High Court; or (iv) an eminent person with expert knowledge in conduct of arbitration. Other members will include an eminent arbitration practitioner, an academician with experience in arbitration, and government appointees.
- **Appointment of arbitrators:** Under the 1996 Act, parties were free to appoint arbitrators. In case of disagreement on an appointment, the parties could request the Supreme Court, or the concerned High Court, or any person or institution designated by such Court, to appoint an arbitrator.
- **Role of courts:** Under the Bill, the Supreme Court and High Courts may now designate arbitral institutions, which parties can approach for the appointment of arbitrators. For international commercial arbitration, appointments will be made by the institution designated by the Supreme Court. For domestic arbitration, appointments will be made...
by the institution designated by the concerned High Court. In case there are no arbitral institutions available, the Chief Justice of the concerned High Court may maintain a panel of arbitrators to perform the functions of the arbitral institutions. An application for appointment of an arbitrator is required to be disposed of within 30 days.

- **Relaxation of time limits:** Under the 1996 Act, arbitral tribunals are required to make their award within a period of 12 months for all arbitration proceedings. The Bill proposed to remove this time restriction for international commercial arbitrations.
- **Completion of written submissions:** Currently, there is no time limit to file written submissions before an arbitral tribunal. The Bill requires that the written claim and the defence to the claim in an arbitration proceeding, should be completed within six months of the appointment of the arbitrators.
- **Confidentiality of proceedings:** The Bill provides that all details of arbitration proceedings will be kept confidential except for the details of the arbitral award in certain circumstances. Disclosure of the arbitral award will only be made where it is necessary for implementing or enforcing the award.

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AT WORKPLACE ACT**

**WHAT:**
- As per the latest amendment to the Companies (Accounts) Rules, 2014, it is now mandatory to disclose compliance under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act in the Annual Reports of Private companies.

**WHY:**
- This is a major step towards making the workplace safe for the women in the private sector. This will cast as ever higher responsibility on the Directors of the Companies for implementation of the Act.

**TELL ME MORE:**
- The Act seeks to cover all women, irrespective of their age or employment status and protect them against sexual harassment at all workplaces both in public and private sector, whether organized or unorganized. It came into force on December 9, 2013.

Some important provisions of the Act:
- The Act defines sexual harassment at the work place and creates a mechanism for redressal of complaints. It also provides safeguards against false or malicious charges.
- The definition of “aggrieved woman”, who will get protection under the Act is extremely wide to cover all women, irrespective of her age or employment status, whether in the organized or unorganized sectors, public or private and covers clients, customers and domestic workers as well.
- Definition of workplace: While the “workplace” in the Vishaka Guidelines is confined to the traditional office set-up where there is a clear employer-employee relationship, the Act goes much further to include organisations, department, office, branch unit etc. in
the public and private sector, organized and unorganized, hospitals, nursing homes, educational institutions, sports institutes, stadiums, sports complex and any place visited by the employee during the course of employment including the transportation.

- **Every employer is required to constitute an Internal Complaints Committee** at each office or branch with 10 or more employees. The District Officer is required to constitute a Local Complaints Committee at each district, and if required at the block level.

- **Functions of the committee:** The Committee is required to complete the inquiry within a time period of 90 days. On completion of the inquiry, the report will be sent to the employer or the District Officer, as the case may be, they are mandated to take action on the report within 60 days.

- **Powers:** The Complaints Committees have the powers of civil courts for gathering evidence. The Complaints Committees are required to provide for conciliation before initiating an inquiry, if requested by the complainant.

- **Penalties have been prescribed for employers.** Non-compliance with the provisions of the Act shall be punishable with a fine of up to 50,000. Repeated violations may lead to higher penalties and cancellation of licence or registration to conduct business.

**Appellate Tribunal for Electricity (ATE)**

- Appellate Tribunal for Electricity is a **statutory body** constituted for the purpose of hearing cases against the orders of the Regulatory Commissions and the Adjudicating officer.

- By virtue of Section 110 of The Electricity Act, 2003, an Appellate Tribunal for Electricity having jurisdiction throughout India has been set up to hear appeals or original petitions against the orders of the Adjudicating officer or The Central Regulatory Commission or State Regulatory Commission or Joint Commission. The Tribunal is conferred with original jurisdiction to hear petitions under Section 121 of the Act and issue directions to all Commissions for the performance of its statutory functions.

- **Composition:** The Appellate Tribunal shall consist of a Chairperson and three other Members. Every Bench constituted by the Chairperson shall consist of at least one Judicial Member and one Technical Member.

- Justice Manjula Chellur is the new Chairperson of Appellate Tribunal for Electricity (ATE).

**SWADESH DARSHAN SCHEME**

**WHAT:**

- The Tourism Ministry had launched ‘Swadesh Darshan’ scheme with an objective to **develop theme-based tourist circuits in the country.** These tourist circuits will be developed on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner.

- The scheme is **100% centrally funded** for the project components undertaken for public funding.

- To leverage the voluntary funding available for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector.
Funding of individual project will vary from state to state and will be finalised on the basis of detailed project reports prepared by PMC (Programme Management Consultant).

A National Steering Committee (NSC) will be constituted with Minister in charge of M/O Tourism as Chairman, to steer the mission objectives and vision of the scheme.

A Mission Directorate headed by the Member Secretary, NSC as a nodal officer will help in identification of projects in consultation with the States/UTs governments and other stakeholders.

PMC will be a national level consultant to be appointed by the Mission Directorate.

**WHY:**

To promote tourism in India

**TELL ME MORE:**

First project under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme the ‘North East Circuit: Imphal & Khongjom’ in Manipur has been inaugurated.

‘North East Circuit: Imphal & Khongjom’

- The project covers two sites i.e. Kangla Fort and Khongjom.
- Kangla Fort is one of the most important historic and archaeological site of Manipur located in the heart of the Imphal city. It served as the seat of Manipur’s power till 1891. Kangla has a special place in the hearts and minds of the people of Manipur.
- The old Govindajee Temple, outer and inner moat and other relics are perfect reflections of the rich art and architectural heritage of Manipur.

**US GIVES INDIA STRATEGIC TRADE AUTHORISATION-1 STATUS**

**WHAT:**

- STA allows for license exception with regards to exports from the US. This type of US government authorisation allows a certain item to be exported under defined conditions without a transaction-specific license.
- Items eligible for export to STA-1 nations include those under control for national security, chemical or biological weapons, nuclear non-proliferation, regional stability, crime control.
- The categories also include electronics, lasers and sensors, information security, computers and electronics, navigation, telecommunications, aerospace, etc.
- COMCASA is meant to provide a legal framework for the transfer of communication security equipment from the US to India that would facilitate “interoperability” between their forces — and potentially with other militaries that use US-origin systems for secured data links.

**WHY:**
The move means that India can get easy access to latest defence technologies, with the reduction of the number of licenses needed for exports from the US.

It is also a boost for the foundational Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA).

STA-1 provides India with greater supply chain efficiency, both for defence, and for other high-tech products.

The status eases export controls for high technology product sales to India, granting it the same access as NATO allies — Australia, Japan and South Korea.

TELL ME MORE:

India and the United States share an interest in countering China’s expanding economic and military weight and the United States has emerged as a top arms supplier to India, selling more than $15 billion of weapons over the past decade as New Delhi modernizes its Soviet-era military.

Looking at current exports from the US to India, 50% of those are eligible now under STA-1. This can free up $2.1 billion in trade, make US exporters more competitive in the global marketplace, help provide India more advanced US technology.

