CONTENTS

1. POLITY/LAW AND GOVERNANCE/INITIATIVES
2. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
3. HEALTH
4. SOCIAL ISSUES
5. DEFENCE AND SPACE
6. ENVIRONMENT
7. EDUCATION
8. FINANCE AND ECONOMY
9. MISCELLANEOUS
Polity/Law and Governance/Initiatives

Cauvery Water Management Authority

• Union government issued a notification for the Cauvery Water Management Authority
• On 16th February, 2018 the apex court had directed the government to form the authority within six weeks. The Supreme Court through its verdict marginally increased Karnataka’s share of Cauvery water, reduced the allocation for Tamil Nadu and sought to settle the protracted water dispute between the two southern states.
• Composition: It would comprise a chairman, eight members besides a secretary. Out of eight members, two each will be full-time and part-time members, while the rest four would be part-time members from states.
• Mandate:
  • To monitor the storage, assess and divide shares, supervise operation of reservoirs and regulate water releases with assistance of the regulating authority.
  • Advise the states to take suitable measures to improve water use efficiency, by way of promoting micro-irrigation (drip and sprinkler), change in cropping pattern, improved agronomic practices, system deficiency correction and command area development.
  • Cauvery Water Management Authority is also expected to look at regulated release of water by Karnataka, at the inter-state contact point presently identified as Billigundulu gauge and discharge station, located on the common border of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016

• Introduced in the Lok Sabha, the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 seeks to allow illegal migrants from certain minority communities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan eligible for Indian citizenship.
• It amends the Citizenship Act of 1955.
• It seeks to allow illegal migrants belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian religious communities coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan to not be imprisoned or deported.
• It also appeals for the minimum years of residency in India to apply for citizenship to be lessened from at least 11 to six years for such migrants.
• The Bill, does not extend to illegal Muslim migrants. It also does not talk about other minority communities in the three neighbouring countries, such as Jews, Bahais etc.
• The bill contradicts the Assam Accord of 1985, which clearly states that illegal migrants heading in from Bangladesh after March 25, 1971, would be deported.
• Under the Citizenship Act of 1955, foreigners who come into India without valid travel documents, or stay in the country beyond their visa period, are considered illegal migrants.
• Anybody who is born in India, has an Indian parent, or has lived in India for over 11 years, is eligible for Indian citizenship. At present, illegal migrants do not fit this category.

Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (IRWA)
• Based on the observations made by Parliamentary Standing Committee and recommendation made by the National Commission for Women on the basis of consultation with civil society groups and likeminded individuals, WCD has proposed amendments in IRWA keeping in mind the recent technological advancement in the field of communications such as social media platforms, over the top services etc.
• Reforms proposed:
  o Amendment in definition of term advertisement to include digital form or electronic form or hoardings, or through SMS, MMS etc.
  o Amendment in definition of distribution to include publication, license or uploading using computer resource, or communication device or in.
  o Insertion of a new definition to define the term publish.
  o 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.
  o 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.
• 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.

Article 35A
• Article 35A is a provision in the Constitution that empowers the Jammu and Kashmir legislature to define permanent residents of the state.
• It was added through the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1954, issued under Article 370
• Article 35A empowers Jammu and Kashmir legislature to define “permanent residents” of the state along with their special rights and privileges. This Article has an intricate relationship with Article 370.
• Jammu and Kashmir Assembly defined Permanent Resident as a person who was a state subject on May 14, 1954 or who had been a resident of the state for 10 years and has “lawfully acquired immovable property in the state.”

• A person who is not a permanent resident of Jammu and Kashmir is not allowed to buy or own properties in the state or vote in state Assembly election or contest election to the state Assembly. An outsider cannot get a job in the Jammu and Kashmir government.

• A recent petition says Article 35 A is against the “very spirit of oneness of India” as it creates a “class within a class of Indian citizens”. Restricting citizens from other States from getting employment or buying property within Jammu and Kashmir is a violation of fundamental rights under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution.

• Also, the parliamentary route of lawmaking was bypassed when the President incorporated Article 35A into the Constitution. Article 368 (i) of the Constitution empowers only Parliament to amend the Constitution.

• The Centre has decided not to file any “counter-affidavit” on Article 35A, which has been challenged in the Supreme Court through a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition. The Supreme Court has scheduled further hearing for August 6.

Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVIC)

• Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is a statutory body established by an Act of Parliament (Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act of 1956). In April 1957, it took over the work of former All India Khadi and Village Industries Board.

• It is an apex organization under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, with regard to khadi and village industries within India, which seeks to – “plan, promote, facilitate, organise and assist in the establishment and development of khadi and village industries in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.”

• Recently, KVIC has created a world record of distributing maximum number of bee-boxes in one day.

• The record was achieved by the KVIC in the Zangalee Army area at Kupwara in Kashmir beating its previous best of 1000 bee boxes distributed in Kaziranga forest area among the Mishing tribe on the occasion of World Honey Bee Day.

• Two thousand three hundred thirty (2330) bee-boxes were distributed among 233 beneficiaries in the Zangalee Army area.

India BPO promotion scheme

• The India BPO Promotion Scheme (IBPS), envisaged under Digital India Programme, seeks to incentivize establishment of 48,300 seats in respect of BPO/ITES operations across the country.
It is distributed among each State in proportion of State’s population with an outlay of Rs. 493 Crore. This would help in capacity building in smaller cities in terms of infra & manpower and would become basis for next wave of IT/ITES led growth.

The Union government is planning to expand its BPO promotion scheme under the Digital India initiative. The government has proposed to more than double the number of seats under the scheme.

Salient Features:
- Financial Support: Up to 50% of expenditure incurred on BPO/ITES operations towards capital expenditure (CAPEX) and/or operational expenditure (OPEX) on admissible items, subject to an upper ceiling of Rs. 1 Lakh/Seat.
- Special incentives toward employment of women & specially enabled persons.
- Incentive for generating employment beyond target & wider dispersal within state including rural areas.
- Encouragement for local entrepreneurs.
- Special consideration for Hilly states of HP, J&K and UK.

National Data Centre
- The Centre will set up the country’s biggest data centre in Bhopal with a capacity to host five lakh virtual servers. It will be set up by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- This will be the fifth National Data Centre after the ones at Bhubaneswar, Delhi, Hyderabad and Pune.
- With the increased expectations from citizens for online services and the number of e-Governance Projects being launched by the Government, the Data Centre requirements are growing exponentially. There is a need to set up strategic infrastructure that facilitates high availability, quick scalability, efficient management & optimized utilization of resources.
- To fulfil this requirement, NIC has set up state-of-the-art National Data Centres to provide services to the Government at all levels. These Data Centres combine round-the-clock operations and management of systems with onsite skilled personnel. The National Data Centres host Government websites, services and apps.

Governor’s rule in J&K
- The state of Jammu and Kashmir is all set to see a governor’s rule following the sudden break in ties between BJP and PDP and subsequent resignation of chief minister Mehbooba Mufti.
- The imposition of governor’s rule in J&K is slightly different than that in other states. In other states, the president’s rule is imposed under the Article 356 of Constitution of India. In J&K, governor’s rule is mentioned under Article 370 section 92 – ‘Provisions in case of failure of constitutional machinery in the State.’
Article 370 section 92 provides for provisions in case of failure of constitutional machinery in the State

The imposition of Article 356 of the Constitution on a State following the failure of constitutional machinery is called President’s Rule in India.

National targets for off-shore wind power

- Government has declared national targets for off-shore wind power.
- Medium target of 5 GW by 2022.
- Long term target of 30 GW by 2030.
- Offshore wind power would add a new element to the already existing basket of renewable energy for the country.
- The offshore wind farming is attractive because of several reasons such as stronger winds for efficient generation of power; no impact on real estate value of land as in case of onshore wind farming; its ability to fulfil the demand of the heavily populated coastal regions and no significant environment costs.

Pariwartan scheme

- The Rural Electrification Corporation has finalised a plan to revitalise stressed power sector assets in a joint venture with the Power Finance Corp and lenders. The plan is named Pariwartan and stands for power asset warehousing and revitalisation.
- Under the plan, the REC has proposed that a special purpose vehicle, a subsidiary company to securitise assets, be set up with PFC and the lending banks, which would be overlooked by an asset management company.
- The asset management firm will take on assets with a capacity of about 40,000 MW at net book value, and seek between 4-5% of equity from the National Infrastructure Investment Fund to run power projects under the scheme.
- The goal of this scheme is to run these power assets to service their current debt, and look at breaking even before the lenders decide to takeover or sell the assets.
- Most of the assets that would be brought under the scheme face coal supply shortages and suffer from a lack of power purchase agreements. The scheme looks to solve these issues by providing special coal supply assistance with assistance from the coal ministry.
- Electricity produced during a 48 month period under the plan would also be sold at power exchanges and short term power purchase agreements would be sought from state governments.

Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme

- Cabinet approves Mechanism for procurement of ethanol by Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) to carry out the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme- Revision of ethanol price for supply to Public Sector OMCs.
• Remunerative price to ethanol suppliers will help in reduction of cane farmer’s arrears, in the process contributing to minimizing difficulty of sugarcane farmers.
• Ethanol availability for EBP Programme is expected to increase significantly due to higher price for C heavy molasses based ethanol and enabling procurement of ethanol from B heavy molasses and sugarcane juice for first time.
• Increased ethanol blending in petrol has many benefits including reduction in import dependency, support to agricultural sector, more environmental friendly fuel, lesser pollution and additional income to farmers.
• It was launched by the Government in 2003 on pilot basis which has been subsequently extended to the Notified 21 States and 4 Union Territories to promote the use of alternative and environmental friendly fuels.
• It aims at blending ethanol with petrol, thereby bringing it under the category of biofuels and saving millions of dollars by cutting fuel imports.
• Ethanol Blended Petrol Programme is being implemented by the Ministry or Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs).
• This intervention also seeks to reduce import dependency for energy requirements and give boost to agriculture sector.
• India is the third largest consumer of energy in the world after China and the US. Currently, the country is dependent on imports for about 82.1% of its crude oil requirement and to the extent of about 44.4% in case of natural gas.
• India is expected to need 10 billion litres of ethanol annually to meet the 20% blending target in 2030 if petrol consumption continues to grow at the current pace. At present, the capacity stands at 1.55 billion litres a year.

Sagarmala
• The Ministry of Shipping’s flagship programme for port-led-prosperity ‘Sagarmala’ received the ‘Gold Award’ in infrastructure sector in the recently concluded 52nd Skoch Summit 2018. The Sagarmala Programme also received the ‘Order of Merit’ at the Summit.

The Sagarmala project seeks to develop a string of ports around India’s coast. The objective of this initiative is to promote “Port-led development” along India’s 7500 km long coastline.
• It aims to develop access to new development regions with intermodal solutions and promotion of the optimum modal split, enhanced connectivity with main economic centres and beyond through expansion of rail, inland water, coastal and road services.
• Nodal ministry: The Union Ministry of Shipping has been appointed as the nodal ministry for this initiative.

The Sagarmala initiative will address challenges by focusing on three pillars of development, namely:
• Supporting and enabling Port-led Development through appropriate policy and institutional interventions and providing for an institutional framework for ensuring inter-agency and ministries/departments/states’ collaboration for integrated development.
• Port Infrastructure Enhancement, including modernization and setting up of new ports.
• Efficient Evacuation to and from hinterland.

