RBI CURRENT AFFAIRS OF APRIL 2018

RBI CURRENT AFFAIRS – (PHASE II) – MAY 2018
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HEALTH:

1. Lassa Fever

Nigeria has announced that it is free from Lassa fever outbreak. The announcement follows the epidemiological review by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Key facts:
- Lassa fever is an acute viral haemorrhagic illness of 2-21 days duration that occurs in West Africa.
- The Lassa virus is transmitted to humans via contact with food or household items contaminated with rodent urine or faeces.
- Person-to-person infections and laboratory transmission can also occur, particularly in hospitals lacking adequate infection prevention and control measures.
- Lassa fever is known to be endemic in Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, but probably exists in other West African countries as well.
- The overall case-fatality rate is 1%. Observed case-fatality rate among patients hospitalized with severe cases of Lassa fever is 15%.
- Early supportive care with rehydration and symptomatic treatment improves survival.

2. Thalaseemia

Thalaseemia is a chronic blood disorder. It is a genetic disorder due to which a patient cannot make enough hemoglobin found in Red Blood Cells (RBC's). This leads to anemia and patients also require blood transfusions every two to three weeks to survive.
Thalassemias are inherited disorders passed from parents to children through genes. Each red blood cell can contain between 240 and 300 million molecules of haemoglobin. The severity of the disease depends on the mutations involved in the genes, and their interplay.

**India is the thalassaemia capital of the world** with 40 million carriers and over 1,00,000 thalassaemia majors under blood transfusion every month.

3. **Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandan Yojana (PMVVY)**

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for extending the investment limit from Rs 7.5 lakhs to Rs 15 lakhs as well as extension of time limits for subscription from 4th May 2018 to 31st March, 2020 under the Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandan Yojana (PMVVY) as part of Government’s commitment for financial inclusion and social security.
PMVVY is a Pension Scheme exclusively for the senior citizens aged 60 years and above.

The Scheme can be purchased offline as well as online through Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India which has been given the sole privilege to operate this Scheme.

Key features:

- It provides an assured return of 8% p.a. payable monthly (equivalent to 8.30% p.a. effective) for 10 years.
- Pension is payable at the end of each period, during the policy term of 10 years, as per the frequency of monthly/ quarterly/ half-yearly/ yearly as chosen by the pensioner at the time of purchase.
- The scheme is exempted from Service Tax/ GST.
- On survival of the pensioner to the end of the policy term of 10 years, Purchase price along with final pension installment shall be payable.
- Loan upto 75% of Purchase Price shall be allowed after 3 policy years (to meet the liquidity needs). Loan interest shall be recovered from the pension installments and loan to be recovered from claim proceeds.
- The scheme also allows for premature exit for the treatment of any critical/ terminal illness of self or spouse. On such premature exit, 98% of the Purchase Price shall be refunded.
- On death of the pensioner during the policy term of 10 years, the Purchase Price shall be paid to the beneficiary.

4. Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)
In a major boost to the expansion of healthcare infrastructure in the country, the Union Cabinet Chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the continuation of Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) beyond 12th Five Year Plan to 2019-20.

The Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) was announced in 2003 with objectives of correcting regional imbalances in the availability of affordable/reliable tertiary healthcare services and also to augment facilities for quality medical education in the country. It is a central sector scheme. The scheme has two components: Setting up of new AIIMS and upgradation of government medical colleges.

**Significance:** Setting up of new AIIMS would not only transform health education and training but also address the shortfall of health care professionals in the region. Construction of new AIIMS is fully funded by the Central Government. The Operations & Maintenance expenses on new AIIMS are also fully borne by the Central Government.

5. **Limit Trans Fats**

WHO has released draft recommendations on limiting the intake of trans fats. These draft recommendations, the first since 2002, are aimed at controlling non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which are responsible for an estimated 39.5 million death (72%) of the 54.7 million deaths worldwide in 2016.

**Recommendations:**

- Saturated fatty acids should not comprise more than 10% of your daily calorie intake.
- Trans-fatty acids should not comprise more than 1% of your daily calorie intake.
- Use heart-healthy polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) as replacement.
- The recommendations are applicable to both adults and children.
Saturated fatty acids: are found in foods from animal sources such as butter, milk, meat, salmon, and egg yolks, and some plant-derived products such as chocolate and cocoa butter, coconut, palm and palm kernel oils.

Trans-fats: are largely produced artificially but a small amount also occurs naturally. Thus in our diet, these may be present as Artificial TFAs and/or Natural TFAs. Artificial TFAs are formed when hydrogen is made to react with the oil to produce fats resembling pure ghee/butter.

In our diet the major sources of artificial TFAs are the partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (PHVO)/vanaspati/margarine while the natural TFAs are present in meats and dairy products, though in small amounts.

Harmful effects: TFAs pose a higher risk of heart disease than saturated fats. While saturated fats raise total cholesterol levels, TFAs not only raise total cholesterol levels but also reduce the good cholesterol (HDL), which helps to protect us against heart disease. Trans fats consumption increases the risk of developing heart disease and stroke. It is also associated with a higher risk of developing obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, metabolic syndrome, insulin resistance, infertility, certain types of cancers and can also lead to compromised fetal development causing harm to the yet to be born baby.

6. POSHAN Abhiyan

The Government of India signed a loan deal worth $ 200 million with the World Bank for the National Nutrition Mission (POSHAN Abhiyaan).

Significance:
• With a focus on improving the coverage and quality of ICDS nutrition services to pregnant and lactating women and children under 3 years of age, the project will include investments in improving the skills and capacities of ICDS staff and community nutrition workers, instituting mechanisms of community mobilization and behavior change communication.

• It also aims at strengthening systems of citizen engagement and grievance redress and establishing mobile technology based tools for improved monitoring and management of services for better outreach to beneficiaries during the critical 1,000 day window for nutrition impact.

• The project will additionally ensure convergence of all nutrition related schemes and provide performance based incentives to states and community nutrition and health workers, facilitating a focus on results.

POSHAN Abhiyaan was launched on International Women’s day (March 8) in 2018 to boost nutrition among children and women. The target of the mission is to bring down stunting among children in the age group 0-6 years from 38.4% to 25% by 2022.

Other Targets:
- Prevent and reduce stunting in children (0-6 years): By 6% @ 2% p.a.
- Prevent and reduce under-nutrition (underweight prevalence) in children (0-6 years): By 6% @ 2% p.a.
- Reduce the prevalence of anemia among young Children (6-59 months): By 9% @ 3% p.a.
- Reduce the prevalence of anemia among Women and Adolescent Girls in the age group of 15-49 years: By 9% @ 3% p.a.
- Reduce Low Birth Weight (LBW): By 6% @ 2% p.a.
7. **NIPAH Virus**

Kerala health department is on high alert in the wake of deaths due to the ‘Nipah’ virus (NiV). The government has set up a task force to monitor the cases and contain the spread of this fast spreading virus which has a reported mortality rate of 70%.

It was first identified in 1998 at Kampung Sungai Nipah village, Malaysia. The virus is named after this village.

**Symptoms in humans:** similar to that of influenza: fever, muscle pain, and respiratory problems. Inflammation of the brain can also cause disorientation. Late onset of Encephalitis can also occur. Sometimes a person can have an asymptomatic infection, and be a carrier of Nipah and not show any symptoms.

**Currently, there are no vaccines** for both humans and animals. Intensive supportive care is given to humans infected by Nipah virus.

**Nipah Virus** - According to WHO, the Nipah virus infection is a newly emerging zoonosis, that is, a disease transmitted from animals to humans. The virus belongs to a new genus termed Henipavirus (subfamily Paramyxovirinae).

The **natural hosts of the virus are fruit bats belonging to the family Pteropodidae.** In 2004, humans were affected after eating the date palm contaminated by infected fruit bats. Pigs can also act as intermediate hosts.

According to WHO, **ribavirin can reduce the symptoms of nausea, vomiting, and convulsions associated with the disease.** Individuals infected need to be hospitalised and isolated. Special care should be taken to prevent human-to-human transmission. Surveillance systems should be established to detect the virus quickly and to initiate appropriate control measures.
8. Ebola

The World Health Organization (WHO) has raised the Ebola health risk assessment to “very high” in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

While the WHO raised the national public health risk to ‘very high,” it said the global risk level is “currently low.”

Background: More than 11,000 people died in the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014-2015, mainly in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The last outbreak in the DRC was in 2014 and killed more than 40 people. The region affected lies 1,300 km north-east of Kinshasa, close to the border with the Central African Republic.
Ebola virus disease (EVD), formerly known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever, is a severe, often fatal illness in humans.

**Transmission:** The virus is transmitted to people from wild animals and spreads in the human population through human-to-human transmission. The average EVD case fatality rate is around 50%. Case fatality rates have varied from 25% to 90% in past outbreaks.

**Prevention:** Community engagement is key to successfully controlling outbreaks. Good outbreak control relies on applying a package of interventions, namely case management, surveillance and contact tracing, a good laboratory service and social mobilisation.

Early supportive care with rehydration, symptomatic treatment improves survival. There is as yet no licensed treatment proven to neutralise the virus but a range of blood, immunological and drug therapies are under development.

**9. Ordinance promulgated to amend the Homoeopathy Central Council Act, 1973**

The Homoeopathy Central Council (Amendment) Ordinance, 2018 was promulgated on May 18, 2018. It amends the Homoeopathy Central Council Act, 1973, which sets up the Central Council of Homoeopathy. The Central Council of Homoeopathy regulates homoeopathic education and practice.

Key features of the Ordinance include:

- **Supersession of the Central Council:** The Ordinance amends the 1973 Act to provide for the supersession of the Central Council with effect from May 18, 2018. The Central Council will be reconstituted within one year from the date of its supersession. In the interim period, the central government will constitute a Board of Governors, which will exercise the powers of the Central Council.
• **Constitution:** The Board of Governors will consist of up to seven members including:
  (i) Persons of eminence in the field of homoeopathy education, and
  (ii) Eminent administrators, appointed by the central government.

The central government will select one of these members as the Chairperson of the Board. With regard to policy decisions, directions of the central government will be final.

• **Permission for existing homoeopathy colleges:** The Ordinance states that:
  (i) if any person has established a homoeopathy medical college, or
  (ii) if an established homoeopathy medical college has opened new courses or increased its admission capacity before the Ordinance was promulgated, it will have to seek permission from the central government within one year.

If the person or homoeopathy medical college fails to seek such permission, then any medical qualification granted to a student from such medical college will not be recognized under the Act.

10. **Cabinet approves setting up of National Institute of Mental Health Rehabilitation**

The Union Cabinet approved the establishment of the first National Institute of Mental Health Rehabilitation in Bhopal.
- It will be set up as a society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- Estimated cost for the first three years of the project is Rs.180 crore.

Main objectives of the institute are:

(i) providing rehabilitation services to persons with mental illness,
(ii) policy framing, capacity development, and advanced research in mental health rehabilitation.

The institute will consist of nine departments and will conduct 12 courses in the area of mental health rehabilitation. These courses will lead to the award of diploma, certificate, graduate, post graduate, and M.Phil. degrees.
Cabinet approves setting up of new AIIMS in Deoghar, Jharkhand

- It will be set up under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY).

- PMSSY was launched in 2006 with the aim of correcting the imbalances in the availability of affordable healthcare facilities in different parts of the country.

- A provision of Rs 1,103 crore has been approved for setting up the new AIIMS.

- It will consist of: (i) a hospital with a capacity of 750 beds, (ii) trauma center facilities, (iii) a medical college with an intake of 100 MBBS students per year, (iv) nursing college with an intake of 60 B.Sc. (Nursing) students per year, (v) 20 speciality and super-speciality departments including 15 operation theatres, and (vi) an AYUSH department with 30 beds for providing treatment facilities in traditional system of medicine.

EDUCATION

1. Atal Tinkering Marathon
It is a six month long nationwide challenge across six different thematic areas, namely, clean energy, water resources, waste management, healthcare, smart mobility and agri-tech. It is being organized by Atal Tinkering Labs of the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) of NITI Aayog.

Top 30 innovations have been selected from among 100 innovations shortlisted. These top 30 innovations have been identified from 20 different States and Union territories from across India.

**Vision:** ‘Cultivate one Million children in India as Neoteric Innovators’

Atal Innovation Mission is establishing Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) in schools across India.

**Objective:** 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.

**Financial Support:** 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.

**Eligibility:** Schools (minimum Grade VI – X) managed by Government, local body or private trusts/society can set up ATL.

**Significance of ATLs** Atal Tinkering Labs have evolved as epicenters for imparting these ‘skills of the future’ through practical applications based onself-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.

2. **SWAYAM**

The Ministry of Human Resource Development has launched a major and unique initiative of online professional development of 1.5 million higher education faculty using the MOOCs platform SWAYAM.
In the first phase, 75 discipline-specific National Resource Centres have been identified which are tasked to prepare online training material with focus on latest developments in the discipline, new & emerging trends, pedagogical improvements and methodologies for transacting revised curriculum.

**SWAYAM**

- It is an online interactive learning platform that provides, not only video lectures, reading material but also assignments/quizzes that could end up in securing credits after completing the assessment system.
- More than 400 Courses are available on SWAYAM covering all the engineering and non-engineering subjects at undergraduate and post-graduate levels.
- The UGC has already issued Regulation that allows transfer of credits earned through the courses done through SWAYAM into the academic record of the students.
- It is now possible for the students and others to take courses of the prestigious IITs or IIMs without formally studying there.
- The platform has been constructed by Microsoft with totally indigenous efforts.

3. **Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya National Mission on Teachers and Training (PMMMNMTT)**

The National Institute of Educational Research and Planning (NIEPA) is in the process of rolling out the National Resource Centre, an initiative that is part of the Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya National Mission on Teachers and Training (PMMMNMTT).

**About the National Resource Centre:**
- The National Resource Centre is envisaged as a one-stop point for Indian academicians to enhance their research and teaching skills.
- The centre will enable college and university teachers to access a detailed database of academic resources, including lists of books, top journals and subject experts in their area of interest.
- It will also suggest a mechanism to higher education institutions to assess students’ satisfaction with teaching and research in the institutions, so that the faculty are able to figure out what students think about their college/university and make improvements.

The Mission proposes to have following components:

- Schools of Education (in Central Universities).
- Centres of Excellence for Curriculum and Pedagogy.
- Inter-University Centres for Teachers’ Education.
- National Resource Centre for Education.
- Centres for Academic Leadership and Education Management.
- Innovations, Awards, Teaching Resource Grant, including Workshop & Seminar, Subject Networks for Curricular Renewal and Reforms.

Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching (PMMMNMTT) is a Scheme launched by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India

The aim of the scheme to improve the quality of school and higher education by addressing comprehensively all issues related to teachers, teaching, teacher preparation, professional development, Curriculum Design, Designing and Developing Assessment & Evaluation methodology, Research in Pedagogy and developing effective Pedagogy.
4. University Grants Commission approves UGC (Online Courses) Regulations, 2018

As per the regulations, higher educational institutions will be able to offer certificate, diploma and degree programmes through an online mode. Such courses should be in the disciplines in which: (i) they are already offering similar courses at graduation level, and (ii) at least one batch has graduated.

Eligibility:
- in existence for at least five years,
- accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council with a minimum score of 3.26 on a 4-point scale
- in the top-100 in overall category in the National Institutional Ranking Framework for at least two years in the previous three years.

Scheme to provide holistic education from pre-school to Class 12 launched
EMPLOYMENT

1. SAMARTH

A meeting of stakeholders on Samarth – Scheme for Capacity Building in Textile Sector under the Skill India Mission was recently held in New Delhi to familiarize the stakeholders about the scheme and its guidelines. The meeting was chaired by Union Minister of Textiles, Smt Smriti Zubin Irani.

NSQF

- National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) organizes qualifications according to a series of levels of knowledge, skills and aptitude. These levels are defined in terms of learning outcomes which the learner must possess regardless of whether they were acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning.
• There are 10 levels in the framework, with the entry level being 1, and the highest level being 10. This will enable a person to acquire desired competency levels, transit to the job market and, at an opportune time, return for acquiring additional skills to further upgrade competencies.

• The framework would be anchored and operationalized by the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), an autonomous body attached to the Ministry of Finance, mandated to coordinate and harmonize skill development efforts of the Government of India and the private sector.

Significance of NSQF

- The NSQF would also help shift emphasis to outcome based learning – both in the general and vocational space.

- NSQF will also facilitate Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) that is largely lacking in the present education and training scenario. Additionally, it would help alignment of Indian qualifications to international qualifications.

- The credit accumulation and transfer system that will be integrated in the NSQF will allow people to move between education, vocational training and work at different stages in their lives according to their needs and convenience.
2. **Startup Ranking Framework**

30 States and Union Territories have participated in the State Startup Ranking Framework 2018 launched by DIPP.

The participating States and UTs shall now be evaluated on a score of 100, against 38 action points categorized into 7 areas of intervention such as Startup Policy and implementation, Incubation support, Seed Funding, Angel and Venture Funding, Simplification of Regulations, Easing Public Procurement and Awareness & Outreach.

In order to evaluate States/UTs in a balanced and transparent manner, the assessment will be based on the aggregate score of the documentary proofs substantiating the implementation of action points by the State/UT Government and also feedback from Startup ecosystem beneficiaries/components.

DIPP has appointed seven dedicated evaluation committees involving members from all relevant departments and reputed players in the ecosystem, for evaluating States’ responses in each area of intervention.

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**Samarth scheme**

**Objective:** skill the youth for gainful and sustainable employment in the textile sector covering the entire value chain of textiles, excluding spinning and weaving. The scheme is intended to provide demand driven, placement oriented National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) compliant skilling programmes to incentivize and supplement the efforts of the industry in creating jobs in the textiles sectors. The scheme targets to train 10 lakh persons (9 lakh in organised and 1 lakh in traditional sector) over a period of 3 years (2017-20), with an outlay of Rs. 1300 crore.
About the Ranking Framework:

- The key objective of the Startup States and UTs Ranking Framework is to **encourage** States and UTs to take proactive steps towards strengthening the Startup ecosystems at the local level.

- The Ranking Framework will **measure the impact of each step initiated at the local level for building a strong Startup ecosystem**. The Ranking Framework will also enable continuous learning through the dissemination of good practices.

- The Ranking Framework is **based on the feedback collected from Startup ecosystem stakeholders**, which include startups, mentors, investors, accelerators, incubators and the government bodies. Areas which should be given greater thrust like seed funding support, women entrepreneurship are given more score.

3. **Bharat Inclusion Seed Fund**

Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad’s (IIMA’s) centre for innovation, incubation, and entrepreneurship (CIIE) has launched ‘Bharat Inclusion Initiative’.
The **Bharat Inclusion Initiative** aims to provide a continuum of solutions to inclusion-focused tech entrepreneurs across the pre-incubation, seed and scale-up stage and help them jump to the next orbit.

It is a **$25 million initiative** that will look to mentor and invest in start-ups in the early stage and seed segment over the next three-four years.

The fund will look at start-ups in areas such as financial inclusion, livelihood, education, agriculture, and health.

The initiative received an initial pledge of $12.5 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, and Omidyar Network.

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**ENVIRONMENT**

1. **WHO global air pollution database**

WHO recently released global air pollution database in Geneva. WHO monitored 4,300 world cities for their air pollution levels in terms of PM 2.5 levels in the year 2016. The PM2.5 includes pollutants like sulfate, nitrate and black carbon, which pose the greatest risk to human health.

- As per the database, 14 out of 15 most polluted cities in the world are from India and the top 14 cities are from India only.
- Kanpur is the most polluted city which came on top with PM 2.5 concentration of 173 micrograms per cubic metre.
- Other Indian cities that registered very high levels of PM2.5 pollutants were Kanpur, Faridabad, Gaya, Patna, Agra, Muzaffarpur, Srinagar, Gurgaon, Jaipur, Patiala and
Jodhpur followed by Ali Subah Al-Salem in Kuwait and a few cities in China and Mongolia.

- The national Capital climbed down from the fourth spot, where it appeared in WHO 2015 data, to the sixth spot only.

**Level of threat from air pollution worldwide**

According to a study which drew off the most-recent data 2016 data, 9 out of 10 people are exposed to dangerously high levels of pollutants around the world which leads to the risk of cancer and cardiovascular diseases.

Air pollution levels were the highest in the eastern Mediterranean and Southeast Asia. Here, in some of the areas, the airborne toxins were five times the limits set by the WHO. These toxins affected the poor and most vulnerable.

Air pollution is the reason behind a dozen of diseases which often prove to be lethal. Almost 7 million deaths were caused by household and outdoor pollution in the previous year.

**Ujjwala:**

- The WHO report has made a special mention of Prime Minister Modi’s ‘Ujjwala’ scheme to provide LPG connections to women from Below Poverty Line (BPL) households.
- The report said, “While the latest data shows ambient air pollution levels are still dangerously high in most parts of the world, countries also show some positive progress.”

2. **Algae Noctiluca Scintillans**
- It is **green algae** which is behind the **scintillating phenomenon** observed in oceans when they glow fluorescent blue at night.

- The *Noctiluca* algae is often reported to occur in patches or blooms in the **Northern Arabian Sea**. These striking green blooms often appear to glow at night due to a special phenomenon called **bioluminescence**, earning them the nickname ‘**sea sparkle**’.

- An Indo-US study has found that global warming is leading to large-scale fish kills in the Arabian Sea by fuelling the growth of this **harmful bioluminescent algae**.

- **Concerns**: It is believed to be dangerous to ocean life because it **produces ammonia**. Their growing abundance is a **cause of concern**, because they adversely affect fish, which do not thrive in such waters.

3. **Bhupathy’s Shieldtail**

- It is a new species of shieldtail snake found recently from the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu.

- The snake, currently found only in the forests of the Anaikatty hills in Tamil Nadu’s Coimbatore district, has been named **Uropeltis bhupathyi** after the late herpetologist S. Bhupathy, for his contributions to the field.

- The reptile belongs to a family of snakes **found only in peninsular India and Sri Lanka**. They are non-venomous, mostly burrowing and earthworm-eating, and are called shieldtails after the large, flat tips of their tails, which make them appear almost sliced off.
4. Namami Gange Programme

National Mission for Clean Ganga has brought on board Survey of India to facilitate the Ganga rejuvenation task by using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology. Through the project, NMCG aims to strengthen planning and implementation at national/state/local levels.

**DEM technology:** The project includes use of Digital Elevation Model (DEM) technology which ensures accurate data collection, an important aspect for river basin management planning. It enables identification of entire topography of an area making it easy for policy makers to analyse the available data thereby supporting the decision-making process.

**Namami Gange programme** was launched as a mission to achieve the target of cleaning river Ganga in an effective manner with the unceasing involvement of all stakeholders, especially five major Ganga basin States – Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal. The programme envisages: River Surface Cleaning, Sewerage Treatment Infrastructure, River Front Development, Bio-Diversity, Afforestation and Public Awareness.

**Implementation:**

- The program would be implemented by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), and its state counterpart organizations i.e., State Program Management Groups (SPMGs).
- In order to improve implementation, a three-tier mechanism has been proposed for project monitoring comprising of a) High level task force chaired by Cabinet Secretary assisted by NMCG at national level, b) State level committee chaired by Chief Secretary assisted by SPMG at state level and c) District level committee chaired by the District Magistrate.
- The program emphasizes on improved coordination mechanisms between various Ministries/Agencies of Central and State governments.
Survey of India: It is the oldest scientific department in the country set up in 1767. It works under the administrative control of Department of Science & Technology.

Functions: As the nation’s Principal Mapping Agency, Survey of India bears a special responsibility to ensure that the country’s domain is explored and mapped suitably, provide base maps for expeditious and integrated development and ensure that all resources contribute with their full measure to the progress, prosperity and security of our country now and for generations to come.

5. National Water Informatics Centre (NWIC)

National Water Informatics Centre (NWIC) has recently been created by Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.

- NWIC would be a repository of nation-wide water resources data and would work as a Subordinate Office under the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.
- NWIC is expected to provide a ‘Single Window’ source of updated data on water resources & allied themes; and provides value added products and services to all stakeholders for its management and sustainable development.
- The Centre will also collaborate with leading research institutes nationally as well as internationally to provide technical support to other central and state organizations dealing with water, emergency response for hydrological extremes.
- The Centre would be headed by a Joint Secretary level officer.
**Background:** The management of water resources is a highly complex and tedious task that involves expertise of multidisciplinary domains and depend on historical and real time reliable data and information.

For this, the first requirement is to develop, maintain and update regularly a comprehensive “Water Resources Information System” (WRIS) in public domain for awareness and involvement of all concerned for effective integrated water resources management. This is also prerequisite for scientific assessment, monitoring, modelling and Decision Support System (DSS) and Integrated water resource Management.

6. **First Organised Census of Indus Dolphins**

For the conservation of Indus dolphins – one of the world’s rarest mammals – the Punjab along with WWF-India is conducting the first organized census on their population.

- A blind species that communicates through echo like bats do, Indus dolphins are **one of the seven freshwater dolphins** found across the world.
- They are **found only in India and Pakistan.** In Punjab, they are confined to only a 185 km stretch between Talwara and Harike Barrage in India’s Beas river in Punjab.
- It is listed by the IUCN as **endangered** on its red list of threatened species. IUCN suspects the population size of the Indus river dolphins has reduced by more than 50% since 1944.

7. **Brown peach aphid**
It is an insect that attacks temperate fruit trees. It has been recorded for the first time in Kashmir Valley, the fruit bowl of India.

**Brown peach aphid**
Aphids feed on the saps of plants, attacking plant tissues that transport food to all different plant parts. The brown peach aphid *Pterochloroides persicae* is a notorious pest of peach and almond trees in the Mediterranean regions. In India, the aphid was recorded for the first time in the 1970s from Himachal Pradesh and Punjab.

The spread of the aphid could affect the local economy which is dependent on fruit trees to a large extent. But if the infestation is not controlled, the invasive aphid can spread fast.

8. **World Migratory Bird Day (May 12) 2018**

World Migratory Bird Day 2018 is being celebrated on May 12th this year.

**Theme:** “Unifying Our Voices for Bird Conservation”.

**World Migratory Bird Day** is celebrated each year to highlight the need for the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats. More than 300 events in more than 60 countries to mark World Migratory Bird Day 2018 will include bird festivals, education programmes, media events, bird watching trips, presentations, film screenings and a benefit concert to raise funds for international nature conservation.
Conservation of migratory species: Efforts to conserve migratory birds both globally and regionally are internationally coordinated by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS, also known as the Bonn Convention) and the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA). The two UN Environment-administered treaties have been spearheading World Migratory Bird Day since 2006.

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals aims to conserve terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range. CMS and its related Agreements on migratory birds bring together governments and other stakeholders to coordinate and further develop conservation policies, to ensure that all flyways in the world benefit from coordination mechanisms that promote cooperation at ground level among the countries involved. It is under aegis of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) is an intergovernmental treaty dedicated to the conservation of migratory waterbirds that migrate along the African-Eurasian Flyway. The Agreement covers 254 species of birds ecologically dependent on wetlands for at least part of their annual cycle.

9. South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN)

SAWEN recently conducted its first ever meeting in India. Representatives of seven countries participated in the meeting and the members agreed on having an operational framework for strengthening the regional body to combat wildlife crime. During the meet six proposals,
including tracking of wildlife smuggling route, review of existing laws and a structure for the organization were tabled.

**Significance:** The South Asia region is very vulnerable to illegal traffic and wildlife crimes due to presence of precious biodiversity and large markets as well as traffic routes for wildlife products in the region. The collaboration in harmonizing as well as enforcing the wildlife protection in the region is considered very important for effective conservation of biodiversity.

**SAWEN** is a regional network comprises eight countries in South Asia – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

It aims at working as a strong regional intergovernmental body for combating wildlife crimes by attempting common goals and approaches for combating illegal trade in the region.

10. **Ivory is ‘government property’**

The Supreme Court, in *Wild Life Warden v Komarrikkal Elias* case, has held that elephant tusk is a property of the Government. The Supreme Court observed that there is a clear “declaration” in the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 on elephant tusks being government property.

**Section 39(1) (c) of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972** says that an ivory imported into India and an article made from such ivory in respect of which any offence against this Act or any rule or order made thereunder has been committed, shall be deemed to be the property of the state.
government, and where such animal is hunted in a sanctuary or national park declared by the Central Government, such animal or any animal article, trophy, uncured trophy or meat derived from such animal shall be the property of the Central Government.