India is the only South Asian nation on the STA-1 list that has 36 countries. Other Asian countries designated as STA-1 are Japan and South Korea. Till recently, India was classified as an STA-2 country along with seven others.

ASIA-PACIFIC INSTITUTE FOR BROADCASTING DEVELOPMENT

WHAT:
The Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) was established in 1977 under the auspices of UNESCO.

- It is a unique regional inter-governmental organisation servicing countries of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) in the field of electronic media development.

- It is hosted by the Government of Malaysia and the secretariat is located in Kuala Lumpur.

WHY:

- The AIBD is mandated to achieve a vibrant and cohesive electronic media environment in the Asia-Pacific region through policy and resource development.

- The Institute seeks to fulfill this mandate by mobilizing the intellectual and technological resources available within the national broadcasting organizations of its member countries as well as regional and international bodies through a well-established infrastructure and networking mechanism which includes government agencies, non-governmental organizations, institutions of higher learning, private sector and individual professionals.

TELL ME MORE:

- India has been elected as the president of the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development.
• **First time opportunity:** India got the presidency of the organisation, servicing countries of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) in the field of electronic media development, for the first time by defeating Iran in the election that took place in Sri Lanka.

• The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) are founding organisations of the Institute and they are non-voting members of the General Conference.

• The Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) is also a founding organisation of the Institute and is a non-voting member of the General Conference.

• **Full membership** of the AIBD is confined to sovereign states and they are invited to designate the broadcasting authority of the country to be the beneficiary.

• The AIBD currently has 26 Full Members (countries), represented by 34 organisations, and 67 Affiliate Members (organisations) with a total membership of 101 representing 48 countries and regions and over 50 partners in Asia, Pacific, Europe, Africa, Arab States and North America.

‘8888’ uprising

**WHAT:**

• It was a series of nationwide protests, marches and civil unrest in Burma (Myanmar) that peaked in August 1988. Key events occurred on 8 August 1988 and therefore it is known as the 8888 Uprising.

• August 8 marks the 30th anniversary of this uprising.

**WHY:**

• **The objective of ‘8888’ was two-fold:** to push for the transfer of power from the military to a civilian leadership and a change in the political system from an authoritarian regime to a multi-party democracy.

**TELL ME MORE:**

• The protests and the bloody crackdown gave rise to the National League for Democracy (NLD), a political party which paved the way for the current Myanmar State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi’s entry into politics and for the pro-democracy movement to continue.

• The democratic transition in Myanmar thus far has been meticulously designed by the military. The primary objective, which is laid out in the country’s 2008 Constitution, is to give the military a dominant role in politics. In a parallel to the ‘Burmese way to socialism’ introduced by former military leader Ne Win in the 1960s, Myanmar now practices what can be called the ‘Burmese way to democracy’ as introduced by former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt in 2003 when he announced the military’s seven-step road map to a flourishing democracy.
RAJASTHAN FIRST STATE TO IMPLEMENT BIOFUEL POLICY

WHAT:
- Rajasthan has become the first State in the country to implement the national policy on biofuels unveiled by the Centre in May this year.
- The policy lays emphasis on increasing production of oilseeds and establish a Centre for Excellence in Udaipur to promote research in the fields of alternative fuels and energy resources.

National Policy on biofuels
- The Policy categorises biofuels as “Basic Biofuels” viz. First Generation (1G) bioethanol & biodiesel and “Advanced Biofuels” – Second Generation (2G) ethanol, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) to drop-in fuels, Third Generation (3G) biofuels, bio-CNG etc. to enable extension of appropriate financial and fiscal incentives under each category.
- 1st generation biofuels are also called conventional biofuels. They are made from things like sugar, starch, or vegetable oil. Note that these are all food products. Any biofuel made from a feedstock that can also be consumed as a human food is considered a first generation biofuel.
- 2nd generation biofuels are produced from sustainable feedstock. The sustainability of a feedstock is defined by its availability, its impact on greenhouse gas emissions, its impact on land use, and by its potential to threaten the food supply. No second generation biofuel is also a food crop, though certain food products can become second generation fuels when they are no longer useful for consumption. Second generation biofuels are often called “advanced biofuels.”
- 3rd generation biofuels are biofuel derived from algae. These biofuels are given their own separate class because of their unique production mechanism and their potential to mitigate most of the drawbacks of 1st and 2nd generation biofuels.

WHY:
- Globally, biofuels have caught the attention in last decade and it is imperative to keep up with the pace of developments in the field of biofuels. Biofuels in India are of strategic importance as it augers well with the ongoing initiatives of the Government such as Make in India, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill Development and offers great opportunity to integrate with the ambitious targets of doubling of Farmers Income, Import Reduction, Employment Generation, Waste to Wealth Creation.

TELL ME MORE:
Expected benefits:
- Import dependency: The policy aims at reducing import dependency.
- Cleaner environment: By reducing crop burning & conversion of agricultural residues/wastes to biofuels there will be further reduction in Green House Gas emissions.
- Health benefits: Prolonged reuse of Cooking Oil for preparing food, particularly in deep-frying is a potential health hazard and can lead to many diseases. Used Cooking Oil is a potential feedstock for biodiesel and its use for making biodiesel will prevent diversion of used cooking oil in the food industry.
Employment Generation: One 100klpd 2G bio refinery can contribute 1200 jobs in Plant Operations, Village Level Entrepreneurs and Supply Chain Management.

Additional Income to Farmers: By adopting 2G technologies, agricultural residues/waste which otherwise are burnt by the farmers can be converted to ethanol and can fetch a price for these waste if a market is developed for the same.

‘STATE ENERGY EFFICIENCY PREPAREDNESS INDEX’

WHAT:
- The nationwide Index is a joint effort of the NITI Aayog and BEE. The index assesses state policies and programmes.
- The Index will help in implementing national energy efficiency initiatives in states and meet both State as well as national goals on energy security, energy access and climate change.
- It has 63 indicators across Building, Industry, Municipality, Transport, Agriculture and DISCOM with 4 cross-cutting indicators.
- The Index examines states’ policies and regulations, financing mechanisms, institutional capacity, adoption of energy efficiency measures and energy savings achieved.

WHY:
- Such an index assumes significance in a country that is now the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases after the US and China, and which is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change. India plans to reduce its carbon footprint by 33-35% from its 2005 levels by 2030, as part of its commitments to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted by 195 countries in Paris in 2015.

TELL ME MORE:
States are categorised based on their efforts and achievements towards energy efficiency implementation, as ‘Front Runner’, ‘Achiever’, ‘Contender’ and ‘Aspirant’.
- The ‘Front Runner’ states in the inaugural edition of the Index are: Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, and Rajasthan based on available data.
- Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Haryana have been categorised in the second best category of ‘achiever’ states.

WORLD NETWORK OF BIOSPHERE RESERVES

WHAT:
- The Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve has become the 11th Biosphere Reserve from India to be included in the UNESCO designated World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR).
This decision was taken at the recently concluded 30th Session of International Coordinating Council (ICC) of Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme of UNESCO held at Palembang, Indonesia.

Launched in 1971, UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) is an Intergovernmental Scientific Programme that aims to establish a scientific basis for the improvement of relationships between people and their environments.

Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve is a National Park and a Biosphere Reserve located in Sikkim, India. The park is named after the mountain Kangchenjunga, which with a height of 8,586 metres (28,169 ft), is the third-highest peak in the world.

The Biosphere Reserve is one of the highest ecosystems in the world, reaching elevations of 1,220 metres above sea-level. It includes a range of ecolines, varying from sub-tropic to Arctic, as well as natural forests in different biomes, which support an immensely rich diversity of forest types and habitats.