Ranking of Aspirational Districts
• NITI Aayog has launched the **first Delta ranking (incremental progress)** for the Aspirational Districts.
• The ranking is based on self-reported data of districts across five developmental areas of Health and Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Financial Inclusion and Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure. Districts to provide real-time data points by filling up the Champions of Change Dashboard.
• The ranking is also a tool to identify sectors and indicator specific challenges so that **Team India**, which is driving this programme, can take immediate corrective measures.
• This Delta ranking takes a step further and looks into specific aspects of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and analyses how districts have performed in last two months across important sectors.
• This grouping and positioning would aid the District Magistrates/Collectors to focus more on these sectors and improve their ranking in future.
• Dahod district of Gujarat improved 19.8 points to rank first.
• West Sikkim district in Sikkim stood second with 18.9 points.
• Bijapur district in Chhattisgarh is ranked 6th position.
• Launched in January this year, the ‘Transformation of Aspirational Districts’ programme aims to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts of the country.
• The broad contours of the programme are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level ‘Prabhari’ Officers & District Collectors), and Competition among districts driven by a Mass Movement or a Jan Andolan.
• With States as the main drivers, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.
• It is a mobile application launched by Indian Railways which helps to track and trace missing and abandoned children in India. The application has been developed by Bachpan Bachao Andolan & Capgemini.
• The app is multiuser where parents and citizens can upload pictures of children, and provide detailed description like name, birth mark, address, report to the police station, search and identify missing kids.
• Amazon Rekognition, web facial recognition service, is being used to identify missing kids. The app is available for both Android and iOS.

International Relations

PM’s Shangri-La Dialogue at Singapore
• PM visited Singapore and hailed it as an important Strategic partner.
• India and Singapore signed 8 agreements to deepen their economic and defense ties including an agreement on logistic cooperation.
• Agreement between their navies on mutual coordination.
• India has formalised a Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in nursing with Singapore which would allow nurses trained in seven nursing institutions across India to gain employment in Singapore.
• Singapore is our springboard to ASEAN.
• Prime Minister also called for equal access as a right under international law to the use of common spaces on sea and in the air that would require freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law.

IBSA summit
• 2018 IBSA Ministerial meet was recently held in Pretoria, South Africa.
• The outcome of this meeting was a document titled IBSA Declaration on South-South Cooperation. This document calls for contribution of each of the member of IBSA forum to contribute to greater understanding of development cooperation as a common endeavour of the global south.
• The establishment of IBSA was formalised by the Brasilia Declaration of 6 June 2003. IBSA is a coordinating mechanism amongst three emerging countries, three multi ethnic and multicultural democracies – India, Brazil and South Africa.

UN Security Council
• The UN General Assembly has elected Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa to serve as non-permanent members on the Security Council for two years starting in January.
• The five new members will replace Bolivia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands and Sweden on the council.
• There are 15 members on the UN Security Council, including the five permanent ones — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — and 10 non-permanent members, half of which are elected each year. Each candidate country needed to secure two thirds of the votes in order to clinch a seat.
• The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.
• Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions; it is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.
• The permanent members can veto any substantive Security Council resolution, including those on the admission of new member states or candidates for Secretary-General.

G7 bloc
• 44th annual G7 Summit: Quebec, Canada.
• G7 Summit is an event conducted annually where world leaders from seven powerful economies of the world, US, Canada, UK, France, Germany, Japan and Italy come together to discuss burning issues happening around the globe. They, by mutual understanding, also form policies or figure out remedies for the concerned issue. Canada has put forward the following 5 themes for this year’s summit:
  ▪ Investing in growth that works for everyone.
  ▪ Preparing for jobs of the future.
  ▪ Working together on climate change, oceans and clean energy.
  ▪ Building a more peaceful and secure world.
  ▪ Advancing gender equality and impacting women’s empowerment.

Maitri Irrigation Project
• India has extended a financial aid of about Rs 10 crore to Nepal for the construction of 2,700 shallow tube well irrigation systems to boost agricultural productivity. The assistance has been extended as part of the final payment for the Nepal-Bharat Maitri Irrigation Project.
• The project was launched in January last year to boost growth to the Himalayan nation’s agricultural sector through enhanced facilities.
• The project is aimed at installing 2,700 shallow tube wells in 12 districts of Nepal.
• The project would ensure all-season irrigation facility to about 8,115 hectares of farm land, augment productivity of wheat, rice and seasonal fruits, vegetables and other crops, it said.
• It would also uplift the socio-economic status of farming families in the 12 districts covered under the project.
India and Vietnam on Joint issue of postage stamp


Sanchi Stupa:
- Commissioned in 3rd century BCE, Expansion/addition/restoration works made in different periods.
  - Commissioned by Emperor Ashoka of the Maurya Dynasty.
  - Located 46 km north-east of Bhopal, the capital city of Madhya Pradesh, India.
  - Buddhist Art and Architecture.
  - It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Pho Minh Pagoda:
- The pagoda was originally built during the Ly Dynasty and later expanded in 1262 during the Tran Dynasty.
- It was a place for high-ranking mandarins and the aristocracy of the Tran Royal Court to worship and lead their religious life.

Assumption Island

- After a growing political opposition, Seychelles President Danny Faure has cancelled the agreement with India for the development of Assumption Island.
- Discussions regarding development of Assumption Island began in 2003, but were formalised in 2015. The deal was to include a 20-year access to the base, as well as permission to station some military personnel on ground with facilities on the island funded by India, owned by the Seychelles and jointly managed by both sides.
- The decision by the Seychelles President to drop the deal in the face of protests over a perceived loss of sovereignty is a blow to the government’s “SAGAR” (Security and Growth for All in the Region) programme, announced by PM Modi during a visit to Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) countries in March 2015.
- It also comes amid India’s troubles with another IOR country, the Maldives, where the government has demanded that India withdraw two helicopters, pilots and personnel from its atolls that had been sent there to help with maritime patrols.
- The deal is seen as important for India because it enhances its surveillance capabilities over the Indian Ocean.
- In concert with a coastal surveillance radar station already operating in Seychelles, a naval base at Agalega in Mauritius, a coastal radar station in Madagascar, an array of radars in Maldives, and a strong presence in the littoral waters of Mozambique, Delhi’s acquisition of facilities on one of the 67 raised coral islands of the Aldabra group will create an impermeable surveillance net in the southwestern and central Indian Ocean.
- Assumption Island’s position dominating the Mozambique channel, a key sea lane for merchant ships, adds to India’s kitty a second potential choke point after the Strait of
Malacca; the latter is dominated by India’s augmented presence in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands chain as well as with naval agreements with Vietnam and Singapore.

**SAARC fund**
- Thimpu-based SAARC Development Fund (SDF) will soon be launching a social enterprise development programme (SEDP) to fund 80 entities annually across eight-member states, including India.
- The SEDP is being launched as part of its SAARC Development Fund’s social window.
- The programme will be implemented in all the SAARC member states with the objective of identifying and building social enterprises by using a mix of grants and concessional returnable capital.
- The programme intends to fund around 80 enterprises across the 8 SAARC member states annually.
- SDF which was established by the heads of the eight SAARC Member States in April 2010. SDF have three Windows. They are Social, Economic and Infrastructure Windows.
- Its governing council comprises finance ministers of the SAARC countries.

**UN Human Rights Council**
- The United States withdrew from the United Nations Human Rights Council accusing it of a “chronic bias against Israel”. Washington’s withdrawal is the latest US rejection of multilateral engagement after it pulled out of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.
- The US problem with the body is twofold: the make-up of its membership and what it considers a disproportionate focus on allegations of human rights abuses committed by its ally, Israel.
- In 2006, when the council was established, then-US President George W Bush refused to join because the organisation included members accused by Washington of human rights violations.
- The country changed tack under the former Obama administration, but the ascent of Trump put Washington’s continued membership back under the spotlight.
- The UN body was established in 2006 with the aim of promoting and protecting human rights around the globe, as well as investigating alleged human rights violations.
- It is made up of 47 member states, which are selected by the UN General Assembly on a staggered basis each year for three-year-long terms.
- Members meet around three times a year to debate human rights issues and pass non-binding resolutions and recommendations by majority vote.
- The council also carries out the Universal Periodic Review of all UN member states, which allows civil society groups to bring accusations of human rights violations in member states to the attention of the UN.
India 2+2 Dialogue
- The inaugural U.S.-India 2+2 Dialogue will take place in the month of July.
- The new dialogue format was agreed to between the two sides during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington D.C. in June, 2017.
- The dialogue mechanism includes defence and foreign ministers of the two countries.
- It replaced India-U.S. Strategic and Commercial Dialogue for trade and commercial issues.
- The objective of this dialogue mechanism is to raise defence and security issues to the forefront and centre of the relationship between India and the U.S.
- It is aimed at enhancing peace and stability across the Indo-Pacific region by elevating strategic consultations in the dialogue.
- The shared priorities include job creation, improving the business and investment climate and sustaining a rules-based global order.
- The U.S. has strategic consultations in this format with key partners and allies including Australia, Japan and the Philippines.

COMCASA and BECA
- The US side has pressed the Indian side to sign the two foundational agreements for defence cooperation: Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), earlier known as the Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA); and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA).
- India and the US have so far signed only one foundational agreement: Logistical Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA).
- COMCASA is a “technology enabler” to help transfer high-tech avionics, encrypted communication and electronic systems to India as well as ensure secrecy of its C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) systems from leaking to other countries like Russia. This agreement would allow the interoperability of India and United States equipments.
- BECA refers to Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation. This agreement would facilitate exchange of geospatial information between India and United States for both military and civilian use.

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)
- The board of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has approved $100 million investment in the National Infrastructure and Investment Fund (NIIF).
- Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a multilateral development bank with a mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia and beyond.
• It is headquartered in Beijing.
• It commenced operations in January 2016 and has now grown to 84 approved members from around the world.
• By investing in sustainable infrastructure and other productive sectors today, it aims to connect people, services and markets that over time will impact the lives of billions and build a better future.

Health

Health insurance scheme for journalists - Odisha
• Under the scheme, journalists from across the state will get health insurance coverage up to Rs 2 lakh.
• At least five members of a journalist’s family would be covered under the scheme.
• The scribes will get their health insurance card from the District Information and Public Relations Officer (DIPRO) in their respective districts.
• Gopabandhu Das (1877–1928) was a social worker, reformer, political activist, journalist, poet and essayist from Odisha. He was popularly known as Utkalamani (Jewel of Utkal or Orissa).

JANAUSHADHI SUVIDHA
• The government has launched the ‘JANAUSHADHI SUVIDHA’, the Oxo-biodegradable Sanitary Napkin, under the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP). The affordable sanitary napkins will now become available at over 3600 Janaushadhi Kendras functional in 33 States/UTs across India.
• Jan Aushadhi Suvidha comes with a special additive, which makes Sanitary napkin biodegradable when it comes in contact with oxygen after being discarded. This would ensure ‘Swachhta, Swasthya and Suvidha’ for the underprivileged Women of India and go a long way in the achievement of vision of Affordable and Quality Healthcare for All.
• The average price of sanitary napkins available in the market today is around Rs. 8 per pad, whereas now with the launch of the SUVIDHA napkins at Rs. 2.50 per pad, this will go a long way in making the basic hygiene requirement aid for Women affordable for the underprivileged sections.
• This is one of the most important requirement in ensuring the Health Security to that section of Women in India who still use unhygienic aids during menstrual period due to non-affordability of some of the popular brands of sanitary napkins available in the market today. Such unhygienic aids cause fungal infections, Reproductive Tract Infection, Urinary Tract Infection, Cervical cancer and also make women vulnerable to infertility.
• According to the National Family Health Survey 2015-16, about 58% of women aged between 15 to 24 years use locally prepared napkins, sanitary napkins and tampons. Further, about 78% women in urban areas use hygienic methods of protection during menstrual period; only 48% women in rural areas have access to clean sanitary napkins.

