Current Affairs

SEPTEMBER 2018
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1. **SC/ST, HOME STATE RULE**

   **Why in News?**
   A Constitution bench of the Supreme Court held that scheduled castes or tribes can avail benefit of reservation in government jobs only in their home states.

   **About the News**
   - A person belonging to a Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST) in a state will not be deemed to be SC or ST in another state to which he/she migrates for the purpose of employment or education.
   - It added that “pan-India reservation” would apply in the case of Delhi.
   - This means that in Delhi, for both central services and those under the union territory, reservation will be open to all SCs/STs from across the country.
   - SC had only reiterated the Constitutional provisions of Articles 341 and 342, which define SCs/STs with respect to any state or union territory.
   - The SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act also doesn't apply to those categorised as SC/ST in one state, but who migrate to a state where they are not notified as SC/ST.
   - The apex court also held that the state could not tinker with list of SCs or STs by including other castes or tribes, which can be done only by Parliament.
   - The conclusion is that the Presidential Orders issued under Article 341 in regard to scheduled castes and under Article 342 in regard to scheduled tribes cannot be varied or altered by any authority including the court.
   - It is Parliament alone which has been vested with the power to so act, that too, by laws made.
   - Any expansion or deletion of the list by any authority except Parliament would be against the constitutional mandate.

2. **JUVENILE JUSTICE ACT**

   **Why in news?**
   An Arunachal Orphanage was found to be in violation of the Juvenile Justice Act.

   **About Juvenile Justice Act**
   - Functioning Under: Ministry of Woman and Child Development

   **Key Features**
   - Aims at ensuring protection, proper care, development and social reintegration of children in difficult circumstances by adopting a child-friendly approach
   - Permits trying of juveniles between the ages of 16 and 18 years as adults for heinous offences.
   - Establishment of Child Welfare Committees (CWC) along with Juvenile Justice Boards (JJB) in each district.
   - Empowers JJB to examine the nature of crime and decide whether it was committed as a child mind or as an adult mind.
   - Based upon the preliminary inquiry of JJB, juvenile offender will be either sent for rehabilitation or will be tried as an adult.
• The CWC will determine institutional care for juvenile in need of care and protection. Prescribes eligibility of adoptive parents and the procedure for adoption.
• To streamline adoption procedures for orphan, abandoned and surrendered children, the existing Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) has been given the status of a statutory body to enable it to perform its function more effectively.
• Penalties for cruelty against a child have been prescribed in case of offering a narcotic substance to a child and selling and abduction of a child.

3. DEPARTMENT OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Why in news?
The first review meeting of the department of official language was chaired by union home minister Rajnath Singh to discuss issues and implementation of Hindi language in official work.

About Department of official language
• The Department of Official Language was set up in June 1975 as an independent Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs.
• It has been taking forward the objective of promoting the use of Hindi as the official language of the Union.
• This Department has been entrusted with the following objectives in accordance with Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961 o Implementing the provisions of the Constitution relating to the Official Language and the provisions of the Official Languages Act, 1963, except to the extent such implementation has been assigned to any other Department.
• Prior approval of the President for authorizing the limited use of a language, other than English, in the proceedings in the High Court of a State.
• Nodal responsibility for all matters relating to the progressive use of Hindi as the Official Language of the Union including Hindi Teaching Scheme for Central Government Employees and publication of magazines, journals & other literature related thereto.
• Co-ordination in all matters relating to the progressive use of Hindi as the Official Language of the Union, including administrative terminology, syllabi, textbooks, training courses and equipment (with standardized script) required therefor.

Official Language of India- what the constitution says?
• Hindi written in Devanagari script is the Official Language of the Union. However, for a period of 15 years from the commencement of the constitution, English will continue to be used.
• Even after 15 years, the Parliament by law may provide for the continued use of English for any specific purpose.
• All authority is in the hands of the central government both for formulating and implementing the language policy.
• It is also special responsibility of the centre to develop and spread the official language (Hindi) of the union (art. 351).

Points to remember
• ‘Pravah’ is an e-learning platform enabling anyone to learn Hindi through their mother tongue. It was developed by the department for use in 16 Indian languages including English.
• ‘Kanthasth’ is a computer software developed by the department for translating the all kinds of official files from English to Hindi and vice versa.
4. ‘WRONGFUL PROSECUTION (MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE): LEGAL REMEDIES’

Why in news?
The Law Commission of India submitted its report titled ‘Wrongful Prosecution (Miscarriage of Justice): Legal Remedies’ to the Government of India.

Features
- The Delhi HC in its Order in the case of Babloo Chauhan expressed grave concern about the state of innocent persons being wrongfully prosecuted, incarcerated for crimes that they did not commit.
- The Court highlighted the urgent need for a legislative framework for provided relief and rehabilitation to victims of wrongful prosecution, incarceration.

Global Scenario on Wrongful Prosecution
- Internationally, the issue is identified as ‘miscarriage of justice’ that takes place after a person has been wrongfully convicted but is later found to be factually innocent basis a new fact / proof coming to light.
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (‘ICCPR’, ratified by India) also creates an obligation on the State parties to enact a law to compensate the victims of such miscarriage of justice.

Wrongful Prosecution
- The panel recommended ‘wrongful prosecution’ to be the standards of miscarriage of justice, as against ‘wrongful conviction’ and ‘wrongful incarceration’.
- ‘Wrongful prosecution’ would include cases where the accused and not guilty of the offence, and the police and / or the prosecution engaged in some form of misconduct in investigating and / or prosecuting the person.
- It would include both the cases where the person spent time in prison as well as where he did not; and cases where the accused was found not guilty by the trial court or where the accused was convicted by one or more courts but was ultimately found to be not guilty by the Higher Court.

Panel Asks for Remedial Measures
- The Report gives an overview of the remedies available under the existing laws and discusses their inadequacies.
- The panel recommends provision of relief to the victims of wrongful prosecution in terms of monetary and non-monetary compensation
- This may include counseling, mental health services, vocational / employment skills development etc. within a statutory framework.
- The Report enumerates the core principles of the recommended framework-
  - defining ‘wrongful prosecution’ i.e., cases in which claim for compensation can be filed,
  - designation of a Special Court to decide these claims of compensation,
  - nature of proceedings – timeline for deciding the claim, etc.,
  - financial and other factors to be considered while determining the compensation,
  - provisions for interim compensation in certain cases,
  - removal of disqualification on account of wrongful prosecution / conviction etc.
- A draft Bill, articulating the aforesaid, is annexed with the Report as the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 2018.
5. MAHATMA GANDHI INTERNATIONAL SANITATION CONVENTION (MGISC)

Why in news?
Union Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation will organize a global sanitation convention to mark the beginning of the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi.

Mahatma Gandhi International Sanitation Convention (MGISC)
- It will be a 4-day international conference that will bring together Sanitation Ministers and other leaders in WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) from around the world.
- The Convention will culminate on 2nd October, Gandhi Jayanti, which is also celebrated as the Swachh Bharat Diwas.
- The global Convention will be aimed at sharing sanitation success stories and lessons across all participating countries.
- The success of the Swachh Bharat Mission will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the global achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 6.2), i.e. to achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all.

6. 4TH WORLD SUMMIT ON ACCREDITATION (WOSA-2018)

Why in news?
Union Minister for HRD has inaugurated 4th World Summit on Accreditation (WOSA-2018) at New Delhi.

Key features
- Ministry highlighted that we need to cover each and every institution under accreditation but right now the number of accredited institutions is very less. Only 15% institutions come under accreditation and 85% institutions are still not coming for accreditation.

World Summit on Accreditation (WOSA) 2018
- It is a biennial Summit organised by NBA, which provides platform to stakeholders to share their knowledge and information on accreditation.
- NBA has already organised three Summits in 2012, 2014 and 2016.
- All these Summits were well attended (WOSA 2012 was attended by 800 participants, WOSA 2014 was attended by 850 participants and WOSA 2016 was attended by 800 participants).
- Continuing this tradition, NBA is organizing WOSA 2018 with focus on “CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN OUTCOME BASED ACCREDITATION”.
- The Summit will facilitate exchange of information on various challenges being faced during the transition between input-output based accreditation to outcome based accreditation.
- The discussion and global participation in WOSA 2018 will bring about new ideas and help in establishing new trends of identifying opportunities and challenges in professional and technical education world-wide

Expected Outcomes
- WOSA 2018 is an opportunity for academia and the industry to explore avenues for future partnerships and to create an environment for open dialogue to facilitate mobility of students and professionals world-wide to gain international experience.
- The educational institutions will have an opportunity to interact with industry, policy makers and accreditation agencies from the globe and learn about their perspectives.
- It will also be a unique chance for the educational institutions to develop and fortify ties with the industry.
Industry would be able to interact with educational institutions and accrediting agencies for exchanging views on their requirements of quality manpower and accreditation parameters.

**Why less accredited institutions in India?**
- It may be for two reasons first some institutions do not want to come under accreditation.
- And the second we have some restriction in our own accreditation mechanism.
- Hence government wants to increase the strength of NBA and NAAC so that more number of institutions can be accredited.

**Importance of Ranking**
- Ranking and rating increase competitiveness among institutions for better performance.
- Under NIRF every institute has constituted an internal committee to improve the ranking. Students also see institutions ranking before taking admission.
- The government wants to boost quality education in the country therefore every year it is closing some non-performing institutions.
- The Ministry is promoting expansion and autonomy of the institutions and benchmark for the same is quality. It has declared such Institutes of Eminence which are completely autonomous.

**National Board of Accreditation (NBA)**
- The National Board of Accreditation (NBA) is an autonomous organisation under Ministry of Human Resource Development engaged in quality assurance of the programs offered by the professional and technical institutions in India through accreditation.
- NBA has been accorded Permanent Signatory Status of Washington Accord since June, 2014.
- It has adopted internationally implemented outcome based assessment and accreditation, to ensure that the graduates of the NBA accredited programs is globally competent and relevant.

**7. ATAL PENSION YOJANA**

**Why in news?**
The Union Cabinet has decided to indefinitely extend the Atal Pension Scheme, which lapsed in August. But seeing the mass participation in this runaway-success scheme, the cabinet has decided to extend it and keep it open-ended.

**Atal Pension Yojana**
- It is a social security scheme launched by the government in 2015 to provide a defined pension between Rs 1,000 to Rs 5,000.
- Now the scheme will expand its focus to target individuals, instead of households.
- According to government data, over 1 crore people have benefited from the government’s flagship scheme.
- The scheme, which was earlier for four years, lapsed in August 2018.

**New Propositions**
- Union Cabinet decided to double the accident insurance and relaxed the age criteria by five years to further incentivise the scheme.
- To further incentivise people’s participation in the scheme the government had decided to relax the age criteria for participation in the scheme.
- Earlier, people of age 18 to 60 years were entitled to enroll in the scheme. But looking at the rise in average age-expectancy, now it has relaxed it further to 65 years.
All accounts opened after August 28 will have an accident insurance limit of Rs 2 lakh, double the earlier Rs 1 lakh limit.

8. ORDINANCE CLEARED AGAINST INSTANT TRIPLE TALAQ

Why in news?
The Union Cabinet has cleared an ordinance as well as Presidents assent has been received that makes talaq-e-biddat, or instant triple talaq, a criminal offence that will attract a maximum jail term of three years.

- The new law incorporates safeguards, including a provision for bail to an accused before the start of the trial.
- The offence of instant triple talaq has also been “compoundable” or a provision that allows the wife to withdraw a complaint or approach the magistrate for a dispute settlement.

Cases are on rise

- 201 cases had been reported from across the country after the Supreme Court banned triple talaq in August 2017.
- Since January 2017, 430 cases had been reported until September this year.
- The practice of triple talaq continues in spite of the Supreme Court having annulled it and the Lok Sabha having passed a Bill that is pending in the Rajya Sabha.

Improvised Bail Provisions

- While instant triple talaq will continue to be a “non-bailable” offence the police cannot grant bail at the police station the accused can approach a magistrate for bail even before trial.
- The magistrate could exercise discretion to grant bail “after hearing the wife”.
- The magistrate would also have power to decide the quantum of compensation and subsistence allowance for the victim and her minor children.
- Another safeguard that had been added is that the police can lodge an FIR (first information report) only if the complaint is filed by the wife (victim), her blood relations or her relatives by virtue of her marriage.
- Non-relatives or neighbours cannot lodge a complaint under the proposed law.

Ordinance making powers of the President (Article 123)

- Ordinance can be proclaimed by the President only during recess when the Parliament is not in session.
- It can also be issued when only one house is in session.
- The decision of the President to issue an ordinance can be questioned in a court on the ground that the President prorogued one house or both the houses of the Parliament deliberately with a view to issue an ordinance on a controversial subject.
- Ordinance issued by the President must be laid before both the houses of Parliament when it reassembles.
- From the date of reassembly the ordinance is valid for a period of six weeks.
- The President can withdraw an ordinance at any time.
- Ordinance cannot be issued to amend the constitution.