The core zone – Khangchendzonga National Park was designated as a World Heritage Site in 2016 under the ‘mixed’ category.

WHY:

- MAB combines the natural and social sciences, economics and education to improve human livelihoods and the equitable sharing of benefits, and to safeguard natural and managed ecosystems, thus promoting innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate, and environmentally sustainable.
- Protection is granted not only to the flora and fauna of the protected region, but also to the human communities who inhabit these regions, and their ways of life.

TELL ME MORE:

- India has 18 Biosphere Reserves. With the inclusion of Khangchendzonga, the number of internationally designated World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) has become 11, with 7 Biosphere Reserves being domestic Biosphere Reserves.
- MAB’s World Network of Biosphere Reserves currently counts more than 600 sites in 122 countries all over the world, including 20 transboundary sites.
- The first of India’s reserves to make it to UNESCO’s list was Tamil Nadu’s Niligiri Biosphere Reserve in 2000.

WORLD BIOFUEL DAY 2018

- Every year 10th August is observed as World Bio-Fuel Day in a bid to create awareness about non fossil-fuels (Green Fuels). On this day in 1893, Sir Rudolph Diesel (inventor of the diesel engine) for the first time successfully ran mechanical engine with Peanut Oil. His research experiment had predicted that vegetable oil is going to replace the fossil fuels in the next century to fuel different mechanical engines. Thus to mark this extraordinary achievement, World Biofuel Day is observed every year on 10th August.
- The Indian Government approved the National Policy on Biofuels-2018 in June 2018. The policy has the objective of reaching 20% ethanol-blending and 5% biodiesel-blending by
The year 2030. Among other things, the policy expands the scope of feedstock for ethanol production and has provided for incentives for production of advanced biofuels.

- Recently, the Government has increased the price of C-heavy molasses-based ethanol to Rs. 43.70 from Rs. 40.85 to give a boost to EBP Programme. Price of B-heavy molasses-based ethanol and sugarcane juice-based ethanol has been fixed for the first time at Rs. 47.40. The Government has reduced GST on ethanol for blending in fuel from 18% to 5%. The Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas is making all efforts to increase ethanol supply for petrol and has taken several steps in this direction.

NATIONAL ENERGY STORAGE MISSION

WHAT:
- In February 2018, an Expert Committee under the chairpersonship of Secretary, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, with representatives from relevant Ministries, industry associations, research institutions and experts was constituted by the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy to propose draft for setting up National Energy Storage Mission (NESM) for India.
- The Expert Committee referred has proposed a draft NESM with objective to strive for leadership in energy storage sector by creating an enabling policy and regulatory framework that encourages manufacturing, deployment, innovation and further cost reduction.

WHY:
- Energy Storage is one of the most crucial & critical components of India’s energy infrastructure strategy and also for supporting India’s sustained thrust to renewables.
- Renewable energy sources now make up almost one-fifth of India’s total installed power capacity. However, as power grids increase their share of solar and wind energy, the problem remains that the peak supply of renewable sources does not always meet peak demand. For instance, solar energy generation may be at its peak at noon, but unless stored, it will not be available when needed to light up homes at night. Moreover, renewable sources are inherently intermittent: there are days when the wind doesn’t blow or the sky is cloudy.

TELL ME MORE:
- The draft expects to kick-start grid-connected energy storage in India, set up a regulatory framework, and encourage indigenous manufacture of batteries.
- The draft sets a “realistic target” of 15-20 gigawatt hours (GWh) of grid-connected storage within the next five years. Power grids do not currently use storage options that would help in smoothly integrating renewable energy sources.
- The mission will focus on seven verticals: indigenous manufacturing; an assessment of technology and cost trends; a policy and regulatory framework; financing, business models and market creation; research and development; standards and testing; and grid planning for energy storage.
PARIVESH

WHAT:
- It is an environmental single window hub for Environment, Forest, Wildlife and CRZ clearances launched recently. This Single-Window Integrated Environmental Management System has been developed in pursuance of the spirit of ‘Digital India’ initiated by the Prime Minister and capturing the essence of Minimum Government and Maximum Governance.
- PARIVESH: Pro-Active and Responsive facilitation by Interactive, Virtuous and Environmental Single-window Hub.

WHY:
- PARIVESH offers a framework to generate economic growth and strengthens Sustainable Development through e-Governance. With automatic highlighting of non-compliance by the system, PARIVESH helps in improving the overall performance and efficiency of the whole appraisal process.
- It also helps the processing authorities, as it has a Single Window System for Central, State and District level clearances.
- The facility of Geographic Information System (GIS) interface for the Appraisal Committee will help them in analyzing the proposal efficiently, automatic alerts (via SMS and emails) at important stages to the concerned officers, committee members and higher authorities to check the delays, if any.
- It also enables project proponents, citizens to view, track and interact with scrutiny officers, generates online clearance letters, online mailers and alerts to state functionaries in case of delays beyond stipulated time for processing of applications.

TELL ME MORE:
- “PARIVESH” is a workflow based application, based on the concept of web architecture. It has been rolled out for online submission, monitoring and management of proposals submitted by Project Proponents to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEFCC), as well as to the State Level Environmental Impact Assessment Authorities (SEIAA).
- It seeks to give various types of clearances (e.g. Environment, Forest, Wildlife and Coastal Regulation Zone Clearances) from Central, State and district-level authorities.
- The system has been designed, developed and hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, with technical support from National Informatics Centre, (NIC).
- It provides single registration and single sign-in for all types of clearances (i.e. Environment, Forest, Wildlife and CRZ), unique-ID for all types of clearances required for a particular project and a single Window interface for the proponent to submit applications for getting all types of clearances (i.e. Environment, Forests, Wildlife and CRZ clearances).

ZERO BUDGET NATURAL FARMING
WHAT:

- Zero Budget Natural Farming, as the name implies, is a method of farming where the cost of growing and harvesting plants is zero. This means that farmers need not purchase fertilizers and pesticides in order to ensure the healthy growth of crops. It is, basically, a natural farming technique that uses biological pesticides instead of chemical-based fertilizers. Farmers use earthworms, cow dung, urine, plants, human excreta and such biological fertilizers for crop protection.

- Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) under Network Project on Organic Farming (NPOF) and All India Coordinated Research Projects (AICRP) on Integrated Farming Systems, has initiated an experiment on “Evaluation of zero budget farming practices in basmati rice-wheat system” at Modipuram (Uttar Pradesh), Ludhiana (Punjab), Pantnagar (Uttarakhand) and Kurukshetra (Haryana) from rabi 2017 to study the zero budget farming practices on productivity, economics and soil health including soil organic carbon and soil fertility.

WHY:

- It reduces farmers’ investment.
- It also protects the soil from degradation.

TELL ME MORE:

- Government of India has been promoting organic farming in the country through the dedicated schemes of Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) since 2015-16 and also through Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY).
- In the revised guidelines of PKVY scheme during the year 2018, various organic farming models like Natural Farming, Rishi Farming, Vedic Farming, Cow Farming, Homa Farming, Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) etc. have been included wherein flexibility is given to states to adopt any model of Organic Farming including ZBNF depending on farmer’s choice.
- Under the RKVY scheme, organic farming/ natural farming project components are considered by the respective State Level Sanctioning Committee (SLSC) according to their priority/ choice.