• ‘Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana’ is a campaign launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Govt. Of India, to provide quality medicines at affordable prices to the masses through special kendra’s known as Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra. Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra (PMBJK) have been set up to provide generic drugs, which are available at lesser prices but are equivalent in quality and efficacy as expensive branded drugs.

• Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI) is the implementing agency of PMBJP. BPPI (Bureau of Pharma Public Sector Undertakings of India) has been established under the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Govt. of India, with the support of all the CPSUs.

Fortified rice

• Fortification is the practice of deliberately increasing the content of an essential micronutrient, i.e. vitamins and minerals (including trace elements) in a food, so as to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply and provide a public health benefit with minimal risk to health.

• Rice fortification is the practice of increasing the content of essential micronutrients in rice and to improve the nutritional quality of the rice.

• The government is planning to provide fortified rice (enriched with essential vitamins and minerals) to all the poor under National Food Security Act (NFSA) across the country, which would cost about Rs 12,000 to Rs 14,000 crore annually. To begin with the scheme is likely to cover the 115 ‘aspirational’ districts across the country.

• The proposal is being prepared with the support of Niti Aayog under the National Nutrition Mission.

• Rice is the world’s most important staple food. An estimated 2 billion people eat rice every day, forming the mainstay of diets across large of Asia and Africa.

• Regular milled rice is low in micronutrients and serves primarily as a source of carbohydrate only. The fortification of rice is a major opportunity to improve nutrition.

• Fortified rice are contains Vitamin A, Vitamin B1, Vitamin B12, Folic Acid, Iron and Zinc.

• Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has formulated a comprehensive regulation on fortification of foods namely ‘Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2016’. These regulations set the standards for food fortification and encourage the production, manufacture, distribution, sale and consumption of fortified foods.
Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis
- India is hosting the 10th meeting of Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis. India has highest burden of Lymphatic Filariasis and there is need of taking leadership role to Eliminate lymphatic filariasis.
- Theme: Celebrating progress towards elimination: Voices from the field on overcoming programme challenges.

Lymphatic Filariasis:
- LF or commonly known as Elephantiasis is one of the oldest and most debilitating neglected disease, which is currently endemic in 73 countries of the world, including India.
- LF is a devastating parasitic infection spread by mosquitoes. The parasites are thread-like worms (filariae) that develop in and then damage the human lymphatic system and associated tissues.
- It is usually contracted in childhood, often before the age of five. The lymphatic system is a network of vessels and specialised tissues that are essential to the maintaining the overall fluid balance and health of organs and limbs and importantly are a major component of the body’s immune defence system.

Effects:
- The damage caused by the filaria or adult worms living in the lymphatic system upset this delicate fluid balance and fluid remains in the tissues causing chronic swelling usually of the lower limbs.
- The disease affects the poorest population in society, particularly those living in areas with poor water, sanitation and hygiene. LF does not kill the affected people, but may cause permanent disfigurement, reduced productivity and social stigma.

About GAELF:
It is an alliance of partners from 72 LF endemic national country programmes, NGOs, private sectors, academic and research institutes and international development agencies that assists WHO’s Global Programme to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis.

Ayushman Bharat health scheme
- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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 kucharoof; 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.

- This will lead to increased access to quality health and medication. In addition, the unmet needs of the population which remained hidden due to lack of financial resources will be catered to. This will lead to timely treatments, improvements in health outcomes, patient satisfaction, improvement in productivity and efficiency, job creation thus leading to improvement in quality of life.

**International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)**

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has released its new International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11).

- The ICD is the global health information standard for mortality and morbidity statistics.

- ICD is increasingly used in clinical care and research to define diseases and study disease patterns, as well as manage health care, monitor outcomes and allocate resources. ICD has been translated into 43 languages.

- More than 100 countries use the system to report mortality data, a primary indicator of health status. This system helps to monitor death and disease rates worldwide and measure progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

- About 70% of the world’s health expenditures (USD $ 3.5 billion) are allocated using ICD for reimbursement and resource allocation.
**ICD-11** identifies health trends and statistics worldwide, and contains around 55,000 unique codes for injuries, diseases and causes of death.

**ICD-11**, which has been over a decade in the making, provides significant improvements on previous versions.

Also for the first time, it is completely electronic and has a much more user-friendly format. And there has been unprecedented involvement of health care workers who have joined collaborative meetings and submitted proposals.

**National Health Resource Repository (NHRR)**

- The Union ministry of health and family welfare has launched the National Health Resource Repository (NHRR).
- The NHRR project aims to strengthen evidence-based decision making and develop a platform for citizens and provider-centric services by creating a robust, standardised and secured Information Technology (IT)-enabled repository of India’s healthcare resources.
- **The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is the project technology partner** for providing data security.
- NHRR shall be the registry of authentic, standardised and updated geo-spatial data of all public and private healthcare.
- This resource repository shall enable advanced research towards ongoing and forthcoming healthcare challenges arising from other determinants of health such as disease and the environment.
- It shall also enhance the coordination between central and state government for optimisation of health resources, making ‘live’ and realistic state project implementation plans (PIPs) and improving accessibility of data at all levels, including state heads of departments, and thus decentralise the decision making at district and state level.
- Some key benefits of the NHRR project are to create a reliable, unified registry of country’s healthcare resources showing the distribution pattern of health facilities and services between cities and rural areas.
- Additionally, it shall generate real-world intelligence to identify gaps in health and service ratios, and ensure judicious health resource allocation and management.
- It shall also identify key areas of improvement by upgrading existing health facilities or establishing new health facilities keeping in view the population density, geographic nature, health condition, distance.

**Software to help strengthen the implementation of Poshan Abhiyan**

- ICDS-CAS (Common Application Software)- It is a specially designed software to help in strengthening service delivery and improving nutrition outcomes through effective monitoring and timely interventions in POSHAN Abhiyaan.
• The POSHAN Abhiyaan empowers the frontline functionaries i.e. Anganwadi Workers and Lady Supervisors by providing them with Smartphones. The Common Application Software (ICDS-CAS) especially developed for this purpose enables data capture, ensures assigned service delivery and prompts for interventions wherever required. This data is then available in near real time to the supervisory staff from Sector, Block, District, State to National level through a Dashboard, for monitoring.

• POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission) was launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister on 8th March, 2018 in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan.

• The programme through use of technology, targeted approach and convergence strives to reduce the level of Stunting, Under-nutrition, Anemia and Low Birth Weight in Children, as also, focus on Adolescent Girls, Pregnant Women & Lactating Mothers, thus holistically addressing malnutrition.

Ban on Oxytocin

• The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has restricted the manufacture of Oxytocin formulations for domestic use to public sector only. Coupled with this, it has also banned the import of Oxytocin and its formulations. The order comes into effect from July 1.

• Only Karnataka Antibiotics & Pharmaceuticals Ltd. (KAPL), a public sector company, will manufacture this drug for domestic use. It will supply the drug to registered hospitals and clinics in public and private sector directly.

• The drug is misused in the dairy industry where livestock is injected with Oxytocin to make them release milk at a time convenient to farmers.

• Oxytocin is also used to increase the size of vegetables such as pumpkins, watermelons, eggplants, gourds, and cucumbers.

• 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.

• 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.
Social Issues

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)

- Indian Railways and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) have jointly launched an awareness campaign on Protection of children in contact with Railways.
- This is an endeavour to spread awareness about large number of vulnerable children coming in contact with Railways as passengers or abandoned, trafficked, run away children separated from their family.
- The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) was set up in March 2007 under the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005.
- It works under the administrative control of the Ministry of Women & Child Development.
- The Child is defined as a person in the 0 to 18 years age group.
- The Commission’s Mandate is to ensure that all Laws, Policies, Programmes, and Administrative Mechanisms are in consonance with the Child Rights perspective as enshrined in the Constitution of India and also the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gramin Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY)

- Ministry of Shipping in association with Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gramin Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY), Ministry of Rural Development recently conducted a workshop on “Skill Development in the Port and Maritime Sector”.
- India is one of the leading suppliers of seafarers in the world and now want to be the leading supplier for all talent in the Port and Maritime sector. Skill Development in the Port & Maritime sector is an opportunity to improve India’s coastal areas, usher in port led prosperity and provide the world with skilled youth.
- The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) announced the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) Antyodaya Diwas, on 25th September 2014. DDU-GKY is a part of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), tasked with the dual objectives of adding diversity to the incomes of rural poor families and cater to the career aspirations of rural youth.
- DDU-GKY is uniquely focused on rural youth between the ages of 15 and 35 years from poor families. As a part of the Skill India campaign, it plays an instrumental role in supporting the social and economic programs of the government like the Make In India, Digital India, Smart Cities and Start-Up India, Stand-Up India campaigns.

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM)

• Conferring awards to best performing SHG and Village Organizations was initiated by DAY-NRLM in 2016-17. The National Awards to the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are intended to provide public recognition to the outstanding performance of the community institutions and incorporate a sense of pride among the poor community members.

• Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) was launched by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India in June 2011. The Mission aims at creating efficient and effective institutional platforms of the rural poor enabling them to increase household income through sustainable livelihood enhancements and improved access to financial services.

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

• PMMVY is implemented by the Ministry of Women & Child Development in collaboration with State Governments.

• It is Centrally Sponsored Scheme under which the cost sharing ratio between the Centre and the States & UTs with Legislature is 60:40, for North-Eastern States & three Himalayan States, it is 90:10 and 100% Central assistance for Union Territories without Legislature.

• It is a conditional cash transfer scheme for pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for first two live births.

• It provides a partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare and to provide conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices.

• In 2013, the scheme was brought under the National Food Security Act, 2013 to implement the provision of cash maternity benefit of ₹6,000 stated in the Act.

• The routine check up of pregnant women is held on 9th of every month.

Swachh Iconic Places
• Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) is an initiative of Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation under Swachh Bharat Mission.

• Initiated as a project to implement Prime Minister’s vision to take iconic places and their surroundings to higher standards of Swachhata, so that all visitors benefit and also take away home the message of cleanliness, Swachh Iconic Places is now in its second phase.

• SIP is a truly collaborative project with three other central Ministries: Urban Development, Culture, Tourism; all levels in the concerned States and more importantly, Public Sector and Private companies as partners.
The government has selected ten new iconic sites under Phase III of the flagship project Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) of the Swachh Bharat Mission.


Phase II included Gangotri, Yamunotri, Mahakaleshwar Temple, Charminar, Convent and Church of St. Francis of Assissi, Kalady, Gommateswara, BaidyanathDham, Gaya Tirth and Somnath temple.