9. DAM REHABILITATION AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Why in news?
The CCEA has approved the Revised Cost Estimate of Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) at the revised cost of Rs 3466 crore with the financial assistance of the World Bank.
Benefit of the Project
- The project will improve the safety and operational performance of selected existing dams and mitigate risks to ensure safety of downstream population and property.
- The primary beneficiaries are both urban and rural communities dependent on reservoir and downstream communities, who are prone to risk associated with dam failure or operational failure.
- Further effectiveness of Dam Safety Organisations will be increased to take the lead to make dams safe from structural and operational point of view through capacity building of staff and officials.

Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP)
- DRIP is a state sector scheme with central component to improve safety and operational performance of selected dams, along with institutional strengthening with system wide management approach.
- The project was launched in 2012 by Central Water Commission (CWC) under Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation with assistance from World Bank.
- The states included are Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Uttarakhand.

DRIP envisages following objectives: –
- Component-I: – Rehabilitation of Dam and its Appurtenant Structures,
- Component-II: – Institutional Strengthening and

10. MPLADS

Why in news?
Unspent MPLAD Funds
- ₹12,000 crore of the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) funds remain unspent, pointed out Central Information Commission (CIC).
- The CIC has urged both houses to come out with a legal framework to ensure its transparency and hold parliamentarians and political parties accountable under RTI for their obligations under the scheme.

Suggestions by CIC
- The framework should make transparency a legal obligation to all MPs and parties.
- They will be required to present a comprehensive report on the number of applications received for their constituency, works recommended, works rejected with reasons, progress of works and details of beneficiaries.
- This should be declared to the public and Parliament as well.
- Liabilities for any breach of duties should also be imposed.
- Further, the framework should prohibit and prevent MPs using the funds for their private works, or diverting them to private trusts or to their own relatives.
- District administrations must provide regular information — work-wise, MP-wise, and year-wise details on progress — which are to be compiled by the MoSPI and made available to the public, said the order.
**MPs Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)**
- MPLADS is a scheme formulated by Government of India in 1993 that provides that each MPs of India the choice to suggest to the Head of the District works to the tune of ₹5 crore per year.
- The MPLADS allots ₹5 crore per year to each Member of Parliament (MP) to be spent on projects of their choice in their constituency.
- The scheme is funded and administered through the Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).
- Projects are to be recommended to and implemented by the district-level administration.
- The Rajya Sabha MPs can recommend works in one or more districts in the State from where he/she has been elected.
- The Nominated Members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha may select any one or more Districts from any one State in the Country for implementation of their choice of work under the scheme.

**11. E-SAHAJ PORTAL, NATIONAL SECURITY CLEARANCE**

**Why in news?**
The Union Home Secretary has launched an online ‘e-Sahaj’ portal for grant of Security Clearance.

**National Security Clearance**
- MHA is the nodal Ministry for security clearances in certain sensitive sectors before issue of licence/permit, permission, contract etc, to companies/ bidders/individuals by the administrative Ministry.
- The objective of national security clearance is to evaluate potential security threats, including economic threats, and provide risk assessment before clearing investment and project proposals in key sectors.
- The aim is to strike a healthy balance between meeting the imperatives of national security and facilitating ease of doing business and promoting investment in the country.

**E-Sahaj Portal**
- The portal will facilitate an applicant to submit application online and also to view the status of his application from time to time.
- The clearance has become standardized, resulting in a process which will be faster, transparent and easy to monitor.
- Various functionaries can access the application and documents online and take timely decisions.
- MHA has cleared about 1,100 cases of security clearance in the past one year.
- Although the given timeline is 90 days, MHA strives to decide Security Clearance cases in 60 days (average time per case in 2018 is 53 days), which is being reduced further.

**12. ETHICS COMMITTEE**

**Why in news?**
Veteran parliamentarian L.K. Advani has been renominated as the Chairman of the Lok Sabha Ethics Committee by Speaker of Lok Sabha.

**Ethics Committees in the Indian Parliament**
- Lok Sabha has a new permanent Standing Committee on Ethics which came into force on 12th August, 2015.
- Until now, the ethics committee in Lok Sabha has been an ad hoc one.
• Rajya Sabha was the first among the two Houses to form an ethics committee, with a full standing committee status, on 30th May, 1997.
• Lok Sabha, in contrast, formed an ad hoc ethics panel in 2000 and has been operating as one until August 2015 when it was given a permanent standing committee status.

**Ethics committees function to uphold the standards of the Parliament and thus its functions are twofold:**
- Formulate a Code of Conduct for members and suggest amendments to it from time to time.
- To oversee the moral and ethical conduct of the Members
- To examine the cases referred to it with reference to ethical and other misconduct of the Members

**What do Ethics Committees do?**
- As mentioned above, ethics committees formulate, enforce and oversee the moral and ethical conduct for members of Parliament.
- While a certain form of code of conduct on speech, conduct and behaviour of members of parliament has existed in most Parliaments in the world, recent years have seen a great thrust on separation between the public and private interests of the MPs.
- Central to this principle is the obligation of the MPs to declare their personal financial interest to the parliament and for such information to be made public in the form of ‘Registers of members’ interests’.

13. **EXPORTING CORRUPTION REPORT, OECD ANTI BRIBERY CONVENTION, UN CONVENTION AGAINST CORRUPTION, PREVENTION OF CORRUPTION ACT**

**Why in news?**
The 2018 edition of the ‘Exporting Corruption Report’ was released by anti-corruption organisation Transparency International

- India is among four countries with “no or little enforcement” mechanism to check foreign bribery, according to a report
- The classification of enforcement is based on the convention countries’ enforcement actions in the period 2014-2017
- India included for the first time
- In this 2018 report, China, Hong Kong, India and Singapore are classified for the first time
- They all have 2 per cent or more of world exports but are not parties to the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention
- All 4 fall into the lowest level (little or no enforcement)
- They are, however, parties to the UN Convention against Corruption, which also calls for enforcement against foreign bribery

**OECD Anti-Bribery Convention**
- Officially known as Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions is a convention of the OECD aimed at reducing political corruption and corporate crime in developing countries, by encouraging sanctions against bribery in international business transactions carried out by companies based in the Convention member countries
- Its goal is to create a truly level playing field in today’s international business environment
- The Convention requires adherents to criminalise acts of offering or giving bribe, but not of soliciting or receiving bribes
Countries that have signed the convention are required to put in place legislation that criminalises the act of bribing a foreign public official.

The OECD has no authority to implement the convention but instead monitors implementation by participating countries via its Working Group on Bribery.

The OECD Anti-Bribery Convention was adopted in 1997 to address the supply side of international corruption.

There are now 44 parties to the convention, 36 of them members of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development).

Amendment to Prevention of corruption act

In July 2018, the Indian Parliament passed a bill amending the present Prevention of Corruption Act, which covers bribe payers for the first time.

The bill also covers agents, subsidiaries and subcontractors of foreign firms working in India or doing business with Indian entities.

The Indian Penal Code and Prevention of Corruption Act prescribe criminal and civil liability only for domestic corruption.

14. DELHI GOVERNMENT’S SCHEME OF HOME DELIVERY OF SERVICES

Why in news?

Delhi government’s ambitious phone-a-sahayak scheme to get doorstep delivery of government services within a limited time frame is set to be an eye-catching exercise in urban-centric administration. The scheme promises to offer 40 services at Rs 50 each and has roped in VFS, a global outsourcing agency, to execute it.

Efficacy of the scheme

The test of this new initiative will not be the range of services it offers.

It will depend on how efficiently it guides consumers past administrative red tapes, that often straitjacket such application procedures.

Right to services act

Recently, the Manipur government announced a single-window services centre in Imphal, to be operational from November, that will also include door-to-door delivery of government services.

In August 2010, Madhya Pradesh had become the first state in India to enact the RSA.

Several other states enacted similar laws to ensure delivery of services to residents.

Most states, however, have failed to fully capitalise on the RSA’s potential, meeting with moderate to poor success rates.

15. NATIONAL BOARD OF EXAMINATION

Why in news?

National Board of Examinations announces 19th Convocation Ceremony

National Board of Examinations (NBE) is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (India).

It was established in 1975 at New Delhi as a Society under Delhi Society registration act, to standardizing postgraduate medical education and examination in India.

The postgraduate degree awarded by the National Board of Examinations is called the Diplomate of National Board (DNB).
• The list of recognised qualifications awarded by the Board in various specialties and super-specialties are approved by the Government of India and are included in the First Schedule of Indian Medical Council Act, 1956.
• The National Board of Examinations conducts the largest portfolio of examinations in the field of medicine in India and perhaps at a Global level
• It provides trained manpower in the form of medical specialists to the country.

Exams conducted by NBE
• NBE is credited with conducting maximum and largest number of examinations for Graduate and Post Graduate Doctors.
• NBE has been entrusted with task of conducting National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test – Post Graduate (NEET-PG) and NEET-SS which are the only examinations for admission to Broad and Super Specialty Medical courses respectively.
• NBE is also a nodal agency for conducting the licensing examination for Indian Citizens who have obtained their MBBS equivalent outside India.
• NBE has been providing more than 8000 specialists in modern medicine every year utilizing the existing infrastructure of Private and Government Hospitals.
• NBE has pioneered starting of Post Graduate courses in district hospitals of the country.

16. ARTICLE 161, 163
Why in news?
Remission of Ex-Prime minister Rajiv Gandhi’s assassins
• The discretionary powers of the Governor are once again at the centre of a fresh controversy to decide on the remission of seven convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.
• A Supreme Court Bench led by Justice Ranjan Gogoi, while disposing a writ petition, recorded that the petitioner had filed an application before the TN Governor.
• Following this, the TN Cabinet adopted a resolution recommending that the Governor release the seven convicts under Article 161 of the Constitution.

Pardoning Powers of Governor (Article 161)
• The Governor can grant Pardons, reprieves, respites and remissions of punishments or suspend, remit and commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the state extends.
• The Governor cannot Pardon a death Sentence. (The President has the power of Pardon a death Sentence).
• The Governor cannot grant pardon, reprieve, respite, suspension, remission or commutation in respect to punishment or sentence by a court martial. However the President can do so.

17. AMITAVA ROY COMMITTEE ON PRISON REFORMS
Why in news?
The apex Court formed a Committee on Prison Reforms chaired by former SC judge, Amitava Roy, to examine the various problems plaguing prisons in the country. The judgment came on a letter from former CJI R.C. Lahoti highlighting the overcrowding in prisons, unnatural deaths of prisoners, gross inadequacy of staff and the lack of trained staff.

Committee on Prison Reforms
• Issuing a slew of directions, the Bench has directed the committee to examine-
• extent of overcrowding in prisons and correctional homes and recommend remedial measures, examination of the functioning of Under Trial Review Committees, availability of legal aid and advice, grant of remission, parole and furlough.
• The panel would also probe the reasons for violence in prisons and correctional homes and recommend measures to prevent unnatural deaths and assess the availability of medical facilities there.
• It would assess the availability and inadequacy of staff in prisons and correctional homes, suggest training and educational modules for the staff and assess the feasibility of establishing open prisons.
• The committee has been asked to recommend steps for the psycho-social well-being of minor children of women prisoners, including their education and health.
• The Committee is further aimed to examine and recommend measures for the health, education, development of skills, rehabilitation and social reintegration of children in observation homes and the provisions of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

18. NN VOHRA COMMITTEE

Why in news?
The Supreme Court has directed political parties to publish online the pending criminal cases of their candidates. The court countered the government’s submissions that under the Representation of the People Act, only convicted lawmakers can be disqualified and not accused ones.
• The Vohra (Committee) Report was submitted by the former Indian Union Home Secretary, N.N. Vohra, in October 1993.
• It studied the problem of the criminalisation of politics and of the nexus among criminals, politicians and bureaucrats in India.

Bane of Criminal Politics in India
• The Law Commission of India, in its 244th report, succinctly put it that instead of politicians having suspected links to criminal networks, as was the case earlier, it was persons with extensive criminal backgrounds who began entering politics.
• The Law Commission said that in the 10 years since 2004, 18% of the candidates contesting either national or State elections had criminal cases against them (11,063 out of 62,847).
• The Goswami Committee on Electoral Reforms, as early as in 1990, highlighted the crippling effect of money and muscle power in elections.

19. NEW VERDICT ON THE AADHAAR ACT

Why in news?
The Hon'ble Supreme Court in a majority opinion upheld Aadhaar as a reasonable restriction on individual privacy. Aadhaar aims to fulfils the government’s “legitimate aim” to provide dignity to a large, marginalized population living in abject poverty.
• Upholding the passage of the Aadhaar Act as a Money Bill, the Court said neither were individuals profiled nor their movements traced.
• This is when Aadhaar was used to avail government benefits under Section 7 of the Aadhaar Act of 2016.
• The statute only sought “minimal” biometric information, and this did not amount to invasion of privacy.

**Bar on bank-mobile link**
• The majority opinion upheld the PAN-Aadhaar linkage, but declared linking Aadhaar with bank accounts and mobile SIM cards unconstitutional.
• Insulating children from the Aadhaar regime
• The card was not necessary for children aged between six and 14 under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan as right to education was a fundamental right.
• Statutory bodies like CBSE and UGC cannot ask students to produce their Aadhaar cards for examinations like NEET and JEE.
• Permission of parents and guardians was a must before enrolling children into Aadhaar.
• Children once they attained the age of majority could opt out of Aadhaar.
• Aadhaar not a hurdle for Divyangs, Elderly
• Validating Aadhaar use was not trivializing the problem of exclusion faced by the elderly, the very young, the disabled and several others during the authentication process.
• Authentication was found to be only having a 0.232% failure (almost negligible), however it was accurate 99.76% times.
• Dismantling the scheme would only disturb this 99.76%.