11. Green Skill Development Programme (GSPD)

In its bid to create over five lakh job opportunities by 2021 through green skills, the government has launched GSPD-ENVIS mobile app to begin enrolments in 30 expert course under its Green Skill Development Programme (GSPD).

**Green Skill Development Programme (GSDP):** is a recent initiative under the ENVIS scheme for skilling the youth in the country. It is an initiative for skill development in the environment and forest region by the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change (MoEF&CC) to develop India’s youth into employable and/or self-employment, making use of the widespread network and experience of ENVIS Hubs/RPs.

The Green Skill Development programme endeavours to develop green skilled workers having technical knowledge and commitment to sustainable development, which will help in the attainment of the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and National Biodiversity Targets (NBT).

**Green skills are those skills required to adapt processes, services and products to climate change and the environmental rules and necessities related to it.** They embrace the information, abilities, values and attitudes required to live in, develop and support a sustainable and resource-efficient society. India is the second most populous country in the world is bestowed with a large working population.

12. A Global Environment Compact
• The UN General Assembly has adopted a resolution to set up a working group for negotiations aimed at creating a Global Pact for the Environment, a legally binding international instrument.

• The resolution requests UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to submit to the General Assembly a report that identifies and assesses possible gaps in international environmental law and environment-related instruments with a view to strengthening their implementation.

• It decides to establish an ad hoc open-ended working group to consider the report, and if deemed necessary, to consider the scope, parameters and feasibility of a Global Pact for the Environment.

• The resolution requests the current president of the General Assembly to appoint two co-chairs of the working group — one from a developing country and one from a developed country — to oversee its consultations.

Key facts:
- The resolution was sponsored by France and won the support of 143 countries.
- Iran, the Philippines, Russia, Syria, Turkey and the United States voted against it.
- Six other countries abstained while several states did not vote.

13. Green Good Deeds

The BRICS Ministerial on Environment has agreed to include “Green Good Deeds” in its official agenda in the next Ministerial in Brazil and another meeting in Russia.
“Green Good Deeds” campaign: The campaign has been launched by the Environment Ministry to sensitise the people and students, in particular, about climate change and global warming. The objective of the campaign is to restore and return the clean and green environment to the next generation.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change had drawn up a list of over 500 Green Good Deeds and asked people to alter their behaviour to Green Good Behaviour to fulfil their Green Social Responsibility.

These small positive actions to be performed by individuals or organisations to strengthen the cause of environmental protection, were put on a mobile application named “Dr Harsh Vardhan App”.

Significance: International conferences on Environment have been deliberating and adopting declarations. However, these declarations are hardly put to practice at the ground level, involving every section of the society. “Green Good Deeds” is an idea to take it to the people and get them involved.

14. Asita Project

National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has asked DDA to expedite “Asita”, its Yamuna River Front Development Project.

Asita (also known as Yamuna River Front Development (RFD) project) aims to restore, revive and rejuvenate the river’s floodplains and make them accessible to the people of Delhi. “Asita” is another name of river Yamuna.

Key features:

- A special focus of the project is on reviving the river’s bio-diversity in the National Capital.
• River Front “walks”, a major component of the project, will enable people to develop a relationship with river Yamuna.

• The project envisages creating a green buffer area approx. 300mts wide along the river edge with species of riverine ecology. Besides, a wide belt of 150mts along the peripheral roads will be developed as greenways for public amenities that will include a continuous trail of pathways and cycle tracks.

• To revive the ecosystem of the floodplains, wetlands will be created to store the flood waters and also to improve the groundwater recharge which will eventually result in flourishing of biodiversity in the floodplains.

• An environmentally conscious approach for integration of the river into the urban fabric of the city has been adopted. A people-friendly bio-diversity zone will be created for people to interact freely with the river’s eco-system.

**Concerns:** The Yamuna was declared a dead river. The dissolved oxygen level, which are crucial to life in the water, is negligible. The river usually flows with heavy toxic foam on its surface and often parts of the river actually catch fire. Ostensibly, in the last 22 years, over Rs. 2,000 crore has been spent on the clean-up of the Yamuna.

**Yamuna River:** The Yamuna is the tributary of river Ganga. It originates from the Yamunotri Glacier at a height of 6,387 metres on the south western slopes of Banderpooch peaks in the uppermost region of the Lower Himalayas in Uttarakhand. It merges with the Ganges at Triveni Sangam, Allahabad, the site for the Kumbha Mela.

**Yamuna Action Plan:** Government of India has sanctioned Yamuna Action Plant (YAP)-I and YAP-II schemes for river Yamuna in Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and YAP-III in Delhi under financial assistance from Japan International
Cooperation Agency (JICA) for taking up works for sewerage/interception and diversion of drains, Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs), low cost sanitation/community toilet complexes, electric/ improved wood crematoria, etc.

15. International Day for Biological Diversity 2018

Every year May 22 is observed as The International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) to increase awareness on various biodiversity issues such as habitat destruction, marine pollution and climate change.

**Theme for 2018** is “Celebrating 25 Years of Action for Biodiversity.”

**Background:** It was first observed in 1993 by the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly. In 2000, May 22 was chosen as the International Day for Biological Diversity to commemorate the Adoption of the Agreed Text of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

**CBD:** At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, world leaders agreed on a comprehensive strategy for “sustainable development” — meeting our needs while ensuring that we leave a healthy and viable world for future generations. One of the key agreements adopted at Rio was the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Convention on Biological Diversity is the international legal instrument for “the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources” that has been ratified by 196 nations.

16. Clean Air India Initiative launched

Clean Air India initiative was recently launched by Prime Minister of Netherlands Mark Rutte, who is in India on a two-day visit.
The Clean Air India Initiative is a collaborative project between Get In The Ring, a platform for start-ups, the government of the Netherlands, Start-up India, and INDUS Forum, an online matchmaking platform of Indian and Dutch businesses.

The campaign aims to curb air pollution in Indian cities by promoting partnerships between Indian start-ups and Dutch companies and build a network of entrepreneurs working on business solutions for cleaner air.

Governments need to be articulate about the problems they want to solve, bring together the right partners, and channelise entrepreneurs in the right direction to find solutions to global problems.”

“Sustainable businesses present an opportunity to do social good, as they represent a for-profit orientation in the right framework. They advance the U.N.’s Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] in a smartly profitable way.

17. Global Fuel Economy Initiative (GFEI)

The Global Fuel Economy Initiative (GFEI) works to secure real improvements in fuel economy, and the maximum deployment of vehicle efficiency technologies across the world. This includes light and heavy duty vehicles, and the full range of technologies, including hybrid and fully electric vehicles. The Initiative promotes these objectives through shared analysis, advocacy, and through in country policy support, and tools.

GFEI is a partnership of the International Energy Agency (IEA), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), International Transport Forum of the OECD (ITF), International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT), Institute for Transportation Studies at UC Davis, and the FIA Foundation.
The GFEI works with countries to develop an appropriate national approach and supporting target for improved car fleet fuel economy, while working toward a global stabilization of emissions from the road transport sector by 2050.

GFEI also work in global policy processes - such as the UNFCCC, G20 and Post 2015 framework – to promote fuel economy as part of energy efficiency, whilst backing-up this advocacy and capacity building with cutting edge research.

The Initiative also promotes fuel economy by engaging in global processes such as the UN Climate Convention and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

18. Biodiversity Award for Arunachal Reserve

Singchung Bugun Village Community Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh has been awarded the India Biodiversity Award for its effort to conserve the critically endangered bird – Bugun liocichla.

Bugun Liocichla (Liocichla bugunorum) was discovered in 2006 in West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. The bird has been named in honour of the efforts of the Bugun community of Singchung village in West Kameng district in conserving the wildlife and forest of the area.

The known population of this species is between 14 and 20 individual birds and occupies an extremely small (3 to 4 square kilometre) area in the temperate forest around 2,200m which is entirely within the traditional lands of Singchung village.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature has classified this species as critically endangered.
SBVCR was formally created on February 6 last year following intensive conservation efforts by the Arunachal forest department. The SBVCR, 17 square kilometre in size, is the core area of a larger conservation area on traditional Bugun lands.

Conservation reserves and community reserves in India are terms denoting protected areas of India which typically act as buffer zones to or connectors and migration corridors between established national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and reserved and protected forests of India.

Such areas are designated as conservation areas if they are uninhabited and completely owned by the Government of India but used for subsistence by communities, and community areas if part of the lands are privately owned. Administration of such reserves would be through local people and local agencies like the gram panchayat, as in the case of communal forests.

The 2002 Amendment to the Indian Wildlife Protection Act (1972) calls for a new category of protected areas, a ‘Community Reserve’ (CR).

19. Green Cricket in India

- The main aim of the partnership is to spread greater awareness about key environmental challenges that are facing the country and highlight alternate and more sustainable solutions.
- Through the agreement, the BCCI will endeavor to reduce its environmental impact by greening its operations and engaging cricketers and fans in green initiatives.
- The partnership will help make cricket green and sensitise spectators towards minimising waste generation during matches.
- The partnership will also focus on phasing out single-use plastic across stadiums and cricket events in the country.
Background: As global host of World Environment Day in 2018, India is leading the global charge to #BeatPlasticPollution in the country, and around the world. It is estimated that the world uses 10 million plastic bags every minute, and much of ends up in our oceans and landfills and is ingested by marine animals and wildlife.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is the national governing body for cricket in India. Today, the BCCI has 30 full-time members. It organizes – among others – the Indian Premier League.

World Environment Day: is the single largest celebration of our environment each year. Since it began in 1974, it has grown to become a global platform for public outreach that is widely celebrated across the globe.

20. NGT issues notices on plea to halt road through Corbett

A plea seeking a stay on the construction of a link road linking Kotdwar to Ramnagar through the Corbett Tiger Reserve has led the National Green Tribunal to seek responses from the Uttarakhand government and the Centre.

Issue: The petition alleges that the construction of the road through the park was in violation of previous Supreme Court orders that prohibited the construction of any road through the Corbett Tiger Reserve.

Corbett National Park is situated in the foothills of the Sub- Himalayan belt in Nainital districts of Uttarakhand state in India. It covers an area of 521 sq. km and together with the neighboring Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary and Reserve Forest areas, forms the Corbett Tiger Reserve. Corbett
is one of the richest bird regions of the Country and has been declared as an ‘Important Bird Area’ (IBA) by Birdlife International.


- **Objective:** The policy provides a framework for the promotion of large grid connected wind-solar photovoltaic (PV) hybrid systems. This would: (i) enable optimal utilisation of power transmission infrastructure and land, (ii) reduce variability in renewable power generation, and (iii) help achieve better grid stability.

- **Wind-solar hybrid systems:** Wind-solar hybrid power plants will include wind turbine generators and solar PV systems, that will be configured to operate at the same point of grid connection. The two systems can be integrated in different ways depending upon the size of each of the source integrated and the technology type. Further, if a particular energy source is stronger at a site, the size of the other source (in terms of capacity) can be kept smaller.
However, for a plant to be recognized as hybrid, the **rated power capacity of one resource should be at least 25% of the rated power capacity of the other source**.

- **New hybrid plants**: The power generated from the hybrid project may be used for: (i) captive purpose (for the plant’s own use), (ii) sale to third party through open access (large consumers buying directly from the power plant instead of through a distribution company), or (iii) sale to the power distribution companies.

With regard to the procurement of hybrid power through transparent bidding, the bidding parameters may include: (i) capacity delivered at grid interface point, (ii) effective capacity utilisation factor of the plant, and (iii) unit price of electricity.

- **Battery storage**: Battery storage may be added to the power plant to: (i) reduce the variability of output power from the hybrid plant, (ii) providing higher energy output for a given capacity, and (iii) ensuring availability of continuous power for a particular period.

- **Incentives**: All fiscal and financial incentives available to wind and solar power projects will also be made available to hybrid project.

**Promoting biomass based co-generation in sugar mills, and other industries**

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has released a scheme to support the promotion of biomass based co-generation in sugar mills, and other industries.

**Co-generation**: Generating both electricity and useful heat at the same time, therefore utilizing the available energy in more than one form.

The total central financial assistance towards the scheme will be Rs 170 crore for the period 2017-18 to 2019-20.
Key provisions under the scheme include:

**Eligibility:** The programme will provide central assistance for projects utilizing biomass such as bagasse, agro-based industrial residue, crop residue, weeds, and wood waste produced in industrial operations. **Municipal solid waste is not covered under the scheme.**

**Firms eligible for financial support:** registered companies, partnership firms, cooperatives, and public sector companies. To avail such financial support, the applicant must have availed a term loan (for the eligible project) from any financial institution like public or private sector banks, central or state cooperative banks, or a non-banking financial company.

**Central Financial Assistance:** Central assistance under the scheme will be Rs 25 lakh/MW for bagasse cogeneration projects, and Rs 50 lakh/MW for non-bagasse cogeneration projects.

**Project timeline:** Promoters will have to complete the project within 24 months (with a six-month extension) from the date of sanction of the central assistance. If the project is not completed within the stipulated time, the central assistance will be cancelled.

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22. Cabinet approves National Policy on Biofuels, 2018

Biofuels are **liquid or gaseous fuels produced from biomass resources.** These resources include biodegradable fraction of products, wastes and residues from agriculture, forestry and related industries, and the biodegradable fraction of industrial and municipal wastes.

Key features of the approved policy include:
• **Categories of biofuels:** The policy creates two categories of biofuels: basic and advanced.

Basic biofuels include first generation bioethanol. Advanced biofuels include second generation ethanol, municipal solid waste, third generation biofuels, bio-CNG.

• **Raw materials:** The policy expands the scope of raw material for ethanol production by allowing the use of certain items that are unfit for human consumption. These include: (i) sugarcane juice, (ii) materials containing sugar such as sugar beet, (iii) materials containing starch such as corn, cassava, and (iv) damaged food grains like wheat, broken rice, and rotten potatoes.

It also allows the use of surplus food grains for production of ethanol for blending with petrol, with the approval of the National Biofuel Coordination Committee.

• **Financial incentives:** The policy indicates a viability gap funding scheme of Rs 5,000 crore in six years for second generation ethanol bio refineries. Further, advanced biofuels will also get additional tax incentives, and higher purchase price as compared to basic biofuels.
23. National Clean Air Programme for India released by the Ministry of Environment

The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) aims to meet the prescribed annual average ambient air quality standards at all locations in the country in a stipulated timeframe.

Objectives:
- Develop an effective and proficient ambient air quality monitoring network across the country for ensuring a comprehensive and reliable database;
- Create an efficient data dissemination and public outreach mechanism for timely measures for prevention and mitigation of air pollution;
- Involve public participation in both planning and implementation of the programmes and policies of government on air pollution; and
• Create a management plan for prevention, control, and abatement of air pollution.

The NCAP intends to plug the gaps in the ongoing government initiatives towards mitigating air pollution:

- It proposes to **increase the number of monitoring stations** from existing 691 to 1,000.
- It also plans to bring in rural areas under the National Air Quality Monitoring Programme.
- Towards achieving this, it will set up 50 monitoring stations in rural areas. The NCAP will also develop guidelines and protocols for monitoring and managing indoor air pollution.
- The NCAP plans to set up an **Accreditation Service** which will certify equipment used in environmental monitoring programmes according to the existing ISO standards.
- It also envisages setting up an **Air Quality Forecasting System** which will accurately forecast air pollution on daily basis and also expected air pollution exigencies.
1. New Shepard rocket and space capsule

Blue Origin, the US aerospace company owned by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, has launched its suborbital New Shepard rocket and space capsule. The mission marked the company’s first test flight of the year and second flight of the New Shepard 2.0 spacecraft.

The New Shepard system is a fully reusable vertical takeoff, vertical landing (VTVL) space vehicle. The system consists of a pressurized capsule atop a booster.

The name New Shepard makes reference to the first American astronaut in space, Alan Shepard, one of the original NASA Mercury Seven astronauts.

New Shepard 2.0 space capsule is designed to fly commercial payloads and up to 6 passengers on suborbital space flights for science and tourism. The capsule features giant windows to give future passengers a stunning view of their launch into space.

2. GRACE-FO Mission

NASA is set to launch a pair of new spacecraft that will observe our planet’s ever-changing water cycle, ice sheets and crust.

The Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment Follow-On (GRACE-FO) mission, a partnership between NASA and the German Research Centre for Geosciences (GFZ), will take over where the first GRACE mission left off when it completed its 15-year mission in 2017.

- GRACE-FO is a successor to the original GRACE mission, which began orbiting Earth on March 17, 2002. The GRACE missions measure variations in gravity over Earth’s surface, producing a new map of the gravity field every 30 days.

- GRACE-FO will carry on the extremely successful work of its predecessor while testing a new technology designed to dramatically improve the already remarkable precision of its measurement system.

GRACE-FO will continue the work of tracking Earth’s water movement to monitor changes in water storage, such as the0
3. Mars InSight Probe

InSight is part of NASA’s Discovery Program, managed by the agency’s Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama.

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

It will use the seismic waves generated by marsquakes to develop a map of the planet’s deep interior.

NASA has launched Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport (InSight), the first-ever mission to study the heart of Mars. It was launched on board Atlas 5 rocket.

Significance of the mission:
- The findings of Mars’ formation will help better **understand how other rocky planets, including Earth, were and are created.** But InSight is more than a Mars mission – it is a terrestrial planet explorer that would address one of the most fundamental issues of planetary and solar system science – understanding the processes that shaped the rocky planets of the inner solar system (including Earth) more than four billion years ago.

- By using sophisticated geophysical instruments, InSight would delve deep beneath the surface of Mars, **detecting the fingerprints of the processes of terrestrial planet formation,** as well as measuring the planet’s “vital signs”: Its “pulse” (seismology), “temperature” (heat flow probe), and “reflexes” (precision tracking).

- InSight seeks to answer one of science’s most fundamental questions: **How did the terrestrial planets form?**

4. **Bangabandhu Satellite-1**

- The Bangabandhu Satellite-1 mission will be the first to utilize Falcon 9 Block 5, the final substantial upgrade to SpaceX’s Falcon 9 launch vehicle. Falcon 9 Block 5 is designed to be capable of 10 or more flights with very limited refurbishment as SpaceX continues to strive for rapid reusability and extremely high reliability.

- Bangabandhu is Bangladesh’s first communications satellite. Built by Thales Alenia Space, a Franco-Italian aerospace manufacturer, it is designed to provide a wide range of broadcast and communication services throughout the country for the next 15 years. It is named after Bangladesh’s “Father of the Nation”- Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.
• **Applications:** Once operational, citizens of Bangladesh will gain access to the Internet, phone services, radio, backhaul, direct-to-home TV, and other related services.

5. **Magnetospheric Multiscale spacecraft (MMS)**

• In a new find, NASA scientists have discovered a new type of magnetic event in turbulent space surrounding Earth. Scientists analysed the data obtained by the NASA’s Magnetospheric Multiscale spacecraft (MMS) to find the new magnetic event in near-Earth environment.

• Magnetic reconnection is one of the most important processes in the space — filled with charged particles known as plasma — around Earth.

• This fundamental process dissipates magnetic energy and propels charged particles, both of which contribute to a dynamic space weather system that scientists want to better understand, and even someday predict, as we do terrestrial weather.

• Reconnection occurs when crossed magnetic field lines snap, explosively flinging away nearby particles at high speeds.

**Magnetospheric Multiscale Mission:** investigates how the Sun’s and Earth’s magnetic fields connect and disconnect, explosively transferring energy from one to the other in a process that is important at the Sun, other planets, and everywhere in the universe, known as magnetic reconnection.
Four identically instrumented spacecraft measure plasmas, fields, and particles in a near-equatorial orbit that will frequently encounter reconnection in action.

**Significance of the mission:** By observing magnetic reconnection in nature, MMS provides access to predictive knowledge of a universal process that is the final governor of space weather, affecting modern technological systems such as communications networks, GPS navigation, and electrical power grids. MMS will establish knowledge, methods and technologies applicable to future space weather missions and the future growth and development of space weather forecasting.

6. **NASA Mars Helicopter**

NASA is planning to send a small helicopter to Mars as part of the space agency’s 2020 mission to place a next-generation rover on the Martian surface, marking the first time such an aircraft will be used on another world.

**The mission:**

- The Mars Helicopter, a small, autonomous rotorcraft, will travel with the agency’s Mars 2020 rover mission, currently scheduled to launch in July 2020, to demonstrate the viability and potential of heavier-than-air vehicles on the Red Planet.
- The helicopter also contains built-in capabilities needed for operation at Mars, including solar cells to charge its lithium-ion batteries, and a heating mechanism to keep it warm through the cold Martian nights. But before the helicopter can fly at Mars it has to get there. It will do so attached to the belly pan of the Mars 2020 rover.
As a technology demonstration, the Mars Helicopter is considered a high-risk, high-reward project. If it does not work, the Mars 2020 mission will not be impacted. If it does work, helicopters may have a real future as low-flying scouts and aerial vehicles to access locations not reachable by ground travel.

**Mars 2020** will launch on a United Launch Alliance (ULA) Atlas V rocket from Space Launch Complex 41 at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida, and is expected to reach Mars in February 2021.

The rover will conduct geological assessments of its landing site on Mars, determine the habitability of the environment, search for signs of ancient Martian life, and assess natural resources and hazards for future human explorers.

Scientists will use the instruments aboard the rover to identify and collect samples of rock and soil, encase them in sealed tubes, and leave them on the planet’s surface for potential return to Earth on a future Mars mission.

### 7. New sheep insemination technique

Scientists at the Central Sheep and Wool Research Institute (CSWRI), Avikanagar, have come up with a new laparoscope-assisted insemination technique for sheep.

**Laparoscope technique:** The minor invasive laparoscopic technique involves passing a rigid fibre-optic laparoscope into the abdomen through a small incision. The reproductive tract is located through camera and the frozen semen is deposited into the uterus.

**Significance:** It has resolved the difficulties involved in freezing of semen and inability to transit the tortuous reproductive tract of the ruminant mammals kept as livestock. It would be of great help in the breed improvement programmes. The new technique would help achieve up to 60% survival in the birth of lambs and would have an immense potential for rapid multiplication of
elite germplasm. As many as 40 females can be inseminated from a single ejaculate using the technique.

8. ISRO making green propellant

- Scientists at the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) have reported progress in the development of an environment-friendly propellant to power satellites and spacecraft. The new propellant is a blend based on hydroxylammonium nitrate (HAN).

- The new HAN-based monopropellant is already being tested. A monopropellant is a chemical propulsion fuel which does not require a separate oxidizer. It is used extensively in satellite thrusters for orbital correction and orientation control.

- The in-house formulation consists of HAN, ammonium nitrate, methanol and water. While methanol was added to reduce combustion instability, the choice of AN was dictated by its capacity to control the burn rate and lower the freezing point of the propellant.

Presently, hydrazine rocket fuel is being used. However, it is a highly toxic and carcinogenic chemical. Due to its high performance characteristics, hydrazine has dominated the space industry as the choice of propellant for over six decades, despite its environment and health hazards and the challenges faced in its manufacturing, storage, ground handling and transportation.


- Mascot IP Nani is a tech-savvy grandmother who helps the government and enforcement agencies in combating IP crimes with the help of her grandson “Chhotu” aka Aditya.
The IP mascot will spread awareness about the importance of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) among people, especially children, in an interesting manner.

This character is also in line with the World Intellectual Property Organization’s (WIPO) campaign for the World IP Day which celebrates the brilliance, ingenuity, curiosity and courage of the women who are driving change in our world and shaping our common future.

- The **World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)** is one of the 17 specialized agencies of the United Nations.
- It was created in 1967 “to encourage creative activity, to promote the protection of intellectual property throughout the world.”
- It has currently 188 member states, administers 26 international treaties, and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- Non-members are the states of Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Solomon Islands, South Sudan and Timor-Leste. Palestine has observer status.
- India is a member of WIPO and party to several treaties administered by WIPO.

### 10. Cell for IPR Promotion & Management (CIPAM)

The Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) recently organized a conference on successful completion of two years of the National Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy adopted by the Government of India in May 2016.

**Highlights of the new IPR policy:**

- The new policy seeks to encourage innovation and improve access to healthcare, food security and environmental protection.
The Policy will allow compulsory licensing with restrictions in case of a public health emergency such as epidemics and it is compliant with the World Trade Organization’s guidelines.

The policy seeks to put in place a legal framework that will encourage the IPR regime and reduce the time taken by the government to approve a trademark to a month by 2017. Currently, the process takes more than a year.

The policy makes the department of industrial policy and promotion (DIPP) the nodal agency for regulating IP rights in the country.

The Policy states “India shall remain committed to the (World Trade Organisation’s) Doha Declaration on Trade Related IPR Agreement (TRIPS) and Public Health.”

It also says “India will continue to utilise the legislative space and flexibilities available in international treaties and the TRIPS Agreement.” These flexibilities include the sovereign right of countries to use provisions such as Section 3(d) and CLs for ensuring the availability of essential and life-saving drugs at affordable prices.

To ensure strong and effective IPR laws, the Policy states India will engage constructively in the negotiation of international treaties and agreements in consultation with stakeholders.

The National Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy, which was approved by the Union Cabinet in May 2016, is a significant move forward to encourage creativity and stimulate innovation in the country. Outreach and Promotion is the first and foremost objective of the National IPR Policy and is critical to shaping an IP environment that is conducive to fostering creativity & innovation in the country.
Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) has been created as a professional body under the aegis of DIPP to take forward the implementation of the National IPR Policy that was approved by the Government in May 2016, with the slogan – “Creative India; Innovative India”.

**Functions:** CIPAM is working towards creating public awareness about IPRs in the country, promoting the filing of IPRs through facilitation, providing inventors with a platform to commercialize their IP assets and coordinating the implementation of the National IPR Policy in collaboration with Government Ministries/Departments and other stakeholders.

### 11. GRACE Mission

NASA’s GRACE mission has confirmed that a massive redistribution of freshwater is occurring across the Earth, with middle-latitude belts drying and the tropics and higher latitudes gaining water supplies.

**Reason:** A combination of the effects of climate change, vast human withdrawals of groundwater and simple natural changes are behind this.

**Concern:** If this continues, it could have profound consequences leading to a situation in which some highly populous regions could struggle to find enough water in the future.

The GRACE mission was selected as the second mission under the NASA Earth System Science Pathfinder (ESSP) Program in May 1997. Launched in March of 2002, the GRACE mission mapped variations in Earth’s gravity field. Designed for a nominal mission lifetime of five years, GRACE operated in an extended mission phase till 2017.

GRACE is a joint partnership between the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the United States and Deutsche Forschungsanstalt für Luft und Raumfahrt (DLR) in Germany.
12. Radar in a CubeSat (RainCube)

NASA is planning to deliver RainCube to the ISS on the OA-9 resupply mission.

RainCube (Radar in a CubeSat) is a technology demonstration mission to enable Ka-band precipitation radar technologies on a low-cost, quick-turnaround platform. RainCube will demonstrate the feasibility of a radar payload on a CubeSat platform. Sponsored by NASA’s Earth Science Technology Office (ESTO) through the InVEST-15 program, RainCube developed a 35.75 GHz radar payload to operate within the 6U CubeSat form factor.

**Main objectives:**

- Develop, launch, and operate the first radar instrument on a CubeSat (6U).
- Demonstrate new technologies and provide space validation for a Ka-band (35.75 GHz) precipitation profiling radar.
- Enable future precipitation profiling Earth science missions on a low-cost, quick-turnaround platform.

If successful, RainCube could open the door for lower-cost, quick-turnaround constellation missions, in which multiple CubeSats work together to provide more frequent observations than a single satellite.

13. ToneTag

ToneTag, a Bengaluru-based financial technology company, is set to introduce sound-based data transfer technology named Tonetag.

**Significance:** ToneTag sound-wave communication platform enables highly secure proximity payments, customer engagement services and on-the-go mobility solutions. The approach in
this technology makes the entire process device agnostic and completely frictionless, making the user experience intuitive and highly adaptable.

**Tonetag technology:** ToneTag is a technology which is a communication protocol that will enable data transfer using sound waves. It is not hardware dependent and works with the devices that do not have a microphone or speaker.

14. Narcotics Control Bureau

The third bilateral meeting between Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), India and Police Narcotics Bureau (PNB), Sri Lanka on Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and related matters was recently held in New Delhi.