Phase III includes RaghavendraSwamy Temple (Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh); Hazardwari Palace (Murshidabad, West Bengal); Brahma Sarovar Temple (Kurukshetra, Haryana); VidurKuti (Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh); Mana village (Chamoli, Uttarakhand); Pangong Lake (Leh-Ladakh, J&K); Nagvasuki Temple (Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh); ImaKeithal/market (Imphal, Manipur); Sabarimala Temple (Kerala); and Kanvashram (Uttarakhand).

**Swajal Scheme**

Swajal is a community owned drinking water programme for sustained drinking water supply.

Under the scheme, 90% of the project cost will be taken care by the Government and the remaining 10% of the project cost will be contributed by the community. The Operations and management of the project will be taken care by the local villagers.

The government recently launched Swajal schemes in 115 aspirational districts of the country. It will involve an outlay of Rs 700 crores through flexible-funds under the existing National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) budget.

The NRDWP was started in 2009, with a major emphasis on ensuring sustainability (source) of water availability in terms of potability, adequacy, convenience, affordability and equity. NRDWP is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with 50: 50 fund sharing between the Centre and the States.

**'Women Wizards Rule Tech' programme**

It is a programme for women techies unveiled by NASSCOM. It aims to increase the number of women in senior levels in the Information Technology (IT) industry.

The programme is designed to support women who are moving up the career ladder, while also paving the way for potential leaders of the future.

The initiative will aid women techies in core technologies like IT-Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES), Business Process Management (BPM), product and research and development (R&D) sectors by equipping them with the skills required for an edge in their career.

The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) is a trade association of Indian Information Technology (IT) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry. Established in 1988, NASSCOM is a non-profit organisation.
Suryashakti Kisan Yojana (SKY) scheme
- In an attempt to promote solar energy, the Gujarat government has announced Suryashakti Kisan Yojana (SKY) scheme under which farmers would be encouraged to generate electricity and sell their surplus to power distribution companies.
- Under the first phase of project, the state government would provide financial assistance to 12,400 farmers out of the state’s total 15 lakh farmers to generate an estimated 175 MW of power.
- The state government and the Centre would jointly share 60% of the cost of installing a solar generating unit in the fields, while the farmers would need to chip in only 5%. The remaining 35% would be in the form of a loan by the state government at the rate of four to 4.5%.
- The government would also enter in a 25-year power purchase agreement with the farmers. Till the farmers repay their loan, the distribution companies would buy electricity from them at the rate of Rs 7 per unit and at Rs 3.5 per unit once the loans are settled. After that, the farmers would get ownership of the solar system.

Van Dhan Vikas Kendras
- Government proposes to set up 3000 Van Dhan Kendras involving 30,000 SHGs across the country.
- The initiative aims to promote MFPs-centric livelihood development of tribal gatherers and artisans. It mainstreams the tribal community by promoting primary level value addition to MFP at grassroots level. Through this initiative, the share of tribals in the value chain of Non-Timber Forest Produce is expected to rise from the present 20% to around 60%.
- The scheme will be implemented through Ministry of Tribal Affairs as Nodal Department at the Central Level and TRIFED as Nodal Agency at the National Level.
- At State level, the State Nodal Agency for MFPs and the District collectors are envisaged to play a pivot role in scheme implementation at grassroot level.
- Locally the Kendras are proposed to be managed by a Managing Committee (an SHG) consisting of representatives of Van Dhan SHGs in the cluster.
- Composition: As per the plan, TRIFED will facilitate establishment of MFP-led multi-purpose Van Dhan Vikas Kendras, a cluster of 10 SHGs comprising of 30 tribal MFP gatherers each, in the tribal areas.
- Minor Forest Produce (MFP) is a major source of livelihood for tribals living in forest areas. The importance of MFPs for this section of the society can be gauged from the fact that around 100 million forest dwellers depend on MFPs for food, shelter, medicines and cash income.
Solar Charkha Mission

- The Solar Charkha Mission will generate employment in rural areas and contribute to the green economy. The mission will entail a subsidy of Rs 550 crore in the initial two years for 50 clusters and every cluster will employ 400 to 2000 artisans.
- The scheme also aims at linking five crore women across the country to the initiative. The mission is expected to create one lakh jobs during the first two years.

Defence and Space

Agni-5 Ballistic Missile

- India recently successfully test-fired its indigenously developed nuclear capable Long Range Ballistic Missile Agni-5 from Dr Abdul Kalam Island off the Odisha coast.
- It is a surface-to-surface missile which can carry nuclear warhead weighing 1.5 tonnes to a distance of over 5,000 km and is the longest missile in India's arsenal capable of reaching most parts of China.
- The missile features many new indigenously-developed technologies, including the very high accuracy Ring Laser Gyro based Inertial Navigation System (RINS), and the most modern and accurate Micro Navigation System (MINS) which improves the accuracy of the missile.
- Agni series: At present, India has in its armoury the Agni series — Agni-1 with 700 km range, Agni-2 with 2,000 km range, Agni-3 and Agni-4 with 2,500 km to more than 3,500 km range.
- With this missile, India has joined an elite club of nations that possess the ICBM launch capability. Only the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council – China, France, Russia, the United States and Britain, along with Israel, have so far possessed such long-range missiles.
Geo-Intelligence Asia – 2018

- The Eleventh edition of GeoIntelligence Asia 2018 is being held in New Delhi. It is organised by GeoSpatial Media and Communication with Directorate General of Information System as Knowledge Partners and Military Survey as Co-organisers.
- The seminar brings together the military, security officials including BSF and Police Forces, Government and industry together to examine the latest technology solutions and on the critical role of geospatial technology in military and security applications.
- **Theme:** ‘GeoSpatial: A Force Multiplier for Defence and Industrial Security’.
- Geospatial intelligence is a critical foundation for many aspects of defense and internal security. It offers the capability of monitoring, predicting and countering threats, while helping strategize and support various field operations.
- The use of big data, advanced geospatial analytics software and sophisticated imaging technologies from (very) high-resolution remote sensing satellites, UAVs and other sensors, enables seamless flow of information in pre-, real-time and post-combat operations.

Cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space

- The Union Cabinet was recently apprised of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between India represented by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and Oman represented by the Ministry of Transport and Communications on Cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, in February, 2018 at Muscat (Oman’s port capital).
- This MoU shall enable the following areas of cooperation such as, space science, technology and applications including remote sensing of the earth; satellite based navigation; Space science and planetary exploration; use of spacecraft and space systems and ground system; and application of space technology.

Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle

- Union Cabinet has given the financial approval of Rs 10,911 crore for the launch of 30 PSLV and 10 GSLV Mk III rockets in the next four years.
- **PSLV** has emerged as a versatile launch vehicle to carry out Sun-Synchronous Polar Orbit (SSPO), Geo-synchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO) and low inclination Low Earth Orbit (LEO) missions.
- It is the first Indian launch vehicle to be equipped with liquid stages.
- The operationalisation of PSLV has made the country self-reliant in the launching capability of satellites for earth observation, disaster management, navigation and space sciences.

GSLV Mk III rockets:
GSLV Mk III is a three-stage heavy lift launch vehicle developed by ISRO. The vehicle has two solid strap-ons, a core liquid booster and a cryogenic upper stage.

GSLV Mk III is designed to carry 4 ton class of satellites into Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO) or about 10 tons to Low Earth Orbit (LEO), which is about twice the capability of GSLV Mk II.

This is India’s first fully functional rocket to be tested with a cryogenic engine that uses liquid propellants — liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen.

Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)

- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has approved procurement of high powered radars for the Indian Air Force and air cushion vehicles for the Army and the Coast Guard together worth over ₹5,500 crore.
- The 12 high power radars will be procured indigenously under the ‘Buy (Indian) IDDM’ category.
- To counter corruption and speed up decision-making in military procurement, the government of India in 2001 decided to set up an integrated DAC. It is headed by the Defence Minister.
- The objective of the DAC is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces, in terms of capabilities sought, and time frame prescribed, by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.
- The DAC is responsible to give policy guidelines to acquisitions, based on long-term procurement plans. It also clears all acquisitions, which includes both imported and those produced indigenously or under a foreign license.
- ‘Buy (Indian-IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured))’ has been introduced in Defence Procurement Procedure-2016 and the same has been accorded top most priority for procurement of capital equipment.
- Under the new category, indigenously designed equipment with 40% indigenous content (IC), or equipment not necessarily designed in-house but having a 60% IC, is intended for procurement from the local industry.

‘EPIC’ planet

- Scientists from ISRO have spotted for the first time a distant planet six times bigger than Earth and revolving around a Sun-like star about 600 light years away.
The planet has been named EPIC 211945201b (or K2-236b). The host star is named EPIC 211945201 or K2-236.

- The planet is smaller in size than Saturn and bigger than Neptune. Its mass is about 27 times Earth’s and six times that of Earth at radius. The scientists estimate that over 60% of its mass could be made up of heavy elements like ice, silicates and iron.
- With this discovery India has joined a handful of countries which have discovered planets around stars.
- The discovery was made using a PRL-designed spectrograph, PARAS, to measure and confirm the mass of the new planet.
- PARAS is an echelle spectrograph (with resolution of 60,000) designed and developed by the members of the Astronomy and Astrophysics Division of PRL.
- The primary aim of PARAS is to search for planets around a sample of 100s of Dwarf main-sequence G,K,M type stars within a volume of 100pc using the Simultaneous ThAr calibration technique. It has wavelength coverage of 400nm to 680nm.

**Pinaka rocket**

- The indigenous Pinaka rocket system of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) is being evolved into a precision-guided missile, with enhanced range and accuracy to hit its targets.
- The rocket has been developed by the Armament cluster of the DRDO, with a lead from Pune-based Armament Research and Development Establishment (ARDE).
- It is used to neutralize the enemy’s positions that are strategically important for the enemy. The advanced versions of this system can also be used to conduct surgical strikes even without entering into the enemy area.
- The launcher can fire 12 rockets with 1.2 tonnes of high explosives within 44 seconds and destroy a target area of 4-square km at a time.
- Pinaka is capable of working in different modes – autonomous mode, stand-alone mode, remote mode and manual mode.
- The second variant of Pinaka, known as Mark-II, has a maximum range of 75 km.
- DRDO is working with Israel’s IMI to develop Pinaka Mark-III which will use IMI’s Trajectory Correction System (TCS) that will enhance the accuracy of the attack.

**Unispace+50**

- UNISPACE+50 was held recently to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and highlight past and future Agency activities in support of the UN’s space-related actions.
- The event aimed at shaping the UN’s comprehensive ‘Space2030’ agenda. The Space2030 agenda will map out how spaceflight and space-related activities can help achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), addressing overarching, long-
term development concerns, through the peaceful exploration and uses of outer space.

**NASA Plans to Protect Earth From Giant Asteroids**
- NASA has released a report outlining the federal government’s response in the event that an asteroid or comet flying through space should ever impact Earth.
- “The National Near-Earth Object Preparedness Strategy and Action Plan” shows how the U.S. federal government would protect and prepare the planet for such an event, and outlines five strategic goals for reducing the risk of an impact.

**India, Bangladesh Navies to join hands**
- India and Bangladesh have agreed to institute a Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) as an annual feature between the two Navies.
- The commencement of CORPAT is a major step towards the enhanced operational interaction between both Navies.
- It is aimed to consolidate bilateral defense relations between India and Bangladesh and to explore new avenues for naval cooperation.