**Aadhaar not a Surveillance tool**
• Authentication transactions through Aadhaar did not ask for the purpose, nature or location of the transaction.
• Besides, information was collected in silos and their merging was prohibited.
• The collection of personal data and its authentication was done through registered devices and was not expanded to the Internet.
• The Authority did not get any information related to the IP address or the GPS location from where authentication was performed.

**Preventing Misuse of Data**
• The Court quashed or read down several provisions in the Aadhaar Act in order to de-fang any possibility of the state misusing data.
• For one, the court held that authentication records should not be retained for more than six months.
• It declared the archiving of records for five years as “bad in law.”
• It also prohibited the creation of a metabase for transactions.
• It read down Section 33 (1), which allowed the disclosure of Aadhaar information on the orders of a District Judge.
• This cannot be done now without giving the person concerned an opportunity to be heard.
1. EAST ASIA SUMMIT
Why in news?
6th East Asia Summit-Economic Ministers’ Meeting (EAS-EMM) and 15th India-ASEAN Economic Ministers’ Meeting (AEM) was held in Singapore.

East Asia Summit
- The East Asia Summit (EAS) is a forum held annually by leaders of 18 countries.
- It is based on the premise of the centrality of ASEAN and has evolved as a forum of political, security and economic cooperation and strategic dialogue.
- It was established in 2005.
- Initially, 16 East Asian and South Asian Countries were members of the forum, only to be expanded to 18 in 2011 summit.
- EAS meetings are held after the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders’ meetings.
- The first summit was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Member countries
- EAS forum includes the 10 ASEAN countries, 6 other Asian and Indo-Pacific countries and Russia and the US.
- ASEAN include Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar and the Philippines
- India, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, The US and Russia are the countries apart from ASEAN states.
- India is a founding member while the US and Russia became part in 2011.

Priority areas of ESA includes
- Environment and Energy,
- Education,
- Finance,
- Global Health Issues and Pandemic Diseases,
- Natural Disaster Management,
- ASEAN Connectivity.

2. UNRWA
Why in news?
US ends funding for UN Palestinian refugee agency.

About the news
- The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a relief and human development agency which supports more than 5 million registered Palestinian refugees, and their patrilineal descendants, who fled or were expelled from their homes during the 1948 Palestine war as well as those who fled or were expelled during and following the 1967 Six Day war.
- It was created in December 1949.
- Originally intended to provide jobs on public works projects and direct relief, today UNRWA provides education, health care, and social services to the population it supports.
• Aid is provided in five areas of operation: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.
• Aid for Palestinian refugees outside these five areas is provided by UNHCR.
• It also provided relief to Jewish and Arab Palestine refugees inside the state of Israel following the 1948 conflict until the Israeli government took over responsibility for Jewish refugees in 1952.
• UNRWA is the only UN agency dedicated to helping refugees from a specific region or conflict and is separate from UNHCR.
• Formed in 1950, UNHCR is the main UN refugee agency, which is responsible for aiding other refugees all over the world.
• Unlike UNRWA, UNHCR has a specific mandate to aid its refugees to eliminate their refugee status by local integration in current country, resettlement in a third country or repatriation when possible.
• UNRWA allows refugee status to be inherited by some descendants.

3. BIMSTEC, KATHMANDU DECLARATION

Why in news?
The BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) is a regional grouping comprising India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal. The regional grouping’s Kathmandu Declaration focuses on backing of terror by state and non-state actors, apart from connectivity among the member nations.

Kathmandu Declaration
• Describing terrorism as a “great threat” to international peace and security, India and six other BIMSTEC nations on called for identifying and holding accountable states and non-state entities that encourage, support or finance terrorism, provide sanctuaries to terrorists and falsely extol their virtues.
• The Kathmandu Declaration deplored terror attacks in all parts of the world, including in BIMSTEC countries, and stressed that there could be no justification for any act of terrorism.
• The declaration did not name any specific country, but Pakistan is often comes to light for providing safe havens to terrorists.

Other Details of the Declaration
• The declaration underlined the importance of multidimensional connectivity, which promotes synergy among connectivity frameworks in the region, as a key enabler to economic integration for shared prosperity.
• The MoU signed provides for optimisation of using energy resources in the region & promotion of efficient & secure operation of power system.

4. 15TH INDIA-ASEAN ECONOMIC MINISTERS’ MEETING (AEM)

Why in news?
Commerce & Industry Minister Suresh Prabhu attended the 6th East Asia Summit- Economic Ministers’ Meeting (EAS-EMM) and 15th India-ASEAN Economic Ministers’ Meeting (AEM) in Singapore. Singapore is currently holding the Chair of ASEAN.
Importance of the meet

- ASEAN has emerged as the second largest trade partner of India in 2017-18 with bilateral trade valued at USD 81.33 billion, comprising 10.58% of India’s total trade with the world.
- The ASEAN-India Business Council (AIBC) presented their recommendations to the forum to sustain the momentum of trade and investment in the region.
- Issues related to promoting connectivity, collaboration on Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) development, blue economy, healthcare, and tourism as well as women and youth economic empowerment were discussed.

About East Asia Summit

- Established in 2005, EAS allows the principal players in the Asia-Pacific region to discuss issues of common interest and concern, in an open and transparent manner, at the highest level.
- The membership of EAS consists of ten ASEAN Member States (i.e. Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam), Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation and the USA.
- EAS is an initiative of ASEAN and is based on the premise of the centrality of ASEAN.
- The six priority areas of EAS are – Environment and Energy, Education, Finance, Global Health Issues and Pandemic Diseases, Natural Disaster Management, and ASEAN Connectivity. India endorses regional collaboration in all six priority areas.
- Following the 12th EAS in November 2017 in Manila, Philippines and following the adoption of the Manila Plan of Action for Maritime Cooperation.
- In 2009, the EAS endorsed the proposal for the revival of Nalanda University by former president APJ Abdul Kalam.

5. RAXUAL-KATHMANDU RAILWAY LINE

Why in news?
A team of Indian authorities conducted the first round of survey to connect the Indian rail with Kathmandu.

Key facts

- The move came at a time when there is buzz about the Chinese railway crossing the Himalayas to counter the Indian influence in Nepal.
- The Chinese railway line has to cross the friction of two highly sensitive Tibetan and Indian seismic plates to reach from Kerung to Kathmandu.
- But the Indian railway was safe in this matter due to comfortable topography.

India-Nepal Cross Border Rail Links

- It is aimed to enhance people-to-people linkage and promote economic growth and development in the region.
- Nepal too has expeditiously resolved all the outstanding issues including making available remaining land required for completion of the ongoing rail link projects.
- Both sides also agreed to put concerted efforts for completion of the railway lines from Jayanagar to Janakpur-Kurtha and from Jogbani to Biratnagar Customs Yard by the October 2018.
- Apart from Raxual-Kathmandu railway line, India has already started building five cross-border railway lines while another railway line – Jayanagar to Janakpur-Kurtha is about to complete within a year.
6. EXERCISE KAZIND

Why in news?
The Joint Army Exercise will be conducted between the Indian and Kazakhstan Army in Otar region, Kazakhstan.

Key facts
- This is the third joint military exercise between the two countries which have a history of extensive cooperation in the defence arena.
- The second edition of the exercise was held in India last year.
- The aim of the exercise is to build and promote bilateral Army to Army relations and exchange skills and experiences between Kazakhstan Army and the Indian Army.

Enhancing Defense cooperation
- The vast experience and expertise of Indian troops in counter insurgency operations holds special importance to the Kazakhstan Army.
- The fourteen days exercise with the Kazakhstan Army will follow a graduated continuum from orientation to a full scale mock exercise.
- Another aim is to achieve optimum integration among the two contingents through enhanced mutual comprehension of each other’s tactics, techniques and procedures.
- The conduct of the joint exercise will set the stage for greater defence cooperation and consequently will manifest in stronger ties between the two great nations.

7. THE 3RD ASEM (ASIA-EUROPE MEETING) CONFERENCE ON ‘GLOBAL AGEING AND HUMAN RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS’

Why in news?
Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment left for Seoul (Korea) for the 3rd ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) Conference on ‘Global Ageing and Human Rights of Older Persons’. The experience gained from the Conference will be beneficial for Policy formulation and implementation for welfare of senior citizens.

3rd ASEM Conference
- The 3-day Conference will reaffirm the universal value of the human rights of older persons.
- It aims to share information on discrimination against the elderly and exemplary cases of long-term and palliative care in Asia and Europe.
- It will also discuss operation and tasks of the ASEM Global Ageing Centre as an implementing institution for mutual cooperation among ASEM members for the protection and promotion of the human rights of older persons.

Asia–Europe Meeting
- The ASEM is an Asian–European political dialogue forum to enhance relations and various forms of cooperation between its partners.
- It was officially established on 1 March 1996 at the first summit in Bangkok, Thailand, by the then 15 members of the European Union (EU) and the European Commission, the then 7 members of the ASEAN and the individual countries of China, Japan, and Korea.
- A series of enlargements saw additional EU members join as well as India, Mongolia, Pakistan and the ASEAN Secretariat in 2008, Australia, New Zealand and the Russian Federation in 2010, Bangladesh, Norway, and Switzerland in 2012 as well as Croatia and Kazakhstan in 2014.
The main components of the ASEM process rest on the following 3 pillars:

1. Political & Security Pillar
2. Economic & Financial Pillar
3. Social, Cultural & Educational Pillar

8. RCEP TRADE DEAL

Why in news?
Members of the proposed RCEP trade deal have conceded to India’s demand to liberalize their services market and allow movement of skilled professionals.

- This may help India, which had so far been a reluctant participant, to conclude RCEP negotiations by the year-end.
- There has been inevitable linkage between services and goods negotiations, because RCEP is not a goods agreement alone, and services must be an integral part of the agreement.
- RCEP countries will open up opportunities for India’s burgeoning skilled professionals seeking gainful employment.

Space for bilateral negotiations
- Members also agreed that countries, which do not have trade agreements, can negotiate bilaterally to decide more ambitious tariff liberalization within a certain range.
- India is also likely to phase out tariffs on certain sensitive items with China beyond 20 years.
- This will allow India to allay concerns of domestic industries such as steel and textiles, which fear that China will start dumping goods once RCEP takes effect.

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)
- It is a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between ASEAN and six Asia-Pacific states.
- Members: ASEAN Members (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and the six Asia-Pacific states (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand).
- RCEP negotiations were formally launched in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia.
- The FTA is scheduled and expected to be signed in November 2018 during the ASEAN Summit and Related Summit in Singapore, after the first RCEP summit was held on 14 November 2017 in Manila, Philippines.
- RCEP is viewed as an alternative to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a proposed trade agreement which includes several Asian and American nations but excludes China and India.

Importance of RCEP:
- In 2017, prospective RCEP member states accounted for a population of 3.4 billion people with a total Gross Domestic Product (GDP, PPP) of $49.5 trillion
- It is approximately 39 percent of the world’s GDP with the combined GDPS of China and Japan making up more than half that amount.
- RCEP is the world’s largest economic bloc, covering nearly half of the global economy.
- RCEP’s share of the global economy could account for half of the estimated $0.5 quadrillion global GDP (PPP) by 2050.
9. COMCASA, 2+2 DIALOGUES

Why in news
The India-U.S. defence relationship has been given a significant boost with the three agreements signed after the inaugural 2+2 Dialogue in Delhi

These are:
- the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)
- “hotlines” between the Defence and Foreign Ministers of both countries
- the first tri-services military exercises between the two countries

Importance of COMCASA
- COMCASA is the third of four “foundational”, or enabling, agreements signed by India after more than a decade of negotiations
- It is perceived as an inevitable consequence of a large amount of U.S. defence hardware it has been purchasing
- This will increase, going forward, given the U.S. decision to include India in the top tier of countries entitled to Strategic Trade Authorisation (STA-1)

Concerns that remain
- While trade was addressed, India did not receive a clear-cut assurance of its GSP (Generalised System of Preferences) status being restored, or of waivers on steel and aluminium tariffs imposed by Washington
- U.S. officials said clearly that they expect India to increase imports of American oil and gas as well as aircraft in order to wipe out the trade surplus India enjoys
- The U.S.’s other demand, to “zero out” oil imports from Iran by November, is simply unreasonable
- It would hurt India dearly not only because of costs at a time when the dollar is strengthening and fuel prices are going up but also in terms of its substantial engagement with Iran
- No public statement was made on what the U.S. will do on India’s investment in the Chabahar port once its full sanctions kick in on November 4
- American officials also gave no firm commitment in their statements that India will receive a waiver to purchase Russian hardware, beginning with the S-400 missile system

Way Forward
- The 2+2 discussions, held after two previous cancellations this year, brought much-needed focus on the India-U.S. relationship after months of drift and occasional discord
- India appears to have taken a leap of faith on its own concerns, expecting that the Trump administration will come through on waiving sanctions and being more flexible on trade issues
- Delhi must work with Washington in the next few months to ensure that the benefits from the 2+2 dialogue don’t add up only on the other side.