NCB, India and PNB, Sri Lanka have recognized the challenging drug situation in the region and identified useful areas of future cooperation including in field of information exchange, control delivery operations and training.

**NCB:**

- The Narcotics Control Bureau is the apex coordinating agency. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 which came into effect from the 14th November, 1985 made an express provision for constituting a Central Authority for the purpose of exercising the powers and functions of the Central Government under the Act.

- The Bureau, subject to the supervision and control of the Central Government, is to exercise the powers and functions of the Central Government for taking measures with respect to:
  - Co-ordination of actions by various offices, State Governments and other authorities under the N.D.P.S. Act, Customs Act, Drugs and Cosmetics Act and any other law for the
- Implementation of the obligation in respect of counter measures against illicit traffic under the various international conventions and protocols that are in force at present or which may be ratified or acceded to by India in future.
- Assistance to concerned authorities in foreign countries and concerned international organizations to facilitate coordination and universal action for prevention and suppression of illicit traffic in these drugs and substances.
- Coordination of actions taken by the other concerned Ministries, Departments and Organizations in respect of matters relating to drug abuse.

15. Border Roads Organization (BRO)

Border Roads Organisation (BRO) is celebrating its **Raising Day on 07 May 2018**. It is celebrating its 58 years of glorious service to the nation. Since its inception in 1960, so far the Organisation has grown from 02 to 19 projects. The works executed have ensured the territorial integrity and the socio-economic upliftment of the most inaccessible regions of the country as well as India’s neighbourhood.

**BRO**

- Functioning under the control of the Ministry of Defence since 2015, the BRO is engaged in road construction to provide connectivity to difficult and inaccessible regions in the border areas of the country.
• It is staffed by officers and troops drawn from the Indian Army’s Corps of Engineers, Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Army Service Corps, Military Police and army personnel on extra regimental employment.

• Engineering Service and personnel from the General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) form the parent cadre of the Border Roads Organisation.

• Currently, the organisation maintains operations in twenty-one states, one UT (Andaman and Nicobar Islands), and neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.

• The BRO operates and maintains over 32,885 kilometres of roads and about 12,200 meters of permanent bridges in the country.

16. Network for Spectrum (NFS) Project

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for enhancement of budget by Rs.11,330 crore for the Network For Spectrum (NFS) project.

Network For Spectrum (NFS) project is for laying of alternate communication network for Defence Services. The project is being implemented by Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL).

The project will also have forward linkages to other related industries such as telecom equipment manufacturing and other telecommunication related services. The NFS project will boost the communication capabilities of the Defence Forces in a major way leading to enhanced national operational preparedness.

The project is crucial since the armed forces will migrate all their communication needs to this optic-fibre network and free more bandwidth for commercial telephony services.

RUSTOM - 2
DRDO chairman S Christopher recently said that Rustom-2 drones will be delivered to the Indian armed forces by 2020.

**Rustom-2**

- Rustom 2 drone is a medium-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle, developed on the lines of predator drones of the United States. The objective of this drone is to carry out surveillance for the armed forces with an endurance of 24 hours.

- The drone was developed for use by all three services of the Indian armed forces, primarily for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) operations.

- The medium-altitude prototype can fly at over 22,000 ft and is a long-endurance (MALE) UAV that has an approximate flight time of 20 hours.

- It can fly at around 280 km/h and carry a variety of payloads like Medium Range Electro Optic (MREO), Long Range Electro Optic (LREO), Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), Electronic Intelligence (ELINT).

- Rustom 2 can fly missions on manual as well as autonomous modes. The onboard way-point navigation system allows the drone to conduct missions autonomously.

**Significance of drones:** Modern warfare is heavily dependent on drones and India had deployed its imported drones effectively during the surgical strikes it carried out across the Line of Control in Pakistan in September 2016.

**17. Brahmos Missile**
BrahMos, supersonic cruise missile was recently successfully test fired from the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Balasore, Odisha.

- BrahMos is a joint venture between DRDO of India and NPOM of Russia.

- The highly versatile BrahMos has been operationalised in the Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force.

- BrahMos is the first Indian missile whose life has been extended from 10 years to 15 years. Life extension of the missile system is yet another step that helps in reducing the cost of BrahMos.

- BrahMos became the first heavy missile system in the world to be integrated successfully on a Sukhoi-30 MKI frontline fighter jet of the Indian Air Force (IAF). The missile can be fired from land, from ships (both vertical and inclined configuration), under-water, and from air.

- BrahMos initially had a range of 300-km, but after India became a part of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the range was extended to 450-km.

- BrahMos can attain a cruise speed of 2.8 Mach and can carry a conventional warhead of almost 300 kg.

**MTCR:** Established in April 1987, the voluntary MTCR aims to limit the spread of ballistic missiles and other unmanned delivery systems that could be used for chemical, biological, and nuclear attacks.

The MTCR regime urges its members, which include most of the world’s key missile manufacturers, to restrict their exports of missiles and related technologies capable of carrying a 500-kilogram payload at least 300 kilometers or delivering any type of weapon of mass destruction.
18. RIMPAC naval exercises

The United States has decided to disinvite China from participating in the Rim of the Pacific naval exercise, held near Hawaii. The decision to withdraw the invitation extended to China was made in response to Chinese activity in the South China Sea.

**Background:** China first participated in the RIMPAC exercises in 2014, as noted by The Diplomat. Back then China’s participation was lauded and viewed as a step toward cooperation. In Asia’s current climate, these exercises are especially important. Tension in both the South China Sea and East China Sea tends to increase during summer months, when activity is on the rise due to the presence of fishing and trade vessels.

RIMPAC is the world’s largest set of international maritime war games. The exercises occur every two years and are led by the U.S. Navy’s Pacific Fleet, headquartered in Honolulu, Hawaii.

They are seen as a unique opportunity for Pacific Rim nations to cooperate as they train and work together to solve problems. Also, the games are seen as a way of ensuring open access to important shipping lanes in Asia’s increasingly contested waters. The exercises are also a display of power — in the sense that participants are able to understand the technological capabilities of other participants — and thus perhaps act as a deterrent to further aggressive action.

**Observer nations:** Several observer nations are usually invited, including China, Ecuador, India, Mexico, the Philippines, and Russia. While not contributing any ships, observer nations are involved in RIMPAC at the strategic level and use the opportunity to prepare for possible full participation in the future.
19. INDOPACOM


The renaming reflects the existing geographic coverage of the command and the acknowledgment of the increasing connectedness between the two oceans — Pacific and India —, but also, more broadly, the process of India’s re-entry into the US government’s “Asia” orbit.”

Background:
Formerly known as United States Pacific Command, it is a unified combatant command of the United States Armed Forces responsible for the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. It is the oldest and largest of the unified combatant commands.

Its commander, the senior U.S. military officer in the Pacific, is responsible for military operations in an area which encompasses more than 100 million square miles, or roughly 52% of the Earth’s surface, stretching from the waters off the west coast of the United States to the west coast of India, and from the Arctic to the Antarctic.

The Commander reports to the President of the United States through the Secretary of Defense and is supported by Service component and subordinate unified commands, including U.S. Army Pacific, U.S. Pacific Fleet, U.S. Pacific Air Forces, U.S. Marine Forces Pacific, U.S. Forces Japan, U.S. Forces Korea, Special Operations Command Korea, and Special Operations Command Pacific.
WOMEN

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)

The Ministry of Women and Child Development recently held a National Conference of 244 Districts under Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) in New Delhi. The Nodal Officers of 244 Districts, State Nodal Officers and Senior officers were part of the conference.

Concerns:
The low and falling child sex ratio in the country is a matter of policy concern, not only because it violates the human rights of unborn and infant girls but also because it deprives the country of the potential economic and social contribution of these ‘missing women’.
In addition, there may be longer-run adverse impacts from a marriage market squeeze caused by an excess supply of male relative to female youth. Already, states like Haryana and Punjab, where the sex ratio has been extremely distorted for several decades, have been experiencing bride trafficking.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme was launched in January, 2015. The scheme is aimed at promoting gender equality and the significance of educating girls.

Target: improving the Child Sex Ratio through multi sectoral interventions including prevention of gender biased sex selection and promoting girls’ education and her holistic empowerment.

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

100 additional One Stop Centres have been approved by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has formulated a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for setting up One Stop Centres (OSC), to be funded from the Nirbhaya Fund. The scheme is being implemented through States/UTs from 1st April 2015.

These Centres will be established across the country to provide integrated support and assistance under one roof to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces in a phased manner.

**Purpose:** to facilitate integrated services for women affected with violence such as police assistance, medical aid, psycho-social counselling, legal aid/counselling, temporary stay for 5 days etc. such that aggrieved women can avail services under one roof and The OSCs are established in existing buildings and in new constructed buildings in a standard format.

3. Domestic Violence Act applies after divorce too

The Supreme Court has upheld a ruling that the Domestic Violence Act, intended to safeguard women against marital abuse, will apply even after divorce. The court observed that the act extends to all man-woman relationships, and also protects divorced women from their former husbands.
The apex court has upheld Rajasthan High Court’s interpretation that ‘domestic relationship’ is not confined to the “relationship as husband and wife or a relationship in the nature of marriage, but it includes other relationship as well such as sisters, mother, etc.”

**Domestic Violence Act 2005** is the first significant attempt in India to recognise domestic abuse as a punishable offence, to extend its provisions to those in live-in relationships, and to provide for emergency relief for the victims, in addition to legal recourse. It extends to the whole of India except the State Jammu & Kashmir.

**Aim:** to protect women from physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and economic abuse at home.

4. **Bharosa**

Aimed at empowering vulnerable and marginalised women by imparting skills training, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will soon set up a skill development centre at ‘Bharosa,’ an integrated support centre for distressed women and children in Hyderabad.

‘Bharosa,’ an initiative of Hyderabad City Police, is a state-of-the-art centre to support women and children who are victims of violence. Since its inception in 2016, a total of 3,560 victims have approached ‘Bharosa’ centre with a range of problems.

It provides under one roof, 24X7 services related to police, medical, legal, prosecution, psycho-therapeutic counselling and relief and rehabilitation services in completely private counselling rooms to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

The centre is equipped with well-trained staff and modern gadgets, including facilities like video conferencing, so that the victims need not go to the court.
UNDP

- Headquartered in New York City, UNDP advocates for change and connects countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.
- The status of UNDP is that of an executive board within the United Nations General Assembly.
- The UNDP Administrator is the third highest-ranking official of the United Nations after the United Nations Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General.
- The UNDP Human Development Report Office also publishes an annual Human Development Report.

Functions: It provides expert advice, training and grants support to developing countries, with increasing emphasis on assistance to the least developed countries. It promotes technical and investment cooperation among nations. To accomplish the SDGs and encourage global development, UNDP focuses on poverty reduction, HIV/AIDS, democratic governance, energy and environment, social development, and crisis prevention and recovery.

5. INSV Tarini

INSV Tarini has completed a historic global Circumnavigation. This is the first-ever Indian circumnavigation of the globe by an all-women crew.

Significance: The expedition titled ‘Navika Sagar Parikrama’ is in consonance with the National policy to empower women to attain their full potential. It has showcased ‘Nari Shakti’ on the world platform and helped change societal attitudes and mindset towards women in India by raising visibility of their participation in challenging environs.
The Journey:

During her **254 day long voyage**, the vessel has covered over 22,000 Nautical miles, visiting five countries – Australia, New Zealand, Falkland Islands (UK), South Africa and Mauritius.
During the course of her voyage, the **vessel has met all criteria of circumnavigation**, viz. crossing the Equator twice, crossing all Longitudes, as also the three great capes (Cape Leeuwin, Cape Horn and Cape of Good Hope).
The expedition was covered in six legs, with halts at 5 ports: Fremantle (Australia), Lyttleton (New Zealand), Port Stanley (Falklands), Cape Town (South Africa) and Port Louis (Mauritius).

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

6. **Women Entrepreneurship Platform**

NITI Aayog and actor Sushant Singh Rajput have decided to collaborate towards promoting the Women Entrepreneurship Platform launched by the NITI Aayog.

**Aim:** The initiative is aimed at building an ecosystem for women across India to realize their entrepreneurial aspirations, scale-up innovative initiatives and chalk-out sustainable, long-term strategies for their businesses. This will be done through an enabling network of industry collaborations, partnerships, mentors and peer-to-peer connect.
From providing unique services such as credit evaluation of women-led startups by CRISIL and potential equity investments through an INR 10 crore fund established by DICE Districts, the WEP opens up avenues of growth and opportunity for women entrepreneurs.

As an enabling platform, WEP is built on three pillars- Iccha Shakti, Gyaan Shakti & Karma Shakti where:

- **Iccha Shakti** represents motivating aspiring entrepreneurs to start their business.
- **Gyaan Shakti** represents providing knowledge and ecosystem support to women entrepreneurs to help them foster entrepreneurship.
- **Karma Shakti** represents providing hands-on support to entrepreneurs in setting-up and scaling up businesses

7. **Women Safety Division in MHA**

MHA has created a new Division to address issues of women safety comprehensively.

About the Women Safety Division:

- The division, headed by a joint secretary level officer, would deal with all aspects of women’s safety in coordination with the relevant ministries, departments and state governments.

- Besides dealing with crimes against women, the new division will deal with crimes against SCs and STs, crimes against children and elderly persons, the anti-trafficking cell, matters relating to prison legislation and prison reforms, all schemes under the

- In order to address offences against women, particularly rape, in a time-bound manner, the division would focus to enhance capacity of the existing administrative, investigative, prosecution and judicial machinery, along with appropriate measures for rehabilitation of victims and bringing attitudinal changes in society.

8. Irish Abortion Referendum

In its recent referendum, Ireland voted decisively to repeal one of the world’s more restrictive abortion bans, sweeping aside generations of conservative patriarchy and dealing the latest in a series of stinging rebukes to the Roman Catholic Church. The vote repeals the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution.

The eighth amendment is a clause inserted into the Irish constitution after a referendum in 1983. It recognises an equal right to life for both mother and unborn child, effectively prohibiting abortion in almost all cases.

Why introduced- Abortion had been illegal in Ireland since the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861. But with reform under way around Europe and many countries opting to permit abortions on request until 12 weeks or more, anti-abortion campaigners in Ireland sought the greater security of a constitutional amendment.

What does the law say now? Two further referendums were held in 1992, resulting in the 13th amendment, which allows women to travel in and out of Ireland to have an abortion (pro-repeal campaigners say 170,000 have done so), and the 14th, which authorises information
about abortion services overseas. In 2013, the law was changed to permit abortions when doctors feel a woman’s life may be at risk from pregnancy complications or suicide. Otherwise, a doctor unlawfully performing an abortion faces prosecution and up 14 years in jail.

**AGRICULTURE**

1. ‘Gobar Dhan’ Scheme

Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has launched the ‘Gobar Dhan’ scheme for Nation. The government is also planning to create an online platform for trading cow dung and agricultural waste under the scheme.

The **Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan (GOBAR-DHAN)** scheme would focus on managing and converting cattle dung and solid waste in farms to compost, biogas and bio-CNG. It will help in keeping the village clean while increasing the income of farmers and cattle herders.

**Benefits:**

- This is hugely helpful for the country as India is home to the highest cattle population in the world, close to 300 million in number, with a daily output of 3 million tonnes of dung.
- The Scheme will encourage the farmers to consider dung and other waste not just as a waste but as a source of income.
- It will provide many benefits to the rural people. It will be easier to keep the village clean and sanitized, livestock health will improve and farm yields will increase.
- Biogas generation will increase self-reliance in energy utilized for cooking and lighting.
- The scheme also provides a stable fuel supply in the market for oil companies and accessible credit in the market through government schemes and banks for entrepreneurs.

2. Frozen Semen Station

Frozen Semen Station is being set up in Maranga, Purnea in Bihar under the Rashtriya Gokul Mission with 100% contribution from the Central Government.

Facts:
- It will be the first state-of-the-art semen production center of the country.
- The center will develop highly modern bull shade, semen processing lab, feed and godown, agricultural equipment, and other facilities.

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

Objectives of Rashtriya Gokul Mission

a) Development and conservation of indigenous breeds

b) Undertake breed improvement programme for indigenous cattle breeds so as to improve the genetic makeup and increase the stock;

c) Enhance milk production and productivity;
d) Upgrade nondescript cattle using elite indigenous breeds like Gir, Sahiwal, Rathi, Deoni, Tharparkar, Red Sindhi and

e) Distribute disease free high genetic merit bulls for natural service.

Implementation
Rashtriya Gokul Mission will be implemented through the “State Implementing Agency (SIA viz Livestock Development Boards). State Gauseva Ayogs will be given the mandate to sponsor proposals to the SIA’s (LDB’s) and monitor implementation of the sponsored proposal. All Agencies having a role in indigenous cattle development will be the “Participating Agencies” like CFSPTI, CCBFs, ICAR, Universities, Colleges, NGO’s, Cooperative Societies and Gaushalas with best germplasm.

Gokul Gram:

Funds under the scheme will be allocated for the establishment of Integrated Indigenous Cattle Centres viz “Gokul Gram”.

- Gokul Grams will be established in: i) the native breeding tracts and ii) near metropolitan cities for housing the urban cattle.
- Gokul Gram will act as Centres for development of Indigenous Breeds and a dependable source for supply of high genetic breeding stock to the farmers in the breeding tract.
- The Gokul Gram will be self-sustaining and will generate economic resources from sale of A2 milk, organic manure, vermi-composting, urine distillates, and production of electricity from bio gas for in house consumption and sale of animal products.
- The Gokul Gram will also function as state of the art in situ training centre for Farmers, Breeders and MAITRI’s.
• The Gokul Gram will maintain milch and unproductive animals in the ratio of 60:40 and will have the capacity to maintain about 1000 animals. Nutritional requirements of the animals will be provided in the Gokul Gram through in house fodder production.

• Gokul Gram will also be set up near to metropolitan cities for managing urban cattle. Metropolitan Gokul Gram will focus on genetic upgradation of urban cattle.

3. Micro-Irrigation Fund

The government has approved a dedicated Rs5,000 crore fund to bring more land area under micro-irrigation as part of its objective to boost agriculture production and farmer’s income.

The Micro Irrigation Fund:

- MIF has been setup with NABARD under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY). An allocation of Rs2,000 crore has been made for this fiscal while Rs3,000 crore has been earmarked for the 2019-20 fiscal. NABARD will extend the loan to state governments during this period.

- NABARD will provide this amount to states on concessional rate of interest. Borrowings from NABARD shall be paid back in seven years including the grace period of two years.

- The lending rate under MIF has been proposed at 3% lower than the cost of raising the fund by NABARD. This cost would be met from the ongoing scheme of PMKSY-PDMC (per drop more crop component) by amending the existing guidelines.

Beneficiaries:

- The dedicated fund would supplement the efforts of PMKSY programme and help bring about 10 lakh hectares under micro-irrigation.
- The fund will facilitate States to mobilise resources for their initiatives, including additional (top up subsidy) in implementation of PMKSY-PDMC to achieve the annual target of about 2 million hectares per year during the remaining period of 14th Finance Commission.

- The states might access this fund for innovative integrated projects, including projects in the Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode and also for incentivizing micro irrigation.

- Farmers Producers Organization (FPO)/Cooperatives/State Level Agencies can also access the funds with state government guarantee or equivalent collateral. Farmers Cooperatives may access this fund for innovative cluster based community irrigation projects.

**PMKSY**: is an umbrella scheme incorporating ongoing schemes of the Ministry like Mega Food Parks, Integrated Cold Chain and Value Addition Infrastructure, Food Safety and Quality Assurance Infrastructure, etc. and also new schemes like Infrastructure for Agro-processing Clusters, Creation of Backward and Forward Linkages, Creation / Expansion of Food Processing & Preservation Capacities.

4. **Model Contract Farming Act, 2018**

The government has released the Model Agriculture Produce and Livestock Contract Farming and Services (Promotion & Facilitation) Act, 2018. It is drafted as a promotional and facilitative act and not regulatory in its structure.

**Background**: With a view to integrate farmers with bulk purchasers including exporters, agro-industries etc. for better price realization through mitigation of market and price risks to the farmers and ensuring smooth agro raw material supply to the agro industries, Union Finance
Minister in the budget for 2017-18 announced preparation of a “Model Contract Farming Act” and circulation of the same to the States for its adoption.

Salient features of the Act:

- The act lays special emphasis on protecting the interests of the farmers, considering them as weaker of the two parties entering into a contract. It brings contract farming outside the ambit of the APMC Act.
- It provides for a “Registering and Agreement Recording Committee” or an “Officer” at the district/block/taluka level for online registration of sponsor and recording of agreement. The contracted produce will also be covered under crop/livestock insurance in operation.
- In a bid to allay the fears of individual farmers, the act explicitly states that no permanent structure can be developed on farmers’ land/premises under such contracts.
- It gives no right, title of interest of the land to the sponsor. Similarly, no rights, title ownership or possession to be transferred or alienated or vested in the contract farming sponsor.
- The act provides for the promotion of Farmer Producer Organization (FPOs)/Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) to mobilise small and marginal farmers. The FPO/FPC can also be a contracting party if so authorized by the farmers.
- As per the law, the contracting party will be obliged to buy the entire pre-agreed quantity of one or more of agricultural produce, livestock or its product of contract farming producer as per contract.
- It also envisages the setting up of Contract Farming Facilitation Group (CFFG) for promoting contract farming and services at village/panchayat level.
• It also includes an accessible and simple dispute settlement mechanism at the lowest level possible for quick disposal of disputes.

The concept of Contract Farming (CF) refers to a system of farming, in which bulk purchasers including agro-processing/exporting or trading units enter into a contract with farmer(s), to purchase a specified quantity of any agricultural commodity at a pre-agreed price.

**Contract farming in India:** Although varied forms of contract farming existed in pockets in the country, the formal contract farming is not, however, wide spread in India. By and large, cultivation of commercial crops like cotton, sugarcane, tobacco, tea, coffee, rubber and dairy have had some elements of informal contract farming for a long time.

5. **Third advance estimates of production of major crops for 2017-18 released**

- The **total food grain production in 2017-18 is estimated to grow by 1.6%** as compared to final estimates in 2016-17. This increase was contributed by 1.2% growth in the production of cereals and 6% growth in the production of pulses.
- In 2017-18, the production of oilseeds is expected to decline by 2% from 2016-17. Oilseeds include soybean, groundnut, rapeseed-mustard, and castor seed.
- During the same period, cotton production is expected to grow by 7% and sugarcane production expected to increase by 16%.
6. Cabinet approved continuation of "Green Revolution - Krishonnati Yojana"

The Union Cabinet approved continuation of Krishonnati Yojana for three years (2017-18 to 2019-20) with an outlay of Rs 33,270 crore.

Krishonnati Yojana is an umbrella scheme which comprises of 11 schemes/missions.
Its objective is to develop the agriculture and allied sector in a holistic and scientific manner to increase the income of farmers by enhancing production, productivity and better returns on produce.

The Schemes that are part of the Umbrella Schemes are:

- National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA).
- Submission on Agriculture Extension (SMAE).
- Sub-Mission on Seeds and Planting Material (SMSP).
- Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanisation (SMAM).
- Sub Mission on Plant Protection and Plan Quarantine (SMPPQ).
- Integrated Scheme on Agriculture Census, Economics and Statistics (ISACES).
- Integrated Scheme on Agricultural Cooperation (ISAC).
- Integrated Scheme on Agricultural Marketing (ISAM).
- National e-Governance Plan (NeGP-A).

7. Cabinet approved corpus for Micro Irrigation Fund under PMKSY

- The Union Cabinet approved a corpus of Rs 5,000 crore for a Micro Irrigation Fund under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayi Yojana.
- Of this, Rs 2,000 crore will be utilised in 2018-19 and the remaining Rs 3,000 crore will be utilised in 2019-20.
• The Fund will be set up under the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD). The Fund was announced in Union Budget 2017-18.

• The NABARD will extend loans to state governments which can incentivize micro irrigation through subsidies or invest in cluster-based micro irrigation projects. These loans must be paid back within seven years (including the grace period of two years).
• An interest subvention of 3% is provided under the Fund. The financial implication of such interest subvention comes to about Rs 750 crore. This cost will be met from the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayi Yojana-Per Drop More Crop by amending the existing guidelines.

8. Cabinet approves financial assistance to sugar mills for clearing sugarcane dues

• The Union Cabinet approved financial assistance to sugar mills to offset the cost of sugarcane, in order to clear the dues of farmers.
• The assistance will be at the rate of Rs 5.5 per quintal of sugarcane crushed in 2017-18 which will be paid directly to the farmers on behalf of the mills.

This amount will be adjusted against the sugarcane price payable to the farmers against the Fair and Remunerative Price, including arrears relating to previous years. This step was taken due to an accumulation of sugarcane dues of over Rs 19,000 crore.
FINANCE & ECONOMY

1. Prompt Corrective Action (PCA)

Reserve Bank has initiated prompt corrective action against public sector lender Dena in view of high non-performing loans, restricting the bank from giving fresh credit and new hiring.

PCA

PCA norms allow the regulator to place certain restrictions such as halting branch expansion and stopping dividend payment. It can even cap a bank’s lending limit to one entity or sector. Other corrective action that can be imposed on banks include special audit, restructuring operations and activation of recovery plan. Banks’ promoters can be asked to bring in new management, too. The RBI can also supersede the bank’s board, under PCA.

PCA is invoked when certain risk thresholds are breached which are based on certain levels of asset quality, profitability, capital and the like. The third such threshold, which is maximum
tolerance limit, sets net NPA at over 12% and negative return on assets for four consecutive years.

Two type of restrictions, mandatory and discretionary.

Restrictions on dividend, branch expansion, directors compensation, are mandatory while discretionary restrictions could include curbs on lending and deposit.

In the cases of two banks where PCA was invoked after the revised guidelines were issued — IDBI Bank and UCO Bank — only mandatory restrictions were imposed. Both the banks breached risk threshold 2.

Impact
- Banks are not allowed to renew or access costly deposits or take steps to increase their fee-based income.
- Banks will also have to launch a special drive to reduce the stock of NPAs and contain generation of fresh NPAs.
- They will also not be allowed to enter into new lines of business. RBI will also impose restrictions on the bank on borrowings from interbank market.

2. Advance Pricing Agreement

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) recently achieved another milestone of having signed its 200th Unilateral Advance Pricing Agreement (UAPA). The total number of APAs entered into by CBDT has gone up to 220, which, inter alia include 20 Bilateral APAs.

About the APA scheme:
The APA scheme was introduced in the Income-tax Act in 2012 and the “rollback” provisions were introduced in 2014.

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

Since its inception, the APA scheme has evinced a lot of interest from taxpayers and that has resulted in more than 700 applications (both unilateral and bilateral) being filed so far in about five years.

The progress of the APA Scheme strengthens the government’s resolve of fostering a non-adversarial tax regime. The Indian APA program has been appreciated nationally and internationally for being able to address complex transfer pricing issues in a fair and transparent manner.

About CBDT:

- The Central Board of Direct Taxes is a statutory authority functioning under the Central Board of Revenue Act, 1963. It is a part of the Department of Revenue in the Ministry of Finance, Government of India.

- It provides essential inputs for policy and planning of direct taxes in India and is also responsible for administration of the direct tax laws through Income Tax Department.

- It is also India’s official Financial Action Task Force unit.

- The CBDT Chairman and Members of CBDT are selected from Indian Revenue Service (IRS) whose members constitute the top management of Income Tax Department.
3. FDI Confidence Index

FDI confidence index for the year 2018 has been released.

The Foreign Direct Investment Confidence (FDI) Index prepared by A.T. Kearney is an annual survey which tracks the impact of likely political, economic, and regulatory changes on the foreign direct investment intentions and preferences of CEOs, CFOs, and other top executives of Global 1000 companies.

The report includes detailed commentary on the markets and the impact a variety of global trade issues have on their FDI attractiveness, as well as a ranking of the top 25 countries.

Performance of India:

- India is ranked 11th. India was down three notches in the overall ranking from last year.
- India remains the second highest ranked emerging market on the Index. A variety of recent reforms have made its regulatory environment more business friendly, and economic growth is forecast to rebound this year.
- Overall, India remains among the top investment destinations due to its market size and rapid economic growth.

Performance of other countries:

- US topped the list, followed by Canada, while Germany dropped to the third place.
- The United States tops the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Confidence Index for the sixth year in a row.