INDIA’S FIRST GENETIC BANK FOR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

WHAT:

- In a step that would further the cause of conservation of endangered and protected animals, India has got its first scientific and most modern national wildlife genetic resource bank.
- It is located in Hyderabad at the Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES), a research wing of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB).
The state-of-the-art bank is equipped with sophisticated equipment to preserve the genetic resources that could be utilised to virtually resurrect an animal species in case it goes extinct.

The bank that contains genetic resources of about 250 wildlife species.

WHY:

The Genetic Resource Bank will store genetic material of Indian species. It will also help in protecting India’s biodiversity and environment.

COMPENSATORY AFFORESTATION FUND ACT

WHAT:

This act provides for setting up Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) at both central and state level to ensure expeditious and transparent utilization of amounts realized in lieu of forest land diverted for non-forest purpose.

The act also seeks to establish the National Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of India, and a State Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of each state. The payments into the funds include compensatory afforestation, NPV, and any project-specific payments.

WHY:

The move will help India re-green its forest and non-forest areas which have lost trees due to forest diversions — amounting to more than 1.3 million hectares after the Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980 kicked in — for allowing various developmental activities.

TELL ME MORE:

The Centre has notified rules for operationalising a Rs 66,000 crore fund collected as compensations under Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act passed in 2016 to promote the green cover in the country.

As per the new rules:

13 activities are permitted for funding. They include plantation, assisted natural regeneration of forests, forest fire prevention, pest and disease control in forests, soil and moisture conservation works and improvement of wildlife habitat.

Usage of funds: 80% of the compensatory afforestation amount will be utilised by states for plantations, assisted natural regeneration of forests, forest fire prevention, pest and disease control in forest, soil and moisture conservation works and improvement of wildlife habitat, among others, in the list of 13 permissible activities. The remaining 20% will be used for 11 listed works to strengthen forest and wildlife protection related infrastructure.

Role of gram sabhas: Besides enlisting the 24 activities which are to be taken up using the fund, the rules also specify that the working plan will be taken up “in consultation with the gram sabha or village forest management committee”.
Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS)

WHAT:
- The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) is a NASA mission that will look for planets orbiting the brightest stars in Earth’s sky. It was led by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with seed funding from Google.
- TESS was launched on April 18th with the help of a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket which sent the satellite into an elliptical orbit around Earth.
- TESS (Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite) has officially started its science operations. Its first observations will be transmitted back to Earth at some point in August, after which it will continue to send in new information for the next two years, at least.

WHY:
- The mission will monitor at least 200,000 stars for signs of exoplanets, ranging from Earth-sized rocky worlds to huge gas giant planets. TESS, however, will focus on stars that are 30 to 100 times brighter than those Kepler examined. This will help astronomers better understand the structure of solar systems outside of our Earth, and provide insights into how our own solar system formed.

TELL ME MORE:
- TESS will occupy a never-before-used orbit high above Earth. The elliptical orbit, called P/2, is exactly half of the moon’s orbital period; this means that TESS will orbit Earth every 13.7 days. Its closest point to Earth (67,000 miles or 108,000 kilometers) is about triple the distance of geosynchronous orbit, where most communications satellites operate.
- It will use transit method to detect exoplanets. It watches distant stars for small dips in brightness, which can indicate that planet has passed in front of them. Repeated dips will indicate planet passing in front of its star. This data has to be validated by repeated observations and verified by scientists.

Scutoid: a new shape discovered

WHAT:
- A scutoid is a solid geometric shape, like a cube or a pyramid, which had not been described until now. The epithelial cells adopt this form when the tissue curves, giving it a more stable structure. It could be said that they look like ‘twisted prisms’.
- Scientists have identified a new shape called the scutoid while studying epithelial cells.
- The epithelial cells are the construction blocks with which an organism is formed. They are like ‘pieces of Tente or Lego from which animals are made.
- The epithelial cells form structures with multiple functions like forming a barrier against infections or absorbing nutrients.
- During the development of an embryo, it changes from a simple structure formed from only a handful of cells to an animal with very complex organs. This process doesn’t only
occur because of the growth of the organism, but also because the epithelial cells start ‘moving and joining together’ to organise themselves correctly and give the organs their final shape.
• This study opens the door to understanding how organs are formed during their development and what might be missing in some diseases in which this process is altered.

Ban on Oxytocin

WHAT:
• The drug, a synthetic version of a human hormone, is a life-saver for women. Doctors use it to induce labour in pregnant women and to stem postpartum bleeding. So critical is its role in maternal health that the World Health Organization recommends it as the drug of choice in postpartum haemorrhage.
• Oxytocin has also been dubbed the hug hormone, cuddle chemical, moral molecule, and the bliss hormone due to its effects on behaviour, including its role in love and in female reproductive biological functions in reproduction.

WHY:
The government’s ban ignores its critical uses, and is motivated instead by the misuse of the hormone in the dairy industry. Because oxytocin stimulates lactation in cattle, dairy farmers inject the drug indiscriminately to increase milk production. This has spawned several unlicensed facilities that manufacture the drug for veterinary use.
• Much is unknown about the ill-effects of oxytocin on cattle. One of the concerns was that oxytocin leads to infertility in dairy animals, and some studies show this to be true.
• It has also been linked to mastitis, a painful inflammation of the udder. Milk consumers worry about exposure to it through dairy products.

TELL ME MORE:
Oxytocin is a hormone that is made in the brain, in the hypothalamus. It is transported to, and secreted by, the pituitary gland, which is located at the base of the brain. It acts both as a hormone and as a brain neurotransmitter. The release of oxytocin by the pituitary gland acts to regulate two female reproductive functions: Childbirth and Breast-feeding.

Ballistic Missile Interceptor AAD

WHAT:
- DRDO conducted the successful test of the Ballistic Missile Interceptor Advanced Area Defence (AAD) from Abdul Kalam Island, Odisha.
- It is an endo-atmospheric missile, capable of intercepting incoming targets at an altitude of 15 to 25 kms.
- Indigenously developed by DRDO, the AAD interceptor is a single-stage missile powered by solid propellants.
- It has been developed as part of indigenously efforts to have multi-layer ballistic missile defence system, capable of destroying incoming hostile ballistic missiles.
- It is 7.5 metres tall and weighs around 1.2 tonnes.
- The interceptor missile has its own mobile launcher, secure data link for interception, independent tracking and homing capabilities and sophisticated radars.

WHY:
- The Indian Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) Programme is an attempt to develop and to use a multi-layered ballistic missile defence system to protect from ballistic missile attacks. The India’s decision to develop Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) was introduced in the light of the ballistic missile threat mainly from Pakistan, especially can be attributed to the Kargil War in 1999.

TELL ME MORE:
- India follows ‘No First Use policy’. A robust BMD provides an opportunity to the nation to strike back if a nuclear projectile is launched by an enemy state.
- BMD would shield from non-state actors initiated missile warfare and thus could avoid Mutual Destruction trap.
- BMD reduces the incentive for the enemy state to launch a nuclear attack, thus enhancing strategic stability.
- An indigenous system would reduce the import bill of defence systems from other nations.
- Technology developed for BMD can be used in other sectors, especially in space technology.

Defence India Startup Challenge

WHAT:
Defence Minister has unveiled the Defence India Startup Challenge.

- Defence India Startup Challenge is part of iDEX (Innovation for Defence Excellence) scheme announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in April meant to build an ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship in India for the defence sector to make India self-reliant.
- It is an initiative to tap startups for finding safe and futuristic Indian solutions to critical needs of the three Armed Forces.
- A list of 11 technologies that the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force need, have been chosen. They included remote air vehicles, laser weapons, secure and safe communication systems and bandwidth, precision targeting systems, sensors, and protected and informed movement of soldiers in battle tanks.
- Those that come up with prototypes of usable products would be supported with ₹1.5 crore each and friendly procurement procedures from the Ministry under SPARK or Support for Prototype & Research Kickstart in Defence.