10. COMPREHENSIVE NUCLEAR-TEST-BAN TREATY

Why in news
UN chief Antonio Guterres reiterated his appeal to eight nations, including India and the US, to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. More than 180 countries have signed the CTBT, and mostly ratified it. The treaty can only enter into force after it is ratified by eight countries with nuclear technology capacity i.e. China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and the United States.
Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty

- The CTBT is a multilateral treaty that bans all nuclear explosions, for both civilian and military purposes, in all environments.
- It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 September 1996 but has not entered into force as eight specific states have not ratified the treaty.
- More than 20 years since its negotiation, the Treaty has yet to enter into force.
- The failure to bring the treaty into force prevents its full implementation and undermines its permanence in the international security architecture.

The Korean Deviance

- Since the turn of the century only the North Korea, has broken this norm, leading to condemnation from the Security Council and repeated imposition of sanctions.
- These tests have shown that no ad hoc measure can replace a global, legally binding ban on nuclear-testing.

India’s stance on CTBT

- India did not support the treaty in 1996 — and still does not — but it had been very supportive during negotiations.
- The roots of that exuberance can be traced to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s famous initiative in 1954 for a “standstill agreement” on nuclear testing.
- His intervention came at a time when the U.S. and the Soviet Union were detonating powerful nuclear weapons with increasing frequency.
- Nehru played an important role in building international momentum for the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty, which India joined.
- India has been observing a unilateral moratorium since 1998 and is a champion of nuclear disarmament.

Remembering Hiroshima and Nagasaki

- On the annual observance of the International Day Against Nuclear Tests, Guterres highlighted the inextricable connection” between testing and eliminating nuclear weapons across the world.
- He recalled the testimony of the survivors, the ‘Hibakusha.
- Hibakusha is the Japanese word for the surviving victims of the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- The word literally translates as “explosion-affected people” and is used to refer to people who were exposed to radiation from the bombings.

11. EXERCISE NOMADIC ELEPHANT

Why in news?
Indo-Mongolia joint exercise Nomadic Elephant-2018 has commenced at Mongolian Armed Forces (MAF) Five Hills Training Area, Ulanbaatar.

- The 12 days long joint exercise is an annual, bilateral exercise since 2006 which is designed to strengthen the partnership between Indian Army and Mongolian Armed Forces.
- The exercise will see them improve their tactical and technical skills in joint counter insurgency and counter terrorist operations in rural and urban scenario under United Nations mandate.

Details of the Exercise

- The Indian contingent is represented by a contingent of 17 PUNJAB Regiment while the Mongolian contingent is represented by Unit 084 of the Mongolian Armed Forces.
- During the exercise both sides will jointly train, plan and execute a series of well developed tactical drills for neutralisation of likely threats that may be encountered in urban warfare scenario.
- Experts from both sides will also hold detailed discussions to share their experience on varied topics for mutual benefits.
- The exercise will contribute immensely in developing mutual understanding & respect for each others military and also facilitate in tackling the world wide phenomenon of terrorism.

12. **SOURCE INDIA PAVILION, IZMIR INTERNATIONAL TRADE SHOW**

**Why in news?**
The Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI) led a 75-member Indian delegation for the ongoing 87th Izmir International Trade Show in Turkey. The delegation had several B2B meetings and business tie-ups with members of the Turkish business community.

**Source India Pavilion**
- India is the Focus Country in the trade show with a standalone pavilion named ‘Source India’.
- The India Pavilion is a multi-product pavilion, including companies displaying products like ceramics, cereals and mechanical appliances.
- These events serve the purpose of opening new areas for co-operation in trade and investment between India and the rest of the world.

**India-Turkey Trade**
- Bilateral trade between the two countries was $7 billion in 2017, an increase of 8% over the previous year.
- There is a huge potential for tie-ups between Indian and Turkish agriculture and food processing sectors.
- The collaborations may range from farming technology, high yielding varieties, farm machinery, food processing and cold storage.

**Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI)**
- TPCI is an apex trade and investment promotion organization notified in the Foreign Trade Policy. TPCI is also recognized and supported by the Department of Commerce, Govt. of India.
- It provides policy suggestions which are essentially based on inputs collated from research and industry stakeholders.
- Aim: To accelerate India’s global trade through advanced research and trade promotion.
- Working: Creating global platform for the industry by organizing seminars, trade shows and business delegations through measures such as—
  - Advanced Trade Research:— Supporting India’s trade policy and economic diplomacy through research.
  - Trade Promotion:— Exploring international trade opportunities in untapped markets and promoting new exporters.
  - Trade Facilitation:— Identifying bottlenecks and bridging the gap between industry and authority by continuous interaction.
  - Investment Promotion:— Exploring scope and facilitating investment in potential business and sectors.
13. **E-VBAB, PAN-AFRICAN E-NETWORK PROJECT**

**Why in news?**
Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd. (TCIL) signed an agreement with Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) for the implementation of e-VBAB Network Project. The two separate platforms, will link various educational institutions and hospitals in India and the participating African countries.

**E-VBAB Network Project**
- E-VBAB Network Project is primarily a technological upgrade and extension of the Pan-African e-Network Project (Phase 1) which was implemented in 48 partner countries across Africa from 2009 till 2017.
- The Phase 1 of the Project successfully imparted tele-education and tele-medicine by linking educational institutions and hospitals in India with those from the participating African countries.
- The flagship e-VBAB project is a step towards capacity building in the field of education and medical science for all the 54 African Nations.
- It is fully funded by MEA, GoI and is envisaged to be implemented in 9 months followed by 5 years of operations and maintenance.
- The project aims to provide an opportunity for local employment and opens the door for access to education and medical expertise from India to African students, doctors, nurses and paramedical staff.
- It will also give an opportunity for Global acceptance of Indian University Education system and Indian medical Health services.

**About Pan-African e-Network project**
- Pan African e-Network project is an ICT project between India and the African Union that seeks to connect the 55 member states of the Union through a satellite and fibre-optic network to India and
- It is aimed to enable access and sharing of expertise between India and African states in the areas of tele-education, telemedicine, Voice over IP, infotainment, resource mapping, meteorological services, e-governance and e-commerce services.
- The e-network is made up of a large undersea cable network and satellite connectivity provided through C-Band transponders of the INTELSAT-904 or RASCOM satellites.
- The project is often described as Africa’s biggest ever in the ICT sector and is expected to extend ICT infrastructure to rural and previously underserved areas.
- The idea for the project came from the then President A P J Abdul Kalam who proposed such a network during his address to the Pan-African Parliament in Johannesburg in 2004.
- The project is seen as an example of India furthering its economic and strategic interests in Africa through the use of soft diplomacy and has been acclaimed as an instance of South-South cooperation, helping to overcome the digital divide in Africa.

14. **UNIATF AWARD**

**Why in news?**
Shri Manoj Jhalani, Additional Secretary & Mission Director (NHM), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, has been conferred with the prestigious UNIATF Award for his outstanding contribution towards prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and related SDGs.

**India’s efforts for prevention and control of NCDs**
- It is in recognition of Government of India’s efforts made in the field of prevention and control of Non-Communicable Diseases.
• National Programme to control NCDs has been scaled up by more than eight times in the past four years and covers all the 36 States/Union Territories now.
• The govt. has also initiated population level prevention, control, screening and management initiative in almost 200 districts under NHM which will cover people above 30 years of age.
• When fully rolled out, the population-based screening will reach over 500 million adults with health promotion, risk reduction, screening, early detection and management of common NCDs.
• Free diagnosis, treatment, follow-up, referral and back referral have been integrated into the program with an IT platform developed through a multi-stakeholder partnership.
• The intervention also forms the core of Ayushman Bharat, comprehensive primary health care program.

United Nations Interagency Task Force (UNIATF)
• The UNIATF on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases was established by the UN Secretary-General in June 2013 and placed under the leadership of WHO.
• It aims to support governments, in particular in low- and middle-income countries, to tackle non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory disease.
• Following the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, UNIATF’s scope of work was expanded in 2016 to include “NCD related SDGs” – i.e. mental health, violence and injuries, nutrition, and environmental issues that impact on NCDs.
• The World Health Organization acts as a Secretariat and lead for the Task Force.
• The UNIATF coordinates the activities of relevant UN organizations and other intergovernmental organizations to support Governments to meet high-level commitments to respond to NCD epidemics worldwide.
• The Task Force reports once a year to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

15. G-20 TRADE AND INVESTMENT MINISTERIAL MEETING

Why in news?
Union Minister of Commerce & Industry will participate in the G-20, Trade and Investment Ministerial Meeting, being held in Mar del Plata in Argentina.

Importance of the meet
• The meeting will provide an opportunity for a dialogue on current developments in international trade and its implications for the global economy.
• Trade and investment must benefit all and countries must jointly address both the opportunities and challenges of globalization, innovation and technological advancements.
• India looks forward to work along with other countries to reform WTO and ensure that it continues to be an engine for global trade.
• Further, the key issues that will be discussed include global value chains, the new industrial revolution and the international trade outlook.
• The multilateral trading system is facing unprecedented challenges in the wake of protectionist measures by some countries, which is not compatible with the WTO.

G-20
• The G20 (or G-20 or Group of Twenty) is an international forum for the governments and central bank governors from 20 major economies.
- It was **founded in 1999** with the aim of studying, reviewing, and promoting high-level discussion of policy issues pertaining to the promotion of international financial stability.
- It seeks to address issues that go beyond the responsibilities of any one organization
- The G20, is the latest in a series of post-World War II initiatives aimed at international coordination of economic policy, which include institutions such as the "**Bretton Woods twins**", the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and what is now the World Trade Organization

**Member States:**
Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union.

16. INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION

**Why in news?**
The global telecom body International Telecommunication Union will set up its local area office for South Asia in the national capital.

**Implications for India**
- The establishment of this ITU local area office will be an important milestone for India.
- It signifies global recognition of the progress India has made in the field of ICT.
- It also places on the responsibility to work with our neighbouring countries to take the benefits of the rapid developments in this technology-driven industry to our people in the South Asia region.
- The ITU South Asia Office will serve nine countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, in addition to the host country.
- This local area office will play a key role ITU’s development programs with focus on Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Land-Locked Developed Countries (LLDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and other similarly placed nations in the region.

**International Telecommunication Union**
- ITU is a United Nations specialised agency for Information and Communication Technologies, with membership of 193 countries and nearly 800 private sector entities and academic institutions.
- The body freezes international standards on telecom technologies that are to be used globally.
- ITU, based in Geneva, Switzerland, is a member of the United Nations Development Group and has 12 regional and area offices in the world.
- The ITU coordinates the shared global use of the radio spectrum, promotes international cooperation in assigning satellite orbits, works to improve telecommunication infrastructure in the developing world.
- The ITU is active in areas including broadband Internet, latest-generation wireless technologies, aeronautical and maritime navigation, radio astronomy, satellite-based meteorology, convergence in fixed-mobile phone, Internet access, data, voice, TV broadcasting, and next-generation networks.
- India has been member of ITU since 1869 and has also been a regular member of the ITU Council since 1952.
17. INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY (IAEA)

Why in news?
India has decided to place four more reactors under the IAEA safeguards. Accordingly, two Russian-designed Pressurized Light Water Reactors and two Pressurized Heavy Reactors being built with Indian technology will be covered. With this, a total of 26 Indian nuclear facilities will be under the international nuclear energy watchdog.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Safeguards
- These are a system of inspection and verification of the peaceful uses of nuclear materials as part of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), supervised by the International Atomic Energy Agency.
- It also contributes to nuclear arms control and disarmament, by responding to requests for verification and technical assistance associated with related agreements and arrangements.

The Divisions of Operations are organized as follows:
- Operations A: conducting safeguards inspections in East Asia and Australasia
- Operations B: conducting safeguards inspections in the Middle East (Southwest Asia), South Asia, Africa and the Americas; this geographic region also includes non-EU European states
- Operations C: conducting safeguards inspection in the European Union states, Russia and Central Asia
- Operations for verification in Iranian Nuclear Deal.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)
- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is an international organization that seeks to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and to inhibit its use for any military purpose, including nuclear weapons.
- The IAEA was established as an autonomous organisation on 29 July 1957.
- The IAEA reports to both the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council.
- Headquarters in Vienna, Austria. The IAEA has two "Regional Safeguards Offices" which are located in Toronto, Canada, and in Tokyo, Japan.
- The IAEA serves as an intergovernmental forum for scientific and technical co-operation in the peaceful use of nuclear technology and nuclear power worldwide.
- The IAEA and its former Director General, Mohamed ElBaradei, were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on 7 October 2005. The IAEA’s current Director General is Yukiya Amano.

18. COUNTRY PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK (CPF)

Why in news?
The World Bank Group (WBG) Board of Executive Directors endorsed a new Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for India.
- The CPF aims to support India’s transition to a higher middle-income country by addressing some of its key development priorities — resource efficient and inclusive growth, job creation and building its human capital.
About Country Partnership Framework (CPF)

- The World Bank Group’s CPF aims to make a country-driven model more systematic, evidence-based, selective, and focused on the Bank’s twin goals of ending extreme poverty and increasing shared prosperity in a sustainable manner.
- Used in conjunction with a Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD), the CPF guides the World Bank Group’s (WBG) support to a member country.
- A Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD) informs each new CPF.
- The aim of the SCD is to identify the most important challenges and opportunities a country faces in advancing towards the twin goals.
- This is derived from a thorough analysis, and informed by consultations with a range of stakeholders.