**China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**
- India has again opposed the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a part of Beijing’s One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, as it “encroaches” on sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- CPEC is clutch of projects valued at $51 billion project which aims at rapidly expanding and upgrading Pakistan’s infrastructure and strengthening the economic ties between the People’s Republic of China (China) and Pakistan.
- The 3,000 km-long China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) consisting of highways, railways, and pipelines is the latest irritant in the India–China relationship.
- CPEC eventually aims at linking the city of Gwadar in South Western Pakistan to China’s North Western region Xinjiang through a vast network of highways and railways.
- The proposed project will be financed by heavily-subsidised loans, that will be disbursed to the Government of Pakistan by Chinese banking giants such as Exim Bank of China, China Development Bank, and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China.
- Indian participation would inextricably be linked to the country’s legitimate claims on PoK.
- CPEC rests on a Chinese plan to secure and shorten its supply lines through Gwadar with an enhanced presence in the Indian Ocean. Hence, it is widely believed that upon CPEC’s fruition, an extensive Chinese presence will undermine India’s influence in the Indian Ocean.
ENVIRONMENT

Odisha beach is Asia’s first to get ‘Blue Flag’ tag
- Chandrabhaga beach on the Konark coast of Odisha will be the first in Asia to get the Blue Flag certification.
- Blue flag project: Launched in December 2017 by the Environment Ministry, the prime objective of the project is to enhance standards of cleanliness, upkeep and basic amenities at beaches. Under the project, each state or union territory has been asked to nominate a beach which will be funded through the ongoing Integrated Coastal Management Programme.
- To achieve the Blue Flag standards, a beach has to strictly comply with 33 environment and tourism-related conditions. The standards were established by the Copenhagen-based Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) in 1985. For example- a beach must be plastic-free and equipped with a waste management system. Clean water should be available for tourists, apart from international amenities. The beach should have facilities for studying the environmental impact around the area.
- Twelve more beaches in the country are being developed by the Society for Integrated Coastal Management (SICOM), an Environment Ministry’s body working for the management of coastal areas, in accordance with the Blue Flag standards.

Ensemble Prediction Systems (EPS)
- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has commissioned two very high resolution (12 km grid scale) state-of-the-art global Ensemble Prediction Systems (EPS) for generating operational 10-days probabilistic forecasts of weather. The EPS involves the generation of multiple forecasts using slightly varying initial conditions.
- Ensemble forecasting provides localised predictions of a 12 km resolution compared to 23 kilometers in the earlier system.
- The new model has been developed jointly by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology and National Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting.
- With this new model, India joins the US with a model that predicts with a 12 km resolution. Only the ‘European Center for Medium Range Weather Forecast’ has a, better, nine-kilometer resolution.

Resource Efficiency Cell
- MoEFCC and TERI have entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to set up a resource efficiency cell in the Ministry.
- The main objectives of the Cell are to provide a platform to mainstream resource efficiency in public policy.
• It aims to achieve this through coordinated thinking among the various relevant Ministries and agencies for promoting resource efficiency in the use of materials in the country.
• It also aims to ensure a ‘systems’ thinking based on materials, products and processes, apart from enabling the preparation of an overarching resource efficiency policy for India and coordinated sectoral policies and regulatory mechanisms.
• NITI Aayog in collaboration with the European Union delegation to India have released the Strategy on Resource Efficiency. The strategy aims to promote resource efficiency in India.
• Resource efficiency very simply put is making more with fewer materials. In practice, through a life-cycle approach, it leads to minimizing impact on environment & the associated societal burdens, transforming ‘waste’ into ‘resources’ fostering circular economy, and strengthening resource security.
• Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy are important goals and central principles for achieving sustainable development. Sustainability is a global priority and SDGs commitment and 11th Five year plan also clearly enunciate importance of Resource efficiency (RE).

**Ganga Praharis**

• A group of 427 trained volunteers, called Ganga Praharis, are reaching to each and every house in areas along river Ganga to educate them about the importance of protecting river’s bio-diversity. They are spread over Ganga basin states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal.
• They are new grassroots-level volunteers to protect the bio-diversity of river Ganga. They are roped-in by Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun as part of the “Biodiversity Conservation and Ganga Rejuvenation” project being sponsored by National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) under the aegis of the Namami Gange programme.
• Ganga Praharis are well trained in ecological monitoring of Ganga aqua life, plantation techniques, awareness creation and community mobilization. They are trained through a series of national, state and site level workshops in diverse skills such as ecological surveys, rescue and rehabilitation of aquatic species, awareness meetings, social interactions and green livelihood skills.
• The Ganga Praharis will be linked to various local environmental authorities, non-governmental stakeholders in their respective states and various other national, academic and research institutions for their capacity development.

**Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABHY)**
• The World Bank has approved Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABHY). The scheme is to be implemented over a period of five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23, with World Bank assistance.
• It is a Rs.6000 crore Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation. The scheme aims to improve ground water management in priority areas in the country through community participation.
• The priority areas identified under the scheme fall in the states of Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. These States represent about 25% of the total number of over-exploited, critical and semi-critical blocks in terms of ground water in India.
• They also cover two major types of groundwater systems found in India – alluvial and hard rock aquifers- and have varying degrees of institutional readiness and experience in groundwater management.
• Funds under the scheme will be provided to the states for strengthening the institutions responsible for ground water governance, as well as for encouraging community involvement for improving ground water management to foster behavioural changes that promote conservation and efficient use of water.
• The implementation of the scheme is expected to have several positive outcomes like better understanding of the ground water regime, focused and integrated community based approach for addressing issues related to ground water depletion, sustainable ground water management through convergence of on-going and new schemes, adoption of efficient water use practices to reduce ground water use for irrigation and augmentation of ground water resources in targeted areas.

Inter-Linking of Rivers
• Union Cabinet was recently apprised of the progress report of Special Committee for Inter-Linking of Rivers.
• The progress report on interlinking of rivers has been submitted to the Cabinet in compliance of the Hon’ble Supreme Court judgement. The court had directed the Union Government of India to constitute a Special Committee for Interlinking of Rivers.
• 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.

Benefits associated:
• Redistribution: India receives most of its rain during monsoon season most of it falls in northern and eastern part of India, the amount of rainfall in southern and western part are comparatively low, thus suffering from shortage of water. Interlinking of rivers will help these areas to have water throughout the year.
• **Boost to agriculture**: Interlinking of rivers will be a practical solution for the problem of monsoon dependency.

• **Disaster mitigation**: The Ganga Basin, Brahmaputra basin sees floods almost every year. In order to avoid this, the water from these areas has to be diverted to other areas where there is scarcity of water.

• **Transportation**: This can be used as inland waterways and which helps in faster movement of goods from one place to other, thus providing commercial usage.

• **Employment generation**: Interlinking also creates a new occupation for people living in and around these canals and it can be the main areas of fishing in India.

**Concerns associated:**

- Interlinking of rivers will cause huge amount of distortion in the existing environment. In order to create canals and reservoirs, there will be mass deforestation. This will have impact on rains and in turn affect the whole cycle of life.
- 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.
- Due to interlinking of rivers, there will be decrease in the amount of fresh water entering seas and this will cause a serious threat to the marine life system and will be a major ecological disaster.
- Due to the creation of Canals and Reservoirs, huge amount of area which is occupied by the people will be submerged leading to displacement of people and government will have to spend more to rehabilitate these people.
- High cost of the project.

**Dam Rehabilitation & Improvement Project (DRIP)**

- The Expenditure Finance Committee (EFC) has approved revised cost estimate of Dam Rehabilitation & Improvement Project (DRIP) for Rs. 3466 crore and has extended time period for conclusion till June, 2020.

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

- The Central Dam Safety Organisation of Central Water Commission, assisted by a Consulting firm, is coordinating and supervising the Project implementation.

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

- The project will also promote new technologies and improve Institutional capacities for dam safety evaluation and implementation at the Central and State levels and in some identified premier academic and research institutes of the country.

- **The project development objectives of DRIP are**: (i) to improve the safety and performance of selected existing dams and associated appurtenances in a sustainable
manner, and (ii) to strengthen the dam safety institutional setup in participating states as well as at central level.

**FAME scheme**

- With an aim to promote eco-friendly vehicles, the government had launched the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles in India (FAME-India) scheme in 2015. It was launched by union ministry for heavy industries.
- The FAME India Scheme is aimed at incentivising all vehicle segments, including two-wheelers, three wheeler auto, passenger four-wheeler vehicle, light commercial vehicles and buses. The scheme covers hybrid and electric technologies like a strong hybrid, plug-in hybrid and battery electric vehicles.
- FAME India – Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric vehicles in India – is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan. The scheme envisages Rs 795 crore support in the first two fiscals. It is being administered by the Heavy Industries Ministry.
- Lately, discussions on the FAME-II scheme, a subsidy programme for purchase of electric vehicles in India, seems to have hit another roadblock after Finance Ministry returned the scheme’s draft proposal raising questions on funding and policy structure. Finance Ministry has sought a more comprehensive scheme framework.

**Composite Water Management Index (CWMI)**

- NITI Aayog has released its report on Composite Water Management Index (CWMI).
- The Composite Water Management Index report is a step in a direction that aims to create awareness among people and governments about the realities of water crisis in the country.
- CWMI aims to enable effective water management in Indian states in the face of this growing crisis.
- The index would provide useful information for the states and concerned Central ministries and departments enabling them to formulate and implement suitable strategies for better management of water resources.
- NITI Aayog has ranked all states in the index on the composite water management, comprising 9 broad sectors with 28 different indicators covering various aspects of ground water, restoration of water bodies, irrigation, farm practices, drinking water, policy and governance.
- The report ranks Gujarat at the top in managing its water resources in the reference year (2016-17) followed by Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra.
- The worst states include Jharkhand, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.
- India is suffering from the worst water crisis in its history and millions of lives and livelihoods are under threat. Currently, 600 million Indians face high to extreme water
stress and about 200,000 thousand people die every year due to inadequate access to safe water.

- The crisis is going to get worse and by 2030, the country’s water demand is projected to be twice the available supply, implying severe water scarcity for hundreds of millions of people and an eventual 6% loss in the country’s GDP.

**Google for flood forecasting**

- Central Water Commission (CWC), India’s apex technical organization in the field of Water Resources, has entered into a Collaboration Agreement with Google for flood forecasting. This initiative is likely to help crisis management agencies to deal extreme hydrological events in a better manner.

CWC and Google will share technical expertise in the fields of artificial intelligence, machine learning, geospatial mapping and analysis of hydrological observation data to collaborate on:

- Improving flood prediction systems, which will help provide location-targeted, actionable flood warnings.
- High priority research project utilizing Google Earth Engine to help visualize and improve flood management.
- A cultural project to build online exhibitions on the Rivers of India.

**Global solar bank**

- ISA is planning global solar bank to finance $150 billion of power projects.
- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) plans to approach multilateral development banks (MDBs) such as Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to create a special purpose vehicle (SPV) to specifically finance solar projects. This SPV aimed at financing $150 billion would become a World Solar Bank.
- The proposal for a World Solar Bank comes against the backdrop of ISA’s mission to undertake joint efforts required to reduce the cost of finance and the cost of technology. It needs to mobilize more than $1,000 billion of investments by 2030 for massive deployment of solar energy and pave the way for future technologies.