- The top five countries on the Index have not changed in the past three years, but their relative positions have shifted.

- While the top 10 likely destinations for FDI were the same in 2016 and 2017, there is a change in the composition of the list this year: Switzerland and Italy enter the top 10 for the first time in more than a decade, edging out India and Singapore.

- European markets account for more than half of the total positions on this year’s Index as well as half of the top 10.

4. GSTN

The GST Council has approved making GST Network (GSTN) a government entity by taking over stakes held by private entities. As per the proposal, the central government will own 50% and the remaining would be collectively held by state governments.

The GSTN is a private limited company floated to aid the rollout of the new indirect tax regime.

The company will provide information technology support to all stakeholders for smooth implementation of the new taxation regime across the country and will be the repository of all information related to taxation and entities registered under GST.

The majority (51%) shareholding in the firm is with private entities including HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and LIC among others.

The central government, jointly with state governments and Union Territories, own 49% in the company.
5. Merchandise Export from India Scheme (MEIS)

The Director General of Foreign Trade has said that the rates enhanced under the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS), a scheme to promote exports, would continue beyond June 30.

Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) under Foreign Trade Policy of India (FTP 2015-20) is one of the two schemes introduced in Foreign Trade Policy of India 2015-20, as a part of Exports from India Scheme.

Objective of Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) as per Indian Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20 (FTP 2015-20) is to offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved in export of goods/products, which are produced/manufactured in India, especially those having high export intensity, employment potential and thereby enhancing India’s export competitiveness.
6. **CriSidEx**

Business sentiment among micro and small enterprises (MSE) improved in the January-March quarter as the sentiment index rose by 14 points in the quarter, according to the CriSidEx survey.

The CriSidEx sentiment index rose to 121 in the survey quarter (SQ) of January-March from 107 in the previous quarter.

**Benefits:** The crucial benefit of CriSidEx is that its readings will flag potential headwinds and changes in production cycles and thus help improve market efficiencies. And by capturing the sentiment of exporters and importers, it will also offer actionable indicators on foreign trade.

7. **SIDBI**
Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) that operates Common Service Centres (CSCs).

Through the MoU, the SIDBI seeks to extend financial support to the Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) of Common Services Centers, with minimum one year of operation, under the Direct Financing Window of SIDBI.

Under the Direct Financing Window, CSC SPV will approve the list of VLEs, within 25 km distance of SIDBI Branch Offices, who require financial support. To avail the loan, the VLEs need to submit their CSC project, with maximum project outlay of Rs. 3.50 lakh and term loan requirement not exceeding Rs. 2 lakh per project.

Through the MoU, both CSC SPV and SIDBI seek to work together to bring more citizens under the ambit of financial inclusion. Moreover, it also seeks to enhance the financial viability of CSCs by including additional services in their bouquet of products.

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

**CSCs enable the three vision areas of the Digital India programme:**

i. Digital infrastructure as a core utility to every citizen.

ii. Governance and services on demand.

iii. Digital empowerment of citizens.
Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) was set up on 2nd April 1990 under an Act of Parliament. It acts as the Principal Financial Institution for Promotion, Financing and Development of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector as well as for coordination of functions of institutions engaged in similar activities.

8. BSE becomes India’s first exchange to be recognized as a DOSM by the US SEC

Asia’s first stock exchange, the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) has become the first stock exchange in India to have received recognition as a ‘Designated Offshore Securities Market’ (DOSM) from the United States Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Implications: The DOSM status allows the sale of securities to U.S. investors through the trading venue of BSE without registration of such securities with the US SEC and thus eases the trades by US investors in India.

Background: Prior to this recognition, investors who wished to sell such securities (i.e., equity or debt securities issued by BSE listed companies in a private placement under the U.S. securities laws) had to take certain measures to ascertain the location of the purchaser prior to re-selling.

The availability of a liquid resale market is expected to:

- Make exempt offerings by BSE-listed companies more attractive to U.S. investors.
- Enhance the attractiveness of Indian Depository Receipts (IDRs) amongst US investors.

An IDR is a depository receipt denominated in Indian rupees issued by a domestic depository in India. Much like an equity share, it is an ownership pie of a company. Since foreign companies are not allowed to list on Indian equity markets, IDR is a way to own shares of those companies. These IDRs are listed on Indian stock exchanges.
IDRs and equity shares: IDRs are similar to equity shares. IDR holders have the same rights as shareholders; they can vote for or against company moves or decisions as and when it comes to them, get dividends, bonus and rights issues as and when the company declares them.

INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana

The government has clarified that all the remaining households in the country including located in the habitations/hamlets/Dhanis/Majras/Tolas associated with the Census villages and households attached to urban settlements would be covered under ‘Saubhagya’.
Under the ‘Saubhagya’ scheme, launched in September, 2017, all willing households in rural areas and poor families in urban areas are given free electricity connections. There are around 4 Crore un-electrified households in the country and they are targeted for providing electricity connections by December 2018.

Implementation: Rural Electrification Corporation Limited (REC) is the Nodal Agency for the operationalization of the scheme throughout the country.

Salient Features of Saubhagya are:

- All DISCOMs including Private Sector DISCOMs, State Power Departments and RE Cooperative Societies shall be eligible for financial assistance under the scheme in line with DDUGJY.

- The prospective beneficiary households for free electricity connections under the scheme would be identified using SECC 2011 data. However, un-electrified households not covered under SECC data would also be provided electricity connections under the scheme on payment of Rs. 500 which shall be recovered by DISCOMs in 10 installments through electricity bill.

- The electricity connections to un-electrified households include provision of service line cable, energy meter including pre-paid/smart meter, single point wiring. LED lamps and associated accessories in line with technical specifications and construction standard.

2. NABH (NextGen Airports for BHarat) Nirman initiative

The government is augmenting the airport capacity of various airports as part of NABH (NextGen Airports for BHarat) Nirman initiative.
The government in February announced a new initiative — NABH Nirman— under which it proposes to expand airport capacity in the country by more than five times to handle a billion trips a year.

The three key aspects of NABH Nirman are:
- fair and equitable land acquisition,
- long-term master plan for airport and regional development
- balanced economics for all stakeholders.

**Significance of the initiative:** In the last three years, domestic air passenger traffic grew at 18% a year and the airline companies placed orders for more than 900 aircraft. NABH Nirman could take the number of airports in India to 700 from about 125 airports today.

3. **Green License plates for e-vehicles**

The government has approved distinctive green licence plates for electric vehicles to encourage people to use electric vehicles. Such vehicles will be fitted with green licence plates bearing numbers in white fonts for private cars and yellow font for taxis.

**Significance:** The measure is aimed at promoting e-vehicle’s use and the government is considering exemption from permits for such vehicles. The purpose behind distinctive number plates is their easy identification for preferential treatment in parking, free entry in congested zones besides other proposed benefits like concessional toll.

**Types of number plates:** India, currently, has four kinds of number plates – white licence plates with numbers on black font for private cars, yellow plates with fonts in black for commercial
vehicles, black plates with yellow font letters for self-driven rental vehicles and blue plates with white font letters for Embassies and High Commissions. Army vehicles, on the other hand, follow a different registration system given by the defence ministry, while vehicles of the President and governors have red licence plates with the national emblem.

**FAME scheme**
- The Government started Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric vehicles (FAME) scheme which provides incentives for purchasing electric vehicle.
- It is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan.
- The scheme envisages Rs 795 crore support in the first two fiscals starting with the current year.
- It is being administered by the Heavy Industries Ministry.

4. **Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) programme**

Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) has shipped the first oil cargo for India’s strategic petroleum reserve at Mangalore.

Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd (ISPRL) had then signed an agreement with ADNOC which allows the firm to store 5.86 million barrels of crude in the strategic facility at Mangalore at its own cost.

India can use the entire available crude oil stored by ADNOC in the Mangalore facility during an emergency situation. The Agreement with ISPRL also allows ADNOC to sell part of the crude oil to Indian refineries on commercial basis while adhering to mutually agreed minimum crude storage which is for the exclusive use of the Indian government.
About SPR programme

- To ensure energy security, the Government of India had decided to set up 5 million metric tons (MMT) of strategic crude oil storages at three locations namely, Visakhapatnam, Mangalore and Padur (near Udupi).
- These strategic storages would be in addition to the existing storages of crude oil and petroleum products with the oil companies and would serve as a cushion during any external supply disruptions.
- In the 2017-18 budget, it was announced that two more such caverns will be set up Chandikhole in Jajpur district of Odisha and Bikaner in Rajasthan as part of the second phase.
- The construction of the Strategic Crude Oil Storage facilities is being managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL), a Special Purpose Vehicle, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB) under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.

5. Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor

Cabinet has approved development of Trunk Infrastructure Components for Integrated Multi Modal Logistics Hub known as “Freight Village” at Nangal Chaudhary in Haryana under Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor Project.

The Freight Village will be connected through Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) at Dabla.

A ‘Freight Village’ is a specialised industrial estate which attracts companies that require logistics services and can cluster to improve their competitiveness. This will allow relocation of retailers, warehouse operators and logistics service providers supplying the regional FMCG
market. Due to its proximity to the main city, it will serve as a distribution centre and as a point of transfer between long distance transport by truck, rail and waterway and short distance distribution with delivery vans. ‘Freight Village’ includes an inter-modal terminal, which facilitates integration between different modes of transport.

**DMIC:**

Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor is a mega infra-structure project of USD 90 billion with the financial & technical aids from Japan, covering an overall length of 1483 KMs between the political capital and the business capital of India, i.e. Delhi and Mumbai. A MoU in this regard was signed in 2006.

**Components:** The project would include six mega investment regions of 200 square kilometres each and will run through six states Delhi, Western Uttar Pradesh, Southern Haryana, Eastern Rajasthan, Eastern Gujarat, and Western Maharashtra. However, the Project Influence Region of DMIC includes parts of Madhya Pradesh too.

**Aim:** The project aims to develop an environmentally sustainable, long lasting and technological advanced infrastructure utilizing cutting age Japanese technologies and to create world class manufacturing and investment destinations in this region.

**Western Corridor:**

In October 2006, the Indian Government established a dedicated body, the Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India (DFCCIL), to carry out the project.

The western DFC will separate freight and passenger traffic to increase the speed of freight movement. It will be used to transport fertilisers, food grains, salt, coal, iron & steel and cement.

The project will eventually be linked to the Eastern DFC to form four hubs known as India’s Golden Quadrilateral including Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata.

The Western Dedicated Freight Corridor covers a distance of 1504 km of double line electric track from JNPT to Dadri via Vadodara-Ahmedabad-Palanpur-Phulera-Rewari.
The Western Corridor passes through 5 states - Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.

6. Zoji La Tunnel

The construction of the much-awaited infrastructure project Zoji La tunnel has begun.

Zojila pass tunnel: is a 14.2-km long tunnel project in Jammu and Kashmir to provide all-weather connectivity between Srinagar, Kargil and Leh, which remains cut-off from the rest of India during winters due to heavy snowfall. “Zojila tunnel will be the longest bi-directional tunnel in Asia.

Implementation: The project will be implemented by the ministry of road transport and highways (MoRT&H) through the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL).

Benefits of the tunnel: The project would enhance the safety of travellers crossing Zojila Pass and reduce the travel time from 3.5 hours to 15 minutes. This pass is most strategic for the entire Kargil sector which has seen intrusion and war in the past. It will further increase the employment potential for the local labourers for the project activities.
Zojila pass is situated at an altitude of 11,578 feet on Srinagar-Kargil-Leh National Highway which remains closed during winters (December to April) due to heavy snowfall and avalanches cutting off Leh-Ladakh region from Kashmir.

![Zojila Pass Diagram]

7. **Eastern Peripheral Expressway**

Eastern Peripheral Expressway was recently inaugurated by PM Modi.

**Eastern Peripheral Expressway**: The 135-km expressway connects National Highway 1 and 2 from the eastern side of Delhi and aims to decongest and de-pollute the national capital by diverting traffic.

- It commences near Kundli in Haryana and terminates near Palwal by passing through Sonepat, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Noida, Faridabad and Palwal.

- It is India’s first highway to be lit by solar power besides provisions of rain water harvesting on every 500 metres on both sides and would showcase 36 national monuments and 40 fountains.
• The state-of-the-art road will have auto challans for over-speeding as cameras will capture speed of vehicles. It will also have provisions of tolling only for the distance travelled. The expressway has an iconic toll plaza at the entry point on Kundli side besides digital art gallery.

• Around 2.5 lakh trees have been planted near it, including transplant of 8-10 year old trees. It also has drip irrigation provision.

Background: The Eastern and the Western Peripheral Expressways were planned in 2006 following the apex court’s order to build a ring road outside the national capital for channelling the traffic not bound for Delhi.

8. Mission Raftaar
The Indian Railways conducted a one-day workshop ‘Mission Raftaar’ in which officials discussed ways to increase the average speed of freight and passenger trains. 

**Issues discussed:** punctuality, rolling stock, removing bottlenecks in terms of traffic, elimination of unmanned level crossings.

**Aim:** doubling the average speed of freight trains and increasing the average speed of coaching trains by 25 kmph over a five-year period.

**Significance:** The average speed of freight trains is 24 kmph and that of passenger trains, excluding suburban trains, is 44 kmph. Increasing the average speed of trains is considered essential for reducing travel time for passengers, transit time for cargo, operational cost, and improving revenues and the railway’s market share.

9. **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMSGY)**

The Government of India and the World Bank has signed a $500 million loan agreement to provide additional financing for the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) Rural Roads Project, implemented by Ministry of Rural Development.

**PMGSY** was launched on 25th December 2000 as a fully funded Centrally Sponsored Scheme to provide all weather road connectivity in rural areas of the country. The programme envisages connecting all habitations with a population of 500 persons and above in the plain areas and 250 persons and above in hill States, the tribal and the desert areas.

10. **PRAAPTI App**

In a bid to rein in errant distribution companies (discoms) that delay payments to power generation companies, the Power Ministry has launched the Praapti web portal, that aims at bringing transparency in power sector of India.
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS & SUMMITS

1. Islamic Cooperation countries (OIC)

Russia has come in support of Organization of Islamic Cooperation countries (OIC) in their effort to enter the Russian market.

Russia’s trade turnover with OIC countries stands at about $75 billion, with exports accounting for about $58 billion. Imports from OIC countries total about $17 billion.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation is an international organization founded in 1969, consisting of 57 member states. It is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.

The organisation states that it is “the collective voice of the Muslim world” and works to “safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony”.

The OIC has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union.
2. Pacific Islands Forum

The Pacific Islands Forum has been granted approval to establish a Permanent Observer Office at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG).

The Permanent Observer status would entrench the presence of the Blue Pacific region in, and strengthen its links to the United Nations organisations, including its specialised agencies, programmes, fund initiatives and joint programs.

Pacific Islands Forum, formerly (1971–2000) South Pacific Forum, organization established in 1971 to provide a setting for heads of government to discuss common issues and problems facing the independent and self-governing states of the South Pacific.

In 2000 Forum leaders adopted the Biketawa Declaration, which was a response to regional political instability and which put forward a set of principles and actions for members to take to promote open, democratic, and clean government, as well as equal rights for citizens regardless of gender, race, colour, creed, or political belief.

3. United Nations Peacekeeping Course for African Partners

The third edition of the United Nations Peacekeeping Course for African Partners (UNPCAP) is being held in New Delhi.

**UNPCAP**

- The course is aimed to build and enhance the capacity of the African Troop Contributing Countries to the UN and to further train the trainers from these countries.
- The course is conducted by the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping in India (CUNPK) in partnership with the US, the Indian Army said in a statement.
- The first and second editions of the course were held in New Delhi in 2016 and 2017, respectively.
- The training incorporates topics on operational and logistical matters, humanitarian issues, thematic topics, Blackboard and table Top exercises and mission briefs. The course is also targeted to assist the student officers to further train officers in their respective countries on the nuances of peacekeeping.
4. 15th Asia Media Summit

The 15th Asia Media Summit (AMS) 2018 is being held in India. India is hosting the event for the first time.

**Theme:** ‘Telling Our Stories – Asia and More’.

**Host:** It is being hosted by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, jointly with the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), New Delhi and Broadcast Engineering Consultants India Limited (BECIL).

**AMS Summit:** It is an annual summit of the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) Kuala Lumpur.

**Scope:** The Summit would encourage regional and bilateral dialogue and cooperation to respond to challenges to the broadcasting sector in the region. It would provide a unique opportunity for broadcasters in the Asian region to share their thoughts on software and hardware aspects of Broadcasting. There are also opportunities for networking, facilities for business to business meetings and prospective translation of these meetings into trade and economic relations after the summit.

**Participants:** Participants would represent organizations like Ministries responsible for Information and Broadcasting in the Asian region, International Organizations UNESCO, FAO, UN; Regulators; Radio and Television broadcasting companies both national/ public and private broadcasters; Television channels and networks, Institutes/Academies of Communication, Media Research; Community Radio groups; Press and Media, and broadcast equipment manufacturers.

**AIBD:** The Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) was established in 1977 under the auspices of UNESCO. It is hosted by the Government of Malaysia and the secretariat is located in Kuala Lumpur.
Founders: The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) are founding organisations of the Institute and they are non-voting members of the General Conference. The Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) is a founding organisation of the Institute and is a non-voting member of the General Conference.

Membership: Full membership of the AIBD is confined to sovereign states and they are invited to designate the broadcasting authority of the country to be the beneficiary. The AIBD currently has 26 Full Members (countries), represented by 34 organisations, and 67 Affiliate Members (organisations) with a total membership of 101 representing 48 countries and regions and over 50 partners in Asia, Pacific, Europe, Africa, Arab States and North America.

Role and mandate: It is a unique regional inter-governmental organisation servicing countries of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) in the field of electronic media development. It is mandated to achieve a vibrant and cohesive electronic media environment in the Asia-Pacific region through policy and resource development.

5. World Gold Council (WGC)

As per WGC’s ‘Gold Demand Trends’ report, the global gold demand fell by 7% to 973 tonne during the January-March period this year as compared to the same period last year mainly due to a decline in investment demand.

Highlights of the report:
- ETF inflows were down year-on-year.
- Investment in gold bars and coins was down.
- Jewelry demand was flat.
- Central banks bought more gold.
- Gold supply up 3 percent year-on-year.

**World Gold Council**: is the market development organisation for the gold industry. It works across all parts of the industry, from gold mining to investment, and their aim is to stimulate and sustain demand for gold.

The World Gold Council is an association whose members comprise the world’s leading gold mining companies. It helps to support its members to mine in a responsible way and developed the Conflict Free Gold Standard.

Headquartered in the UK, they have offices in India, China, Singapore, Japan and the United States.

6. **Asian Development Bank (ADB)**

51st Annual Meeting of Asian Development Bank (ADB) is being held in Manila, Philippines. The Annual Meeting of the ADB Board of Governors is an opportunity to provide guidance on ADB administrative, financial, and operational directions.

**About ADB**: a regional development bank established on 22 August 1966 and is headquartered in Philippines. It aims to facilitate economic development of countries in Asia. It also aims for an Asia and Pacific free from poverty.

**Membership**: The bank admits the members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, formerly known as the United Nations Economic
Commission for Asia and the Far East) and non-regional developed countries. Currently, it has 67 members – of which 48 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.

**Voting:** ADB was modelled closely on the World Bank, and has a similar weighted voting system where votes are distributed in proportion with member’s capital subscriptions.

**Funding:** ADB raises funds through bond issues on the world’s capital markets. ADB also rely on its members’ contributions, retained earnings from its lending operations, and the repayment of loans. Japan holds the largest proportions of shares at 15.67%. The United States holds 15.56%, China holds 6.47%, India holds 6.36%, and Australia holds 5.81%.

**Board of Governors:** It is the highest policy-making body of the bank. It is composed of one representative from each member state. The Board of Governors also elect the bank’s President who is the chairperson of the Board of Directors and manages ADB. The Alternate Board of Governors are nominated by Board of Governors of ADB’s 67 to represent them at the Annual Meeting that meets formally once year to be held in a member country.

**Loans:** It offers both Hard Loans and Soft loans. The ADB offers “hard” loans from ordinary capital resources (OCR) on commercial terms, and the Asian Development Fund (ADF) affiliated with the ADB extends “soft” loans from special fund resources with concessional conditions.
7. WHO Framework Convention on tobacco control

The Union Cabinet has given approval to accede to the Protocol under World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on tobacco control to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products. It will be applicable to both smoking and chewing or smokeless tobacco (SLT) forms as negotiated and adopted under Article 15 of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).

The **WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC)** is the first international public health treaty negotiated under the auspices of the WHO.

**Objective:** provide a framework for supply and demand reduction measures for tobacco control at the national, regional and global levels.
Article 15 of WHO FCTC envisages elimination of all forms of illicit trade and tobacco products, including smuggling, illicit manufacturing and counterfeiting. **India is a party to WHO FCTC.**

The FCTC provides an internationally co-ordinated response to combating the tobacco epidemic, and sets out specific steps for governments addressing tobacco use, including to:

- Adopt tax and price measures to reduce tobacco consumption.
- Ban tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.
- Create smoke-free work and public spaces.
- Put prominent health warnings on tobacco packages.
- Combat illicit trade in tobacco products.

**Significance of the protocol:**

- Elimination of illicit trade in tobacco products through strengthened regulation will help in strengthening comprehensive tobacco control, leading to reduction in tobacco use which in turn, will result in reduction in disease burden and mortality associated with tobacco use.
- Accession to such treaty will provide actionable alternatives against such prevailing practices that are affecting public health at large. India, being at the forefront of tobacco control, would be able to influence the international organizations including World Custom Organization in controlling such illicit trade.
- The protocol to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products is a path breaking initiative in strengthening global action against tobacco and is also a new legal instrument in public health. It is a comprehensive tool to counter and eventually eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products and to strengthen legal dimensions for international health cooperation.
8. Iran Nuclear Deal

US President Donald Trump has announced he is pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal. He described the agreement as “decaying and rotting”.

**Background:** The agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has been on the rocks since Trump’s election, and the resulting climate of uncertainty spooked many large firms from doing business in Iran, thus diminishing the economic incentives that drew Iran to the agreement in the first place.

Iran agreed to rein in its nuclear programme in a 2015 deal struck with the US, UK, Russia, China, France and Germany.

Under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) Tehran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water, all key components for nuclear weapons.

The JCPOA established the Joint Commission, with the negotiating parties all represented, to monitor implementation of the agreement.

Trump and opponents to the deal say it is flawed because it gives Iran access to billions of dollars but does not address Iran’s support for groups the U.S. considers terrorists, like Hamas and Hezbollah. They note it also doesn’t curb Iran’s development of ballistic missiles and that the deal phases out by 2030. They say Iran has lied about its nuclear program in the past.

**Reaction of other countries:**

- The agreement was signed by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council: The United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia and China, plus Germany — and Iran. The deal was also enshrined in a UN Security Council resolution, incorporating it into international law.
- Some of the US’ closest allies, the UK, France and Germany, issued a statement expressing “regret and concern” about the decision, emphasizing Iran’s compliance with the deal and their “continuing commitment” to the deal. The leaders of those countries failed in their attempts to convince Trump to preserve the deal.

- Russia meanwhile said the deal was “new confirmation of Washington’s incompetence,” and underscored that the US, not Iran, is now technically in violation of the deal.

9. **SCO Cultural Ministers’ Meeting**

15th SCO Cultural Ministers’ Meeting is being held in Sanya, China. India is participating in the Cultural Ministers’ Meet for first time as full time member.

The **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)** is an eight-member multilateral organization, established on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai, China by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Pakistan also became the full member of SCO along with India, taking its membership to 8.

After the expansion of membership, SCO represents approximately 42% of the world’s population, 20% of its GDP and 22% of the landmass.

The **main objectives of the SCO** are to strengthen relations among member states; promote cooperation in various fields like political affairs, economics, and education, culture, tourism, environment protection etc. and promote regional peace, security, and stability among others.

10. **World Health Assembly**
Plenary Meeting of the 71st World Health Assembly is being held at Geneva. In addition to its three main themes of celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Organization, the 40th Anniversary of Alma-Ata and WHO’s top priority, universal health coverage, it will cover many topics on health throughout the life-course including sexual and reproductive health; early childhood development; maternal, infant and young child nutrition; poliomyelitis and the Global Vaccine Action Plan.

The World Health Assembly (WHA) is the forum through which the World Health Organization (WHO) is governed by its 194 member states. It is the world’s highest health policy setting body and is composed of health ministers from member states.

The members of the World Health Assembly generally meet every year in May in Geneva, the location of WHO Headquarters.

The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.

11. NATO

Colombia is all set to formally become the NATO’s first Latin American “global partner.”

Colombia will join as a “global partner” which means it will not necessarily have to take part in military action, and will be fully accredited in Brussels. The move would improve Colombia’s image on the world stage.

Areas of cooperation include cyber security, maritime security, terrorism and its links to organised crime, as well as building the capacities and capabilities of the Colombian armed forces.
The **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** was founded in 1949 and is a group of 29 countries from Europe and North America that exists to protect the people and territory of its members.

The Alliance is founded on the principle of collective defence, meaning that if one NATO Ally is attacked, then all NATO Allies are attacked.

The NATO lists Afghanistan, Australia, Iraq, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand and Pakistan as “partners across the globe”.

### 12. Global Wind Summit

The first edition of the Global Wind Summit will be held in Hamburg, Germany.

**Global Wind Summit:**

- The conference on wind is the largest and most important meeting of the wind industry worldwide. The event combines two conferences, WindEnergy Hamburg and WindEurope.

- The event will provide a platform for experts from across the globe to discuss innovative and green technologies for harnessing wind energy making.

- The focus of the conferences would be on three major subjects - **Dynamic markets, cost efficiency and smart energy**. How to develop new markets, make product competitive in auctions and use wind power for all energy applications.
Background: India is fourth largest country — after China, the US and Germany — in terms of wind energy installation capacity at around 33 GW. The government has set a target of achieving 60 GW by 2022.

13. Trade Facilitation Pact in services

India has pitched for inclusion of the trade facilitation pact on services in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) saying it would help promote growth of the global economy.

Background: On the lines of the trade facilitation pact in goods, India has submitted a detailed proposal to the WTO to negotiate a trade facilitation agreement in services (TFS). India is pitching for this pact as the sector contributes over 60% to the GDP and 28% to total employment.

Trade Facilitation agreement in services: The TFS proposal aims at liberalising rules for movement of professionals and other steps to reduce transaction costs with a view to boost growth of the services sector. It will focus on issues like liberalised visa regime, long-term visas for business community and freer movement of professionals for the greater benefit of both India and the world, among others.

Key proposals:

- The proposed agreement would set provisions on all four modes of services supply of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).
- For services supplied through “mode 3” (a foreign company setting up subsidiaries or branches to provide services in another country), it suggests streamlining the setting up of businesses through a “single window”.

- For the cross-border movement of services suppliers (known as “mode 4”), it suggests simplifying work permit and visa procedures and ensuring that measures relating to taxation, fees and social security contributions do not unfairly disadvantage foreign service suppliers.

- Other suggestions include enhancing cooperation among authorities, facilitating cross-border data flows, and allowing WTO members to comment on measures before their entry into force. The proposal also foresees special and differential treatment for developing countries.

**14. Mission Innovation**

The Mission Innovation Ministerial is being held at Malmo-Sweden. India is also taking part in the ministerial.

Mission Innovation is a global platform of 23 countries and European Union aimed at accelerating clean energy innovations through enhanced Government funding, greater public-private sector partnership and enhanced global cooperation.

Mission Innovation is complemented by private sector-led investments of extraordinary levels of private capital in clean energy, focusing on early-stage innovations.

As part of the initiative, participating countries have committed to seek to double their governments’ clean energy research and development (R&D) investments over five years, while encouraging greater levels of private sector investment in transformative clean energy technologies. These additional resources will dramatically accelerate the availability of the advanced technologies that will define a future global energy mix that is clean, affordable, and reliable.
Mission Innovation was announced on November 30, 2015, as world leaders came together in Paris to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change.

India is Founding Member of the Steering Committee and also a Member of the two sub-groups: Joint research and Capacity Building and Private Sector Engagement.

15. Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)

Pakistan is hosting its first ever Shanghai Cooperation Organisation-Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (SCO-RATS) meeting in Islamabad. The participants of the meeting include the executive committee of the SCO and of RATS along with legal advisors from eight member states.