19. G-4, UNGA

Why in news?
External Affairs Minister has kicked off her week-long diplomatic engagements at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

Highlights of the Assembly
- The 73rd UNGA is taking place against the backdrop of increased American hostility towards the world body in particular and multilateralism in general.
- US believe that multilateral global bodies and treaties function to the detriment and at its cost.
- The U.S has reduced its funding for the U.N. and either withdrawn or threatened to withdraw from several U.N. bodies under the Trump presidency.
- Trump is, however, seeking more support for his combative stance against Iran, from member countries.

G4 Nations
- The G4 nations comprising Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan are four countries which support each other’s bids for permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council.
- Unlike the G7, where the common denominator is the economy and long-term political motives, the G4’s primary aim is the permanent member seats on the Security Council.
- Each of these four countries have figured among the elected non-permanent members of the council since the UN’s establishment.
- Their economic and political influence has grown significantly in the last decades, reaching a scope comparable to the permanent members (P5).
- However, the G4’s bids are often opposed by the Uniting for Consensus movement, and particularly their economic competitors or political rivals.

20. BOUNDARY WORKING GROUP, BWG

Why in news?
India and Nepal have agreed to explore the possibility of using high resolution satellite images in boundary survey work.

Agreement over Boundaries
- During the 5th meeting of the Nepal-India Boundary Working Group (BWG) both sides agreed to continue mapping of no-man’s land encroachment and cross-border occupation.
• The two countries also agreed to maintain status quo in cultivation of the disputed land until an agreement is reached between the two governments.
• The meeting also agreed to finalise the work schedule for the remaining field seasons.

Nepal-India Boundary Working Group
• The BWG is a joint body constituted by India and Nepal in 2014.
• Its purpose is to conduct works in the fields of construction, restoration and repair of boundary pillars, including clearance of no-man’s land and other technical tasks.

21. ‘CHAMPIONS OF THE EARTH’ AWARD

Why in news?
Our PM Narendra Modi has been awarded with the UN’s highest environmental honour for his leadership of the International Solar Alliance and pledge to eliminate single use plastic in India by 2022.

• Six of the world’s most outstanding environmental changemakers have been recognised with the UN’s highest environmental honour.
• The laureates are recognised for a combination of bold, innovative, and tireless efforts to tackle some of the most urgent environmental issues of our times.

Pioneering Work
• French President Mr. Macron and PM Modi have been jointly recognised in the Policy Leadership category for their pioneering work in championing the International Solar Alliance.
• They have been promoting new areas of cooperation on environmental action, including Macron’s work on the Global Pact for the Environment and Modi’s unprecedented pledge to eliminate all single-use plastic in India by 2022.
• Cochin International Airport has also been honoured this year with the award for Entrepreneurial Vision, for its leadership in the use of sustainable energy.

Champions of the Earth
• The United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) established Champions of the Earth in 2005 as an annual awards programme to recognize outstanding environmental leaders from the public and private sectors, and from civil society.
• Typically, five to seven laureates are selected annually.
• Each laureate is invited to an award ceremony to receive a trophy, give an acceptance speech and take part in a press conference.
• No financial awards are conferred.
• This awards programme is a successor to UNEP’s Global 500 Roll of Honour.

The International Solar Alliance (ISA)
• It is an alliance of more than 121 countries, most of them being sunshine countries, which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.
• The primary objective of the alliance is to work for efficient exploitation of solar energy to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
• This initiative was first proposed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a speech in November 2015 at Wembley Stadium, in which he referred to sunshine countries as Suryaputra ("Sons of the Sun").
• The alliance is a treaty-based inter-governmental organization. Countries that do not fall within the Tropics can join the alliance and enjoy all benefits as other members, with the exception of voting rights.
The initiative was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the India Africa Summit, and a meeting of member countries ahead of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in November 2015.

The framework agreement of the International Solar Alliance opened for signatures in Marrakech, Morocco in November 2016, and 121 countries have joined.

22. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK (UNSDF)

Why in news?

India-UNSDF (2018-2022)
- The Framework outlines the work of UN agencies in India, to support the achievement of key development outcomes that are aligned to the national priorities.
- The NITI Aayog is the national counterpart for the UN in India for the operationalization of the UNSDF.
- Nineteen (19) UN agencies have signed on the UNSDF 2018-2022.

About United Nations Sustainable Development Framework
- The UNSDF 2018-22 comprises of seven priority areas that outline the work that UN agencies will undertake jointly or individually, fully aligned with the priorities of the GoI.

The seven priority areas outlined in the UNSDF are:
- Poverty and Urbanization;
- Health, Water, and Sanitation;
- Education and Employability;
- Nutrition and Food Security;
- Climate Change, Clean Energy, and Disaster Resilience;
- Skilling, Entrepreneurship, and Job Creation;
- Gender Equality and Youth Development.
1. IPPB - PAYMENT BANK

**Why in News?**
Prime Minister will launch India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) in New Delhi on September 1, 2018.

**About the News**
- India Post Payments Bank will focus on providing **banking and financial services to people in rural areas**, by leveraging the reach of 1.55 lakh post office branches.
- The government aims to link all the 1.55 lakh post offices to the India Post Payments Bank system by 31 December, 2018.

**About India Post Payments Bank**
- India Post Payments Bank has been set up under the Department of Posts, Ministry of Communication, with **100% equity owned by Government of India**.
- It started operations on **30 January, 2017**, by opening two pilot branches, one at Raipur and the other at Ranchi.
- India Post Payments Bank is the **third entity to receive payments bank permit** after Airtel and Paytm.
- India Post Payments Bank will offer 4 per cent interest rate on savings accounts.
- Payments banks can **accept deposits of up to Rs 1 lakh per account** from individuals and small businesses, but do not have the mandate to extend loans.
- But India Post Payments Bank will, in alliance with other financial service providers, **offer third-party products**. For example, in case of loans, India Post Payments Bank will work as an agent of PNB.
- India Post Payments Bank will offer a range of products such as savings and current accounts, money transfer, direct benefit transfers, bill and utility payments, and enterprise and merchant payments.

**More about Payment Bank**
- Payment Bank was established to **provide payments/remittance services** to migrant labour workforce, low income households, small businesses and other unorganized sector entities.
- **Nachiket Mor Committee** recommended creation of Payment Banks.
- India's **first payments bank** was launched by Airtel.
- It cannot offer all the services that a commercial bank offers.
- It can take deposits **upto 1 lakh per account** and it can issue debit cards but not credit cards.
- **It cannot lend.**
- It **has to maintain Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR).**
- RBI has mandated the minimum paid-up equity capital for payments bank at **100 crore**.
- These entities have to invest a minimum **75% of demand deposit** balances in Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) - eligible government securities or treasury bills with maturity of up to one year.
- It can hold a maximum of 25% in current and time/fixed deposits with other commercial banks for operational purposes and liquidity management.
- A payments bank can **work as a business correspondent (BC) of another bank**.
- They can also **distribute simple financial products** like mutual fund units and insurance products.
2. BLUE ECONOMY / MOUNTAIN ECONOMY

Why in news?
Both blue economy and mountain economy featured in the fourth BIMSTEC Summit Declaration, Kathmandu, Nepal.

What is Blue Economy?
- The World Bank defines ‘blue economy’ as the "sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, while preserving the health of ocean ecosystem."
- It is an emerging concept which encourages better stewardship of ocean or ‘blue’ resources.
- The blue economy model aims for improvement of human wellbeing and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.
- It provides for an inclusive model which ensure participation of all affected social groups and sectors.
- The blue economy is not just about market opportunities; it also provides for the protection and development of more intangible ‘blue’ resources such as traditional ways of life, carbon sequestration, and coastal resilience to help vulnerable states mitigate the often devastating effects of climate change.

They key elements can be summarized as follows
- Optimum and efficient utilization of resources
- Sustainable, inclusive, harmonious and environment friendly development.
- Exploitation of opportunities in emerging marine industries.
- Creating and streamlining legal and regulatory institutions which govern the access, use and protection of maritime resources.
- Blue economy also reflects in the Goal 14 of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Green economy
The green economy is defined as an economy that aims at reducing environmental risks, and that aims for sustainable development without degrading the environment.

Blue water economy
There is no official definition of ‘Blue-Water Economy’. In a liberal sense, it denotes economic activities in high seas, for example, marine transportation, deep sea fishing, and deep sea mineral explorations.

The Commonwealth Blue Charter
- It emanated from the concept of blue economy.
- It highlights the close linkages between the ocean, climate change, and the wellbeing of the people of the Commonwealth.
- It reaffirms the values of the Commonwealth, including equity and public participation in marine and coastal decision-making.
- It supports all of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG14 ‘life below water.’
- The Blue Charter is said to help countries develop an integrated approach to the building of the blue economy.

What is Mountain Economy?
This concept underscores the necessity of making concrete efforts to ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their bio-diversity in order to support sustainable development.
3. NATIONAL MISSION ON GEM

**Why in news?**
Union Minister of Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation launched the National Mission on Government eMarketplace (GeM) for increasing awareness and accelerating the use of (GeM).

**Highlights:**
- The National Mission will cover all central government departments, states and public sector undertakings in a mission mode.
- It is aimed at creating awareness about GeM, train the buyers and sellers, get them registered in GeM and increase the procurement through GeM.
- Aim of this mission is to promote inclusiveness by empowering various categories of sellers and service providers such as MSMEs, start-ups, domestic manufacturers, women entrepreneurs, and Self-Help Groups.
- It will also highlight and communicate the value addition via transparency and efficiency in public procurement, including corruption-free governance in sync with the Central Government’s objective of ‘Minimum Government, Maximum Governance’.
- The mission also aims to give a boost to cashless, contactless, paperless transactions in line with Digital India objectives.
- It will improve overall efficiency and driving significant savings in Government procurement spends and it will maximize easy availability of all types of products and services procured by Government buyers via registration drives for existing vendors, further expanding the base of online products and services.
- Widespread training initiatives will be undertaken across the country, ensuring on-boarded buyers and sellers are aware of all GeM features.

**GeM:**
- Government eMarketplace is the national public procurement portal offering an online, end-to-end, solution for procurement of common use goods and services by government departments.
- GeM provides an open, inclusive, transparent and efficient online marketplace, which provides huge savings to government.
- It is mandatory for central government departments to procure through GeM. 25 states and Union Territories have signed MoU with GeM to adopt it as the mandatory mode of procurement for their departments so far.
- It has established itself as an open, transparent, efficient and inclusive platform providing huge savings to the government.
- GeM deploys technology to completely automate procurement processes and systems, introducing greater accountability in public procurement across India.

4. GOVERNMENT MAKES PRADHAN MANTRI JAN DHAN YOJANA OPEN-ENDED SCHEME

**Why in news?**
The government on Wednesday decided to make the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) an open-ended scheme and added more incentives to encourage people to open bank accounts.

**Highlights:**
- The overdraft limit for account holders of Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana has now been doubled to Rs. 10,000 from Rs. 5,000 earlier and there won't be any conditions attached for overdraft up to Rs. 2,000. The age limit for availing overdraft facility has also been revised from 18-60 years to 18-65 years.
Under the expanded coverage from 'every household to every adult', accidental insurance cover for new RuPay card holders has been raised from Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 2 lakh to Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana accounts opened after August 28, 2018, said the release.

According to the release, 32.41 crore Jan Dhan accounts have been opened with more than Rs. 81,200 crore of deposit balance and 53 per cent are women account holders and 59 per cent accounts are in rural and semi urban areas.

The pipeline of Jandhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) will continue to provide the necessary backbone for coverage of these activities and thereby accelerating the pace of digitised financially included and insured society, added the release.

**PMJDY:**
- Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), is financial inclusion program of Government of India, that aims to expand and make affordable access to financial services such as bank accounts, remittances, credit, insurance and pensions. This financial inclusion campaign was launched by the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi on 15 August 2014.
- Launched in August 2014, the first phase of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana scheme was focused on opening basic bank accounts and RuPay debit card with inbuilt accident insurance cover of Rs. 1 lakh.
- Besides, it provided Basic Banking Accounts with overdraft facility of Rs. 5,000 after six months Phase II beginning August 15, 2015 was planned to provide micro-insurance to the people and pension schemes to unorganised sector workers.

**5. PCR, DEOSTHALEE COMMITTEE REPORT**

**Why in news?**
Recently, RBI Deputy Governor Viral Acharya made a case for setting up a Public Credit Registry (PCR), incorporating unique identifiers: Aadhaar for individual borrowers and Corporate Identification Number for firms.

**What is PCR?**
- A public credit registry is an information repository that collects all loan information of individuals and corporate borrowers.
- It helps banks distinguish between a bad and a good borrower and accordingly offer attractive interest rates to good borrowers and higher interest rates to bad borrowers.