**Global Environment Facility (GEF)**

- India has announced it will increase for the next four years the money it pays to the Global Environment Facility (GEF), a mechanism to provide grants for environment projects. India will increase its commitments from $12 million to $15 million to the GEF’s new four-year investment cycle, known as GEF-7.
- The Global Environment Facility was established on the eve of the **1992 Rio Earth Summit** to help tackle our planet’s most pressing environmental problems.
• It is an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector that addresses global environmental issues.
• GEF funds are available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to meet the objectives of the international environmental conventions and agreements.
• The World Bank serves as the GEF Trustee, administering the GEF Trust Fund.
• It is a FINANCIAL MECHANISM for five major international environmental conventions: the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Education

Global Initiative on Academic Network (GIAN)
• Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) in Higher Education was launched in 2015. It is a program of Ministry of Human Resource and Development.
• GIAN aims at tapping the talent pool of scientists and entrepreneurs to engage with the institutes of higher education in India to augment the country’s existing academic resources, accelerate the pace of quality reforms, and further strengthen India’s scientific and technological capabilities.
• In a bid to make Indian cities more sustainable, the NITI Aayog has launched a new course on ‘Urban Analytics – Evaluating and Measuring Sustainability of Cities’ at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Roorkee. The course was launched under Global Initiative on Academic Network (GIAN). The course will provide an understanding and analysis on the urbanisation and its impacts that would help in evaluating the conditions of sustainability in Indian cities.

World Best Universities Ranking
• The 15th edition of the QS World University Rankings has been released by global higher education analysts QS Quacquarelli Symonds. QS ranks the world’s top 1,000 universities, across 85 countries.
• Globally, Massachusetts Institute of Technology remains the top university for the seventh consecutive year.
• Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay (IIT-B), Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, and Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi (IIT-D) are in the top 200.
• The number of Indian universities in the top 1,000 increased from 20 to 24. 9 Indian institutions have been individually ranked in the top-500 as against 6 last year.
• IIT-Bombay is now the top institute in the country rising 17 positions from 2018 to 162. Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore, rises 20 places to 170th.
• 17 of India’s 24 ranked universities improved their rank for Academic Reputation, while 13 improved their rank for Employer Reputation.
• International Ranking Expert Group (IREG) emerged as a joint initiative of the UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES) and a group of international ranking experts concerned with the quality of academic ranking.

Kashmir Super 50

• Project Kashmir Super 50 is a joint initiative by Indian Army, Center for Social Responsibility and Leadership (CSRL) and PETRONET LNG Limited (PLL).
• It was launched on 22 March 2013 to transform the educational status of children from economically weaker sections in the Kashmir region.
• As part of the 11-month program, selected students are provided with complete free residential coaching for IIT-JEE, JKCET and other premier Engineering Institutes.
• Kashmir Super 50 has been one of the most successful projects undertaken by the Indian Army in the valley and has directly impacted the lives of number of youths in J&K by providing them the right guidance and opportunity to make a career for themselves. The project has equally helped the families of these youths in their growth and prosperity. It is a major initiative towards bringing normalcy in the valley.

Atal Tinkering Labs

• With a vision to ‘Cultivate one Million children in India as Neoteric Innovators’, Atal Innovation Mission is establishing Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) in schools across India.
• The objective of this scheme is to foster curiosity, creativity and imagination in young minds; and inculcate skills such as design mindset, computational thinking, adaptive learning, physical computing etc.
• AIM will provide grant-in-aid that includes a one-time establishment cost of Rs. 10 lakh and operational expenses of Rs. 10 lakh for a maximum period of 5 years to each ATL.
• Schools (minimum Grade VI – X) managed by Government, local body or private trusts/society can set up ATL.
• Atal Tinkering Labs have evolved as epicenters for imparting these ‘skills of the future’ through practical applications based on self-learning.
• Bridging a crucial social divide, Atal Tinkering Labs provide equal opportunity to all children across the spectrum by working at the grassroot level, introducing children to the world of innovation and tinkering.
• The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is the Government of India’s flagship initiative to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.
NITI Aayog’s Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) has selected 3,000 additional schools for the establishment of Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs), bringing the total number of ATL schools to 5,441. The selected schools shall receive a grant of Rs 20 lakh spread over the next five years to establish Atal Tinkering Labs for nurturing innovation and entrepreneurial spirit among secondary school children across India.

National Digital Library of India
- National Digital Library of India (NDLI) is a project of the Ministry of Human Resource Development under the aegis of National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT).
- It is developed by IIT Kharagpur.
- The objective of NDL is to make digital educational resources available to all citizens of the country to empower, inspire and encourage learning.
- NDL is the Single Window Platform that collects and collates metadata from premier learning institutions in India and abroad, as well as other relevant sources.
- It is a digital repository containing textbooks, articles, videos, audio books, lectures, simulations, fiction and all other kinds of learning media.
- It makes quality learning resources available to all learners and has 1.7 Crore content from more than 160 sources, in over 200 languages.
- The National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been envisaged as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme to leverage the potential of ICT, in teaching and learning process for the benefit of all the learners in Higher Education Institutions in any time anywhere mode.
- The Mission has two major components – providing connectivity, along with provision for access devices, to institutions and learners; and content generation.
- The Mission aims to extend computer infrastructure and connectivity to over 25000 colleges and 2000 polytechnics in the country including each of the departments of 419 universities/deemed universities and institutions of national importance as a part of its motto to provide connectivity up to last mile.
- LAN of up to 400 nodes on average has also been envisaged to be provided to the universities under the NMEICT scheme. The Mission, in addition to utilize the connectivity network of service providers, shall explore the possibility to provide connectivity utilizing Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT), Virtual Private Network (VPN) and EduSat channels.

National Testing Agency
- In pursuance of the Budget Announcement 2017-18, the Union Cabinet, in November 2017, approved creation of the National Testing Agency (NTA) as an autonomous and self-sustained premier testing organization to conduct entrance examinations for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the country.
The National Testing Agency, which is being set up to relieve the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) of the burden of conducting multiple examinations, will also train paper setters to set better question papers and provide better model answers. It will be chaired by an educationist who will be appointed by the MHRD. The agency will have a board of governors who will represent the member institutions.

- The NTA would initially conduct those entrance examinations which are currently being conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). The examinations will be conducted in online mode twice a year in order to give adequate opportunity to candidates to bring out their best.
- Among the examinations that will be transferred to the NTA are the prestigious Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) for admission to engineering colleges like the IITs and NITs and the National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to all medical colleges in the country, except AIIMS and JIPMER, Puducherry.
- In order to serve the requirements of the rural students, NTA would locate the centres at sub-district/district level and as far as possible would provide hands-on training to the students.

**Higher Education Commission of India**

- A Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Bill 2018 which seeks to repeal UGC Act and provides for setting up of Higher Education Commission of India has been prepared by the Ministry of HRD.
- The focus of the Commission will be on improving academic standards and quality of higher education, specifying norms for learning outcomes, lay down standards of teaching/research etc.
- It will provide a roadmap for mentoring of institutions found failing in maintaining the required academic standards.
- The Commission will encourage higher education institutions to formulate a Code of Good Practices covering promotion of research, teaching and learning.
- The Commission will also specify norms and processes for fixing of fee chargeable by higher education institutions and advice the Central Government or the State Governments, as the case may be, regarding steps to be taken for making education affordable to all.
- The Commission will monitor, through a national data base, all matters covering the development of emerging fields of knowledge and balanced growth of higher education institutions in all spheres and specially in promotion of academic quality in higher education.
- The proposed commission will have 12 members appointed by the central government, apart from the chairperson and vice-chairperson.
Finance and Economy

Public credit registry

• To provide a single-point and real-time source for financial liabilities of a person or entity, the Reserve Bank of India has decided to set up a public credit registry (PCR) in a modular and phased manner. The decision is based on the report of RBI appointed task force led by YM Deosthalee.

• The PCR will be the single point of mandatory reporting for all material events for each loan, notwithstanding any threshold in the loan amount or type of borrower. The PCR will serve as a registry of all credit contracts, duly verified by reporting institutions, for all lending in India and any lending by an Indian institution to a company incorporated in India.

• Credit information is spread over multiple systems in bits and pieces, making it difficult to get a comprehensive view of the financial liabilities of a person or entity. A PCR aims to remove information asymmetry to foster the level of access to credit, and to strengthen the credit culture in the economy.

• Also, a comprehensive credit information repository covering all types of credit facilities (funded and non-funded) extended by all credit institutions – commercial banks, cooperative banks, NBFCs, MFIs – and also covering borrowings from other sources, including external commercial borrowings and borrowing from market, is essential to ascertain the total indebtedness of a legal or natural person.

• A PCR can potentially help banks in credit assessment and pricing of credit as well as in making risk-based, dynamic and counter-cyclical provisioning.

• The PCR can also help the RBI in understanding if transmission of monetary policy is working, and if not, where are the bottlenecks.

• Further, it can help supervisors, regulators and banks in early intervention and effective restructuring of stressed bank credits.

• A PCR will also help banks and regulators as credit information is a ‘public good’ and its utility is to the credit market at large and to society in general.

Small finance banks

• The Reserve Bank of India has decided to allow urban co-operative banks (UCB) to convert into small finance banks (SFB), a move aimed at bringing these entities into mainstream banking. It has been decided to allow voluntary transition of UCBs meeting the prescribed criteria into SFBs.

• UCBs currently face regulation by both the RBI and the respective State governments. By turning into SFBs, they will be regulated only by the RBI.

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

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

**What they cannot do?**
- Lend to big corporates and groups.
- Cannot open branches with prior RBI approval for first five years.
- Other financial activities of the promoter must not mingle with the bank.
- It cannot set up subsidiaries to undertake non-banking financial services activities.
- Cannot be a business correspondent of any bank.

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

**Bad Bank**
- The concept of having a ‘bad bank’ to take over the troubled loans of public sector banks (PSBs) is being considered by the government to enable them to get back to business.
- Finance minister recently announced that a bankers’ panel would look at the feasibility of setting up a new asset reconstruction company (ARC) or asset management company (AMC) to take over bad loans of PSBs. The panel is headed by Punjab National Bank non-executive chairman Sunil Mehta.
- The Bad Bank concept was pioneered at the Pittsburgh-headquartered Mellon Bank in 1988 in response to problems in the bank’s commercial real-estate portfolio. According to McKinsey & Co, the concept of a “bad bank” was applied in previous banking crises in Sweden, France, and Germany.
- While the government has not charted out any guidelines on the structure of a bad bank, such an institution would be largely based on the principles of an asset restructuring company (ARC), which buys bad loans from the commercial banks at a
discount and tries to recover the money from the defaulter by providing a systematic solution over a period of time. Since a bad bank specialises in loan recovery, it is expected to perform better than commercial banks, whose expertise lies in lending.

Benefits:
- A single government entity will be more competent to take decisions rather than 28 individual PSBs.
- Capacity building for a complex workout can be better handled by the government which has regulatory control and has management skillsets in public sector enterprises.
- Foreign investors with both risk capital and risk appetite would be more in a government-led initiative, knowing that regulatory risks would stand considerably mitigated in various stages of resolution, including take outs.

**Insolvency Code**
- Recently, President Ram Nath Kovind gave his nod to promulgate the Insolvency and Bankruptcy code (Amendment) Ordinance 2018.