The main agenda is to talk over the issue related to terrorist threats in the region and how to overcome them.

The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, is a permanent organ of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which serves to promote cooperation of member states against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism. The Head of RATS is elected to a three-year term. Each member state also sends a permanent representative to RATS.

16. Gilgit-Baltistan

Pakistan’s top civil and military leaders have decided to give greater administrative and financial authority to Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

It is located in the northern Pakistan. It borders China in the North, Afghanistan in the west, Tajikistan in the north west and Kashmir in the south east. Gilgit-Baltistan is
treated as a separate geographical entity by Pakistan. It has a regional Assembly and an elected Chief Minister.

Gilgit-Baltistan shares a geographical boundary with Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and India considers it as part of the undivided Jammu and Kashmir, while Pakistan sees it as a separate from PoK. The USD 46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) also passes through this region.

Gilgit-Baltistan is home to five of the “eight-thousanders” and to more than fifty peaks above 7,000 metres (23,000 ft). Three of the world’s longest glaciers outside the polar regions are found in Gilgit-Baltistan.

**India’s opposition:** India has termed as “entirely unacceptable” any possible attempt by Pakistan to declare the Gilgit-Baltistan region, bordering the disputed Pakistan-administered Kashmir, as the fifth province.

**17. Nepal – first country in South-East Asia validated for eliminating trachoma**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has validated Nepal for having eliminated trachoma as a public health problem – a milestone, as the country becomes the first in WHO’s South-East Asia Region to defeat the world’s leading infectious cause of blindness.

**Background:** Trachoma was the second leading cause of preventable blindness in Nepal in the 1980s. In 2002, the Government of Nepal stepped up efforts to eliminate the disease with the establishment of a national trachoma programme. From 2002 to 2005, following the implementation of sustained control activities, the prevalence of active (inflammatory) trachoma fell by 40%.
Trachoma: is a chronic infective disease of the eye and is the leading cause of infective blindness globally. Trachoma is a disease of poor environmental and personal hygiene and inadequate access to water and sanitation. It affects the conjunctiva under the eyelids. Repeated infections cause scarring leading to in-turning of the eyelashes and eyelids. This further causes damage to the cornea and blindness.

18. CLMV Conclave

5th India – CLMV (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam) Business Conclave was recently held at Phnom Penh, Cambodia. During the conference, government and business community of CLMV countries were invited to actively partner in India’s initiative to strengthen manufacturing capacities.

CLMV: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam collectively, is the third largest economy in ASEAN, followed by Indonesia and Thailand. India’s trade with the CLMV countries has grown from USD 1.5 bn to more than USD 10 bn in the last 10 years.

CLMV conclave: is an annual feature which provides an opportunity for Indian business leaders to interact with government and business stakeholders representing the four countries. The conclave facilitates to create and provide a platform for the decision makers from CLMV countries to interact with a range of Indian business companies involved in trading, manufacturing, processing, engineering, consultancy, construction etc.

19. India’s second IT Corridor in China

The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) has launched its second IT corridor in China to cash in on the burgeoning Chinese software market which remained elusive despite the presence of top Indian technology firms.
The newly established Digital Collaborative Opportunities Plaza (SIDCOP) platform at Guiyang in China provides market access to Indian IT firms in the huge Chinese market.

The Guiyang corridor will focus on Big Data. Last December, the NASSCOM established its first SIDCOP platform in the Chinese port city of Dalian, which is India’s first IT hub in China. Dalian corridor’s focus was on IOT (Internet of Things).

The corridor is aimed at setting up local offices and assisting companies from Guiyang to establish software and IT units in India.

**Background:** India’s top IT firms have a big presence in China, specially multi-nationals and IT Corridor at Dalian which are expected to provide a gateway for the Indian IT-small and medium-sized enterprises.

**20. India and Guatemala agree to support each other for Non-permanent membership of UNSC**

Agreeing to push the ‘complementary’ and ‘not competitive’ nature of bilateral relations to a new level for mutual benefit from the emerging opportunities in both the countries, India and Guatemala agreed to support each other’s candidature for Non-Permanent Membership in the United Nations Security Council.

Guatemala will support India’s candidature for UNSC membership for 2021-22 while New Delhi will do so for 2031-32 for Guatemala.

**21. Informal Summit between India & Russia**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin held their first informal Summit in the city of Sochi in the Russian Federation on May 21, 2018.
Purpose: an occasion for both leaders to deepen their friendship and to exchange views on international and regional issues, in keeping with the tradition of high level political exchanges between India and Russia.

Outcomes:

- Agreed that the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between India and Russia is an important factor for global peace and stability.
- They shared the view that India and Russia have an important role to play in contributing to an open and equitable world order.
- They recognized each other’s respective roles as major powers with common responsibilities for maintaining global peace and stability.
- They held in depth discussions on major international issues such as importance of building a multipolar world order, consultation and coordination with each other, including on the Indo-Pacific Region, agreed to continue working together through multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, SCO, BRICS and G-20.
- Both leaders expressed their concern over terrorism and radicalization: endorsed the importance of restoring peace and stability in Afghanistan in an atmosphere free from the threat of terrorism, and agreed to work together towards achieving this objective.

The two leaders welcomed the idea of holding informal Summits as an additional engagement at leadership level, besides the Annual Summits between the two leaders.

Prime Minister has invited President Putin for the 19th Annual Summit in India later in the year.
LAW & GOVERNANCE

1. Citizenship Bill

People in Assam have been protesting against the granting of Indian citizenship to Hindu foreigners as the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 began its hearing in Assam. Protesters say the move would threaten the existence of the indigenous people of Assam. They also see it as a violation of the provisions of the Assam Accord of 1985.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 seeks to allow illegal migrants from certain minority communities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan eligible for Indian citizenship. In other words, it amends the Citizenship Act of 1955. The Bill provides that the registration of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders may be cancelled if they violate any law.

Coverage:
- The Citizenship Amendment Bill 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, however, 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.

Assam Against it: The Citizenship Amendment Bill has not been sitting well with the Assamese as it contradicts the Assam Accord of 1985, which clearly states that illegal migrants heading in from Bangladesh after March 25, 1971, would be deported.
Assam Accord:

- The Assam Accord (1985) was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985. The accord brought an end to the Assam Agitation and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in the state of Assam soon after.

- As per the Accord, those Bangladeshis who came between 1966 and 1971 will be barred from voting for ten years. The Accord also mentions that the international borders will be sealed and all persons who crossed over from Bangladesh after 1971 are to be deported.

- Though the accord brought an end to the agitation, some of the key clauses are yet to be implemented, which has kept some of the issues festering.

2. Senior Citizen Draft Bill

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has drafted the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizen Draft Bill, 2018, that will amend the 2007 version of the legislation to expand its scope and provide for more stringent penalties.

Key provisions:

- The Bill enhances the jail term for those found abandoning or abusing their parents, 60 years or older, to six months from the existing three months.

- The Bill expands the definition of children, which currently refers to only biological children and grandchildren, to include daughter-in-law and son-in-law and also adopted/step-children.
• It extends the definition of maintenance beyond provision of food, clothing, housing, health care to include “safety and security” of the parent.

• As per the Bill, senior citizens can also approach a Maintenance Tribunal in case their children neglect or refuse to maintain them. In such cases, the draft Bill states that the Tribunal can order the children or, in case the person is childless, the relative to pay a monthly maintenance to the senior citizen. The amount would be decided by taking into account the standard of living of the senior citizen and the financial situation of both the parties.

• The Bill proposes to make monthly maintenance amount variable as people who earn more, can afford to shell out a higher amount for the upkeep of their parents.

• The Bill also introduces a punitive measure of up to one month imprisonment in case the monthly allowance remains unpaid.

• Currently, various government and private schemes for insurance/health, housing and travel, have varied cut-off age for offering benefits meant for senior citizens. The Bill mandates the uniform age across schemes should be 60 years.

• The Bill will require the government to establish and run at least one Senior Citizen Care Home in every district in the country.

• As per the Bill, if parents transfer property to their children on the condition that they take care of them, and this clause is breached, the transfer of property will be deemed to be “made by fraud or coercion or under undue influence” and a tribunal can order it to be transferred back to the parent.

3. SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act
The government is planning to bring an ordinance to overturn the Supreme Court verdict putting safeguards on arrests under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and subsequently introduce a bill to insulate it from further judicial scrutiny.

The government is likely to introduce the bill in monsoon session of Parliament to incorporate the legislation in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution, laws under which cannot be challenged in courts.

**Impact:**
The ordinance is an interim arrangement to overturn the Supreme Court’s ruling on the issue. The proposed ordinance would make it clear that notwithstanding any judgement or any other law in force, the provisions of the act shall remain valid. Once promulgated, this would mean the ordinance would overturn the SC order.

Also, *once included in the Ninth Schedule, the legislation gets protection under Article 31-B (validation of certain Acts and Regulations) and is not subject to judicial scrutiny.*

**Issue:**
In its March 20 order, the apex court had laid down new guidelines for police officers on how to ensure that innocent people, especially public officials, are protected from false complaints under the act. The “dilution” triggered massive protests by various Dalit and political outfits.
4. Umang App

EPFO (Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation) has announced the introduction of a new service for pensioners through the Umang App. Under the new facility, a pensioner can view his pension passbook on the app.
5. Gujarat to offer PNG subsidy

Gujarat is planning to launch the new PNG/LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) Sahay Yojana—an extension to the Ujjwala Yojana.

The scheme for select urban areas will supplement Ujjwala for BPL-AAY households not covered under Ujjwala to help supply households with clean fuel.

As per the scheme, the government will pay Rs 1,600 as one-time subsidy per connection and Rs1,725 as loan to customers opting for a new PNG connection. As a result, a beneficiary will have to pay only Rs118 to get a new connection and a refundable security deposit of Rs50 per month for a period of 100 months. The pipeline infrastructure and maintenance charges will be borne by city gas distribution companies.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana aims to provide LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to poor households.

Under the scheme, an adult woman member of a below poverty line family identified through the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) is given a deposit-free LPG connection with financial assistance of Rs 1,600 per connection by the Centre. Eligible households will be identified in consultation with state governments and Union territories.
6. National Telecom Policy

The draft National Digital Communications Policy 2018 has been released by the Department of Telecom (DoT).

The draft policy has outlined three major missions which it aims to achieve by 2022:

(a) **Connect India** under which it aims to create robust digital communications.

(b) **Propel India** under which the government aims to harness the power of emerging digital technologies, including 5G, artificial intelligence (AI), Internet Of Things (IoT), etc.

(c) **Secure India** which aims to safeguard the digital sovereignty of India with a focus on ensuring individual autonomy and choice, data ownership, privacy and security.

**Key features:**

- **Major goals:** The policy has outlined goals such as providing broadband for all, creating 4 million additional jobs in the digital communications sector, apart from enhancing the contribution of the digital communications sector to 8% of India’s gross domestic product (GDP) from less than 6% in 2017.

- **Data protection:** In the wake of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytics data scandal, the government aims to now establish a comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals and facilitates India’s participation in the global digital economy.
• **National Broadband mission:** The policy has announced goals such as deployment of 5 million public Wi-Fi Hotspots by 2020 and 10 million by 2022 through a National Broadband Mission.

• **Fibre First Initiative:** The policy aims to implement a ‘Fibre First Initiative’ to take fibre to the home by according telecom optic fibre cables the status of public utility.

• **Infrastructure convergence:** The government also aims to enable infrastructure convergence of IT, telecom and broadcasting sectors by amending the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 and other relevant acts for the purpose of convergence in coordination with respective ministries.

• **Boost to investments:** In order to attract investments of $100 billion in the digital communications sector and increase India’s contribution to global value chains, the government will review levies and fees including license fee, universal service obligation fund (USOF) levy and concept of pass through revenues in line with principles of input line credit apart from rationalising spectrum usage charges (SUCs) to reflect the costs of regulation and administration of spectrum.

• **Light touch licensing regime:** The DoT will also establish light touch licensing regime for the proliferation of public data offices (PDOs) and Public Data Office Aggregators for providing internet access through Wi-Fi hotspots.

• **Renewable energy technologies:** The Policy talks of incentivising the use of renewable energy technologies in the communications sector, including utilisation of small cell fuel batteries, lithium-ion batteries or other similar technologies.

7. **DNA Profiling Bill**
The Supreme Court has considered the submission of the Centre that it would move a Bill in the upcoming Parliament session for DNA profiling to enable authorities to maintain records of unidentified and unclaimed dead bodies or missing persons.

**Background:** The government was responding to a PIL petition on the use of DNA profiling for identifying unclaimed bodies, especially to match them with old cases of missing persons.

**Human DNA Profiling Bill:**
The Centre’s Human DNA Profiling Bill, 2015, was prepared by the Department of Biotechnology and the Hyderabad-based Centre for DNA-Fingerprinting and Diagnostics. Several organisations and individuals, however, raised concerns that the bill gave sweeping powers to government to mine the database and use it for purposes beyond just solving crime.

**Law commission report:** Last year, the Law Commission of India, in its 271st report, prepared the draft Bill named The DNA Based Technology (Use and Regulation) Bill, 2017 after examining various judicial pronouncements and constitutional provisions. It however had also flagged that privacy concerns and the ethics involved in this scientific collection of data were very high. The Commission said the procedure for DNA profiling, if given statutory recognition, should be done legitimately as per constitutional provisions.

**Highlights of the DNA Based Technology (Use and Regulation) Bill, 2017:**

- **DNA profiling Board:** Constitution of a DNA Profiling Board, a statutory body to undertake functions such as laying down procedures and standards to establish DNA laboratories and grant accreditation to such laboratories; and advising the concerned ministries/departments of the Central and state governments on issues relating to DNA laboratories.

- **Functions of the Board:** The Board shall also be responsible for supervising, monitoring, inspecting and assessing the laboratories. The Board will frame guidelines for training of
the police and other investigating agencies dealing with DNA-related matters. Advising on all ethical and human rights issues relating to DNA testing in consonance with international guidelines will be another function of the Board. It will recommend research and development activities in DNA testing and related issues, etc.

- **Security:** DNA profiling would be undertaken exclusively for identification of a person and would not be used to extract any other information.

- **National DNA Data Bank:** There shall be a National DNA Data Bank, and Regional DNA Data Banks for the states, to be established by the Central government. The data banks will be responsible for storing DNA profiles received from the accredited laboratories and maintaining certain indices for various categories of data, like crime scene index, suspects’ index, offenders’ index, missing persons’ index and unknown deceased persons’ index.

- With a view to assist the kith and kin of missing persons, provisions have been made for proper identification of missing persons on the basis of their bodily samples/substances.

8. **Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)**

The parliamentary panel on Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) funds has recommended that amounts donated by lawmakers for rehabilitation work after natural disasters to be disbursed within two weeks.

**Issue:** Funds are to be released by the nodal district of the lawmaker concerned to the district authority of the affected district. However, funds allocated for the purpose by the
parliamentarians often reach the affected people too late to help. Currently, the actual transfer takes anything from six months to over a year due to red tape.

**MPLAD scheme:** was launched in December, 1993, to provide a mechanism for the Members of Parliament to recommend works of developmental nature for creation of durable community assets and for provision of basic facilities including community infrastructure, based on locally felt needs.

**Works under the scheme:** Works, developmental in nature, based on locally felt needs and always available for the use of the public at large, are eligible under the scheme. Preference under the scheme is given to works relating to national priorities, such as provision of drinking water, public health, education, sanitation, roads, etc. MPs were allowed to spend the money outside their constituency — and outside their State in case of Rajya Sabha — after the 1999 super cyclone in Odisha.

**Funds:** Funds are released in the form of grants in-aid directly to the district authorities. The funds released under the scheme are non-lapsable. The liability of funds not released in a particular year is carried forward to the subsequent years, subject to eligibility.

**Execution of works:** The MPs have a recommendatory role under the scheme. They recommend their choice of works to the concerned district authorities who implement these works by following the established procedures of the concerned state government. The district authority is empowered to examine the eligibility of works sanction funds and select the implementing agencies, prioritise works, supervise overall execution, and monitor the scheme at the ground level.

**Recommendation of works:** The Lok Sabha Members can recommend works in their respective constituencies. The elected members of the Rajya Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the state from which they are elected. Nominated members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha may select works for implementation anywhere in the country.
9. Finance Commission

The Fifteenth Finance Commission has constituted an Advisory Council to advise and assist the Commission.

The role and functions of the Advisory Council will be:

- To advise the Commission on any issue or subject related to the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Commission, which may be of relevance.
- To assist in the preparation of any paper or research study which would enhance the Commission’s understanding on the issues containing in its ToR.
- To help in broadening the Commission’s ambit and understanding to seek best national and international practices on matters pertaining to fiscal devolution and improving the quality and reach and enforcement of its recommendations.

Finance Commission: is a body set up under Article 280 of the Constitution. Its primary job is to recommend measures and methods on how revenues need to be distributed between the Centre and states.

Composition: The Constitution provides that Finance Commission shall consist of a Chairman and four other members to be appointed by President. The Chairman or members are eligible for reappointment.

Qualifications: The Chairman shall have vast experience in Public affairs and other four members shall be selected among persons who a) have qualifications as par with a judge of HC, b) has special knowledge of Finance and Accounts of govt, c) have vast experience in financial matters and d) have special knowledge of economics.
10. Indian Petroleum & Explosives Safety Service (IPESS)

The Union Cabinet has approved the Cadre review and formation of Group ‘A’ service of the technical cadre of Petroleum & Safety Organization (PESO) in the name of Indian Petroleum & Explosives Safety Service (IPESS).

**Significance:** To remove acute stagnation in all grades and uplift the morale of the workforce and enhance its performance, it has been decided to form Group ‘A’ Service of the technical cadre of PESO in the name of IPESS and restructure the newly-formed service.

The measure will enhance the capacity and efficiency of the organization and it will also enhance career progression of its Group ‘A’ officers.

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PESO is a subordinate office under Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP).

The organization is serving the nation since 1898 as a nodal agency for regulating safety of substances such as explosives, compressed gases and petroleum.

The organization deals with wide range of subjects related to explosives, petroleum, compressed gases, pressure vessels, gas cylinders, cross-country pipelines, Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), Auto Liquefied Petroleum Gas (Auto LPG) etc.
11. Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission

In a step that would spare animals from suffering due to drug experiments, the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission has approved **modern, animal-free tests for drug manufacturers**.

In its latest guidelines on tests for drugs manufactured and marketed in India, the IPC has replaced the pyrogen test carried out on rabbits and the abnormal toxicity test carried out on guinea pigs and mice with tests that can be done in test tubes. With the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission’s new mandate, the pyrogen test will be replaced by a bacterial endotoxin test or a monocyte activation test which can be carried out in test tubes.

**Background:** People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India has been pushing for doing away with the cruel methods of testing on animals for the past several years.

**Key facts:**

- **The pyrogen test** is carried out to check impurity or substance that can cause adverse side-effects. For the test, the drug is injected into a rabbit and the animal is closely observed for feverish symptoms.

- **The abnormal toxicity test** is carried out to check potential hazardous biological contamination in vaccine formulations. This batch test is done before the product is approved for marketing. In this, mice or guinea pigs are injected with the vaccine.
Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) is an Autonomous Institution of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

IPC is created to set standards of drugs in the country. Its basic function is to update regularly the standards of drugs commonly required for treatment of diseases prevailing in this region.

It publishes official documents for improving Quality of Medicines by way of adding new and updating existing monographs in the form of Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP). It further promotes rational use of generic medicines by publishing National Formulary of India.

12. TRIFED

Tribal Co-operative Marketing Development Federation (TRIFED) of Ministry of Tribal Affairs has operationalised Retail Inventory Software (RIS) in all its Tribes India Outlets, Regional Offices and Head Office for inventory control.

The electronic mode of system has been made available at all Regional Offices and Outlets, streamlining the entire retail operations from purchases up to sales by automating the transaction process and tracking important purchase, stocks and sales data.

Implementation of RIS software will bring greater transparency and control over various transactions under Retail sale.

TRIFED: an apex organization at National Level and functioning under the administrative control of Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

TRIFED is serving the interests of Tribals, who are engaged in collection of NTFP and making of Tribal Art & Handicraft Products for their livelihood so as to ensure better remunerative price for their products as well as for the socio-economic betterment through Self Help Groups, Empanelled NGOs, State level Tribal Development Corporations, Forest Development Corporations for undertaking marketing development of the tribal products. It also organizes exhibitions like National Tribal Craft Expo called “Aadi Mahotsav” etc. in which it promotes and markets tribal products.
13. PRAGATI

The Prime Minister recently chaired his twenty-sixth interaction through PRAGATI – the ICT-based, multi-modal platform for Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation.

The 25 PRAGATI meetings so far have seen a cumulative review of 227 projects with a total investment of over Rs. 10 lakh crore. Resolution of Public Grievances has also been reviewed across a range of sectors.

PRAGATI is a unique integrating and interactive platform. The platform is aimed at addressing common man’s grievances, and simultaneously monitoring and reviewing important programmes and projects of the Government of India as well as projects flagged by State Governments.

Unique features:

- The PRAGATI platform uniquely bundles three latest technologies: Digital data management, video-conferencing and geo-spatial technology.

- It also offers a unique combination in the direction of cooperative federalism since it brings on one stage the Secretaries of Government of India and the Chief Secretaries of the States.

- With this, the Prime Minister is able to discuss the issues with the concerned Central and State officials with full information and latest visuals of the ground level situation. It is also an innovative project in e-governance and good governance.

- It is a three-tier system (PMO, Union Government Secretaries, and Chief Secretaries of the States).
• Issues to be flagged before the PM are picked up from the available database regarding Public Grievances, on-going Programmes and pending Projects.

• The system will ride on, strengthen and re-engineer the data bases of the CPGRAMS for grievances, Project Monitoring Group (PMG) and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. PRAGATI provides an interface and platform for all these three aspects.

• The system has been designed in-house by the PMO team with the help of National Informatics Center (NIC).

14. Special Category Status for Bihar

CM Nitish Kumar has appealed for Special Category Status for Bihar. He has highlighted various issues impeding Bihar’s development and implored the central government for granting the Special Category Status (SCS) for the state.

Issue: Six states — Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Jharkhand, Orissa and Rajasthan — at different points in time have been demanding special category status. However, the Inter-Ministerial Group had rejected Bihar’s plea to be considered a special category State.

Reasons: It is observed that Bihar not only had the highest number, but also the highest proportion of backward districts compared with any other state. As many as 36 out of 38 districts in Bihar were backward as per the rankings of Inter Ministry Task Group (IMTG). It is also a fact that Bihar has occupied the last rank in terms of real per capita GSDP among all States in all the years 2000 through 2012. Bihar accounted for roughly 2.8 % of the GDP but 8.2% of the country’s population during 2009-12.
Special Category Status: There is no provision of SCS in the Constitution; the Central government extends financial assistance to states that are at a comparative disadvantage against others. The concept of SCS emerged in 1969 when the Gadgil formula (that determined Central assistance to states) was approved.

Some prominent guidelines for getting SCS status:

- Must be economically backward with poor infrastructure.
- The states must be located in hilly and challenging terrain.
- They should have low population density and significant tribal population.
- Should be strategically situated along the borders of neighboring countries.

Assistance to SCS States:

The SCS States used to receive block grants based on the Gadgil-Mukherjee formula, which effectively allowed for nearly 30 per cent of the Total Central Assistance to be transferred to SCS States as late as 2009-10.

Following the constitution of the NITI Aayog (after the dissolution of the Planning Commission) and the recommendations of the Fourteenth Finance Commission (FFC), Central plan assistance to SCS States has been subsumed in an increased devolution of the divisible pool to all States (from 32% in the 13th FC recommendations to 42%) and do not any longer appear in plan expenditure.

The FFC also recommended variables such as “forest cover” to be included in devolution, with a weightage of 7.5 in the criteria and which could benefit north-eastern States that were previously given SCS assistance. Besides, assistance to Centrally Sponsored Schemes for SCS States was given with 90% Central share and 10% State share.
15. The Commercial Courts (Amendment) Ordinance promulgated

- The Commercial Courts, Commercial Division and Commercial Appellate Division of High Courts (Amendment) Ordinance, 2018 was promulgated on May 3, 2018.
- It amends the Commercial Courts, Commercial Division and Commercial Appellate Division of High Courts Act, 2015.
- The Act enables the creation of commercial courts to adjudicate commercial disputes (such as disputes related to construction contracts or contracts for provision of goods).

Key features:

- **Reduction in pecuniary limits**: Under the Act, commercial courts and commercial divisions in High Courts can decide disputes with a value of at least one crore rupees. The Ordinance reduces this limit to three lakh rupees.

- **Establishment of certain commercial courts**: Under the Act, state governments may constitute commercial courts at the district judge level, after consulting the concerned High Court.

  District judge level includes judge of a city civil court, sessions judge, and an additional district judge. The Act bars such commercial courts to be constituted in cases where the High Court has the original jurisdiction to hear commercial cases. (Original jurisdiction refers to when a court has the power to hear a fresh case).
The Ordinance removes this bar and **allows states to constitute commercial courts where the High Court has original jurisdiction.**

- **Commercial Appellate Courts:** In areas where High Courts do not have ordinary original civil jurisdiction, state governments, may notify commercial appellate courts at the district judge level. Appeals against the order of a commercial court (below the level of a district judge) will lie before the Commercial Appellate Court.

- **Mediation:** A provision for mandatory mediation has been provided in those cases where no urgent relief (such as an injunction) is being sought by the parties to the dispute. The mediation process is required to be completed within a period of three months (may be extended by another two months). A signed settlement between the parties will have the same effect as an arbitral award under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.

**16. Cabinet approves resolution mechanism for commercial disputes in CPSEs**

The Union Cabinet approved a two-tier resolution mechanism for commercial disputes of Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs).

Currently, commercial disputes are resolved through the Permanent Machinery of Arbitration (set up under the Department of Public Enterprises).

The new two-tier mechanism will replace this existing system to resolve commercial disputes between CPSEs, and CPSEs and government departments or organizations.

This excludes disputes concerning the Railways, Income Tax, Customs and Excise Departments.

Key features of the new mechanism include:
First level: Commercial disputes will be referred to a Committee which will comprise of Secretaries of the respective Ministries or Departments to which the disputing parties belong to, and the Secretary of the Department of Legal Affairs. Further, financial advisors of the two concerned Ministries or Departments will represent the issues related to the dispute before the above Committee. At this level, the disputes must be resolved within three months.

Second level: If the dispute remains unresolved at the first level, it will be referred to the Cabinet Secretary. The decision of the Cabinet Secretary will be final and binding.

SPORTS

The National Sports University Ordinance, 2018 promulgated

It establishes a National Sports University in Manipur. Note: The National Sports University Bill, 2017 was introduced in Lok Sabha in August 2017 and is currently pending passage.

Key features of the Ordinance include:

Establishment of the University: The National Sports University will be headquartered in Manipur. It may establish outlying campuses, colleges, or regional centres.

The University will:

(i) undertake research on physical education,
(ii) strengthen sports training programmes, and
(iii) collaborate internationally in the field of physical education, among others.

Functions: Key powers and functions of the University include: (i) prescribing courses of study and conducting training programmes, (ii) granting degrees, diplomas, and certificates, (iii) providing facilities through a distance education system, and (iv) conferring autonomous status on institutions.

Authorities: The University will have the following authorities:

(i) **Court** - review the policies of the University and suggest measures for its development,
(ii) **Executive Council** - the principal executive body,
(iii) **Academic and Activity Council** - supervise academic policies
(iv) **Board of Sports Studies** - approve the subjects for research and recommend measures to improve standards of teaching, and
(v) **Finance Committee** - examine proposals related to creation of posts and recommend limits on the expenditure of the University. Additional authorities may be declared through statutes of the University.

**COAL**

Inter-ministerial groups submits recommendations on rationalizing coal linkages for independent power producers

The Ministry of Coal had constituted an inter-ministerial group to review the existing sources of coal for independent power producers with coal linkages in October 2017.

Coal linkage is the allocation of coal mines to thermal power plants
The recommendations made by the group include:

- **Transfer of coal linkage**: Under coal linkage rationalization, the coal linkage of a thermal power plant of an independent power producer (IPP) may be transferred from one coal company to another. Such transfer will be based on the existing availability of coal and the future coal production plan of the coal company.