**How will it impact?**
- PCR will address issues such as information asymmetry, improve access to credit and strengthen the credit culture among consumers.
- It can also address the bad loan problem staring at banks, as corporate debtors will not be able to borrow across banks without disclosing existing debt.
- A PCR may also help raise India’s rank in the global ease of doing business index.
- Setting up the PCR will help improve India’s rankings in the World Bank’s ease of doing business index.

**Panel’s proposals**
- The move is based on the recommendations of a committee, headed by Y.M. Deosthalee.
- The committee has suggested the registry should capture all loan information and borrowers be able to access their own history.
- Data is to be made available to stakeholders such as banks, on a need-to-know basis. Data privacy will be protected.
Why PCR is necessary?
- Credit information is now available across multiple systems in bits and pieces and not in one window.
- Data on borrowings from banks, non-banking financial companies, corporate bonds or debentures from the market, external commercial borrowings (ECBs), foreign currency convertible bonds (FCCBs), masala bonds, and inter-corporate borrowings are not available in one data repository.
- PCR will help capture all relevant information about a borrower, across different borrowing products in one place.
- It can flag early warnings on asset quality by tracking performance on other credits.

PCR in other countries
- PCR in other countries now include other transactional data such as payments to utilities like power and telecom for retail consumers and trade credit data for businesses.
- Regularity in making payments to utilities and trade creditors provides an indication of the credit quality of such customers.

Innovation in lending
- Access to credit information, including debt details and repayment history would drive innovation in lending.
- For example, currently most banks focus on large companies for loans and consequently the micro, small and medium enterprises are left with limited options for borrowing.
- With satisfactory payment history and validated debt details made available, it will increase the credit availability to micro, small and medium enterprises along with deepening of the financial markets.
- This will support the policy of financial inclusion.

6. MOVE, THE FIRST GLOBAL MOBILITY SUMMIT

Why in news?
Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Friday inaugurate the first Global Mobility Summit called MOVE, which will deliberate on steps to promote electric vehicles and shared mobility.

About the summit
- The summit will deliberate on five themes including comprehensive: electrification and alternative fuels, reinventing public transport, goods transport and logistics and data analytics and mobility.
- The two-day summit is being organised by the government think-tank Niti Aayog.
- The summit also aims to set the base for a transport system which is safe, clean, shared and connected, affordable, accessible and inclusive.

Main objectives
- Affordability of public transit is crucial for low-income users and of freight for the industry.
- Accessibility and inclusivity are crucial for remote and differently-abled users across geographies, with the philosophy of leaving no-one behind.
- Safe, energy-efficient and low-emission systems are necessary for India to meet its international commitments on climate change.
7. CENTRE DOUBLED THE LIMIT FOR FILING LOAN RECOVERY APPLICATIONS

Why in news?
The Centre doubled the limit for filing loan recovery applications by banks and financial institutions from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 20 lakh in order to reduce pendency of cases in the 39 Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRT) in the country.

Highlights
- Any bank or financial institution or a consortium of banks or financial institutions cannot approach DRTs if the amount due is less than Rs 20 lakh.
- Under the existing norms, a DRT is supposed to dispose of a matter referred to it within 180 days of the receipt of an application and an appeal can be filed against a DRT order with the Debt Recovery Appellate Tribunals (DRATs).
- However, the 180-day deadline is rarely followed by the tribunals and cases are heard for years. Lack of adequate staff, proper infrastructure and huge pendency of cases drags down the speed of resolution process.

Debt Recovery Tribunal
- In 1993, “The Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act” (RDDBFI Act) was passed to ease recovering of loans given by banks and financial institutions to lenders
- Hence, under the RDDBFI Act, special tribunals known as Debt Recovery Tribunals were established with the objective of providing expeditious adjudication and recovery of debts due to Banks and FIs which was critical to the successful implementation of financial sector reforms.
- There are more than 30 DRTs in various regions of the country operating today. Some DRTs have jurisdiction over more than one state whereas some states have multiple DRTs. The Guwahati DRT has jurisdiction over all the 7 North Eastern sister states.

8. PRADHAN MANTRI FASAL BIMA YOJANA

Why in news?
The Government has decided to incorporate the provision of penalties for States and Insurance Companies for the delay in settlement of insurance claims under the PMFBY.
- The farmers will be paid 12% interest by insurance companies for the delay in settlement claims beyond two months of prescribed cut-off date.
- State Governments will have to pay 12% interest for the delay in release of State share of subsidy beyond three months of prescribed cut-off date submission of requisition by insurance companies.
- The guidelines also detail a Standard Operating Procedure for evaluation of insurance companies and remove them from the scheme if found ineffective in providing services.

Insuring Horticulture Crops
- The Government has also decided to include perennial horticultural crops under the ambit of PMFBY on a pilot basis.
- The scheme as per the new guidelines provides add on coverage for crop loss due to attack of wild animals, which will be implemented on a pilot basis.
- Aadhaar number will be mandatorily captured to avoid duplication of beneficiaries.

Insuring more Non-loanee Farmers
- The insurance companies are given a target of enrolling 10% more non-loanee farmers than the previous corresponding season.
- They will have to mandatorily spend 0.5% of gross premium per company per season for publicity and awareness of the scheme.
Settlement of Claims

- The much demanded rationalization of premium release process has been incorporated in the new guidelines.
- As per this, the insurance companies need not provide any projections for the advance subsidy.
- Release of upfront premium subsidy will be made at the beginning of the season based on 50% of 80% of total share of subsidy of corresponding season of previous year as GOI/State subsidy.
- Balance premium will be paid as a second installment based on the specific approved business statistics on the portal for settlement of claims.
- Final installment will be paid after reconciliation of entire coverage data on portal based on final business statistics. This will reduce the delay in settling the claims of farmers.

Pradhan Mantri Fasal BimaYojana (PMFBY)

- There will be a uniform premium of only 2% to be paid by farmers for all Kharif crops and 1.5% for all Rabi crops.
- In case of annual commercial and horticultural crops, the premium to be paid by farmers will be only 5%. The premium rates to be paid by farmers are very low and balance premium will be paid by the Government to provide full insured amount to the farmers against crop loss on account of natural calamities.
- There is no upper limit on Government subsidy. Even if balance premium is 90%, it will be borne by the Government.
- Earlier, there was a provision of capping the premium rate which resulted in low claims being paid to farmers. This capping was done to limit Government outgo on the premium subsidy. This capping has now been removed and farmers will get claim against full sum insured without any reduction.
- The use of technology will be encouraged to a great extent. Smart phones will be used to capture and upload data of crop cutting to reduce the delays in claim payment to farmers. Remote sensing will be used to reduce the number of crop cutting experiments.

9. MSME UDHYAMIMITRA

Why in news?
The Alternative Mechanism comprising of its Chairperson, the Union Finance Minister decided that Bank of Baroda, Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank may consider their consolidation. It will be the First-ever three-way consolidation of banks in India, with a combined business of Rs. 14.82 lakh crore, making it India’s Third Largest Bank.

Impact of the Merger

- It will help create a strong globally competitive bank with economies of scale and enable realization of wide-ranging synergies.
- Leveraging of networks, low-cost deposits and subsidiaries of the three banks has the potential for substantial rise in customer base, market reach, operational efficiency, wider products and services, and improved access for customers.

Combined range of Services

- Dena Bank’s strength in MSME will further augment the strength of the other two to position the amalgamated bank for being an MSME Udyamimitra
- Larger distribution network will reduce operating and distribution costs with benefits for the amalgamated bank, its customers and their subsidiaries
• Global network strength of Bank of Baroda will be leveraged to enable customers of Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank to have global access.

10. DAIRY PROCESSING & INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND (DIDF)

Why in news?
Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare has inaugurated the Dairy Processing & Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF).
• Vast opportunities exist today for dairy entrepreneurs and in order to concretize these opportunities and help double the income of dairy farmers, huge outlay is needed to operationalize the National Action Plan (Vision-2022).

Dairy Processing & Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF)
• As announced in Union Budget 2017-18, the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DADF) started the DIDF with an outlay of Rs 10881 crore.
• Under this scheme, milk cooperatives will be provided financial assistance of Rs 8004 crore in the form of a loan at 6.5% interest, which will be reimbursed over a period of 10 years.
• Additional milk processing capacity of 126 lakh litre per day, milk drying capacity of 210 MT per day, milk chilling capacity of 140 lakh litre per day shall be created.
• The government has also given a provision of interest subsidy on loans.
• With this scheme, 95,00,000 farmers in about 50,000 villages will be benefitted.
• In addition to this, many skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers will get employment, directly and indirectly.

Implementing National Dairy Plan Phase-I Scheme
• Implementation of the World Bank-funded National Dairy Plan Phase-I scheme is also being done by the NDDB through the state government’s cooperative milk organizations/milk federations.
• On the other hand, the implementation of the National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD) is being done by the state’s cooperative/milk federations.
• Under this scheme special assistance was given for the development of cooperative milk committees, incentives to increase the number of milk producers and increase processing and refrigeration capacity.

Revitalizing the Rashtriya Gokul Mission
• The ministry has said that in order to increase production, under the Rashtriya Gokul Mission, 10 semen centers have been identified for the production of Sex Sorted Semen for the production of more female animals.
• Also, 20 Embryo Transfer Technology (ETT) centers are being set up for the production of high genetic merit bulls of indigenous bovine breeds.
• Besides, INDUSCHIP has been developed for genomic selection of indigenous breeds and 6000 dairy animals have been genetically evaluated using INDUSCHIP.
• Under the flagship scheme 20 Gokul Grams are also being established.
• Apart from this, for the conservation of indigenous breeds, two National Kamdhenu Breeding Centres, one in Andhra Pradesh at Chintaladevi and other in Madhya Pradesh at Itarsi are being established.

National Action Plan Vision 2022
• The Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DAHDF) is working on a National Action Plan Vision 2022
• Under the plan, suitable provisions are being made to build additional milk processing infrastructure for processing additional volume of milk (expected on account of higher milk production and meeting the increased demand for value-added products).

11. E-RYTHU APP
Why in news?
The government of Andhra Pradesh has launched a mobile platform, e-Rythu (e-farmer in Telugu) which will enable small-scale farmers to market their produce at reasonable prices.
• It aims to digitize agriculture marketplaces, payments, workflows, and provide farmers an easy and secure way to buy, sell and receive payments for agricultural products via their feature phones.
• The platform has been developed by MasterCard Labs for Financial Inclusion in Nairobi, Kenya, and has been customized for India use by the Labs team based at Pune.

Utility of the App
• The app will help farmers looking to sell their produce to connect with the right buyers more efficiently in local language and receive the best possible prices.
• Due to the small scale, and long travel distance from the places where they sell, most small and medium farmers in Andhra Pradesh suffer income losses.
• Additionally, since these farmers do not have a formal credit history, it is difficult for them to access any formal financial services.
• It will make horticulture markets more transparent for sellers, buyers, and other stakeholders, and pave the way for financial inclusion of millions of small and medium farmers in the state.

12. RAIL SAHYOG PORTAL
Why in news?
The Minister of Railways and Coal has launched a web portal Rail Sahyog to provide a platform for the Corporates and PSUs to contribute to creation of amenities at/near Railway Stations through CSR funds.

Rail Sahyog Portal
• The portal has been envisaged as a platform for all including individuals as also private & public organisation to contribute towards CSR activities in association with Indian Railways.
• The companies desirous of contributing can show willingness on the portal by registering their requests which will be processed by Railway officials.
• This portal will provide an opportunity for Industry/ Companies/ Associations to collaborate with Railways. Individuals, Private companies have the freedom to execute projects in Railways.
• The main focus is on ensuring creation of good quality assets through this collaboration.

CSR Funded activities in Railways
• Construction of toilets in circulating areas of all stations with provision of low cost sanitary pad vending machine & incinerator in female toilets and contraceptives vending machine in male toilets and initial one year maintenance.
• Providing free Wi-Fi at stations through setting up Hotspots.
• Provision of Benches at station Platforms as facility for senior citizens/disabled.
• Bottle crushing machines at 2175 major stations for ensuring environmental sustainability.
• Dustbins at all stations for Swachh Bharat will help in preventing littering around.
• Separate dustbins for wet/dry waste need to be provided at circulating area of Station and Platforms.

13. STAY ON RECOGNISING NON PERFOMING LOANS

Why in news?
The Supreme Court has ordered a stay on the Reserve Bank of India’s February 12 circular asking banks to recognise loans as non-performing even if repayment was delayed by just one day, and resolve them within 180 days

What does the decision imply?
• The apex court’s decision to overturn RBI rules and transfer all pleas seeking exception from them to itself is clearly the biggest challenge against the IBC yet
• It is likely to cause significant uncertainty in the resolution of stressed assets and undermine investor confidence in the bankruptcy process
• The postponement of the Supreme Court’s next hearing of the case to mid-November will send the signal that there are likely to be considerable delays in the resolution of stressed assets
• This is in contrast to hopes that asset resolution under the new bankruptcy regime would be done within a strict time frame
• Distressed power companies, and a number of other firms in the shipping, sugar and textile sectors, however, will be relieved as they are spared from bankruptcy proceedings

How will this decision take a toll on banks and companies?
• According to the Association of Power Producers, the Supreme Court’s order will save stressed companies producing 13GW worth of power from being pushed to the doors of bankruptcy courts. Banks, too, will be happy as the reprieve will help them delay the recognition of bad loan losses.