**Significant changes introduced:**
1. **Homebuyers as financial creditors:** Homebuyers would now be treated as financial creditors or, in other words, on par with banks, with the power to initiate insolvency proceedings against errant builders. Homebuyers shall have the right to be represented in the committee of creditors (CoC), which takes the key decision regarding revival of the company or its liquidation.

2. **Definition of a related party:** The amendment now defines related party in relation to an individual running the firm and they would be barred from bidding for the firm under the resolution process. Prior to the amendment, related party was defined only with reference to a company facing insolvency.

3. **Changes in voting share of committee of CoC:** The amendment has changed the voting share required in CoC meetings. For extending the insolvency process beyond 180 days till 270 days and for appointment of the resolution professional (who oversees the process), now a voting share of 66% is sufficient, compared with earlier requirement of 75%. Unless a specific approval is required in the Code, all other decisions of the CoC can be taken with 51% voting share against the earlier norm of 75%. Withdrawal from the insolvency process is permitted with the approval of 90% of voting share of the CoC.
4. **If a financial creditor is a related party:**
If a financial creditor (banks and other financial institution) or his authorised representative is a related party to the company facing insolvency, it shall not have any participation or voting during a meeting of the CoC. However, exemption is provided in case the financial creditor has become a related party on account of conversion or substitution of debt to equity shares or instruments convertible into equity shares prior to the date of commencement of insolvency proceedings.

5. **Moratorium period:**
For a company under insolvency, a moratorium period is provided during which no parallel proceedings are allowed. Whether such moratorium is available to guarantors of the company was a subject of debate. Now the amendment has said that the moratorium is not available to persons who provided guarantee for the loans availed by the corporate debtor.

6. **Tenure of an insolvency resolution professional:**
Under the insolvency process, an interim resolution professional (IRP) is appointed first and then, a resolution professional. As per the amendment, the tenure of the IRP would continue till the appointment of the resolution professional (RP), compared with the earlier 30-day fixed tenure. Also, for the appointment of the RP, a written consent from the professional is required in a specified format.

**Working capital loan norms to be tightened**
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed a minimum 40% loan component for working capital funding of ₹150 crore and above to bring in greater credit discipline and improve monetary transmission. This will come into effect from October 1 and will be increased to 60% from April 1, 2019.
- Currently, working capital is mostly in the form of cash credit for which interest rate is reset once a year. Also, cash credit does not have a tight repayment schedule.

**Proposed new norm will address**
- If there is a loan component then there will be a repayment schedule which will put pressure on borrowers to manage their liquidity.
- Since the loan component will have a fixed tenure, the reset clause can be invoked at the end of each tenure period.
- By making it mandatory to have a loan component associated with all working-capital facilities, it will be easier to control the possible volatility which arises on account of cash credit limits.

**Credit enhancement fund**
Credit enhancement scheme that aims to improve the bankability and credit worthiness of MSME, including cooperatives and NGOs, which are experiencing difficulty in obtaining loans from banks due to lack of acceptable collaterals, credit knowledge and credit track records.

The government is likely to launch a Rs 500-crore credit enhancement fund next month to facilitate infrastructure investments by insurance and pension funds.

The fund was first announced in the financial budget for fiscal year 2016-17.

It will help in upgrading credit ratings of bonds issued by infrastructure companies and facilitate investment from investors like pension and insurance funds.

The initial corpus of the fund, to be sponsored by IIFCL (India Infrastructure Finance Company), will be Rs 500 crore, and it will operate as a non-banking finance company.

IIFCL will hold a 22.5% stake in the NBFC, while the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has offered to pick up a 10% stake. State-run SBI, Bank of Baroda and LIC will also have stakes in the firm.

Business Correspondents

Business Correspondents are retail agents engaged by banks for providing banking services at locations other than a bank branch/ATM.

Basically, BCs enable a bank to expand its outreach and offer limited range of banking services at low cost, as setting up a brick and mortar branch may not be viable in all cases. BCs, thus, are an integral part of a business strategy for achieving greater financial inclusion.

The government is planning to make all CSCs across the country Business Correspondents of Banks. 2.90 lakh CSCs will be able to work as Business Correspondents (BCs).

BCs are permitted to perform a variety of activities which include identification of borrowers, collection and preliminary processing of loan applications including verification of primary information/data, creating awareness about savings and other products, education and advice on managing money and debt counseling, processing and submission of applications to banks, promoting, nurturing and monitoring of Self Help Groups/ Joint Liability Groups, post-sanction monitoring, follow-up of recovery.

They can also attend to collection of small value deposit, disbursal of small value credit, recovery of principal / collection of interest, sale of micro insurance/ mutual fund products/ pension products/ other third party products and receipt and delivery of small value remittances/ other payment instruments.

Banks Board Bureau

It was set up in February 2016 as an autonomous body – based on the recommendations of the RBI-appointed Nayak Committee. It was the part of Indradhanush Plan of government.
RBI CURRENT AFFAIRS – JUNE 2018

- Its broad agenda was to improve governance at state-owned lenders. Its mandate also involved advising the government on top-level bank appointments and assisting banks with capital-raising plans as well as strategies to deal with bad loans.
- The Banks Board Bureau (BBB) has recommended 22 general managers to be elevated as executive directors at various public sector banks. These recommendations are based on interactions held by the Banks Board Bureau with eligible candidates from PSBs towards appointment against vacancies in PSBs for the period 2018-19.
- The Appointments Committee of Cabinet headed by Prime Minister will take the final decision in this regard. There are already some vacancies at executive director level and more would be created during the course of the year.

RBI alters ‘relative’ definition
- Concerned over funds sent abroad under the ‘maintenance of close relative’ category of the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has narrowed the definition of relatives to check the flow of funds.
- RBI has aligned the definition of ‘relative’ with the definition given in Companies Act, 2013 instead of Companies Act, 1956. Hence, funds under the ‘maintenance of close relative’ category can be sent only to immediate relatives such as parents, spouses, children and their spouses.
- Outward remittances under maintenance of close relatives shot up to almost $3 billion in 2017-18 from a mere $174 million in 2013-14. In fact, funds sent under this category have more than doubled since 2015-16. Overall outward remittances under LRS went up to $11 billion from $1 billion in the same period.
- Under LRS, all resident individuals can freely remit $250,000 overseas every financial year for a permissible set of current or capital account transactions.
- **Permitted**: Remittances are permitted for overseas education, travel, medical treatment and purchase of shares and property, apart from maintenance of relatives living abroad, gifting and donations. Individuals can also open, maintain and hold foreign currency accounts with overseas banks for carrying out transactions.
- **Not permitted**: However, the rules do not allow remittances for trading on the foreign exchange markets, margin or margin calls to overseas exchanges and counterparties and the purchase of Foreign Currency Convertible Bonds issued by Indian companies abroad. Sending money to certain countries and entities is also barred. Under LRS, people can’t send money to countries identified as ‘non cooperative’ by the Financial Action Task Force. Remittances are also prohibited to entities identified as posing terrorist risks.

Cross-Border Insolvency
- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) is planning to introduce a globally accepted and well-recognised cross-border insolvency framework, fine-tuned to suit the needs of aspirational Indian economy.
The Government has taken initiative for Cross-Border Insolvency within the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (the Code) to provide a comprehensive legal framework.

As the size of the Indian economy grows, business and trade have adopted an increasingly international character. Creditors and corporates frequently transact business in more than one jurisdiction. Foreign banks and creditors finance Indian companies and Indian banks have foreign exposure.

Also, as part of its Ease of Doing Business and Make in India policies, India seeks to attract foreign companies to set up manufacturing facilities in India.

**Bharat 22 Exchange Traded Fund (ETF)**

The government has announced the first Further Fund Offer (FFO) of Bharat 22 Exchange Traded Fund (ETF). This is in pursuance of its disinvestment policy targeting an initial amount of Rs.6,000 crore.

**BHARAT 22:**

- Bharat 22 consists of 22 stocks of CPSE’s, PSB’s & strategic holding of SUUTI. Bharat 22 is a well Diversified portfolio with 6 sectors (Basic Materials, Energy, Finance, FMCG, Industrials & Utilities).
- The Bharat 22 Index will be rebalanced annually. ICICI Prudential AMC will be the ETF Manager and Asia Index Private Limited (JV BSE and S& P Global) will be the Index Provider.

**Board of management for cooperative banks**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has come out with draft guidelines on constituting a board of management (BoM) in addition to the board of directors, *for urban cooperative banks (UCBs)*, with the aim of strengthening the governance in these banks.

**Need:** As UCBs are accepting public deposits, it is imperative that a separate mechanism be put in place to protect the interests of depositors.

**Applicability:** Existing UCBs with deposit sizes exceeding Rs100 crore shall put in place the BoM within one year, while others banks may take two years. UCBs with deposit sizes up to Rs100 crore will have BoMs of a minimum of three members, while those with deposit sizes of more than Rs100 crore will have at least five members in the BoMs. The maximum number of members in the management shall not exceed 12.

**Composition:**

- It will consist of members with special knowledge and practical experience in banking to facilitate professional management and focused attention to banking related activities of UCBs.
- The circular also said that at least 50% of the members of the BoM should have specialisation or practical experience in fields such as accountancy, agriculture, law.
The chief executive officer of the bank will be an ex-officio member of the BoD and BoM and he will be under the general superintendence, direction and control of the board.

Functions: The BoM will be responsible for credit, risk and liquidity management of the bank. It will be responsible for the day-to-day functions, including considering loan proposals, recovery of bad loans, borrowings and overseeing audit and inspection functions.

Management: The BoM will report to the BoD, which will continue to oversee the general direction and control of a UCB. RBI shall have powers to supersede the BoM if the functioning of BoM is found unsatisfactory.

Export Credit Guarantee Corporation
- Cabinet has approved the capital infusion of Rs.2000 crore for strengthening of Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC).
- The infusion would enhance insurance coverage to MSME exports and strengthen India’s exports to emerging and challenging markets like Africa, CIS and Latin American countries.
- With enhanced capital, ECGC’s underwriting capacity and risk to capital ratio will improve considerably.
- With a stronger underwriting capacity, ECGC will be in a better position to support Indian exporters to tap new and unexplored markets.
- Increased capital infusion will help ECGC to diversify its product portfolio and provide cost effective credit insurance helping exporters to gain a stronger foothold in the difficult markets.
- ECGC is a premier export credit agency of the Government of India to provide Export Credit Insurance Services to facilitate exports from the country.
- The ECGC offers credit insurance schemes to exporters to protect them against losses due to non-payment of export dues by overseas buyers due to political and/or commercial risks.

Treasury Bill
- After reviewing the cash position of the Central Government, the Government of India, in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to notify the amounts for the issuance of Treasury Bills for the Quarter ending September 2018.
- T-bills are short term securities issued on behalf of the government by the RBI and are used in managing short term liquidity needs of the government.
- 91-day T-bills are auctioned every week on Wednesday and 182-day and 364-day T-bills are auctioned every alternate week on Wednesdays.
- Treasury bills are issued at a discount and are redeemed at par.
Miscellaneous

Methanol Economy

- The NITI Aayog is working on a roadmap for full-scale implementation of methanol economy in the country in near future, which would not only curb pollution, but reduce India’s dependence on oil imports as well.
- Methanol is a promising fuel as it is clean, cheaper than fossil fuels and a good substitute for heavy fuels. India imports methanol from Saudi Arabia and Iran at present. Across the world, methanol is emerging as a clean, sustainable transportation fuel of the future.
- Methanol can be used as an energy producing fuel, transportation fuel and cooking fuel, cutting down India’s oil import bill by an estimated 20% over the next few years. Unlike CNG, using methanol as a transportation fuel would require minimal alteration in the vehicles.
- Methanol is a clean-burning fuel that produces fewer smog-causing emissions — such as sulphur oxides (SOx), nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulate matter — and can improve air quality and related human health issues.
- Methanol 15% blend (M15) in petrol will reduce pollution by 33% & diesel replacement by methanol will reduce by more than 80%.