RISECREEK

WHAT:
- They are industry-standard microprocessors developed by scientists from IIT- Madras. They are produced under Project Shakti and have been fabricated free at Intel’s facility at Oregon, U.S., to run the Linux operating system.
- These microprocessors can be adapted by others, as the design is open source. They optimise power use and compete with international units such as the Cortex A5 from Advanced RISC Machines (ARM).
- At a frequency of 350 MHz, RISECREEK can meet the demands of defence and strategic equipment such as NAVIC (Indian Regional Navigation Satellite) and Internet of Things (IoT) electronics.
- The Shakti plan started in 2014 as an IIT-M initiative. Last year, the Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology funded a part of the project.
- The Shakti project is not aimed at only building processors. It also aims to build high speed interconnects for servers and supercomputers based on variants of the RapidilO and GenZ standards. These are key to build large clusters of processors to get Petaflop and Exaflop level supercomputers.

Chandrayaan-2

WHAT:
- Chandrayaan 2 is India’s second lunar exploration mission after Chandrayaan-1. Developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)
- Chandrayaan-2 includes soft-landing on Moon and moving a rover on its surface. It is an advanced version of the previous Chandrayaan-1 mission. It consists of an orbiter, lander and rover configuration.
- The Orbiter spacecraft when launched from Sriharikota will travel to the Moon and release the Lander, which will in turn deploy a tiny Rover to roam the lunar surface — all three sending data and pictures to Earth.
- It would be launched with the help of GLSV Mark III launcher.
WHY:
- The wheeled rover will move on the lunar surface and will perform on-site chemical analysis.
- The Chandrayaan-2 orbiter will circle the moon and provide information about its surface.
- The payloads will collect scientific information on lunar topography, mineralogy, elemental abundance, lunar exosphere and signatures of hydroxyl and water-ice.

TELL ME MORE:
- The lander will also land near the south pole, which has remained unexplored.
- The mission's lander is called Vikram, named after Vikram Sarabhai.
- Chandrayaan 2’s journey has been rather slow so far. Although the mission was envisioned way back in November 2007, as a joint mission between India and Russia, it had faced a series of setbacks.
- As per the tie-up, Russia was supposed to provide the lander for the mission, while India would develop the rover and orbiter. ISRO had its prototype ready for a 2013 launch but Russia delayed delivering the lander. Later, Russia said it would not be able to provide a lander for ISRO.
- India then called off the deal and decided to make the Chandrayaan mission completely indigenous. The development has taken time, and given that it is the first time India is developing a lander, the programme has faced many glitches like the present one.
- The mission, Chandrayaan 2, has been postponed again from its proposed October launch to January 2019. This time, the delay was caused because the indigenously developed lander was having trouble with rethrottling. The lander has now gone back to the design table for a design change.

Uakitite
- It is a new mineral has been discovered in a meteorite in Eastern Russia.
- It is named “uakitite” after the Uakit region of Siberia where the meteorite was discovered.
- 98% of the Uakit meteorite is an iron alloy called kamacite, which so far has only been found in other meteorites. The other two percent is comprised of minerals that form in space.

Maitree 2018
- It is an annual joint military training exercise between India and Thailand. The 2018 edition of this exercise is being held in Thailand.
- Aim: The aim of this exercise is to build and promote closer relations while exchanging skills and experiences between the two armies.
- Last exercise was held in Himachal Pradesh’s Baklo in 2017.
UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance)

WHAT:
- Umang is an initiative to promote Digital India program. The term — Umang stands for Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance and is envisaged to make e-governance. The application is developed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and National e-Governance Division (NeGD) in order to drive Mobile Governance in India.

WHY:
- The key goal of launching this application is to allow the citizens of India do everything online, at just a click – be it making a passport, Aadhaar or Pan, book a gas cylinder, know about your Provident fund account or resolving an Aadhaar related. Umang app basically provides a unified approach where you can install one application to avail multiple government services — almost over 100 of them.

TELL ME MORE:
- Recognizing the importance of reaching out to the consumers and to safeguard their interests, TRAI has now integrated its Mobile Apps namely DND 2.0 & MyCall with UMANG Platform.
- TRAI MyCall is an intuitive and user friendly application for Crowdsourced Voice Call Quality Monitoring. The Application helps Mobile phone users to rate their experience about voice call quality in real time and help TRAI gather consumer experience data along with Network data.
- A pop up requests the user to rate the call after it ends. Callers simply select their rating in the form of stars and indicate if the calls were made in indoor, outdoor or while travelling. Callers can also provide additional details such as noise or audio delay or mark a call-drop.
- DND (Do Not Disturb) Services App enables smart phone users to register their mobile number under DND and report spam messages or calls to avoid Unsolicited Commercial Communication (UCC)/Telemarketing Calls/SMS.

Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT)
- Astronomers have used an Indian telescope to discover the most distant radio galaxy ever known, located at a distance of 12 billion light-years. The galaxy, from a time when the universe was only 7% of its current age was found using the Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) in Pune.
- Radio galaxies are very rare objects in the universe. They are colossal galaxies with a supermassive black hole in their centre that actively accretes gas and dust from its surroundings.
‘Seva Bhoj Yojna’

WHAT:
- Union Ministry of Culture has launched ‘Seva Bhoj Yojna’ – a scheme to reimburse central share of CGST and IGST on food, prasad, langar or bhandara offered by religious and charitable institutions.
- The ‘Seva Bhoj Yojna’ has a total outlay of Rs 325.00 crore for financial years 2018-19 and 2019-20.
- The scheme seeks to reimburse the central government’s share of Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) and Integrated Goods and Service Tax (IGST) on purchase of raw items such as ghee, edible oil, atta, maida, rava, flour, rice pulses, sugar and jaggery, which go into preparation of food/prasad/langar/bhandara offered free of cost by religious institutions.

WHY:
- The main objective of the scheme is to lessen the financial burden of such charitable religious institutions, which provide free of cost without any discrimination to the general public and devotees.

TELL ME MORE:
The charitable religious institutions including temples, gurudwara, mosque, church, dharmik ashram, dargah, monasteries, which fulfill the following criteria are eligible for the grant:
- The institutions that have been in existence for at least five years before applying for financial assistance/grant.
- The institutions that serve free food to at least 5000 people in a month.
- The institutions covered under Section 10( 23BBA) of the Income Tax Act or those registered as Society under Societies Registration Act (XXI of 1860) or as a Public Trust under any law for the time being in force of statutory religious bodies constituted under any Act or institutions registered under Section 12AA of Income Tax Act.

Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH)

WHAT:
- The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) is a non-profit charitable organization registered under the Societies’ Registration Act, 1860.

WHY:
- It was founded in 1984 with the vision to create a membership organisation to stimulate and spearhead heritage awareness and conservation in India.

TELL ME MORE:
- The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) has called for transforming heritage buildings in Rajasthan into “economic assets” for the society. Economic benefits could be derived from these properties as an alternative to paying for their upkeep on a regular basis.
• Since 1984, INTACH has pioneered the conservation and protection of India’s natural and cultural heritage and is today the largest membership organisation in the country dedicated to conservation.
• In 2007, the United Nations awarded INTACH a special consultative status with United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)

WHAT:
PMKSY has been conceived amalgamating ongoing schemes viz. Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP) of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation (MoWR, RD&GR), Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) of Department of Land Resources (DoLR) and the On Farm Water Management (OFWM) of Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC).
  ▪ The scheme will be implemented by Ministries of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development.
  ▪ The major objective of PMKSY is to achieve convergence of investments in irrigation at the field level, expand cultivable area under assured irrigation, improve on-farm water use efficiency to reduce wastage of water and enhance the adoption of precision-irrigation and other water saving technologies (More crop per drop).