Troubles faced by power sector:
• The troubles of power companies can be traced to structural issues such as the absence of meaningful price reforms
• unreliable fuel supply
• unsustainable finances of public sector power distribution companies

14. GOVERNMENT MOVES TO STABILISE RUPEE

Why in news?
Finance minister announced a series of measures to boost market confidence, curb the widening current account deficit and stabilize the rupee

Highlights
• Measures include scrapping a withholding tax on masala bonds – rupee-denominated debt sold overseas – and relaxations in the overseas debt regime.
• Mandatory hedging conditions for infrastructure loans through the external commercial borrowing (ECB) route will be reviewed
• 20% exposure limit on investments by foreign portfolio investors in debt to a single corporate group will be removed.
• The government will permit the manufacturing sector to access ECBs up to $50 million with residual maturity of one year instead of three years.
Masala bonds will be exempt from withholding tax this financial year and Indian banks will be allowed to become market makers in masala bonds including by underwriting.

**Why is rupee falling?**

External factors like policy decisions taken by the U.S. that is seeing the dollar strengthen, global crude prices and trade wars are impacting India despite having strong macroeconomic fundamentals.

### 15. ATAL BIMIT VYAKTI KALYAN YOJNA

**Why in news?**
The Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) has approved a new scheme- Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana for Insured Persons covered under the Employees’ State Insurance Act,1948.

**Key points**
- Under this ABVKY Scheme, ESIC will provide relief amount to employees in cash directly into their bank accounts in case of unemployment. This financial assistance would be given to employees even while they search for new engagement.
- The cash benefit given to the unemployed persons searching for new employment will be 25 percent of his average earning of 90 days.
- Now all the insured people covered under Employees State Insurance Act, 1948 can avail benefits of Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana (ABVKY).
- Around 3.2 crore Insured Persons (IPs) will benefit from newly launched scheme of ESIC ‘Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna’.
- ESI Corporation also approves the proposal for reimbursement of Rs. 10/- per person to employers. This would encourage and enhance Aadhaar Seeding of workers and their family members in ESIC database. It will restrict multiple registrations from same insured people and thus will enable them to get scheme benefits which requires longer contributory conditions.

**ESIC (Employees’ State Insurance Corporation)**
- ESIC is a pioneer Social Security organization providing comprehensive social security benefits like reasonable Medical Care and a range of Cash Benefits in times of need such as employment injury, sickness, death etc.
- The ESI Act applies to premises/precincts where 10 or more persons are employed.
- The employees drawing wages up to ₹ 21,000 per month are entitled to health insurance cover and other benefits, under the ESI Act.

### 16. AYUSHMAN BHARAT, PRADHAN MANTRI JAN AROGYA YOJANA (PMJAY)

**Why in news?**
The Ayushman Bharat—Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), a health insurance scheme announced in the last budget, will be launched on 23 September.
- It is arguably the most ambitious social health insurance (SHI) programme ever launched anywhere in the world.
- PMJAY will provide insurance up to ₹500,000 per family per year for in-patient secondary and tertiary treatment.
- It will cover over 100 million vulnerable families, which is about 500 million people, the poorest 40% of India’s population.
- Treatment would be provided by empanelled public and private hospitals.
About PMJAY

- PMJAY is actually the second tier of Ayushman Bharat, a two-tier scheme. It will ride on the first tier, a network of 150,000 health and wellness centres (HWCs) that will provide free universal and comprehensive primary health care.
- The HWCs will serve as the awareness, screening and referral link between patients and PMJAY.
- A cadre of frontline health service professionals called Pradhan Mantri Aarogya Mitras (PMAMs) are being trained to facilitate the provision of treatment to beneficiaries at hospitals.

Relevance of PMJAY

- The significance of PMJAY has to be seen in the context of existing health conditions and health service delivery systems in India.
- With an average life expectancy of 68.3 years, India trails all its Asian neighbours barring Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar and Laos.

17. PRADHAN MANTRI ANNADATA AAY SANRAKSHAN ABHIYAN (PM-AASHA)

Why in news?
The Centre recently launched the Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA) to ensure better prices for farm produce.

The new Umbrella Scheme includes the mechanism of ensuring remunerative prices to the farmers and is comprised of

- Price Support Scheme (PSS),
- Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS)
- Pilot of Private Procurement & Stockist Scheme (PPPS).
Why PM-AASHA?
- Over the past two years, farmers bear huge losses due to increased production of oilseeds and pulses. High production leads to fall in the wholesale prices of these commodities.
- It is evident that increased MSP in past is not sufficient and limited modus operandi for the distribution of the MSP benefits is not good for all the states/UTs.
- The government, therefore, realize that it is very important that if the price of the agriculture produce market is less than the MSP, both central and states should purchase either at MSP or work in manner to provide MSP for farmers through some other mechanisms.
- The Cabinet has decided to give additional government guarantee of Rs. 16,550 crore making it Rs. 45,550 crores in total.

18. MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX (MPI)

Why in news?
The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) have released the 2018 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI).

Performance of India:
- India has made giant strides in reducing multidimensional poverty, bringing down its poverty rate from 55% to 28% in ten years.
- Between 2005-06 and 2015-16, more than 271 million people have come out of the clutches of poverty in India. However, India still has the largest number of people living in multidimensional poverty in the world-around 364 million people. 156 million out of 364 million people who are MPI poor in 2015/2016 are children.
- India’s scale of poverty reduction has parallels with the phenomenal level of poverty reduction achieved in China a decade or so earlier. India’s scale of multidimensional poverty reduction over the decade from 2005/6 to 2015/16 – from 635 million poor persons to 364 million– can be compared to the speedy pace of China’s poverty reduction, which occurred over more than 20 years.
- Across nearly every state, poor nutrition is the largest contributor to multidimensional poverty. Not having a household member with at least six years of education is the second largest contributor. Insufficient access to clean water and child mortality contribute least.

India’s relative performance:
- Among the South Asian countries, only Maldives boasts lower MPI of 0.007 than India (0.121). Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan and Afghanistan all boast higher incidences of multidimensional poverty.
- After India (364 million people), the countries with the largest number of people living in multi-dimensional poverty are Nigeria (97 million), Ethiopia (86 million), Pakistan (85 million), and Bangladesh (67 million).
Global performance:

• The global MPI covers 105 countries in total, home to 75% of the world’s population, or 5.7 billion people. Of this proportion, 1.3 billion are identified as multidimensionally poor, and half of them are younger than 18 years old.

• 83% of the world’s poor live in South Asia and Africa. The latest data further reveals the vast majority of the multidimensional poor – 1.1 billion people – live in rural areas around the world, where poverty rates are four times higher than among those living in urban areas.

Multidimensional Poverty Index

• The Multidimensional Poverty Index was launched by the UNDP and the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) in 2010.

• Basic philosophy and significance of MPI is that it is based on the idea that poverty is not unidimensional (not just depends on income and one individual may lack several basic needs like education, health etc.), rather it is multidimensional.

• The MPI measures overlapping deprivations at the household level across the same three dimensions as the Human Development Index (health, education and living standards).

• The index shows the proportion of poor people and the average number of deprivations each poor person experiences at the same time.

19. AGMARK ONLINE SYSTEM

Why in news?
The government Wednesday launched an online platform for processing applications related to quality certification mark ‘Agmark’ for agricultural products.

Key points

• Existing procedures for Agmark certification were in physical form and time consuming.

• Through the Agmark online system, process of application will be simple, quick, transparent and 24x7.

• Certificate of authorisation, permission of printing press, permission of laboratories and services related to laboratory information management system will be provided.

• The use of modern technologies by the National Informatics Center has made these processes easy, reliable and cost effective by providing online electronic mode.

About Agmark:

• AGMARK is a certification mark employed on agricultural products in India, assuring that they conform to a set of standards approved by the Directorate of Marketing and Inspection, an agency of the Government of India.

• The AGMARK is legally enforced in India by the Agricultural Produce (Grading and Marking) Act of 1937 (and ammended in 1986).

• The Agmark certification is employed through fully state-owned Agmark laboratories located across the nation which act as testing and certifying centres.

20. GOODS AND SERVICES TAX NETWORK (GSTN)

Why in news?
The Union Cabinet cleared a proposal to make the Goods and Services Tax Network a government-owned company.
About Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN)

- The GST Network is responsible for maintaining the software and the IT system for the GST. It was set up as a private limited company in 2013 under the United Progressive Alliance government. It is a Section 8 company registered under the new Companies Act and is a not-for-profit entity.
- Till now, the Centre and states together held a 49% stake in the GST Network, while the remaining 51% was with five private financial institutions – HDFC, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, NSE Strategic Investment Co, and LIC Housing Finance.
- In May, the GST Council had agreed to the proposal to make GST Network totally government-owned, with the Centre owning a 50% stake and all the states together holding the remaining 50% on a pro-rata basis.
- The Cabinet approval will pave the way for the GST Network Board to start the process of acquiring the 51% stake held by the private companies. The 11-member board will induct three directors from the Centre and three from the states. Three other independent directors will be nominated by the board, along with the chairman and the chief executive officer.

21. “JAN DHAN DARSHAK” MOBILE APPLICATION

Why in news?
Finance Ministry has launched Mobile Application Jan Dhan Darshak as a Part of Financial Inclusion. This App will provide guidance to the common people in locating a financial service touch point at a given location in the country.

Key points
- Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance and National Informatics Centre (NIC) have jointly developed the app Jan Dhan Darshak as a part of financial inclusion initiative.
- Jan Dhan Darshak app will be in a unique position to provide a citizen centric platform for locating financial service touch points across all providers such as banks, post office, CSC, etc. These services could be availed as per the needs and convenience of the common people.

Some of the salient features of this App are as follows:
- Find nearby Financial touch points, based on current location (Branches/ATM/Post offices)
- Search by place name
- Search by place name also available with Voice Interface
- Phone number of bank branches available in app, with the facility of call button for integrated dialing
- Users’ feedback will go directly to the concerned bank for carrying out the necessary updation in data on financial touch points.
22. FINANCIAL INCLUSION INDEX

Why in news?
The government announced three initiatives to take banking to the last mile comprising a financial inclusion index, geographical mapping of banking services and hassle-free online loans for MSMEs valuing up to Rs 10 million.

The index will have three measurement dimension
(i) Access to financial services
(ii) Usage of financial services
(iii) Quality.

Key Highlights
- The single composite index gives a snapshot of the level of financial inclusion that would guide the macro policy perspective.
- The various components of the index will help measure financial services for use of internal policy making. The index can also be used directly as a composite measure in development indicators.
- Further, the index enables fulfilment of G20 Financial Inclusion Indicators requirements.
- It will also facilitate researchers to study the impact of financial inclusion and other macroeconomic variables.

23. NEW WEB PORTAL FOR MSME CREDIT

Why in news?
With an aim to take the banking services to the "last mile Union finance minister announced transformative initiative in MSME credit space. The web portal www.psbloansin59minutes.com will enable in principle approval for MSME loans up to Rs. 1 crore within 59 minutes from SIDBI and 5 Public Sector Banks (PSBs).

Highlights:
- A first in MSME banking credit space, www.psbloansin59minutes.com is one of its kind platform in MSME segment which integrates advanced fintech to ensure seamless loan approval and management. The loans are undertaken without human intervention till sanction and or disbursement stage.
- A User Friendly Platform has been built where MSME borrower is not required to submit any physical document for in-principle approval. The solution uses sophisticated algorithms to read and analyse data points from various sources such as IT returns, GST data, bank statements, MCA21 etc. in less than an hour while capturing the applicants basic details using Smart analytics from available documents.
- The system simplifies the decision making process for a loan officer as the final output provides a summary of credit, valuation and verification on a user-friendly dashboard in real time.

The key features of the contactless platform include:
- Majority stake of SIDBI & big 5 PSBs- SBI, Bank of Baroda, PNB, Vijaya and Indian Bank.
- A first for MSME borrowers-Connect with multiple banks without visiting the branch.
- Only Platform in the market with a Banker Interface which covers the Branch Level integrations (with maker-checker-approver) in tune with current systems of PSBs.
- Only Platform that enables Bankers to create Loan Products in line with the Scoring models & assessment methods within their approved credit policy.
• Only Platform that has an integrated GST, ITR, Bank Statement Analyzer, Fraud Check and Bureau Check as well as host of other features which at present is not available with any other player in the market.
• Only Platform that has been integrated with CGTMSE for checking the eligibility of Borrowers. MSME borrower gets loan up to Rs.2 crore without any collateral, which is major relief for MSME borrower.
1. GERMANY TO GIVE RS 990 CRORE LOAN FOR CLEAN GANGA MISSION

Why in news?
Germany will provide a soft loan of 120 million euros (approx. Rs 990 crore) to India as part of its contribution to the ongoing river Ganga cleaning programme.