  Objective: allocate coal mines closer to the power plants, reducing coal transportation costs, resulting in lower coal costs for the power producers. These savings have to be passed on to the consumers of power, such as power distribution companies.

  Such rationalization will be voluntary for the thermal power plants. It is also expected that if coal travel distance is reduced, it will free up railway freight infrastructure for other sectors.

- **Process of rationalization**: The calling for requests for linkage rationalization will be a one-time process. It will be undertaken jointly by Coal India Limited, Singareni Collieries Company Limited, and Central Electricity Authority in a transparent manner. Such rationalization will be considered only for the IPPs that have these linkages through the allotment route (government allotment).

- **Post rationalization**: Fuel Supply Agreements (agreement between coal company and power plant) of the rationalized source will be implemented only after the central or state Electricity Regulatory Commission approves the supplementary agreement.

**TRANSPORT**

**DGCA releases draft guidelines related to airline cancellation and refunds**

The Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has released draft guidelines related to:

(i) refund of airline tickets to passengers, and
(ii) facilities to be provided to passengers by airlines due to denied boarding, cancellation of and delays in flights.

Key guidelines include:

Refund of airline tickets

- **Lock-in period:** The airlines will provide a ‘lock-in’ option for 24 hours after booking the ticket. During this time period a passenger can cancel or change the ticket without any additional charges, except for the normal prevailing fare of the changed ticket. This lock-in option will be available to passengers up to 96 hours before the flight’s departure.

- **Additional charges:** Airlines will not levy any additional charge for correction in name of the same person. Such error has to be pointed out by the passenger within 24 hours of the booking.

- **Cancellation charges:** Currently, airlines cannot levy cancellation charges that are more than the basic fare plus fuel surcharge. The proposed guidelines extend this provision to travel agents.

Denied boarding, cancellation of and delays in flights

- **Cancellation of flights:** Currently, if an airline informs the passengers of the cancellation less than two weeks before and up to 24 hours of the scheduled time of departure, then it will offer the passenger an alternate flight within two hours of their scheduled departure. The guidelines propose that, in addition, the airline may also refund the price of the ticket, if acceptable to the passenger.

- **Flight delays:** If a flight is expected to be delayed by more than four hours from the scheduled departure time or a previously revised departure time (before 24 hours), airlines will offer an option of full refund of ticket. If the delay is more than 24 hours and
is moved to the next day, the airline will offer the passengers: (i) meals and refreshments in relation to waiting time, and (ii) hotel accommodation when necessary (including transfers). Such facilities will be free of charge.

- If a passenger misses a connecting flight due to delay caused by an airline, the airline must offer: (i) Rs 5,000 for a delay more than three hours, (ii) Rs 10,000 for a delay between four and 12 hours, and (iii) Rs 20,000 for delay more than 12 hours. Such compensation will be paid only if the passenger has informed the airline of the connecting flight at the time of booking.

COMMUNICATIONS

Draft National Digital Communications Policy 2018 released

- **National Broadband Mission**: A National Broadband Mission will be established to secure universal broadband access. This will include implementation of:
  (i) broadband initiatives such as BharatNet and GramNet,
  (ii) ‘Fibre First Initiative’ to provide optic fibre cables in tier I, II and III towns, and in rural clusters.

- **Spectrum**: New Spectrum bands will be identified and provided for timely deployment and growth of 5G networks. The draft policy proposes optimal pricing of spectrum and simplifying the process of obtaining permissions from various agencies.
• **Investments:** To increase investments in the sector, the draft Policy proposes to recognize telecom infrastructure as critical and essential infrastructure similar to roadways and railways.

It also proposes to reform the licensing and regulatory regime by:

(i) reviewing levies and fees,
(ii) rationalizing taxes and levies on digital communication equipment,
(iii) simplifying compliance obligations.

• **Data protection:** A comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications will be set up that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals.

**In-flight connectivity approved**

- The Telecom Commission has approved in-flight connectivity as recommended by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).
- This implies that airlines and telecom service providers can offer voice and data services in Indian airspace once an aircraft reaches an altitude of 3,000 m.
- These services will be provided through Indian satellites or satellites approved by the Department of Space.
- A separate category of licensee called **In-Flight Connectivity Provider** will be created with a token license fee of one rupee. It is expected that it will take 3 to 4 months to operationalize the service.

**Cabinet approves provision of mobile connectivity in LWE areas**
The Union Cabinet approved Phase II of project to provide mobile services in inhabited uncovered areas affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE) through Universal Service Obligation Fund.

In Phase I of the project, 2,335 towers were made operational. In Phase II of the project, mobile services will be provided at 4,072 tower locations of 96 districts in 10 states. The Phase II of the project is estimated to cost Rs 7,330 crore.

**Purpose:** The network would be used by the security personnel deployed in LWE affected areas. Further, mobile services will also be provided to the residents in unconnected inhabited villages in such regions.

**Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)** USOF was formed by the Central Government to help fund projects to boost connectivity in rural areas. The money for this fund comes through a ‘Universal Access Levy,’ charged from the telecom operators as a percentage of various licenses fees being paid by them.

**Provision of mobile connectivity in Meghalaya under CTDP approved**

- The Union Cabinet has approved the implementation of a Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan (CTDP) for the north eastern region in Meghalaya.

- The project is estimated to cost Rs 3,911 crore and will be funded by the Universal Service Obligation Fund.

- The Cabinet also approved an increase cost of CTDP Project for north eastern region for an amount of Rs 8,121 crore as compared to Rs. 5,336 crore approved earlier.
Increase in budget for Network for Spectrum for defence services approved

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved increase of Rs 11,330 crore towards the Network for Spectrum project.
- This is in addition to Rs 13,334 crore approved in 2012.
- The project seeks to develop a dedicated optical fibre network for defence services.

INDUSTRY

Directorate General of Trade Remedies created

The Department of Commerce notified the creation of the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR).

The DGTR will be the **apex national authority for administering all trade remedial measures including anti-dumping, countervailing duties and safeguard measures.**

Currently these functions are dealt by the Directorate General of Anti-dumping and Allied Duties, Directorate General of Safeguards, and Safeguards (QR) functions of Directorate General of Foreign Trade. The DGTR will merge these into one single national entity.

MINORITY AFFAIRS

CCEA approves restructuring of Multi-Sectoral Development Programme

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the restructuring and renaming of the Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MsDP) as **Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram.**
Further, the scheme has been approved for continuation till 2019-20 with an allocation of Rs 3,972 crore.

MsDP was launched in 2008 with an aim to address the development gaps in minority concentrated areas by providing basic amenities and creating socio-economic infrastructure.

Key features of the restructured programme include:

- **Criteria**: The criteria for identification of minority concentration areas have been rationalized by lowering the population percentage criteria. Previously, towns that were backward in terms of both basic amenities and socio-economic parameters were taken up under the scheme. Under the restructured scheme, towns backward in either or both of these criteria will be considered under the scheme.

- **Coverage of the scheme**: The existing MsDP covers 196 districts in 27 states/union territories which is being extended to a total of 308 districts in 32 states/union territories. The restructured scheme will include minority concentration district headquarters along with minority concentration towns, blocks, and cluster of villages.

- **Earmarking of funds**: Rs 3972 crore has been allocated to the scheme for a three-year period (2017-2020). Of the total funds, 80% will be earmarked for projects related to education, health, and skill development.

**STATISTICS**
Draft National Policy on Official Statistics released

Core statistics: The draft policy proposes to focus on certain statistics of national importance as core statistics. These core statistics will be regulated for quality and timeliness. This includes eight domains including national income, money and banking, demography, social and environment sectors.

The **Union List in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution will be amended** to include (i) censuses of subjects other than population, and (ii) statistics of national importance (as declared by Parliament). The central government would regulate, and bear the cost of producing and disseminating such core statistics.

**National Statistical Commission:** The draft policy proposes that a National Statistical Commission (NSC) be constituted to regulate and audit core statistics and advise the central government on improving other official statistics. A Bill will be introduced in the Parliament to constitute the NSC as a public corporation.

A **National Statistical Appraisal and Assessment Organisation** will be set up under NSC to conduct statistical audits.

A **National Statistical Development Council** will be set up under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister to provide guidance to the NSC on policy matters,

An initial endowment fund of Rs 500 crore will be provided to the NSC. Further, certain share of the budget on official statistics would be devolved to the NSC every year.

**All-India Indian Statistical Service:** Currently, there are several statistical cadres such as the Indian Statistical Service, State Statistical Services, and other Group A Statistical posts or cadres. The draft policy seeks to combine such services to constitute an all-India Indian Statistical Service to unify statistical cadres in the country.
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Visit of Prime Minister to Indonesia
The Prime Minister visited Indonesia and signed 15 agreements for cooperation in various fields including: (i) defence, (ii) exploration of outer space, and (iii) health cooperation.

Visit of Prime Minister of Netherlands to India
The Prime Minister of Netherlands visited India on a two-day visit. 52 MoUs were signed between the countries in various sectors including: (i) water management and port and waterways related projects, (ii) agrifood and horticulture, (iii) life sciences and health, (iv) business, and (v) information technology.
1. Ministry of Civil Aviation

Maharashtra will get a new airport at ParuleChipi in Sindhudurg district in 2018

The airport is being constructed by IRB Sindhudurg Airport Pvt. Ltd. on a **design-build-finance-operate-transfer (DBFOT) basis** for the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC). Sindhudurg airport will have a 2500-meter runway which has provision for future development. The airport will be built at an approximate cost of 520 crores.

An airport in Sindhudurg was necessary in order to provide better connectivity to the Konkan region of Maharashtra, parts of Goa, North Karnataka and Western Maharashtra. At present the state of Maharashtra has three functional international and 13 domestic airports.

**Biggest Airport, after Mumbai, to be developed in Mopa, Goa**

A joint team of the Airports Authority of India (AAI) and Commerce Logistics Department will visit Goa on 7th-8th May 2018 to facilitate the development of cargo hubs at the new airport to be constructed at Mopa in Goa.

**Purpose:** leverage the advantages the State offers in terms of connectivity to the coastal belt of Western India. The four coastal states in the western part of the country, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and Goa, will benefit greatly from the biggest airport, after Mumbai, to be constructed in Mopa.

Goa will become a logistics hub of India after a second airport becomes functional in 2020 in the state. The two airports in Goa, at Dabolim and Mopa, will help position the State as a logistic hub.
Mopa airport will have the capacity to handle 30 million passengers annually as well as cargo. The cargo policy to be announced by the Government of India will help to contribute 40% of India’s GDP from global trading. Dabolim airport will also be upgraded with an investment of about 600 crores.

2. Ministry of Defence

Exercise of Vijay Prahar

Formations of South Western Command are carrying out Exercise VIJAY PRAHAR employing more than 20000 troops, cutting edge equipment and state of the art force multipliers in the Mahajan Field Firing Ranges close to Suratgarh in Rajasthan.

Aim: orchestrate wide spectrum of threats which are planned to be tackled through high tempo joint air and land operation involving hundreds of aircrafts, thousands of tanks and artillery pieces supported by real time intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and just in time logistic support. The month-long exercise is essentially to practice the troops in penetrative manoeuvres across the obstacle ridden terrain under a nuclear umbrella.

During the exercise, the formations of South Western Command are practising and operationalising certain innovative concepts of operating in the network centric environment, integrated employment of modern day sensors with the weapon platforms, employment of attack helicopters in the air cavalry role and bold offensive of application of the Special Forces. The formations will refine their drills and procedures for fighting in the nuclear environment during the course of the exercise.
Visit of Indian Naval Ships to Danang, Vietnam

As part of ongoing operational deployment of the Indian Navy’s Eastern Fleet ships to South East Asia and North West Pacific region, three Indian Naval Ships Sahyadri, Shakti and Kamorta under the command of Rear Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi, Flag Officer Commanding, Eastern Fleet shall be making a port call at Tien Sa Port, Danang from 21-25 May 2018.

During the visit, there would be professional interaction between personnel of both the navies, official calls and interaction with dignitaries of the Vietnamese Government. Visits by local populace, guided tours for Indian Naval personnel, sports events and a band concert by Indian Navy band is also planned. On completion of the harbour phase, both Indian Navy and Vietnam Peoples’ Navy would be undertaking an exercise.

Background:

- Bilateral relations between India and Vietnam are characterised by strong bonds of friendship based on cultural, religious and economic ties dating back to 2nd Century AD. The influence of Indian civilisation speaks of the deep rooted historical linkages between the two nations.

- India-Vietnam relations have been strengthened in recent years due to a vibrant economic relationship and growing convergence on security issues. In 2016, during the official visit of Indian Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi to Vietnam, the relations between the two countries were elevated to the level of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

- Visit by Prime Minister of Vietnam, HE Mr Nguyen Xuan Phuc to India in January this year as a guest for the Republic Day and for the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit and a State visit by the President of Vietnam, HE Mr Tran Dai Quang in March 2018 signify momentum of the bilateral relationship.
Strong defence cooperation is a vital component of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries.

The Indian Defence Minister is scheduled to visit Vietnam in June this year and the Chief of General Staff of Vietnam People’s Army and the Commander-in Chief of Vietnam People’s Navy are scheduled to visit India later this year.

The Indian Navy has had extensive interactions with Vietnam People’s Navy, particularly in the field of training, repairs, maintenance and logistics support aimed at capacity building. The last visit by Indian Navy ship to Vietnam was in Sep 2017, when two of its ships INS Satpura and INS Kadmatt visited Hai Phong port.

The current visit seeks to enhance maritime cooperation between the two Navies and will further bolster the strong bonds of friendship between the two countries and contribute to security and stability in the region and the world at large.

CAS visit to Israel

Chief of the Air Staff, Indian Air Force, is embarking on a four day visit to the State of Israel from 21st to 24th May 18. The CAS would attend a conference themed ‘Air Superiority as a Bridge to Regional Stability’, as part of 70th anniversary celebrations of the Israel Air Force. The conference will enable strategic dialogue between Israel’s highest leadership, innovative thinkers and the invited Air Force Commanders.

Israel has been India’s strategic partner in defence. Both Air Forces have been undertaking mutually beneficial professional exchange programs over the years. The CAS is expected to meet and interact with Chiefs and Senior Commanders of Air Forces from over 20 countries attending the event.
In addition to the professional interaction during the conference, the CAS will also be visiting bases of the Israel Air Force, monuments of Israeli military aviation and cultural heritage.

**Way Forward:**

The participation of the Indian Air Force Chief would provide further impetus towards increasing defence cooperation with Israel and pave the way for greater interaction and cooperation in future.

**Joint Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Surveillance of Maldives**

Indian Naval (IN) ship Sumedha, a Naval Offshore Patrol Vessel (NOPV), has been deployed to undertake joint EEZ surveillance of Maldives from 09 to 17 May 18, as part of Indian Navy’s ‘Mission Based Deployments’.

The ship would undertake an Operational Turnaround (OTR) at Male from 11 to 12 May 2018, during which the ship would interact and impart training to Maldives’ National Defence Forces (MNDF) personnel.

Sumedha would also embark MNDF personnel onboard and undertake joint EEZ surveillance of Maldives from 12 to 15 May 2018. The MNDF personnel would be disembarked at Male, on completion of the EEZ surveillance.

Two officers and eight sailors of the Indian Navy’s Marine Commando (MARCO) cadre are currently conducting the 2nd Asymmetric Warfare Training Exercise ‘Ekatha 2018’ at Maldives, from 28 Apr to 15 May 2018.

During the exercise training on various diving related issues including use and maintenance of diving equipment, medical emergencies, etc, are being imparted to MNDF personnel. The Indian Ambassador to Maldives also witnessed the training exercise on 06 and 07 May 2018. IN ship Sumedha would de-induct the IN MARCOs Training Team from Male on 15 May 2018.
The Joint EEZ surveillance of Maldives is an endeavour of the Government of India and the Indian Navy to ensure the safety and security of the vast EEZ of the island nation.

**Indian Army Women Officers’ Mountaineering Expedition to Mt. Bhagirathi-ii**

Indian Army Women Officers’ Mountaineering Expedition to Mt. Bhagirathi-II (6512 metres) consisting of nine women officers, was flagged off by Director General of Military Training on 14 May 2018. The expedition will be conducted from 14 May to 11 Jun 18. The team also plans to set a new world record of practicing Yoga at 21000 ft on the occasion of Yoga Day 2018.

**Aim:** encouraging women in the field of adventure where dauntless courage, will-power and determination are put to test. The Indian Army women officers are exploring their maximum potential in the field of adventure sports.

Mt. Bhagirathi-II is located in the Garhwal Himalayas in Gangotri National Park. The peak rises right above the Gangotri glacier which sets new challenges for the climbers.

The summit is challenging owing to its technical requirements, vertical ascents, inclement and unpredictable weather conditions. It will be a true test of the climbers’ technical acumen in mountaineering, mental strength and physical courage.

**E-Pension Payment Order**

Furthering the Digital India-initiatives of Govt. of India, Principal Controller of Defence Accounts (Pensions), Allahabad has started issuance of electronic-Pension Payment Orders (e-PPOs) to the pensioners along with their Pension Disbursement Agencies viz., Banks, Defence Pension Disbursement Offices, Post Offices, etc. What began in the first phase, for all Commissioned
Officers and JCOs/ORs of Armed Forces from the month of October 2017, has now been extended to all defence pensioners including defence civilians.

Principal Controller of Defence Accounts (Pensions), Allahabad is the sole agency under Ministry of Defence which sanctions Pensions for the Defence Services viz., Army, Coast Guard, Defence Research and Development Organization, General Reserve Engineer Force, Border Roads Organization, Military Engineering Services and other Defence organisations including Defence Account Department and Defence Civilians.

The shift from manual system to e-PPO system is expected to minimize delays in pension disbursement and further revision as and when needed. This initiative also eliminates the occurrence of human errors in data entry at multiple levels.

Way Forward: The next big step in this direction would be digitizing pension documents received from 46 record offices and more than 2900 Heads of Offices. This initiative by PCDA (P) will facilitate better implementation of OROP.

SURYA KIRAN XIII

Joint Military Exercise SURYA KIRAN-XIII between India and Nepal will be conducted at Pithoragarh from 30 May to 12 June 2018.

The exercise will comprise of nearly 300 soldiers from both Indian and Nepal Army who would be sharing their experiences gained during conduct of various counter insurgency and counter terrorism operations in the past.

Exercise SURYA KIRAN is a biannual event which is conducted alternatively in Nepal and India. Notably in the series of military training exercises undertaken by India with various countries, Exercise SURYA KIRAN with Nepal is the largest in terms of troop participation.
Aim: to conduct battalion level joint training with emphasis on counter terrorism operations in mountainous terrain. During the exercise, aspects of disaster management and joint effort towards relief work have also been included.

The joint military exercise will enhance the level of defence cooperation which will further strengthen the bilateral relations between the two nations.

Mount Deotibba Expedition-2018

All women high altitude expedition to Mount Deotibba (6001 Mtrs) which is located in Himachal Pradesh, has been organised by the Indian Navy from 28 May to 15 Jun 2018.

Indian Navy had summited Mt Everest in May 2017. The Service had previously launched the first successful expedition to Everest in 1965 and has been to the South & North poles in 2006 and 2008 respectively.

Now, with culmination of Sagar-Parikarma, the circumnavigation around the globe by All Women Navy Team, Indian Navy seeks to achieve a similar feat on land by organising an ‘All Women Expedition to Mt Deotibba as a launch pad for scaling higher peaks including Everest in near future.

3. Ministry of Power

9th India-Japan Energy Dialogue held in New Delhi

- Both Japan and India, as the third and the seventh largest economies respectively, recognized that having access to reliable, clean and economical energy is critical for their economic growth and in achieving this, both agreed on further strengthening of
bilateral energy cooperation for energy development of both countries, while also contributing to worldwide energy security, energy access and climate change issues.

- Both India and Japan with a view to implement Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the aegis of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognized the importance of development and deployment of next generation technologies including hydrogen to realize de-carbonization.

- Both India and Japan appreciated the relevance of the grid stability given the high penetration of variable renewable energy. Both countries agreed to initiate the discussion towards development of Electric Vehicles (EVs) by collaborating with "Policy dialogue on next generation/Zero emission vehicles".

- Both India and Japan reiterated the continued importance of coal-based electricity generation in the energy mix in both the countries and also agreed to promote the cooperation on environmental measures for coal-fired power plants.

- Both India and Japan further confirmed their commitment to work together in promoting well-functioning energy markets and affirmed to promote transparent and diversified Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) market through the relaxation of destination clause.

4. Ministry of Home Affairs
NDMA to conduct workshop on Disaster Risk Reduction database

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is conducting a two-day National Workshop on Data Requirements for Disaster Risk Reduction Database.

The workshop is being held in collaboration with United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR).

**Need:** India often refers to global databases and snapshots of disaster events for reporting disaster losses. However, these databases work under various limitations and are not able to produce accurate analyses.

In this background, it is important to create a uniform and credible national-level disaster database. Locally obtained and validated data will aid scientific analyses and suitable policy interventions to reduce disaster risks.

**Aim:** develop consensus on disasters, thresholds and develop standardised templates for data collection, updation and validation to ensure accuracy and quality. Issues such as interoperability and security of the data will also be discussed.

This database is crucial for assessing and tracking our risks and progress towards resilience without which India will not be able to meet its developmental goals.

It will also be a step forwards towards implementing the Prime Minister’s 10-point agenda to address disaster risks, outlined during the Asian Ministerial Conference on DRR (AMCDRR) in November, 2016.

**Online Event Clearing System for Foreign Nationals**
Union Home Secretary launched the online Event Clearance System (https://conference.mha.gov.in) for grant of security clearance to the conference/seminar/workshop organized in India. This will enable the Indian Missions abroad for issuance of Conference Visa to foreign nationals/delegates intending to attend such events organized by a Ministry or Department of the Government of India, State Governments or UT Administrations, Public Sector Undertakings, Central Educational Institutions, Public Funded Universities or private institutions or NGOs.

With the introduction of the online module the whole process has become paperless and standardized resulting in effective monitoring and timely disposal.

Indian Missions are authorized to issue conference visas to delegates on production of an invitation to a conference/seminar/workshop being organized in India. However, prior reference is required to be made to the Ministry of Home Affairs before granting conference visas to foreigners participating in conferences/seminars/workshops etc. in India in the following cases:-

(i) If the participants are nationals of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Sudan or foreigners of Pakistani origin or Stateless persons; and/or

(ii) If the participants of conferences/seminars/workshops are required to visit 'Restricted' or 'Protected' areas in India, or areas affected by terrorism, militancy and extremism etc. viz. Jammu & Kashmir and the North Eastern States (other than the States of Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland).

3rd Meeting of India– U.K. Home Affairs’ Dialogue

Issues discussed:
- Cyber security, women safety, organized crime, terror financing etc. and a need to put in place a mechanism for timely exchange of information and intelligence inputs on such issues.

- Indian fugitives/economic offenders residing in the U.K. The Indian delegation impressed upon the UK authorities the need to expedite the process of extradition.

- Streamlining the process of various categories of visas for Indian Students and highly skilled professionals and other categories. It was agreed that there will be further interactions on the issues.

- It was agreed to maintain the momentum for enhanced security cooperation between the two countries.

5. Ministry of Communications

In-Flight Connectivity

Telecom Commission has approved almost all the TRAI’s Recommendation on In-flight Connectivity. With this, the airlines and the TSPs can offer voice and data services in India Airspace once an aircraft reaches an altitude of 3000 metres. It is expected that it will take 3 to 4 months to operationalize the service.

In-Flight voice and data services shall be provided through Indian Satellites or through satellites approved by Department of Space for communication purposes, with gateways in India.

A separate category of licensee called In-Flight Connectivity Provider shall be created with a token license fee of Re. 1. Such facility of voice and data connectivity shall also be extended to ships and other moving vehicles (Earth Stations in Motion).

Cabinet approves financial assistance to sugar mills for clearing cane dues of farmers

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval to provide financial assistance @ of Rs. 5.50 per quintal of cane crushed in sugar season 2017-18 to sugar mills to offset the cost of cane, in order to help sugar mills to clear cane dues of farmers.

Details:

- The assistance shall be paid directly to the farmers on behalf of the mills.
- It will be adjusted against the cane price payable due to the farmers against Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) including arrears relating to previous years.
- Subsequent balance if any, shall be credited into the mill’s account.

Assistance shall be provided to those mills which will fulfil the eligibility conditions as decided by the Government.

Background:

Due to higher sugar production against the estimated consumption during the current sugar season 2017-18, the domestic sugar prices have remained depressed since the commencement of the season. Due to depressed market sentiments and crash in sugar prices, the liquidity position of sugar mills has been adversely affected, leading to accumulation of cane price dues of farmers which have reached to more than Rs.19,000 crore.

In order to stabilize sugar prices at reasonable level and to improve liquidity position of mills thereby enabling them to clear cane price dues of farmers, Government has taken following steps in past three months:
a. **Increased customs duty on import of sugar from 50% to 100%** in the interest of farmers.

b. Imposed reverse stock holding limits on producers of sugar for the months of February and March, 2018.

c. Government has also fully withdrawn the customs duty on export of sugar to encourage sugar industry to start exploring possibility of export of sugar.

d. In view of the inventory levels with the sugar industry and to facilitate achievement of financial liquidity, *Minimum Indicative Export Quotas (MIEQ)* have been fixed for sugar season 2017-18. Export Quotas of 20 Lakh tonnes of all grades of sugar; viz. raw, plantation white as well as refined, have been prorated amongst sugar factories by taking into account their average production of sugar achieved by the sugar mills during last two operational sugar seasons and the current season (up to February, 2018).

e. Further, to facilitate and incentivize export of surplus sugar by sugar mills, Government has allowed **Duty Free Import Authorization (DFIA)** Scheme in respect of sugar.

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**CxO Forum on “Standardizing the Digital Space” organized by BIS**

**Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)** the National Standards body of India organized a CxO Forum on "Standardizing the Digital Space" on 8 May, 2018 in New Delhi to deliberate on the key issues and challenges in the Digital space.

"Standardizing the Digital Space" is an initiative by BIS to bring the technocrats and tech-entrepreneurs in the country and global experts on the same platform to discuss and deliberate on the key issues and challenges that need to be overcome in the journey of Digital...
transformation and also to discuss the role of standards and regulations in "Scripting the future of IT".

The event was organized to highlight the role of standardization and invite participation in Standards Formulation for IT Sector. This event is in line with the 33rd plenary and working group meetings of JTC 1/SC 7 being hosted by BIS from 6th to 11th May 2018 where experts from more than 35 different countries are participating.

7. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

Cabinet approves accession to the Protocol under WHO Framework Convention on tobacco control to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products

It will be applicable to both smoking and chewing or smokeless tobacco (SLT) forms as negotiated and adopted under Article 15 of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC). India is a party to WHO FCTC.

Details:

The protocol lays down obligations of the parties. It spells out supply chain control measures that must be adopted by the parties viz. licensing of manufacture of tobacco products and machinery for manufacturing of tobacco products, due diligence to be kept by those engaged in
production, tracking and tracing regime, record keeping, security; and measures to be taken by those engaged in e-commerce, manufacturing in free-trade zones and duty free sales.

The protocol lists out offences, enforcement measures such as seizures and disposal of seized products. It calls for international cooperation in information sharing, maintaining confidentiality, training, technical assistance and cooperation in scientific and technical and technological matters.

Impact:

Elimination of illicit trade in tobacco products through strengthened regulation will help in strengthening comprehensive tobacco control, leading to reduction in tobacco use which in turn, will result in reduction in disease burden and mortality associated with tobacco use.

Accession to such treaty will provide actionable alternatives against such prevailing practices that are affecting public health at large. India, being at the forefront of tobacco control, would be able to influence the international organizations including World Custom Organization in controlling such illicit trade.

The protocol to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products is a path breaking initiative in strengthening global action against tobacco and is also a new legal instrument in public health. It is a comprehensive tool to counter and eventually eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products and to strengthen legal dimensions for international health cooperation.

Background:

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is the first international public health treaty negotiated under the auspices of the WHO. The objective of FCTC is to provide a framework for supply and demand reduction measures for tobacco control at the national, regional and global levels.