WHY:
• To provide irrigation facility to farmers.
• To help farmers understand the importance of water efficiency.

TELL ME MORE:
• A revised Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) has been signed amongst Govt. of India (through MoWR, RD & GR), NABARD and National Water Development Agency (NWDA) for funding of central share of 99 prioritized irrigation projects under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) through Long Term Irrigation Fund (LTIF).
• The MoU will enable this Ministry to release Central Assistance to prioritized projects under PMKSY as per the requirements from time to time.
• To cater to the large fund requirement and ensure completion of the projects, the Union Finance Minister, during his Budget speech 2016-17, announced creation of dedicated Long Term Irrigation Fund (LTIF) in NABARD with an initial corpus of Rs. 20,000 crore for funding of Central and State share for the identified ongoing projects under PMKSY (AIBP and CAD).
• Corpus would be raised by way of budgetary resources and market borrowings to fund fast tracking of implementation of incomplete major & medium irrigation projects.

PENCIL Portal
• The government has launched a web portal called ‘PENCIL’ for effective implementation of the National Child Labour Project, (NCLP).
• PENCIL (Platform for Effective Enforcement for No Child Labour) — an electronic platform for no child labour in the country has been developed by the Labour Ministry.
• PENCIL portal has five components — Child Tracking System, Complaint Corner, State Government, National Child Labour Project and Convergence.

Concessional Financing Scheme (CFS)

WHAT:
• The Union Cabinet has approved the first extension of Concessional Financing Scheme (CFS) to support Indian Entities bidding for strategically important infrastructure projects abroad. Under the CFS, the Govt. of India has been supporting Indian Entities bidding for strategically important infrastructure projects abroad since 2015-16.

WHY:
• Prior to the introduction of CFS, Indian entities were not able to bid for large projects abroad since the cost of financing was very high for them and bidders from other countries such as China, Japan, Europe and US were able to provide credit at superior terms, i.e., lower interest rate and longer tenures which works to the advantage of bidders from those countries.
• Also, by having projects of strategic interest to India executed by Indian entities, the CFS enables India to generate substantial backward linkage induced jobs, demand for material and machinery in India and also a lot of goodwill for India.

TELL ME MORE:
• Under the Scheme, MEA selects the specific projects keeping in view strategic interest of India and sends the same to Department of Economic Affairs (DEA).
• The strategic importance of a project to deserve financing under this Scheme, is decided, on a case to case basis, by a Committee chaired by Secretary, DEA.
• Once approved by the Committee, DEA issues a formal letter to EXIM Bank conveying approval for financing of the project under CFS.
• The Scheme is presently being operated through the Export-Import Bank of India, which raises resources from the market to provide concessional finance.
• Government of India (GoI) provides counter guarantee and interest equalization support of 2% to the EXIM Bank.
• Under the Scheme, EXIM Bank extends credit at a rate not exceeding LIBOR (avg. of six months) + 100 bps. The repayment of the loan is guaranteed by the foreign govt.
STRATEGIC INVESTMENT FUND UNDER NIIF

WHAT:
• 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 Rs 40,000 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 objective of National Investment and Infrastructure Fund II (‘Strategic Fund’) is to invest largely in equity and equity-linked instruments. The Strategic Fund will focus on green field and brown field investments in the core infrastructure sectors.

WHY:
• NIIF’s strategy includes anchoring equity, quasi-equity and debt funds in partnership with investors targeting investments across the relevant sectors in India.

TELL ME MORE:
• Strategic fund will focus on green field and brown field investments in the core infrastructure sectors.

Bhoomi Rashi and PFMS linkage

WHAT:
Bhoomi Rashi, the portal developed by MoRTH and NIC, comprises the entire revenue data of the country, right down to 6.4 lakh villages.
• The entire process flow, from submission of draft notification by the State Government to its approval by the Hon. Minister of State for RT&H and publication in e-Gazette, is online.
• The portal, created for expediting the process of publication of notifications for LA, is now being fully utilised for issuing the notifications.
• Bhoomi Rashi portal has been instrumental in reducing the time taken for approval and publication of notifications pertaining to land acquisition.

The Public Financial Management System (PFMS) is an end-to-end solution for processing payments, tracking, monitoring, accounting, reconciliation and reporting.
• It is administered by the Department of Expenditure.
• It is implemented by the Controller General of Accounts.

WHY:
• Introduction of the PFMS resulted in effectiveness and economy in public finance management through better cash management for government transparency in public expenditure and real-time information on resource availability and utilisation across schemes. It also resulted in improved programme administration and management,
reduction of float in the system, direct payment to beneficiaries and greater transparency and accountability in the use of public funds.

TELL ME MORE:
- The government has proposed to integrate Bhoomi Rashi with Public Financial Management System (PFMS). Integration of Public Financial Management System (PFMS) with Bhoomi Rashi is one of the key functionalities to facilitate payment related to compensation for land acquisition to all the beneficiaries directly through the Bhoomi Rashi system.
- It provides scheme managers a unified platform for tracking releases and monitoring their last mile utilisation.
- It provides platform for efficient management of funds through tracking of funds and real time reporting of expenditure and receipts through treasury and bank interface.
- The line ministries/departments utilise this platform to monitor the utilisation of funds provided to the implementing agencies and state governments.
- PFMS is also used for DBT payments under MGNREGA and other notified schemes of the Government of India.

Niryat Mitra mobile app

WHAT:
- The app has been developed by the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO).
- It provides wide range of information required to undertake international trade right from the policy provisions for export and import, applicable GST rate, available export incentives, tariff, preferential tariff, market access requirements – SPS and TBT measures. All the information is available at tariff line.
- The app works internally to map the ITC HS code of other countries with that of India and provides all the required data without the users bothering about the HS code of any country. Presently the app comes with the data of 87 countries.

WHY:
- The exports are showing good sign and registering increase at the rate of 20%. The government plans to further increase the ease of doing business. Therefore, the app will provide big opportunity to everybody and help promote export interests in the country.
- The Human Resource tool of the app enables candidates with interest in the international trade sector to register and apply against the vacancies arising in the sector. Companies can also search the profiles of the candidates and engage them.

TELL ME MORE:
- ITC (HS) codes are better known as Indian Trade Clarification (ITC) and are based on Harmonized System (HS) of Coding. It was adopted in India for import-export operations. Indian custom uses an eight digit ITC (HS) code to suit the national trade requirements.
Any changes or formulation or addition of new codes in ITC-HS Codes are carried out by DGFT (Directorate General of Foreign Trade).

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**India unveils geographical indication logo, tagline**

**WHAT:**
- A GI is primarily an agricultural, natural or a manufactured product (handicrafts and industrial goods) originating from a definite geographical territory.
- India has unveiled a tagline and a tricolour logo for geographical indication (GI) certified products. From now on, the GI-registered goods will sport the logo and the tagline to make them more attractive.
- **Tagline:** “Invaluable Treasures of Incredible India”.
- **Logo:**

![GI Logo & Slogan](image)

**WHY:**
- Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the place of its origin.
- Once the GI protection is granted, no other producer can misuse the name to market similar products. It also provides comfort to customers about the authenticity of that product.