Global Peace Index 2018

- Australia-based Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), world’s leading think tank that develops metrics to analyse peace and quantify its economic value, has released the 12th edition of the Global Peace Index (GPI), or measure of global peacefulness.
- India has moved up four places to the 137th rank among 163 countries. The improvement is due to a reduction in the level of violent crime driven by increased law enforcement. India was ranked 141 last year.
- India was also among the countries with the biggest decreases in the number of deaths, along with Sri Lanka, Chad, Colombia, and Uganda.
- Iceland remains the most peaceful country in the world, a position it has held since 2008. New Zealand, Austria, Portugal and Denmark also sit in the top five most peaceful rankings.
- Syria remains the least peaceful country in the world, a position it has held for the past five years. Afghanistan, South Sudan, Iraq and Somalia comprise the remaining least peaceful countries.

Kaleshwaram project and Upper Pravara (Nilwande-II) Project:

- Ministry of Water Resources has accepted two major irrigation projects from states.
The Kaleshwaram Project of Telangana: It involves diversion of Godavari water for irrigation and drinking water purposes.

The Upper Pravara (Nilwande-II) Project of Maharashtra: It involves diversion water for irrigation and drinking water purposes.

Various Flood management schemes approved

- The Mahananda Flood Management Scheme: Bihar.
- Seer Khad Project: Himachal Pradesh.
- Ghatal Master Plan: West Bengal.

Tripura’s “State Fruit”

- President Ram Nath Kovind has declared Tripura’s queen variety pineapple as “state fruit”.

Deocha-Pachami coal block:

- The Centre has handed over the Deocha-Pachami coal mines to the West Bengal government.
- It is said to be second largest coal block in the world.
- The coal block is located in Birbhum district in West Bengal.
- Power to auction non-coal mines: As per the new mining law — the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2015 — which came into effect from January 2015, the non-coal mines have to be auctioned by the respective state governments.

World Oceans Day

- World Ocean Day is celebrated every year on June 8th.
- Action focus for 2018: preventing plastic pollution and encouraging solutions for a healthy ocean.
- The concept of a ‘World Oceans Day’ was first proposed in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro as a way to celebrate our world’s shared ocean and our personal connection to the sea, as well as to raise awareness about the crucial role the ocean plays in our lives and the important ways people can help protect it.

Vigilance commissioner

- Former NIA chief Sharad Kumar is the new vigilance commissioner for a term of four years or till he attains the age of 65.

CVC:
- It is the apex vigilance institution. It was created via executive resolution (based on the recommendations of Santhanam committee) in 1964 but was conferred with statutory status in 2003. It submits its report to the President of India.
- Composition: Presently, the body consists of central vigilance commissioner along with 2 vigilance commissioners.
- Appointment: They are appointed by the President of India on the recommendations of a committee consisting of Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha (if there is no LoP then the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha).
- Term: Their term is 4 years or 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- Removal: The Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner can be removed from his office only by order of the President on the ground of proved misbehavior or incapacity after the Supreme Court, on a reference made to it by the President, has, on inquiry, reported that the Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner, as the case may be, ought to be removed.

**Seva Bhoj Yojna**
- **Union Ministry of Culture** recently introduced a new scheme called ‘SevaBhojYojna’ to reimburse the central share of CGST and IGST on items for food/prasad/langar/bhandara offered free of cost by charitable religious institutions.
- 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.

**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.

**KATRIN experiment**
Researchers in Germany with the Karlsruhe Tritium Neutrino experiment have started collecting data to determine the mass of the universe’s lightest particle—neutrino. Those are sometimes called “ghost particles” because they’re so difficult to detect.

**Einstein’s theory: Earth is a free-falling elevator in Sun’s gravity**

- Physicists at NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) pulled out a 14-year-long experiment to test a key principle underlying Einstein’s famous theory of general relativity—which describes how gravity relates to space and time.
- The test conducted by the NIST physicists is being considered as the most accurate test ever which confirms the ‘earth elevator’ phenomenon. They used the solar system as a laboratory, where they treated Earth as an elevator falling through the Sun’s gravitational field.
- They monitored 12 high-precision atomic clocks spread around the world for 14 years, from 1999 to 2014. The experiment tested whether all parts of the earth would have the same acceleration at the same rate. The clocks remained synchronized for over 14 years, proving the earth elevator theory.
- According to Albert Einstein, the earth is a free-falling elevator in Sun’s gravity. He theorised that all objects located in such an elevator would accelerate at the same rate as if they were in a uniform gravitational field or no gravity at all. He also predicted that the properties of these objects relative to each other would remain constant during the elevator’s free-fall.

**World Day Against Child Labour – 12 June 2018**

- International Labour Organization (ILO) launched the World Day Against Child Labour in 2002 to focus attention on the global extent of child labour and the action and efforts needed to eliminate it.
- **Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals**
- Theme this year: “Generation Safe & Healthy”.

**Nikkei Asia Prize**

- Noted social reformer and founder of Sulabh International Bindeshwar Pathak was recently honored with Japan’s prestigious ‘Nikkei Asia Prize for Culture and Community’. The award was given to him for his significant work in tackling poor hygiene and discrimination.

**Water Productivity Mapping of Major Indian Crops**

- It is a book published by NABARD.
- The book is based on study of 10 important crops. The ten important crops include rice, wheat, maize, pulses, oilseeds, sugarcane, cotton and potato etc.
The book suggests to realign cropping pattern keeping in view water scarcity of irrigation, ration irrigation supplies in canal irrigation system, improve micro-irrigation and invest in water harvesting and artificial recharge and encourage participatory irrigation management through water user association and farmer’s producer organisation.

**Artificial leaf that creates biofuel**
- IISc scholars have developed an artificial ‘leaf’ that’ll help reduce carbon footprint and create biofuel.
- The researchers used copper aluminium sulphate and zinc sulphide. The two materials, which are otherwise wide band gap semiconductors, became low band gap semiconductors when combined. Simply put, the lower the band gap, the better conductivity a substance will have.

**GLONASS**
- GLONASS is an acronym, which stands for Globalnaya Navigazionnaya Sputnikovaya Sistema, or Global Navigation Satellite System. GLONASS is Russia’s version of GPS (Global Positioning System).
- Russia has successfully launched a Glonass-M positioning satellite using a Soyuz-2.1b carrier rocket from Plesetsk space center. With this launch, there are now 26 Glonass satellites in orbit.
- GPS developed by USA has a network of 31 satellites covering this planet and has been widely used in commercial devices like mobile phones, navigators etc.
- GLONASS is developed by Russia originally started by Soviet Union in 1976. This has a network of 24 satellites covering the earth.
- GPS of the United States of America.
- Galileo of the European Union.
- IRNSS or NAVIC of India.
- Quasi-Zenith Satellite System (QZSS) of Japan.

**Cop Connect**
- It is a mobile application developed by Telangana police for their internal communication purpose. It has been developed on the lines of WhatsApp. Police have developed this app keeping in view the safety of their information besides having hassle free communication.
- The app is a secure communication channel, with no limit on the number of members in any individual group (unlike the regular WhatsApp which has a restriction of 256 numbers) and has all the features of WhatsApp.
Other features of the Cop-Connect app are chatting, group chats, file sharing (image, audio, video and documents) and location sharing. A unique feature, iMeeting, can help in creating and scheduling department meetings in an easy way.

International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028
- Republic of Tajikistan and United Nations are jointly organizing a high-level Conference on “International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028”. The Conference will discuss key water related issues of sustainable development goals adopted by UN member countries.
- In order to accelerate efforts towards meeting water-related challenges, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2018-2028 as the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development”.

Talent surplus in India by 2030
- According to a report- ‘The Salary Surge’, India would be the only economy that will not face an upward revision of wages by 2030, as it has a talent surplus, bucking the global trend of a talent crunch.
- Globally, a shortage of highly skilled employees could dramatically drive up salaries for the most in-demand workers by 2030. This is likely to add more than USD 2.5 trillion in annual labour costs by 2030, for organisations around the world.

Ambubachi Mela
- Ambubachi Mela, a four-day fair to mark the annual menstruation of the goddess is being held at Kamakhya temple in Guwahati.

SKOCH Award
- Ministry of Women & Child Development has received the ‘Best Performing Social Sector Ministry’ SKOCH Award for its Achievements and Initiatives.
- The Skoch Awards celebrate human excellence and agents of change in Indian society. They are the highest independently instituted civilian honours in India.
- Only end-user departments and domain ministries may apply including State undertakings.
- The Skoch Awards have become the only independent benchmark of best practices in India in the fields of governance, finance, banking, technology, corporate citizenship, economics and inclusive growth.
- Skoch Consultancy Services is a think tank dealing with socio-economic issues with a focus on inclusive growth.
Aldabra Tortoise
In a goodwill gesture, Seychelles has gifted a pair of giant Aldabra tortoise to India. The pair will be kept at Hyderabad Zoo.
Key facts:
▪ The Aldabra Giant Tortoise (Aldabrachelys gigantea) from the Aldabra Atoll in the Seychelles is said to be one of the largest species of tortoises on the planet.
▪ It is also one of the world’s longest living animals, with one Aldabra Giant Tortoise reaching the age of 255 years.
▪ The Aldabra giant tortoise’s current IUCN conservation status is ‘vulnerable’.
▪ The atoll has been protected from human influence and is home to around 100,000 giant tortoises, the world’s largest population of the animal.

Global realty transparency index
• Jones Lang LaSalle Inc. (JLL) has released the Global Real Estate Transparency Index 2018.
The 2018 Global Real Estate Transparency Index covers 100 markets and is based on 186 indicators.
These variables are divided into six areas—performance measurement, market fundamentals, governance of listed vehicles, regulatory & legal frameworks, transaction process and environmental sustainability.
The Index scores markets on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1.00 being the highest possible score). Depending on their overall performance, markets are assigned to one of five transparency tiers.
▪ Highly Transparent.
▪ Semi-Transparent.
▪ Low Transparency.
▪ India has moved up just one spot from 36 in 2016 to 35 in 2018.
▪ The UK, Australia, the US, France and Canada are the top five countries.
▪ Sri Lanka is at the 66th position and Pakistan at 75th among south Asian countries. Venezuela is the least transparent market with 100th rank.
▪ Among BRICS nations, both China and South Africa remained on the same rank 33rd and 21st position, respectively, while, Brazil slipped to 37th position and Russia remained at 38th rank.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)
• In a blow to Pakistan, the Financial Action Task Force has placed it on the ‘grey list’ for failing to curb anti-terror financing. The decision was taken at the global financial watchdog Financial Action Task Force’s (FATF) plenary session held recently in Paris.
• The placement on the ‘grey list’ could hurt Pakistan’s economy as well as its international standing.