One of the key tobacco supply reduction strategies contained in Article 15 of WHO FCTC envisages elimination of all forms of illicit trade and tobacco products, including smuggling, illicit manufacturing and counterfeiting. Accordingly, the said Protocol was developed and
adopted by the Conference of Parties (COP) which is the governing body of FCTC. The protocol is divided into 10 parts and contains 47 Articles.

8. Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment

DEPwD to organise Cochlear Implant Awareness Programme in Faridabad on 6th May, 2018

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment will organize a ‘Cochlear Implant Awareness Programme’ on 6th May, 2018 (Sunday) at Huda Convention Centre, Sector-12, Faridabad (Haryana).

Under ADIP Scheme of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), there is provision for Cochlear Implant surgeries of Hearing Impaired children’s up to the age of 5 years at the cost of Rs. 6.00 Lakhs per unit. After Successful Cochlear Implant Surgeries, the child is able to hear and speak like normal Children. Government has empanelled 172 Hospitals (both Government & Private) throughout the country for the surgeries.

Ali Yavar Jung National Institute for Speech and Hearing Disabilities (AYNISHD), Mumbai is the Nodal Agency for Cochlear Implant Surgeries. During the last 4 years (2014-15 to 2017-18) 1149 Cochlear Implant Surgeries have been conducted successfully.

9. Ministry of Finance
27th GST council meeting discusses change in GST rate for digital transactions and imposition of Sugar Cess

I. **Incentive to promote Digital Transactions:**

a. Keeping in view the need to move towards a less cash economy, the Council has discussed in detail the proposal of a concession of 2% in GST rate [where the GST rate is 3% or more, 1% each from applicable CGST and SGST rates] on B2C supplies, for which payment is made through cheque or digital mode, subject to a ceiling of Rs. 100 per transaction, so as to incentivise promotion of digital payment.

b. The council has recommended for setting up of a Group of Ministers from State Governments to look into the proposal and make recommendations, before the next Council meeting, keeping in mind the views expressed in GST Council.

II. **Imposition of Sugar Cess over and above 5% GST and reduction in GST rate on ethanol:**

a. Keeping in view the record production of sugar in the current sugar season, and consequent depressed sugar prices and build-up of sugarcane arrears, the Council discussed the issue of imposition of sugar cess and reduction in GST rate on ethanol in great detail.

b. The council has recommended for setting up of a Group of Ministers from State Governments to look into the proposal and make recommendations, within two weeks, keeping in mind the views expressed in GST Council in this regard.
Fifteenth Finance Commission constitutes an Advisory Council to advise on the matters related to its Terms of Reference

The role and functions of the Advisory Council will be:

- To advise the Commission on any issue or subject related to the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Commission, which may be of relevance;

- To assist in the preparation of any paper or research study which would enhance the Commission's understanding on the issues containing in its ToR; and

- To help in broadening the Commission's ambit and understanding to seek best national and international practices on matters pertaining to fiscal devolution and improving the quality and reach and enforcement of its recommendations.

Two day Regional Conference on “Physical and Social Infrastructure for Regional Development” in Guwahati

The Seminar is organized by the Ministry of Finance, Government of India in collaboration with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) and the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FICCI).

Highlights:

- It provides an opportunity to do an in depth analysis of the core infrastructure related issues of the North Eastern States.
- The North East also has the best reputation of being the hub for industrial communication due to its proximity to the South Asian countries.
• Successful Regional Development hinges on connecting remote areas through physical infrastructure as well as by making greater investment in social infrastructure including in health and education.

• Taking into account the relatively high female labour force participation in regions such as the North East, priority needs to be given also to policy efforts ensuring greater participation of women in the development process.

• Different initiatives like UDAN, Single Window Clearance for Trade, Inland Waterways and efficient Private Sector participation etc. must be utilized for the maximum development of the region.

10. NITI Aayog

NITI Aayog to Collaborate with IBM to develop Precision Agriculture using Artificial Intelligence

NITI Aayog and IBM signed a Statement of Intent (SoI) today to develop a crop yield prediction model using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to provide real time advisory to farmers in Aspirational Districts.

The partnership aims to work together towards use of technology to provide insights to farmers to improve crop productivity, soil yield, control agricultural inputs with the overarching goal of improving farmers’ incomes.
First phase of the project will focus on developing the model for 10 Aspirational Districts across the States of Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

**Scope:** to introduce and make available climate-aware cognitive farming techniques and identifying systems of crop monitoring, early warning on pest/disease outbreak based on advanced AI innovations. It also includes deployment of weather advisory, rich satellite and enhanced weather forecast information along with IT & mobile applications with a focus on improving the crop yield and cost savings through better farm management.

**NITI Aayog,** on its part, will **facilitate the inclusion of more stakeholders** on the ground for effective last mile utilisation and extension, using the insights generated through these models.

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**NITI Aayog and Google sign SoI to help grow AI ecosystem in India**

Aiming to foster growth for India’s nascent artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) ecosystem, NITI Aayog and Google have come together to work on a range of initiatives to help build the AI ecosystem across the country.

The **NITI Aayog has been entrusted to setup a national programme** to conduct research and development in frontier technologies such as AI. In furtherance of this mandate, NITI Aayog has been developing India’s national strategy on AI along with the National Data and Analytics Portal to enable the wide deployment and use of AI.

Under the aegis of this program, **Google will train and incubate Indian AI startups in an accelerator program.** These startups will be mentored and coached by Google and its affiliates to enable them to better leverage AI in their respective business models.
To help bolster the research ecosystem, one of the initiatives includes funding Indian researchers, scholars and university faculty for conducting AI-based research. Further, Google will also bring its online training courses on AI to students, graduates and engineers to numerous cities across India, in the form of study groups and developer-run courses.

NITI Aayog and Google will organize an **AI/ML hackathon** that will be focused on solving key challenges within agriculture, education, healthcare, financial inclusion, transportation/mobility and more. This hackathon may use **Kaggle, a global platform, to help facilitate international participation into these planned hackathon challenges**.

Google through the NITI Aayog, will conduct hands-on training programs that aim to sensitise policymakers and technical experts in governments about relevant AI tools, and how they can be used to streamline governance.

**Google and NITI Aayog will work on the following initiatives:**

- Organize trainings for relevant government functionaries to introduce them to open source AI tools with the goal of enabling more effective governance.
- Awarding grants and scholarships to researchers, scholars and university faculty conducting cutting edge research in the field of AI/ML in India.
- Organizing AI/ML study jams for students and developers based on Google’s Machine Learning Crash Course (MLCC) on the fundamentals of machine learning.
- Incubating Indian AI/ML startups in a program where they will be mentored by Google to better leverage AI in their respective business models.
- Organise a Hackathon focused on using AI/ML and open data sets to solve key challenges within agriculture, education, healthcare, etc. in India.

**NITI Aayog’s three day Venture Capital Symposium 2018 begins**
NITI Aayog, in association with Vision India Foundation, is organising the Venture Capital Symposium 2018 to deepen the economic relationships between France and India. Following the visit of French President Emmanuel Macron, 20 of the biggest French venture capital and private equity funds are coming to India to explore investment opportunities.

The Venture Capital Symposium 2018 is a three day event where the French investors will be interacting with 100 early to mid-stage Indian start-ups.

Highlights:

- Showcased India’s entrepreneurial might and the strides taken in innovation for solving the challenges faced by the country.
- Urged the investors to focus on India to not just target one billion people but to build solutions in India for the seven billion strong global market.
- Utilise funds more effectively by investing in India, which has the ‘3D advantage’ of demographic dividend, demand & democracy.

Four investor groups - Eren Group, Claranova, Olymp Capital and TNP - made announcements of setting up offices in India and commitments to invest in various sectors such as energy, aerospace, blockchain and Internet of Things.

The event facilitates interactions between French investors, Indian investors, Indian start-ups and critical government functionaries. The French investors will explore the investment landscape as well as the socio-cultural richness of India.

The Venture Capital Symposium 2018 aims to support the Start-up India programme that was launched by the Hon’ble Prime Minister of India. The three day symposium is being organized by NITI Aayog and Vision India Foundation is the Knowledge Partner for the event.
NITI Aayog and ABB India sign statement of Intent

To collaborate to provide AI, big data and connectivity solutions across sectors

NITI Aayog and ABB India signed a Statement of Intent (SoI) today to support the Indian government realize its ambitious vision of ‘Make in India’ through advanced manufacturing technologies that incorporate the latest developments in robotics and artificial intelligence.

NITI Aayog will work with ABB across various sectors of the economy, such as the power and water utilities, industries like food as well as the heavy industries and the transport (rail and metro) and infrastructure to suggest solutions for digitalization, incorporating the Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies. The initiative also covers the fast growing segment of electric mobility.

Jointly, NITI Aayog and ABB will work with government ministries, solicit feedback for areas critical to them and discuss solutions using industrial automation, and digitalization technologies.

Through this SoI, NITI Aayog will facilitate participation of policymakers and government functionaries in workshops and training programs organized by ABB India. Such programs will feature subject matter experts and will aim to sensitize policymakers and officials about relevant AI capabilities, and explore ways they can be used for revolutionizing manufacturing productivity.

The first workshop for senior government officials, under this collaboration, would be organised in June, 2018 at ABB Ability Innovation Centre in Bengaluru. Given the importance of the food processing sector, the workshop will focus on digital and automation technologies in this sector.

NITI Aayog and all stakeholders will be exposed to hands-on experience of ABB Ability, the company’s comprehensive digital portfolio of solutions that deliver value of industrial digitalization to utilities, industries and transportation and infrastructure.
Based on the interactions with ABB India, NITI Aayog will also make recommendations to government ministries for guidelines and policies regarding development and adoption of AI technology in sectors such as power & water utilities, manufacturing, eMobility and infrastructure, with industrial automation and digitalization as the backbone.

NITI Aayog, in collaboration with ABB, will come out with a report on policy recommendations based on the feedback received in the workshops, by December this year.

The workshops and training programs will be held at ABB Ability Innovation Center (ABB AIC). As the company’s biggest research and development center in the world, located in Bengaluru, it develops technologies in areas such as AI, cyber security, automation engineering, data analytics, augmented and virtual reality and industrial software.

11. Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs

‘First Apex Conference for the CEOs of Smart Cities’ in Bhopal

The two-day conference is being organized for providing a platform for cross learning and knowledge sharing among the Smart City CEOs on 8-9 May 2018.

The conference will enable the CEOs to learn from the experiences of all city leaders to understand in greater details both successes and failures. The convergence of all the best practices in Smart city missions across the country on a single platform will help the city leaders to not waste time in 'reinventing the wheel' but use the collective learning to accelerate the progress of work.
**Discussion:** The plenary sessions will feature panel discussions and presentations by Smart City CEOs highlighting their high impact projects under Mission, which can be disseminated as learning for other cities. Further, the way forward for the city level project implementation will be discussed. There will also be an exhibition showcasing the different projects being undertaken by Cities under Smart Cities Mission. The two-day Apex Conference also provides an opportunity for the participating Smart City CEOs to visit the locations and appreciate the smart city projects implemented by Bhopal Smart City Limited.

**Objective:** provide momentum to the cities and a platform for cross-learning, sharing and disseminating the experience gained over the past two and a half years. The exhibition and presentations by the CEOs will provide useful insights for accelerating project implementation and enable cross learning among Smart Cities. Such knowledge sharing will help the cities to convert ideas into concrete actions as the outcome of the conference.

**12. Ministry of Tribal Affairs**

**Ministry of Tribal Affairs to expand Van Dhan Vikas Kendras in Tribal Districts across the country**

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.

**Aim** - mainstreaming 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%. About 3000 such Van Dhan Kendras are proposed to be set up in two years in the forested Tribal Districts of the country.
To begin with, this initiative is proposed to be taken up on priority in the 39 Districts with more than 50% tribal population and to then gradually be expanded to other Tribal Districts in India.

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.

The initiative aims to promote MFPs-centric livelihood development of tribal gatherers and artisans. MFP or what may be more aptly referred to as Non Timber Forest Produces (NTFPs) are the primary source of income and livelihood for about 5 crore tribal people in the country. Notably, most of the tribal Districts in India are forested Districts. Tribals have enormous traditional skills in the processes involved in collection and value addition of NTFPs. Based on local skills and resources the ideal model of tribal development has, therefore, to be NTFP centric.

**Key Highlights of Van Dhan Initiative**

- At unit level, aggregation of produce would be done by SHGs having about 30 members each forming *Van Dhan Vikas ‘Samuh’*. The SHGs would also undertake primary value addition of the MFPs using equipment such as small cutting and sieving tools, decorticator, dryer, packaging tool etc based on MFPs available in the area.

- A typical Van Dhan Vikas Samuh would have the following facilities:
- Provision for required building/ infrastructure support to be established in one of the beneficiary’s house/ part of house or Government/ gram panchayat building
- Equipment/ Tool Kit comprising of equipment such as small cutting and sieving tools, decorticator, dryer, packaging tool etc. based on MFPs available in the area
- Fully equipped training facilities for a batch of 30 trainees with provision for raw material for training purpose and supply of trainee kits (comprising of bag, scribbling pad, pen, brochures, training manual, booklet etc)
- Provisioning of working capital for the SHGs through tie up with financial institutions, banks, NSTFDC etc

• A cluster of ten such SHGs within the same village shall form a Van Dhan Vikas Kendra. Subject to successful operations of the samuhs in a Kendra, common infrastructure facilities (pucca Kendra) may be provided to the Kendra in the next phase in terms of building, warehouse, etc. for use of the samuh members.

• An illustrative list of major MFPs which may be covered under the initiative are tamarind, mahua flower, mahua seed, hill broom, chironjee, honey, sal seed, sal leaves, bamboo split, myrobalan, mango (amchur), aonla (churan/candy), seed lac, tez patta, cardamom, black pepper, turmeric, dry ginger, cinnamon, coffee, tea, sea buckthorn tea, etc. Apart from these, any other MFP with potential for value addition may be included.

13. Ministry of Commerce & Industry

Government Committed to get Access to Indian Pharma in Key Markets
The 6th annual International Exhibition of Pharma and Healthcare (iPHEX) (being held in New Delhi) is being attended by over 650 delegates from 130 countries, including scores of regulators.

Highlights:

- Government is committed to promoting pharmaceutical exports to untapped markets, including China which has agreed for a high level bilateral Round Table to pave the way for Indian Pharma to get market access and penetration in their vast market.

- Need for reaching out to newer markets, especially in Africa, where affordability is the key issue, which can be very well addressed by the Indian exporters.

- Genomics is the new branch in medicine, which can play a major role for the Indian Pharmaceutical sector.

- Increase in the validity of the GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices) Certificate, from two to three years.

- Protocol for clinical trials approval has also been changed, setting the time line of 45 days. Once approval does not come within this timeline, the protocol would have deemed to be approved.

Indo-Dutch Startup Initiative: #StartUpLink to be launched

In an endeavour to further the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship, Invest India (host to the Govt. of India’s initiative, ‘Startup India’ under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry) and the Dutch Government are jointly launching the Indo-Dutch #StartUpLink initiative.
The official launch will take place on 25th May, 2018. The initiative will fulfil the twin objective of **facilitating market expansion for startups in the two countries** alongside **fostering a joint sense of innovation and entrepreneurship**.

The Indo-Dutch #StartUpLink is developed for Indian and Dutch startups that are exploring each other’s markets and offers access to key information, relevant networks, pilot opportunities, and navigators for the respective startup ecosystems.

Startup India Hub under Invest India and Netherlands Enterprise Agency under the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Change would act as single points of contact and navigators for their respective countries.

‘**Clean Air’ India Ring**, a critical component of the Indo-Dutch #StartUpLink, will be launched on 24th May. The initiative is a multi-corporate challenge that will test and scale innovations through collaboration between startups, corporates and governments by providing pilot opportunities for promising innovations that solve the problem of pollution. Indian and Dutch startups will be matched through this program to relevant corporates for the same.

**International Conference on the TRIPS CBD Linkage 7-8 June 2018 in Geneva**

India has taken the lead in seeking to revive WTO discussions on issues **related to preventing theft of traditional knowledge**. Government of India, along with the Centre for WTO Studies, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade and the South Centre (an inter-governmental organisation based in Geneva), are organising an International Conference on TRIPS- CBD Linkage in Geneva on 7-8 June 2018.
Brazil and South Africa are some of the other countries that have joined hands with India on this crucial initiative.

Participants: indigenous people/local communities in developing and developed countries, internationally acclaimed academicians working on the subject, Geneva-based negotiators and capital based experts.

Resource persons, stakeholders and experts from a large number of countries, including Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Peru, Philippines, New Zealand, South Africa, Switzerland, and the US, would participate in the international conference.

The **Convention on Biological Diversity** is a multilateral agreement on sustainable development and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resource. It has membership of 196 countries.

The **Doha Ministerial Declaration in 2001** had tasked the TRIPS Council of the WTO to examine the relationship between the TRIPS Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the protection of traditional knowledge and folklore. It also mandated that while doing so, the Council should be guided by the objectives and principles set out in the TRIPS Agreement and should fully take into account the development dimension. While there has been considerable debate and deliberations on the subject no common understanding has yet been reached at the WTO.

**Significance:** It seeks to address bio-piracy.

The developing countries seek an amendment in the TRIPS Agreement to make disclosure of source or origin of genetic resource by patent applicants, submission of evidence of prior informed consent of local communities and evidence of fair and equitable sharing of benefits under the relevant national regimes mandatory. In 2008, developing countries garnered the support of the European Union to form a coalition of 109 countries (which included the African and Caribbean and Pacific Countries) for the above proposal seeking amendment of the TRIPS Agreement to enable mandatory disclosures in patent applications.
The last major proposal along similar lines but incorporating the mechanism agreed to under the Nagoya Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity was submitted by India, Brazil along with other like-minded countries in 2011. After this, the discussions appear to have lost steam.

The **Nagoya Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits arising from their utilization** came into effect in **2014**: It provides a legal framework for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources for research and commercialization purpose. At present, more than 100 countries have acceded to the protocol. This makes its mandatory for them to set down an access and benefit regime in compliance with the protocol.

India is optimistic that during the forthcoming international conference on TRIPs CBD issues the proponents will agree on a clear roadmap for pursuing this issue at the WTO.

**14. Ministry of Information & Broadcasting**

**15th Asia Media Summit to be hosted by India from May 10-12, 2018 in New Delhi**

The 15th Asia Media Summit (AMS) 2018 is being hosted by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, jointly with the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), New Delhi and Broadcast Engineering Consultants India Limited (BECIL), from 10th - 12th May, 2018 in New Delhi.
The AMS 2018, an annual summit of the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) Kuala Lumpur, is a prestigious summit in the Asia Pacific Region and India is hosting the event for the first time.

**Theme - ‘Telling Our Stories – Asia and More’**

**Participants** would represent organizations like Ministries responsible for Information and Broadcasting in the Asian region, International Organizations UNESCO, FAO, UN; Regulators; Radio and Television broadcasting companies both national/ public and private broadcasters; Television channels and networks, Institutes/Academies of Communication, Media Research; Community Radio groups; Press and Media, and broadcast equipment manufacturers.

The Summit would encourage regional and bilateral dialogue and cooperation to respond to challenges to the broadcasting sector in the region. It would provide a unique opportunity for broadcasters in the Asian region to share their thoughts on software and hardware aspects of Broadcasting. There are also opportunities for networking, facilities for business to business meetings and prospective translation of these meetings into trade and economic relations after the summit.

The **Agenda** of the summit would include Plenary Sessions on Media regulation policies: Ethics, rules and laws and Our Exciting Stories. Parallel Sessions would be held on Asian values as broadcasting themes; Should all good stories be commercially successful?; New technologies in the Broadcasting and Film Industry to Enhance Story-Telling; Media business models in the new era; Telling compelling stories: Challenges and Opportunities - Radio and Community Radio; Sustainable development Stories – Special Focus; CEO Roundtable Story-telling and the success of media.

**15. Ministry of Railways**
Artificial Intelligence to Monitor the Food Production in Base Kitchens

An artificial intelligence module has been developed by IRCTC to find anomalies in standard operating procedure using CCTV footage. With this module base Kitchens will be monitored pan India. The Artificial Intelligence module realizes the value of their videos and photos with vision computing. It can detect an unexpected change or an event that does not conform to the expected pattern using their machine learning algorithms.

To begin with, 16 base kitchens of IRCTC have been installed with high definition cameras connected to huge monitors for AI vision detection. Live streaming of 16 base kitchens is played all the time. The system detects anomalies of head gear, uniforms, rodents and mopping across kitchens and raises issues to be dealt accordingly with by IRCTC.

The module has been developed in association with New Delhi based company called WOBOT.

International Rail Coach Expo to be hosted by Integral Coach Factory Chennai

For the first time an International Rail Coach Expo (IRCE) to focus on Rail Coaches and train sets, is being held in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, from 17th to 19th May, 2018, in the ICF RPF Parade Grounds, Chennai.

Many reputed rail car and equipment builders will be showcasing their technology and products. It will be a unique platform to bring different suppliers under one roof and create synergy for “Make in India”.

The expo is being hosted by Integral Coach Factory, popularly known as ICF, under the Ministry of Railways, in coordination with CII (Confederation of Indian Industries) and RITES Ltd. a PSU under Ministry of Railways with the following features:-
• Exclusive Rail Coach and train sets for display for the first time in India
• 100+ exhibitors from 10+ countries
• Conferences/seminars on specialized subjects on Rail Coach and Train sets
• Key brands from rail coach and train sets will be displaying products focusing on innovation and future technologies
• Exclusive platform to meet and interact with the decision makers and senior officials of ICF and other Indian Railway production units
• Display of Rolling Stock designs viz. train sets for 160 kmph
• Display of Rolling stock designs including interiors, passenger amenities and other comfort features
• Development of Rolling Stock including emerging technologies in manufacture of train coaches with Stainless Steel, Aluminium Car body and others
• The development of High Speed Trains and the options available for Indian Railways

Ateli- Phulera Section of Dedicated Freight Corridor to be Open from 15th August, 2018

Ateli-Phulera section of Western Dedicated Freight Corridor - The distance between two stations is 190 Kms and it falls in Haryana (Mahendragarh district) and Rajasthan (Jaipur district). This section contains 10 number of viaducts and major bridges, 127 number of minor bridges, one rail fly over and 118 road under bridges. There are 6 DFC stations in this section and two junctions, i.e. Ateli and Phulera.

DFCCIL will run freight train at the maximum speed of 100 km/per hour as against the current maximum speed of 75 kms per hour on Indian Railway tracks whereas the average speed of freight trains will also be increased from existing speed of 26 km/ph on Indian Railways lines to 70 km/ph on Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFC).
DFCCIL, a special purpose vehicle (SPV) is engaged in planning, construction, operation and maintenance of the Dedicated Freight Corridors and in the first phase, the two corridors, namely Eastern Corridor from Ludhiana to Dankuni (1856 Kms) and the Western Corridor from Dadri to Jawahar Lal Nehru Port (JNPT) (1504 Kms) are being constructed for exclusively movement of Goods Trains.

The Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor from Ludhiana to Dankuni near Kolkata is traversing states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

The Western Dedicated Freight corridor from Dadri (Uttar Pradesh) to Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (Mumbai) is passing through Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

The Western Corridor is being funded by Japan International Corporation Agency (JICA), while the Eastern Corridor from Mughalsarai to Ludhiana is being funded by the World Bank.

16. Ministry of Human Resource Development

“Swachh Bharat Summer Internship- 100 Hours of Swachhata”

'Swachh Bharat Summer Internship – 100 Hours of Swachhata' - was launched by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in association with the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation to engage youth across the country for sanitation related work and village level development.
The program from 1st May to 31st July 2018 is aimed to:

- Develop the skill and orientation of youth for sanitation related work,
- Bring youth across the country to make a significant contribution to the swachhata revolution
- Integrate youth in the community service in rural areas in the run up to the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

Procedure:

Students enrolled in Colleges and Universities may apply in ‘Swachh Bharat Summer Internship’ through the enrolment form. Candidates may participate individually or in teams also. The location and team size may be decided in consultation with Nodal Officers. After enrollment for the internship through the website, candidates will be accepted as valid only once approved by the Nodal Officer at the Parent Institution. Candidates are to devote at least 100 hours conducting Swachhata-related activities in rural areas selected by them and approved by the parent institution. The last date of registration is 15th May, 2018.

17. Ministry of Shipping

Easy Financing Models Being Worked Upon to Promote Private Participation in Developing Inland Waterways

The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) will involve banks for ensuring availability of financing options for the private players engaged in Inland Water Transport (IWT) sector.
Financing and funding for Operation and Maintenance of IWT assets is a challenge for shippers, vessel operators and asset management firms as the banking sector is not yet ready with any customized financing option for the sector.

The Government is developing National Waterways as a key transport intervention, as part of an integrated transport network strategy, which will help correct the transport modal mix that imposes huge logistics costs on the Indian economy. At present the cost of logistics in India, at 15 per cent of GDP, are about twice those in the United States.

18. Ministry of Minority Affairs

Promotion and Progress of meritorious youths from Minority communities is the priority of the Government

The Ministry of Minority Affairs has been putting effective efforts for “promotion and progress” of meritorious youth from Minority communities.

It has been running a large scale free-coaching programme for meritorious youths belonging to notified minority communities preparing for UPSC examinations. Through various institutions and organisations, the Ministry has been running coaching programmes such as “Nai Udaan”, “Naya Savera” for minority youths preparing for Civil Services, other UPSC examinations, medical, engineering and administrative examinations.

During 2017-18, 105 youths from the notified minority communities who qualified prelims of Civil Services Exams, have been provided financial support under the “Nai Udaan” scheme.
An awareness campaign is also going on for the youths belonging to minority communities to ensure they participate in these examinations, through television channels, newspapers and different institutions and organisations. This year, free-coaching will be provided to more than 15,000 youths from across the country.

“Nai Udaan” and “Naya Savera” schemes have been revised during last year and rate of financial assistance on qualifying UPSC prelims has been increased from Rs 50,000 to Rs 1 lakh.

Under “Naya Savera” programme, the Ministry of Minority Affairs has also been working with reputed institutions and organizations to provide free-coaching to Minority youths.

19. Ministry of Law & Justice

**MoU between India and Morocco in the legal field approved**

The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval for signing of the MoU for cooperation in the legal field between India and Morocco, in order to share their experience and expertise in the field of law and legislation.

The MoU will give an opportunity to the Lawyers, Law Officers and law students to discuss issues in the field of law and justice in seminars, symposiums and workshops arranged by authorities of India and Morocco.
20. Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

26th BASIC Ministerial meeting of Environment Ministers in Durban

The 26th BASIC Ministerial Meeting of Environment Ministers was held in Durban, South Africa. The grouping is a bloc of 4 countries – Brazil, South Africa, India and China. It was attended by from BASIC countries and Michal Kurtyka of Poland, next President of Conference of Parties (COP-24) under United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). India was represented by Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan.

**Key Outcomes of the Meeting:**

BASIC countries decided to preserve integrity of historic 2015 Paris Agreement, including principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and equity.

Held that world is at a critical stage in combating climate change and response of developed nations to tackle the issue is still not complete.

**Background:**

BASIC countries are bloc (geopolitical alliance) of four large newly industrialized countries – Brazil, South Africa, India and China. It was formed by an agreement of November 2009. They are committed to act jointly at Copenhagen climate summit, including possible united walk-out if their common minimum position was not met by the developed nations during climate talks. It is working to define common position on emission reductions and climate aid money and try to convince other countries to sign up to Copenhagen Accord.
BRICS Ministerial on Environment Includes Green Good Deeds in its Official Agenda

Green Good Deeds, the societal movement launched by the Union Minister for Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Dr Harsh Vardhan, to protect environment and promote good living in the country, has found acceptance by the global community.

The ongoing BRICS Ministerial on Environment at Durban, South Africa, has agreed to include “Green Good Deeds” in its official agenda in the next Ministerial in Brazil and another meeting in Russia.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan had formally launched the nation-wide campaign in January 2018. He enlisted the cooperation of thousands of people – students, teachers, voluntary organisations, Residents Welfare Associations and professionals to adopt these deeds.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change had drawn up a list of over 500 Green Good Deeds and asked people to alter their behaviour to Green Good Behaviour to fulfil their Green Social Responsibility. These small, positive actions, to be performed by individuals or organisations to strengthen the cause of environmental protection have been put up on a mobile App named “Dr Harsh Vardhan”.