**TELL ME MORE:**
- A total of 320 products have been conferred the GI status in India so far.
- Karnataka comes first with 38 GI products, followed by Maharashtra which has 32 products.
- Tamil Nadu comes third with 25 GI products.
• GI is covered as element of intellectual property rights (IPRs) under Paris Convention for Protection of Industrial Property.
• At international level, GI is governed by WTO’s Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).
• In India, Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection Act), 1999 governs it.

GAOFEN-11

WHAT:
• It is an optical remote sensing satellite, launched by China as part of its high-resolution Earth observation project. It will aid in the Belt and Road Initiative. It was the 282nd flight mission by a Long March carrier rocket.

WHY:
• The satellite can be used for land survey, urban planning, road network design, agriculture, and disaster relief.

TELL ME MORE:
• Gaofen-11 will become part of the China High-resolution Earth Observation System (CHEOS), initiated in 2010 to provide all-weather, all-day coverage by 2020 with optical and synthetic aperture radar satellites, and could also include airborne and near-space systems such as stratospheric balloons.

Pingali Venkayya

WHAT:

Pingali Venkayya was a freedom fighter and the designer of the Indian National Tricolour. The national flag that we see today was based upon his design.

MOVE HACK, A GLOBAL MOBILITY HACKATHON

WHAT:

NITI Aayog has launched Move Hack, a global mobility hackathon to crowdsource solutions aimed at the future of mobility in India.
The hackathon has a two-pronged campaign approach:
1. “Just Code It”: aimed at solutions through innovations in technology/product/software and data analysis.
2. “Just Solve It”: innovative business ideas or sustainable solutions to transform mobility infrastructure through technology.
KADAKNATH CHICKEN

WHAT:
- The famous Kadaknath chicken meat from Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh has now got a Geographical Indication (GI) tag. GI registration is valid up to a period of around five years till February 7, 2022.
- Kadaknath is famous for its delicious black meat (‘kali-masi’), which is supposed to be invigorating and full of medicinal properties.

INTERNET CORPORATION FOR ASSIGNED NAMES AND NUMBERS (ICANN)

WHAT:
- The Internet Corporation of Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is a non-profit organization that was set up in 1998 to oversee the administration of domain names.
- ICANN coordinates and ensures the smooth and secure functioning of the cybernetic framework.
- ccNSO of the ICANN is the policy-development body for global issues regarding country code top-level domains (ccTLD) within the ICANN structure.
- The members of ccNSO, which is ICANN’s policy development body for ccTLD (country code top-level domains) issues, are all country code top level domain operators from around the world.

WHY:
- The global nature of the Web today means that there are constantly increasing numbers of Domain Names, Host Names, IP addresses and web sites that are emerging on a daily basis. ICANN oversees this interconnected network and ensures that computers across the internet can find one another through defined unique pathways and identifiers.

TELL ME MORE:
ICANN performs four major functions namely:
- Approval of companies that can become accredited registrars for domain names.
- Decision making regarding the addition of new Top Level Domains (TLDs) to the Root system.
- Coordinating technical parameters to maintain universal connectivity.
- Creating a Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP) for competing domain names.
- The nominating committee of Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) has selected Ajay Data, Founder & CEO of Data XGen Plus and a global leader in email linguistic services, as a new council member of Country Code Supporting Organisation (ccNSO).
- **Ajay Data is the first Indian to have been selected as a member of ccNSO** and will be representing India at a global level. He will be the custodian of Asia, Australia and Pacific Islands as a member of ccNSO.
Global Innovation Index

- NITI Aayog has proposed to join hands with Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) to develop a Roadmap for Top 10 Rank in Global Innovation Index (GII).
- India’s rank on the Global Innovation Index (GII) has improved from 60 in 2017 to 57 in 2018. India has been consistently climbing the GII ranking for the past two years.
- GII is jointly released by Cornell University, INSEAD and World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). GII ranks 126 economies based on 80 indicators.

Operation ‘Madad’

- Operation “Madad” has been launched by the Southern Naval Command (SNC) at Kochi since 09 Aug 2018 for assisting the state administration and undertaking disaster relief operations due to the unprecedented flooding experienced in many parts of Kerala, owing to incessant rainfall and release of excess water from Idukki and other dams.

Delhi Police gets India’s first all-women SWAT team

Delhi will be the first police force in the country to have an all-women SWAT team.
- Trained by specialists from India and abroad, 36 women constables from northeastern states have been inducted into the squad after rigorous, 15-month training.
- The maximum numbers of members (13) are from Assam and five each from Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Manipur.
- These commandos will be stationed at strategic locations in central and south Delhi.
- Amids intel inputs of women fidayeen planning to target the capital, this all-women unit would helm the security apparatus around Red Fort and India Gate as well. Many of them would be posted in anti-terror vans called Parakram.
- The women are trained to handle challenges unique to the capital—like climbing multi-storey buildings or carrying out hostage rescue operations at hotels, buses or metro.
- The formation of this team is being considered a big achievement as most western countries do not have all-women SWAT teams due to the kind of training required to become one.

Uighurs

- The Uighurs are a Muslim ethnic minority mostly based in China’s Xinjiang province. They make up around 45% of the population there. Xinjiang is officially designated as an autonomous region within China, like Tibet to its south.
- A UN human rights committee has heard there are credible reports that China is holding a million Uighurs in “counter-extremism centres”.
- Human rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have submitted reports to the UN committee documenting claims of mass imprisonment, in camps where inmates are forced to swear loyalty to China’s President Xi Jinping.
- The World Uyghur Congress said in its report that detainees are held indefinitely without charge, and forced to shout Communist Party slogans.
- It said they are poorly fed, and reports of torture are widespread. Most inmates have never been charged with a crime, it is claimed, and do not receive legal representation. China is said to carry out the detentions under the guise of combating religious extremism.

**Iris Scan Authentication feature for Aadhaar-based transactions by Axis bank**
- Axis Bank has become the **first bank in the country to introduce Iris Scan Authentication feature** for Aadhaar-based transactions through its micro ATM tablets.
- The bank has deployed highly secure iris powered micro ATM tablets which are STQC certified and UIDAI compliant registered devices with completely integrated iris sensors.
- Micro ATMs completely eliminate the requirement of debit cards, passwords, PINs, and user IDs, and empower consumers to avail banking services using only their Aadhaar numbers and biometrics (iris scan/fingerprint scan).

**Ease of Living index**
- Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has released Ease of Living Index.
- The index has been developed to **allow city managers to get a grip on the city’s baseline and compare its performance across key indicators**.
- The index covers 111 cities that are smart city contenders, capital cities, and cities with population of 1 million plus.
- **The index captures** the quality of life based on the data collected from the urban local bodies on four parameters, which were further broken down into 15 categories.
- **The four parameters** include institutional (governance), social (identity, education, health, security), economic (economy, employment) and physical factors (waste water and solid waste management, pollution, housing/inclusiveness, mixed land use, power and water supply, transport, public open spaces).
- **Institutional and social parameters** carry 25 points each, physical factors have a weightage of 45 points and economic factors five points totalling to a 100 mark scale on which cities were evaluated.
- Pune has ranked first while two more Maharashtra cities — Navi Mumbai and Greater Mumbai — figure in the second and third spots.
- Tirupati, Chandigarh, Thane, Raipur, Indore, Vijaywada and Bhopal also figure in the top 10 list in that order. Among other major cities, Chennai holds 14th rank, Ahmedabad 23rd, Hyderabad 27th, and Bengaluru 58th.
- Rampur in Uttar Pradesh has ranked the worst on the scale with Kohima and Patna on the bottom two and three ranks while Varanasi stands at 33.
- Kolkata is excluded from the index.