21. Ministry of Culture

Children Theatre Workshop by IGNCA from 21st May to 21st June
The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) will organize a children’s theatre and personality development workshop from 21st May to 21st June, 2018 in partnership with Udaan - the Centre of Theatre Art and Child Development.

In this workshop, children will be trained to enhance their fundamental skills and theatrical skills.

Children between the age of 6yrs - 14yrs can participate in this workshop. The workshop will commence on 21st May and will end on 21st June and two plays will be staged at the end of this workshop in which all the trained children will participate.

In the one month of this workshop, children will be trained to increase their thinking & mind power, to improve their stage manners including theatre, improvising, etc. along with boosting their confidence. All children will be provided certificate at the end of the workshop.

For the workshop, the IGNCA will support ‘Udaan’ which has been organising theatre workshops for the last 25 years in which more than 25000 children have participated.

22. Ministry of Science & Technology

CSIR bags the Clarivate Analytics India Innovation Award 2018 in the Government Research Organizations Category

The citation reads as “CSIR is a pioneer of India’s intellectual property movement and a leader in terms of sheer volume of patents published during the analysis period.”
Every year, Clarivate Analytics – formerly the IP & Science division of Thomson Reuters - recognizes the most innovative companies in India according to patent-related metrics that get to the essence of what it means to be truly innovative. This analysis is done using proprietary Clarivate Analytics data and tools. The evaluation is strictly driven by metrics for both patent volume (patents published) as well as patent quality (grant success rate, extent of globalization, and citations).

The Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), a contemporary R&D organization, is known for its cutting edge R&D knowledge base in diverse science & technology areas. CSIR has a dynamic network of 38 national laboratories, 39 outreach centres, 3 Innovation Complexes and 5 units.

CSIR’s R&D expertise and experience is embodied in about 4600 active scientists supported by about 8000 scientific and technical personnel.

CSIR covers a wide spectrum of science and technology – from radio and space physics, oceanography, geophysics, chemicals, drugs, genomics, biotechnology and nanotechnology to mining, aeronautics, instrumentation, environmental engineering and information technology. It provides significant technological intervention in many areas with regard to societal efforts which include environment, health, drinking water, food, housing, energy, farm and non-farm sectors. Further, CSIR’s role in scientific human resource development is noteworthy.

According to the SCImago Institutions Ranking World Report 2017, CSIR has been ranked 9th in the world amongst the 1207 government institutions, with an overall global ranking of 75 in the world, covering 5250 institutions.

23. Ministry of Tourism

108th session of UNWTO Executive Council in San Sebastian, Spain
The Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Tourism, Shri K. J. Alphons along with a delegation of senior officials attended the 108th session of UNWTO Executive Council from 23rd to 25th May 2018 held in San Sebastian, Spain.

The Executive council decided that in order to address new challenge and trends, the organization will pay special attention to scaling up innovation and digitization in the sector.

During the three day Executive Council meeting, Sh. K. J. Alphons chaired the ‘Programme and Budget Committee’ meeting of UNWTO.

Discussion:

- Developing a Joint Action Plan focused on Tourism Innovation and Digital Transformation including the positioning of India on this Action Plan of UNWTO.

- Involving UNWTO in developing tourism as a strong agent for the better future of the world and establishing the Global Public Private Partnerships. The subject regarding strengthening the relationship between India and UNWTO was also discussed in this meeting.
The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.

The UNWTO Executive Council represents the Organization’s governing body whose task is to take all necessary measures in consultation with the Secretary-General, for implementation of its own decisions and recommendations of the Assembly and report thereupon to the Assembly.

The Council meets at least twice a year, the next to be held in Bahrain. The council consists of 30 Full Members elected by the assembly in proportion of one member for every Five Full Members, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure laid down by the Assembly with a view to achieving fair and equitable geographical distribution.

24. Ministry of Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises

Inauguration of facilities under NATRIP at International Centre for Automotive Technology (ICAT) Manesar

NATRIP stands for National Automotive Testing and RND Infrastructure Project (NATRIP).

ICAT has been rendering services of automotive testing & certification to the industry since 2006.

NATRIP is the largest and most significant initiative in the automotive sector which represents a joining of hands between the Government of India, a number of State Governments and Indian Automotive Industry to create a state of the art testing, validation and R&D infrastructure in the country.
The augmented facilities are of Noise, Vibration & Harshness Lab (NVH), Passive Safety Lab (PSL), Electromagnetic Compatibility (EMC) Lab and Tyre Test Lab (TTL) and have been completed at ICAT Centre-II at Manesar in Haryana.

The centre already has fully functional facilities like Powertrain lab, Fatigue lab, Vehicle Evaluation lab, Component lab, CAD-CAE lab and Infotronics lab.

The newly opened labs have the following facilities:

- **Noise Vibration & Harshness (NVH) Lab**: The NVH lab is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities such as Semi Anechoic Rooms with dynamometer capabilities for Passenger Cars and Heavy Commercial Vehicles, modal analysis room, coupled acoustic rooms & listening room. The Passenger Car Semi Anechoic Chamber has capability to simulate external Pass By Noise test for development of vehicles to meet present and future regulatory targets.

- **Electromagnetic Compatibility (EMC) Lab**: Electromagnetic compatibility is the ability of a vehicle or electrical/electronic component to function satisfactorily in its electromagnetic environment. It has a General Instrumentation room for component level tests like Conducted Immunity, Conducted Transient Emissions and Electrostatic Discharge.

- **Passive Safety Lab (PSL)**: This lab is equipped with world class test facilities which include full-fledged crash test facilities to conduct Full Frontal, Frontal OBD, Side Impact, Rear Impact etc. crash tests as per Indian and International regulations. It has all types of instrumented crash dummies with dummy calibration facility, high speed cameras, specialized lightings, on board data acquisition system, soak room, pedestrian protection test facility, deceleration sled test facility, airbag test facility etc.
**Tyre Test Lab (TTL):** TTL is providing services related to Type Approval & Conformity of Production of Tyres. ICAT has transformed this lab into Centre of Excellence (COE) by developing new capabilities including the installation of Dual Station Endurance Test Rig and Tyre Rolling Resistance Test Rig.
MACROECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GDP estimated to grow at 6.7% in 2017-18; fourth quarter of 2017-18 sees 7.7% growth

Provisional estimates suggest that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (at constant prices) of the country is expected to be at 6.7% year-on-year. GDP grew at 7.7% in the fourth quarter of 2017-18, over the corresponding period a year ago. This was higher than the 7% growth in the third quarter of 2017-18.

Figure 1: GDP growth (in %, year-on-year)

Sources: MOSPI, PRS.
Industrial production grew by 6.3% in the fourth quarter of 2017-18

- The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) grew by 6.3% in the fourth quarter (Jan-Mar) of 2017-18, as compared to the same period in 2016-17.
- Manufacturing saw the highest increase of 7.2% in this quarter, followed by an increase of 6.1% in electricity and 1% in mining.
Figure 2: Growth in IIP in fourth quarter of 2017-18 (year-on-year)

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Sources: MOSPI; PRS.
MISCELLANEOUS

1. **Elysia chlorotica**

It is a green *sea slug* which can suck out an algae’s plastids that generate energy from sunlight — and incorporate them into its own biology. In doing so, it becomes an animal with the photosynthetic ability of a plant.

**Uniqueness:** It takes only the plastids, or the organelles that contain chlorophyll and perform photosynthesis, from the algae. The slug then uses its own genome to keep the plastids operating within its own body throughout the rest of its life.

**Found:** The sea slug *Elysia chlorotica*, a mollusk that can develop to a length of 2 inches has been discovered in intertidal zone between Nova Scotia, Canada, and Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts, as well as in Florida.

**Application:** Figuring out how the slug keeps these algae-made solar panels functioning could lead to innovations in developing green machines that need only sunlight to generate energy or bioproducts that could be used as biodiesel.

2. **National Technology Day**

Since 1999, May 11 is celebrated as National Technology Day to mark India’s technological advancements.

**Theme:** “Science and Technology for a Sustainable Future”.

**Significance of the day:**
- On May 11, 1998, India detonated three nuclear bombs in the Indian Army’s Pokhran Test Range. Dr APJ Abdul Kalam lead the Indian team of scientists to successfully test-fire the Shakti-1 nuclear missile at Rajasthan’s Pokhran test range.

- Hansa 3, India’s first indigenous aircraft was first tested on the same day in 1998 in Bangalore.

- Successful test firing of Trishul, a short range missile made in India, was also done on the same day.

- Every year, on this day, the Technology Development Board of India awards various individuals with national awards for their contribution to indigenous technology.

3. **MP gets India’s First Smart Cities Control Centre**

In a major step towards realising the centre’s smart city mission (SCM), the Madhya Pradesh government on Tuesday launched the country’s first **Integrated Control and Command Centre (ICCC) for all seven smart cities** (Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain, Gwalior, Jabalpur, Satna, and Sagar) of the state in Bhopal.

ICCC is a cloud-based Universal Internet of Things (UIoT) platform developed by Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE). It can run multiple city command centre operations through its multi-efficiency capabilities.

ICCC would integrate a multitude of citizens’ services applications and sensors running across selected cities of Madhya Pradesh. It would enable the authorities to monitor the status of various smart civic amenities in real-time through the sensors connected to it.

The GPS sensors installed in public transport buses, dial 100 vehicles, 108 ambulance services, smart poles, smart lights, traffic management cameras, public bike sharing, solid waste management, meteorological department updates, smart maps etc. would be linked to this centre, enabling the authorities to monitor the status of the civic amenities in real-time.
Smart City mission: Under the scheme that was launched in 2014, around 100 cities in the country will be developed.

- **Selection of cities**: The selection is based on the scores cities get for carrying out urban reforms in areas including sanitation and governance. Cities that score the highest will be picked for the project, to be implemented over a 10-year period.

- **Development**: These cities will be developed to have basic infrastructure through assured water and power supply, sanitation and solid waste management, efficient urban mobility and public transport, IT connectivity, e-governance and citizen participation. Bottom-up approach has been the key planning principle under Smart City Mission.

- **Funding**: Under the scheme, each city will get Rs 500 crore from the Centre for implementing various projects. An equal amount, on matching basis, will have to be contributed by the state or urban local bodies. The mission will provide central funding of Rs 48,000 crore to the selected cities.

- **Implementation**: by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) created for the purpose. The SPV will plan, appraise, approve, release funds, implement, manage, operate, monitor and evaluate the Smart City development projects. Each smart city will have a SPV which will be headed by a full time CEO and have nominees of Central Government, State Government and ULB on its Board.

4. **GI tag for rural crafts**
The **Chau mask of Purulia**, the **wooden mask of Kushmandi**, the **Patachitra**, the **Dokras of Bengal**, and **Madhurkathi (a kind of mat)** have been presented with the Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the Geographical Indication Registry and Intellectual Property India.

**Significance:** GI tags for these five rural crafts would not only help the artisans create their own brand but would also provide legal protection to artisans practising the crafts against attempts to duplicate them in other regions.

A GI is primarily an agricultural, natural or a manufactured product (handicrafts and industrial goods) originating from a definite geographical territory. Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the place of its origin.

**Security:** Once the GI protection is granted, no other producer can misuse the name to market similar products. It also provides comfort to customers about the authenticity of that product.

5. **Mangaluru narrow-mouthed frog**

- It is the newest frog discovered from Karnataka.
- It is christened Microhyla kodial after the city of Mangaluru (called kodial in the Konkani language).
- The Mangaluru narrow-mouthed frog is found only in a small industrial space in Mangaluru.
- **Physical features:** The greyish-brown frog is just 2 cm long. It has a thick olive-green band on its head, less-prominent dark green bands on the rest of its body.
• The Mangaluru narrow-mouthed frog is the 42nd species belonging to the genus Microhyla recorded from south Asia. More than 650 microhylids – or frogs belonging to the family Microhylidae – are found across the world’s tropics.

6. Global Action to protect bees

On the occasion of World Bee Day celebrated on May 20th, the United Nation’s Food and Agricultural Organization and the European Union have called for global action to protect pollinators, and bees in particular, which are crucial for ensuring food security.

World Bee Day: To underline the importance of the issue, and following a Slovenian proposal, the UN has named May 20 as World Bee Day, as it marked the birthday of Anton Jansa (1734-1773), a Slovenian pioneer in modern beekeeping.

7. 4th Room- Temperature Ferromagnetic Element: Ruthenium

A platinum-group chemical element called ruthenium (Ru) is the fourth single element to have unique ferromagnetic properties at room temperature.

Ru:

- Ruthenium is a chemical element with symbol Ru and atomic number 44. It is a rare transition metal belonging to the platinum group of the periodic table. Like the other metals of the platinum group, ruthenium is inert to most other chemicals.
- Most ruthenium produced is used in wear-resistant electrical contacts and thick-film resistors. A minor application for ruthenium is in platinum alloys and as a chemistry catalyst. A new application of ruthenium is as the capping layer for extreme ultraviolet photomasks.

- Ruthenium is generally found in ores with the other platinum group metals in the Ural Mountains and in North and South America. Small but commercially important quantities are also found in pentlandite extracted from Sudbury, Ontario and in pyroxenite deposits in South Africa.

- From an application perspective, Ru is interesting because it does not oxidize easily and theoretical predictions indicate it is particularly temperature-stable, which is an important property allowing scaling of magnetic memories.

**Significance:** The discovery could be used to improve sensors, devices in the computer memory and logic industry, or other devices using magnetic materials.

8. **NIFTEM**

Food Processing Ministry to collaborate with international labs for wider acceptability of NIFTEM approved products.

NIFTEM is the brainchild of the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) Government of India.

- It was created to cater to the needs of various stakeholders such as entrepreneurs, food processing industry, exporters, policy makers, government and existing institution.

- It works actively for assisting in setting up food standards, businesses incubation and can also include knowledge sharing.
- It would also be an apex institution in the field of food technology and management, networking and co-ordinating with other institutions in the same field in India and Abroad.

9. Permanent Residency Status scheme (PRS)

Recent report by the government shows that even after two years after it was launched, the Permanent Residency Status (PRS) scheme providing a host of facilities for foreigners who invest at least ₹10 crore under the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) route has not found a single applicant.

Features:
- Under the Scheme, suitable provisions will be incorporated in the Visa Manual to provide for the grant of PRS to foreign investors.
- The PRS will be granted for a period of 10 years with multiple entry. This can be reviewed for another 10 years if the PRS holder has not come to adverse notice.
- PRS will serve as a multiple entry visa without any stay stipulation and PRS holders will be exempted from the registration requirements.
- PRS holders will be allowed to purchase one residential property for dwelling purpose.
- The spouse/ dependents of the PRS holder will be allowed to take up employment in private sector (in relaxation to salary stipulations for Employment Visa) and undertake studies in India.

The scheme will be applicable only to foreign investors fulfilling the prescribed eligibility conditions, his/her spouse and dependents. These include:
The foreign investor will have to invest a minimum of Rs. 10 crores to be brought within 18 months or Rs. 25 crores to be brought within 36 months. Further, the foreign investment should result in generating employment to at least 20 resident Indians every financial year.

10. ALIMCO

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD-Divyangjan Shashaktikaran Vibhag), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO) for the Financial Year 2018-19. It covers major developments to be achieved in this year for the Empowerment of Divyangjan of the country.
ALIMCO is a “Not For Profit” Central Public Sector Undertaking working under the administrative control of Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment. For past 40 years, it has been relentlessly manufacturing various types of aids and appliances on mass scale to meet the requirements of PwDs including orthopedically, visual and hearing impaired etc.

11. ASEAN India Film Festival

India is hosting the ASEAN India Film Festival. The Film Festival will be a platform for people of the film industry of member countries to explore areas of cooperation in the domain of “cinema and cultural cooperation. The Film Festival will be non-competitive. The tagline of the Festival is proposed to be ‘Friendship through Films’.

The Directorate of Film Festivals is organising ASEAN India Film Festival in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs (ASEAN Multilateral Division) as part of the series of events to commemorate the 25 years of ASEAN and India relations.

Aim: As a vehicle of Cultural Exchange, the Directorate of Film Festival aims to provide access to new trends in filmmaking by providing the platform for an exchange of ideas, culture and experiences in the field of cinema.

The ASEAN film festival will have countries which have immense and colourful cultural diversity but share common historical thread. This will be showcased through screenings of films, alongside exchange of ideas, discussions between the film personalities and interactive sessions with the audience.
QUESTIONS (MAY)

Q.1) Which of the following statements is wrong regarding Pacific Islands Forum?

[a] It was formerly known as South Pacific Forum.

[b] It was established in 1971.

[c] It comprises 18 members.

*[d] None of the above

Q.2) Consider the following statements regarding Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and identify the correct ones:

1. It was an international organization founded in 1969.
2. It works to “safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony.
3. It is the largest inter-governmental organization in the world.

*[a] 1 and 2

[b] 2 and 3

[c] 1 and 3

[d] 1, 2 and 3

Q.3) Which of the following statements is/are true regarding Prompt Corrective Action (PCA)?
[a] RBI can supersede the bank’s board under PCA.

[b] PCA norms allow the regulator to place certain restrictions on banks.

[c] PCA is invoked when risk thresholds are breached.

*[d] All of the above

Q.4) Which of the following countries topped in the Foreign Direct Investment Index of 2018?

[a] China

*[b] US

[c] Germany

[d] Japan

Q.5) Which of the following statements is incorrect regarding CriSidEx?

1. It is a composite index based on a diffusion index of 8 parameters.

2. It measures MSE business sentiment on a scale of 0 to 200.

[a] 1 only

[b] 2 only

[c] Both 1 and 2

*[d] Neither 1 nor 2

Q.6) India’s First Frozen Semen Station is being set under which of the following missions?
Q.7) Which of the following is the nodal agency for the operationalization of the SAUBHAGYA scheme throughout the country?

[a] National Thermal Power Corporation

*[b] Rural Electrification Corporation

[c] Power Finance Corporation

[d] Power Grid Corporation Company

Q.8) NABH Nirman aims to expand the capacity of which of the following?

[a] Schools

[b] Hospitals

*[c] Airports

[d] Railways

Q.9) Which of the following locations have been selected for storing India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR)?

[a] Vishakhapatnam
Q.10) Which of the following statements is incorrect regarding Lassa Fever?

*[a] It is an acute bacterial haemorrhagic disease of 2-21 days duration.
[b] It is transmitted to humans via contact with food or household items contaminated with rodent urine or faeces.
[c] It is endemic in West African countries.
[d] All of the above

Q.11) Which of the following has been recently created by Ministry of Water Resources to act as a repository of nation-wide water resources data?

[a] Rashtriya Jal Suuchna Kendra
[b] National Water Repository
[c] Rashtriya Jal Samachar Kendra
*[d] National Water Informatics Centre

Q.12) Which of the following statements is/are true regarding Indus Dolphin?

[a] It is a blind species.
[b] It is found in India and Pakistan only.
[c] It is listed by IUCN as endangered on its red list of threatened species.

*[d] All of the above

Q.13) Which of the following statements is incorrect regarding SAWEN?

1. It is a regional network comprising 8 countries of South Asia.
2. It aims at working as a strong regional intergovernmental body for combating wildlife crimes.
3. It held its first ever meeting in India in May 2018.

[a] 1 and 2

[b] 2 and 3

[c] 1 and 3

*[d] None of the above

Q.14) Which of the following missions is set to be launched by NASA to observe planet’s ever-changing water cycle and crust?

[a] Magnetospheric Multiscale spacecraft (MMS)

*[b] GRACE-FO

[c] ULA Atlas V

[d] None of the above
Q.15) Survey of India works under the administrative control of which of the following?

[a] Department of Geography  
[b] Department of Posts  
[c] Department of Science & Technology  
[d] None of the above

Q.16) Which of the following is true regarding the new resolution mechanism for commercial disputes of Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs)?

1. It will replace the Permanent Machinery of Arbitration which presently resolves the commercial disputes.  
2. It is a two-tier resolution mechanism.  
3. It will also cover disputes related to Railways.  

[a] 1 and 2  
[b] 2 and 3  
[c] 1 and 3  
[d] 1, 2 and 3

Q.17) National Institute of Mental Health Rehabilitation has been approved to be set up in which of the following cities?

[a] Pune
Q.18) Which of the following are true regarding ‘Samagra Shiksha’?

1. It seeks to provide holistic education from Class I to senior secondary levels.
2. Sarva Shikshya Abhiyan is one of the schemes subsumed under it.
3. It envisages active participation of stakeholders such as parents and school management committee members.

[a] 1 and 2
*[b] 2 and 3
[c] 1 and 3
[d] All of the above

Q.19) Which of the following is/are true regarding National Policy on Biofuels, 2018?

1. Municipal solid waste is an advanced biofuel.
2. Items that are unfit for human consumption (such as damaged food grains) have been excluded from the scope of raw material for ethanol production.

*[a] 1 only
[b] 2 only
[c] Both 1 and 2
Q.20) Which of the following has been created as the apex national authority for administering all trade remedial measures?

[a] Director General of Safeguards (DGS)

*[b] Director General of Trade Remedies (DGTR)

[c] Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)

[d] Director General of Trade Solutions (DGTS)

Q.21) Which of the following schemes is/are a part of Krishonnati Yojana?

[a] Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture

[b] National Food Security Mission

[c] National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture

*[d] All of the above

Q.22) Multi-sectoral Development Programme has been restructured and renamed into which of the following?

*[a] Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karayakaram

[b] Pradhan Mantri Jan Vibhag Karayakaram

[c] Pradhan Mantri Jan Praman Karayakaram

[d] Pradhan Mantri Jan Kalyan Karayakaram

[d] Neither 1 nor 2
Q.23) Which of the following is/are true regarding the scheme released by the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy to support the promotion of biomass based co-generation in sugar mills?

1. Programme will provide central assistance for projects utilizing municipal solid waste.
2. Promoters will have to complete the project within 12 months from the date of sanction of the central assistance.

[a] 1 only

[b] 2 only

[c] Both 1 and 2

[d] Neither 1 nor 2

Q.24) Which of the following is/are true regarding Draft National Policy on Official Statistics?

1. It proposes to focus on certain statistics of national importance as core statistics.

2. The draft policy seeks to combine All-India Indian Statistical Services to unify statistical cadres in the country.

3. The draft policy proposes that a National Statistical Commission (NSC) be constituted to regulate and audit core statistics and advise the central government on improving other official statistics.
[a] 1 and 2

[b] 2 and 3

[c] 1 and 3

*[d] 1, 2 and 3

Q.25) NIPAH virus was first identified in which of the following countries?

[a] Namibia

[b] Jordan

*[c] Malaysia

[d] Guinea

Q.26) Which of the following statements is correct regarding National Resource Centre?

[a] It is an online record of clean rivers across the country.

[b] It is a Centre for recording renewable resources in the country.

*[c] It is a one-stop point for academicians to enhance their research and teaching skills.

[d] None of the above

Q.27) Which of the following statements is correct regarding Bharat Inclusion Initiative?

*[a] It aims to provide a continuum of solutions to inclusion-focused tech entrepreneurs across the pre-incubation, seed and scale-up stage.

[b] It aims to prepare a record of Indian Citizens excluding refugees.
[c] It aims to involve all the sections of the society in the process of development.

d] None of the above

Q.28) Which of the following is project which aims to restore, revive and rejuvenate Yamuna river’s floodplains and make them accessible to the people of Delhi?

[a] Yama project

[b] Jamuna project

[c] Kalindi project

*d] Asita project

Q.29) Which of the following is true regarding International Day of Biological Diversity?

1. It is observed every year on June 5.

2. Theme for 2018 is “Celebrating 25 Years of Action for Biodiversity.”

3. It was first observed in 1993.

[a] 1 and 2

*b] 2 and 3

[c] 1 and 3

[d] 1, 2 and 3
Q.30) Which of the following is correct regarding ToneTag technology?

[a] It is a technology which is engaged in geo tagging of assets.

*[b] It is a communication technology that will enable data transfer through sound waves.

[c] It is a mobile technology which will enable data transfer through light waves.

[d] None of the above

Q.31) Which of the following statements are correct regarding Network for Spectrum (NFS) project?

1. It is for laying of alternate communication network for Air Transport Services.

2. It is being implemented by BSNL.

[a] 1 only

*[b] 2 only

[c] Both 1 and 2

[d] Neither 1 nor 2

Q.32) Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding Rustom-2?

1. It is a medium altitude, long endurance, unmanned aerial vehicle.

2. Its objective is to carry out surveillance for the armed forces with an endurance of 24 hours.
3. It can fly missions on manual mode only.

* [a] 1 and 2

[b] 2 and 3

[c] 1 and 3

[d] All of the above

Q.33) Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)?

1. It was established in April 1987.

2. It aims to limit the spread of ballistic missiles and other unmanned delivery systems that could be used for chemical, biological, and nuclear attacks.

3. India is not a member of MTCR.

* [a] 1 and 2

[b] 2 and 3

[c] 1 and 3

[d] 1, 2 and 3

Q.34) Which of the following is the world’s largest set of international maritime war games?

[a] DIMDEX

* [b] RIMPAC
Q.35) Which of the following is not a pillar of World Entrepreneurship Platform?

[a] Ichha Shakti
[b] Gyan Shakti
[c] Karma Shakti
*[d] Vigyan Shakti

Q.36) Which of the following has become India’s first exchange to be recognized as a Designated Offshore Securities Market (DOSM) by US SEC?

[a] National Stock exchange
[b] Multi Commodity Exchange
*[c] Bombay stock exchange
[d] NCDEX

Q.37) Which of the following is/are incorrect regarding Indian Depository Receipt (IDR)?

[a] IDR holders have same rights as shareholders.
[b] It is a depository receipt denominated in Indian rupees issued by a domestic depository in India.
*[c] It is not listed on Indian stock exchange.
[d] All of the above

Q.38) Which of the following is a mission to increase the speed of passenger and freight trains?

* [a] Mission Raftaar
[b] Mission Tez
[c] Mission Pace
[d] Mission Express

Q.39) Which of the following is an app that enables citizens to monitor the payments that are being made to power generation companies?

[a] PARASTHITI
[b] PRAGATI
* [c] PRAAPTI
[d] PRAGYA

Q.40) The first edition of Global Wind Summit will be held in which of the following countries?

[a] Italy
[b] US
* [c] Germany
[d] China
Q.41) Which of the following statements is/are true regarding CLMV conclave?

1. It is an annual feature which provides an opportunity for Indian business leaders to interact with government and business stakeholders representing the four countries.

2. The 5th India – CLMV conclave was recently held in Cambodia.

[a] 1 only

[b] 2 only

[c] Both 1 and 2

[d] Neither 1 nor 2

Q.42) Which of the following is correct regarding BASIC countries?

1. It was a group formed by an agreement of 2009.

2. Its members are committed to act jointly at Copenhagen Climate Summit.

3. Canada is one of the members of BASIC countries.

[a] 1 and 2

[b] 2 and 3

[c] 1 and 3

[d] All of the above

Q.43) Which of the following is/are correct regarding UNWTO Executive Council?
[a] It represents the World Tourism Organization’s governing body.

[b] It has full 30 members.

[c] It meets at least twice a year.

*[d] All of the above

Q.44) Western Corridor is funded by which of the following?

*[a] Japan International Corporation Agency (JICA)

[b] World Bank

[c] AIIB

[d] New Development Bank

Q.45) Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding 15th Asian Media Summit 2018?

[a] The Agenda of the summit included Plenary Sessions on Media regulation policies: Ethics, rules and laws and Our Exciting Stories.

[b] Its theme was ‘Telling Our Stories – Asia and More’.

[c] India is hosting the event for the first time.

*[d] All of the above

Q.46) A three day Venture Capital Symposium was being held by NITI Aayog to deepen the economic relationships with which of the following countries?
Q.47) The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently raised the Ebola health risk assessment to “very high” in which of the following countries?

[a] Democratic Republic of Congo
[b] Guinea
[c] Liberia
[d] Namibia

Q.48) Which of the following is not a member of SAWEN?

[a] Malaysia
[b] India
[c] Bhutan
[d] Maldives

Q.49) Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO)?

1. It is one of the 17 specialized agencies of UN.
2. Its headquarters are located in New York.
3. India is a member of WIPO.

Q.50) Which of the following is a technology demonstration mission to enable Ka-band precipitation radar technologies on a low-cost, quick-turnaround platform?

*[a] RainCube
[b] ToneTag
[c] HailSquare
[d] None of the above