**Vidyalakshmi Portal**

**WHAT:**
Vidya Lakshmi is a first of its kind portal for students seeking Education Loan.
• This portal has been developed under the guidance of Department of Financial Services, (Ministry of Finance), Department of Higher Education (Ministry of Human Resource Development) and Indian Banks Association (IBA).
• The portal has been developed and being maintained by NSDL e-Governance Infrastructure Limited.
• Students can view, apply and track the education loan applications to banks anytime, anywhere by accessing the portal. The portal also provides linkages to National Scholarship Portal.

WHY:
• To help student avail easy education loan

TELL ME MORE:
• As part of its digital initiative, Karnataka Bank has integrated its education loan scheme/s with Vidya Lakshmi Portal of Government of India.

National Sports University Bill, 2018

WHAT:
• Lok Sabha has passed National Sports University Bill, 2018 to set up the country’s first National Sports University in Imphal, Manipur that will provide sports education, research and coaching.
• The Bill replaces National Sports University Ordinance, 2018 promulgated by President in May 2018 to protect interests of students who already have been enrolled in National Sports University.
• The Bill establishes a National Sports University located in Manipur. It will promote sports education in the areas of: (i) sports sciences, (ii) sports technology, (iii) sports management, and (iv) sports coaching. It will function as a national training centre for select sports disciplines. It may also establish campuses and study centres in other parts of the country. The University will be empowered to grant degrees, diplomas and certificates.
• Objectives: The key objectives of the University are: (i) research, development and dissemination of knowledge in physical education and sports sciences, (ii) strengthening physical education and sports training programmes, (iii) generating knowledge capabilities, skills and competence at various levels, and (iv) training talented athletes to help them to evolve into international level athletes.

WHY:
• Setting up of National Sports University in Manipur will result in giving an opportunity for youth of country in general and of North Eastern States in particular for pursuing courses such as B.PEd, MPEd, Diploma / certificate courses in coaching, physiotherapy, fitness, sports management, sports journalism, etc.

TELL ME MORE:
• The Bill provides for several authorities under the University. These include: Court, Executive Council, Academic and Activity Council, Board of Sports Studies etc.

• **Role the central government:** The central government will review and inspect the functioning of the University. The Executive Council may take action based on the inspection report. If it fails to take action to the satisfaction of the central government, it will have to comply with the directions issued by the central government. Further, the central government may annul any proceeding of the University which is not in line with the Act.

• **Funding:** The University will be required to maintain a fund which will be credited with the funds that it receives from the central government, state government, and fees and money received from any other sources (grants and gifts). All funds of the University will be invested as decided by the Board on the recommendation of the Finance Committee.

### Fields Medal

**WHAT:**
- Akshay Venkatesh, a renowned Indian-Australian mathematician, is one of four winners of mathematics’ **prestigious Fields medal, known as the Nobel prize for math.** He has won the Fields Medal for his profound contributions to an exceptionally broad range of subjects in mathematics.
- The Fields medals are awarded every four years to the most promising mathematicians under the age of 40.
- Each winner receives a 15,000 Canadian-dollar cash prize. At least two, and preferably four people, are always honoured in the award ceremony.
- The prize was inaugurated in 1932 at the request of Canadian mathematician John Charles Fields, who ran the 1924 Mathematics Congress in Toronto.

### Digital Literacy Library

**WHAT:**
- **Facebook Launches Digital Literacy Library** to Help Youth Build Skills Online. The Library aims to help young people build the skills they need to safely enjoy online technology.
- The library is a collection of lessons to help young people think critically and share thoughtfully online.
- Divided into themes such as privacy and reputation, identity exploration, security, safety and well-being, the lessons reflect the voices of young people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, geographies, and educational levels.
- The lessons can be found on Facebook’s Safety Center as well as on Berkman Klein’s Digital Literacy Resource Platform.
WHY:

- There are 830 million young people online around the world, and this library is a resource for educators looking to address digital literacy and help these young people build the skills they need to safely enjoy digital technology.

IMPRINT-2

WHAT:

- IMPacting Research, INnovation and Technology (IMPRINT) is a national initiative of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) designed to address all major engineering challenges relevant to India through an inclusive and sustainable mode of translational research.
- IMPRINT-2 has been approved by Government of India (GoI) with a revised strategy under which, this national initiative will be jointly funded and steered by MHRD and Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- While any faculty member from an MHRD funded Higher Education Institute (HEI) including Centrally Funded Technical Institution (CFTI) may lead as the Principal Investigator (PI), single or multiple partners from stake holder ministry, institutions, PSUs, strategic agencies and industry are welcome as Co-PI, partner or collaborator.
- Proposals under IMPRINT II Projects should (a) address any declared theme (thrust area) under one of the 10 domains of IMPRINT, and (b) connect either with already identified or new research topics defined by the PI under the same 10 domains.
- Projects proposals should provide clear and convincing evidence of promise for translational research leading to viable technology (product, process or prototype) development.
- For advancing research in the high education institutions, the government has approved 122 new research projects at a cost of Rs 112 crore under IMPRINT-2 covering Energy, Security, Healthcare, Advanced Materials, ICT and Security/Defence domains.

Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)

WHAT:

- Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), launched in 2013 aims at providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions.
- The central funding (in the ratio of 60:40 for general category States, 90:10 for special category states and 100% for union territories) would be norm based and outcome dependent.
- The funding would flow from the central ministry through the state governments/union territories to the State Higher Education Councils before reaching the identified institutions.
- The funding to states would be made on the basis of critical appraisal of State Higher Education Plans, which would describe each state’s strategy to address issues of equity, access and excellence in higher education.
WHY:
• The key objectives of RUSA are to improve access, equity and quality in higher education through planned development of higher education at the state level. Objectives include creating new academic institutions, expanding and upgrading the existing ones, developing institutions that are self-reliant in terms of quality education, professionally managed, and characterized by greater inclination towards research and provide students with education that is relevant to them as well the nation as a whole.
• RUSA would create new universities through upgradation of existing autonomous colleges and conversion of colleges in a cluster.
• It would create new model degree colleges, new professional colleges and provide infrastructural support to universities and colleges.
• Faculty recruitment support, faculty improvements programmes and leadership development of educational administrators are also an important part of the scheme.
• In order to enhance skill development the existing central scheme of Polytechnics has been subsumed within RUSA. A separate component to synergise vocational education with higher education has also been included in RUSA.
• Besides these, RUSA also supports reforming, restructuring and building capacity of institutions in participating states.

TELL ME MORE:
• NITI Aayog has identified 117 districts as ‘Aspirational Districts’ for Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA).
• These districts have been selected on the basis of the composite index which includes published data of deprivation enumerated under Socio-Economic Caste Census, Health & Nutrition, Education and Basic Infrastructure.
• Support by the Centre: Under the scheme, central assistance is provided for opening of new Model Degree Colleges(MDCs) in these districts and in unserved & underserved districts in North Eastern and Himalayan States.
• Kind of support: The central support provided under the component of new MDCs is infrastructural in nature in which funds are released for creation of Colleges with requisite infrastructure such as appropriate number of class rooms, library, laboratory, faculty rooms, toilet blocks and other essential requirements for technologically advanced facilities.
• States’ role: Under this component, a commitment is given by the State Governments that all recurring expenditure (including salaries) in respect of the MDC being established, will be borne by the respective State Government. Additionally, under a separate component of RUSA viz., Faculty Recruitment Support, central support is provided for creation of additional posts of Assistant Professors.