Highlights
- In 2015, the German government to India committed an interest subsidised loan of up to euro 120 million through German Development Bank KfW for financing investments such as construction of sewerage network and sewage treatment plants.
- The money will be used in Uttarakhand for various activities including construction of sewerage network, sewage treatment plants and rehabilitation of existing waste water systems.
- Project would focus on extension and replacement of around 360 kilometres of a sewerage system. It would also include complete house connection to the network, construction of sewage treatment plants of 150 million litres per day capacity and 13 sewage pumping stations.
- German development agency GIZ has prepared a ‘Ganga Box’, aimed to target school-going children and inform them about the river. Vikrant Tyagi, a project coordinator with GIZ, said
- Ganga book has been prepared on lines of ‘Danube Book’ when cleaning of European river was undertaken. This book will have information mythological, socio-cultural, economic importance about river and suggestions to avoid pollution, like not dumping plastic in water body
- Such initiatives intended to bring change in the behaviour of the people towards the river.

2. ARCTIC SEA

Why in news?
The study, published in the journal 'Science Advances', says that warmer water that originated hundreds of miles away were penetrated deep into the interior of the Arctic and, this water has the potential to melt the region's entire sea-ice pack if it reaches the surface, researchers say.

Findings of the study
- According to the researchers, the upper ocean in the Canadian Basin has seen a two-fold increase in heat content over the past 30 years
- They were able to trace this water to the Chukchi Sea further south, where a decline in sea ice has left the surface ocean more exposed to summer solar warming
- Northern Chukchi Sea is where every summer sea ice melts and retreats
- Due to the exposure of summer sun, heated water is being driven north by the Arctic winds but has remained below the surface waters. This has resulted in a high-temperature zone trapped far beneath the ice pack.

**Alarming statistics**
- US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has reported record-breaking climate extremes in the Arctic region every year
- According to the Arctic report card, 2017 saw the lowest ever measurements for maximum winter sea ice cover across the Arctic and the second warmest air temperatures on record
- The Arctic region shows no sign of returning to the reliably frozen region it was decades ago, while the temperatures continue to increase at double the rate of the global temperature increase
- Most of the ice that covers the Bering Sea in the northern Pacific Ocean vanished a month early this year which in turn had an impact on the hunting and fishing activities of the inhabitants of western Alaska.

3. **CHINA WARNS INDIA OF FLOOD-LIKE SITUATION AFTER HEAVY RAINFALL: ASSAM, ARUNACHAL PRADESH ON HIGH ALERT**

**Why in news?**
Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, two of India’s Northeastern states have been put on high alert after China reported that there has been a rise in the Tsangpo River’s water level highest in 50 years due to heavy rainfall.

**Key facts**
- When the river flows into Arunachal, it is known as Siang. Three rivers—Siang, Dibang and Lohit—meet in eastern Assam bordering Arunachal and form the Brahmaputra
- At present, three rivers in Assam — the Dhansiri, Brahmaputra and Jia Bharali — are flowing above the danger level.
- Hydrological experts said that the rising water level in Tsangpo since July can be due to a combination of factors. There is a possibility of sudden release of water from man-made barriers or a natural dam that was formed due to landslips caused by major earthquakes in the Tibetan region of China in November 2017.

4. **INDIAN OCEAN WAVE EXERCISE 2018 (IOWAVE18)**

**Why in news?**
The Indian Ocean Wave Exercise 2018 (IOWave18) begins in the Indian Ocean. India along with 23 other nations is participating in this major Indian ocean-wide tsunami mock drill.

**IOWave18**
- It involves evacuation of thousands of people from coastal areas in over half a dozen coastal states.
• This tsunami warning exercise is being organised by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO. It was the IOC that coordinated the setting up of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (IOTWMS).
• In India, IOWave18 is being coordinated by Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) under Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).
• NDRF Battalions, Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guards, Army, Critical installations (nuclear power plants), Port & harbors are also participating the exercise.
• Karnataka and Kerala too have been involved but they expressed their inability to take the exercise to the coastal villages communities because of the current flood situation

**Key Highlights of Exercise IOWave18**

- Exercise IOWave18 will simulate Indian Ocean countries being put in a tsunami warning situation and require the respective National Tsunami Warning Centres and the Disaster Management Offices in each country to implement their Standard Operating Procedures.
- IOWave18 will also provide an opportunity for Member States to test the indicators of Indian Ocean Tsunami Ready (IOTR) programme in pilot communities. IOTR is a community performance-based programme that facilitates a structural and systematic approach in building tsunami preparedness.
- The IOTWMS Tsunami Service Providers (TSP) of Australia, India and Indonesia will provide exercise bulletins and detailed tsunami threat advice on their password-protected websites.
- Exercise IOWave18 will comprise two scenarios on successive days: one in the north western Indian Ocean off the coast of Iran, and the other in the eastern Indian Ocean off the west coast of northern Sumatra.
- The first scenario will simulate a magnitude 9.0 earthquake off the coast of Iran and the second scenario will simulate a magnitude 9.3 earthquake off the west coast of Northern Sumatra.
- Both scenarios will generate simulated tsunami waves travelling across the Indian Ocean basin.

5. DEDICATED MISSION TO REVIVE HIMALAYAN SPRINGS

**Why in news?**
NITI Aayog constituted group of experts has urged the government to set up a dedicated mission to salvage and revive spring water systems in the country’s Himalayan States given their vital importance as a source of water for both drinking and irrigation for the region’s inhabitants.

**Concerns**
- Spanning States across the country’s north and northeast and home to about 50 million people, the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) has been heavily reliant on these natural groundwater sources, which are under increasing threat from the urbanization caused by a constant push for development and climate change.
- Almost half of the perennial springs have dried up or have become seasonal and tens of thousands of villages are currently facing acute water shortage for drinking and other domestic purposes.
- Almost 60% of low-discharge springs that provide water to small habitations in the Himalayan region have reported clear decline during the last couple of decades.

**Shimla crisis**
- The extent of the crisis plaguing the mountainous region was recently evident when more than half a dozen districts of Himachal Pradesh and the State capital Shimla faced a severe...
drinking water crisis this May after major water sources either went fully or partially dry. While poor water management was said to be the key cause, according to State authorities, they also attributed reduced snowmelt and depressed flow from springs as contributors to the crisis.

- Also, with almost 64% of the cultivable area in the Himalayan fed by natural springs, they are often the only source of irrigation in the region.

**Highlights of the report**

- The report noted that there were also multiple sources of pollution in springs and these were due to both geogenic, or ‘natural’ causes and anthropogenic, or man-made, ones.

- Microbial content, sulphates and nitrates were primarily because of anthropogenic reasons and contamination from fluoride, arsenic and iron was mainly derived from geogenic sources. Coliform bacteria in spring water could originate from septic tanks, household wastewater, livestock facilities, and manure lagoons in the source area or in the aquifers feeding springs. Similarly, nitrate sources were septic tanks, household wastewater, agricultural fertilizers, and livestock facilities.

- The group recommends ‘a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach of managing springs that will involve building upon the existing body of work on spring water management. The programme could be designed on the concept of an action-research programme as part of a hydrogeology-based, community-support system on spring water management.

- With over 60,000 villages in the IHR, growing urbanization – due to 500 townships and 10 cities – was increasing demographic pressure on the region’s water resources.

- The task force moots an 8-year programme to overhaul spring water management. This includes: preparing a digital atlas of the country’s spring sheds, training para-hydrogeologists who could lead grassroots conservation and the introduction of a ‘spring health card’.

6. **INDIAN ROOFED TURTLE**

**Why in news?**

Wildlife Trust of India and SPOAR (Society for Protecting Ophiofauna & Animal Rights) came together to save a small yet significant population of turtles identified as Indian Roofed Turtle (Pangshura tecta), a Schedule-I species under the WPA (1972) at Lotadevi Temple pond in Jalpaiguri.

**Background**

- The Lota Devi temple is very old religious place and thousands of devotees throng to worship Goddess Kali. The offerings made by the devotees in the pond left it very polluted.

- A small population of Indian Roofed Turtles in the pond was struggling to survive due to the pollution.

- Tests conducted earlier this year showed that dissolved oxygen in the pond was very low and contamination of the water was resulting in the death of turtles.

**Conservation efforts**

- Society for Protecting Ophiofauna & Animal Rights (SPOAR) and the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) cleaned dredged and fenced the pond and added native aquatic plants and fish to help the surviving turtles.

- To substantiate the conservation efforts, the team decided to encompass the religious belief and the legacy of Lotadevi deity by establishing a Kurma avatar (second Avatar of Lord Vishnu in the form of a turtle to support the foundation for the cosmos) temple. This temple is the fourth of its kind in India where “Kurma” avatar idol has been installed and
worshipped. This symbolic idol is placed on an alter just outside the fenced area where devotees can place their daily offerings rather than directly polluting the pond. This art of possibilities is truly a reflection of ancient teachings, imbibing nature and religion to ensure harmonious coexistence.

- There were about 20 Indian Roofed Turtle in the pond. Following the conservation efforts, new turtle hatchlings were recently spotted in it

**Indian Roofed Turtle**

- It is a species of turtle, protected under Schedule 1 of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- It is found in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan.
- In India, it is found in Ganges, Brahmaputra and Indus River drainages.
- It is listed on CITES Appendix I.
- It is listed as “Least Concern” in the IUCN list of threatened species.
- The protected areas in Jalpaiguri are known for protecting this species.
- In addition to it, it is also found in Lotadevi temple located on the basin of River Karala in Jalpaiguri.

7. **TYphoon JEBI**

**Why in news?**
Japan issued evacuation advisories for almost 300,000 people and cancelled hundreds of flights in the face of strong winds and heavy rain as typhoon Jebi roared north and was set to make landfall.

**Key points**

- Jebi - whose name means “swallow” in Korean - is the latest harsh weather to hit Japan this summer following deadly rains, landslides, floods and record-breaking heat that killed hundreds of people.
- Typhoon Jebi, known in the Philippines as Typhoon Maymay, was tied as the most intense tropical cyclone in the Northern Hemisphere of 2018 and is considered to be the strongest typhoon to strike Japan since Typhoon Yancy in 1993.
- Jebi initiated a slow weakening trend on September 2 and made landfall over Shikoku and then the Kansai region of Japan as a very strong typhoon on September 4.

**Tropical cyclones**

- Tropical cyclones are regarded as one of the most devastating natural calamities in the world.
- They originate and intensify over warm tropical oceans.
- These are ferocious storms that originate over oceans in tropical areas and move over to the coastal areas causing violent winds, very heavy rainfall, and storm outpourings.

**They are known as:**

- Cyclones in the Indian Ocean
- Hurricanes in the Atlantic
- Typhoons in the Western Pacific and the South China Sea
- Willy-willies in Western Australia

**The conditions which favour the formation and intensification of tropical cyclone storms are:**

- Large sea surface with temperature higher than 27° C
- Presence of the Coriolis force
- Small differences in the vertical wind speed
- A pre-existing weak- low-pressure area or low-level-cyclonic circulation
- Upper divergence above the sea level system
8. INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT OF WILDLIFE HABITATS (CSS-IDWH)

Why in news?
The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Wednesday approved continuation of the Centrally sponsored umbrella scheme of Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-IDWH) beyond the 12th Plan period from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

Highlights
- It is a centrally sponsored umbrella scheme consists of Project Tiger, Development of Wildlife Habitats and Project Elephant.
- There are three such plans: Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Project Tiger (CSS-PT), Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-DWH) and Project Elephant (CSS-PE).
- As per an official release, the total outlay is Rs 1,731.72 crore as the central share (Rs 1,143 crore for Project Tiger, Rs. 496.50 crore for development of wildlife habitats and Rs 92.22 crore for Project Elephant) from 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- The coverage is entire country in case of Development of Wildlife Habitats (DWH) and 23 elephant range states for Project Elephant.
- A total of 18 tiger range states, distributed in five landscapes of the country would be benefited under the Project Tiger scheme.
- The schemes would address the human-wildlife conflict effectively. Besides, the communities opting for voluntary relocation from the Core/Critical Tiger Habitat (6900 families) would be benefitted under CSS-PT and 800 families under Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Development of Wildlife Habitat.
- The schemes are expected to generate direct employment of about 30 lakh mandays annually which will include many local tribes besides non-tribal local workforce.

The Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH)
IDWH is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme launched during the 11th Plan period to provide technical and financial assistance to States/UTs for protection of wildlife habitat. The activities covered under the scheme include the staff development and capacity building, wildlife research and evaluation, anti-poaching activities, wildlife veterinary care, addressing man-animal conflicts and
promoting eco-tourism. Financial assistance is also provided to States for relocation of communities from within protected areas to other areas.

**The scheme has following three components:**
- Support to Protected Areas (National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves and Community Reserves)
- Protection of Wildlife Outside Protected Areas
- Recovery programmes for saving critically endangered species and habitats.
- Centrally-sponsored Project Bustard, Project Snow Leopard, Project Tiger and Project Elephant have been clubbed with the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH) scheme.

9. **NEW GANGA CLEAN-UP LAW PLANS**

**Why in news?**
Union Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation has prepared draft Bill which proposes setting up armed **Ganga Protection Corps (GPC)** to arrest any person who has committed offence of polluting River Ganga punishable under this law. The Bill calls for National Ganga Council and National Ganga Rejuvenation Authority to enforce law and protect Ganga River.

**Highlights of the bill**
- Almost similar provisions are there in the Environment Protection Act 1986, creation of GPC is new.
- The draft Bill says that commercial fishing or aquaculture activities in the Ganga and any of its tributaries shall be punishable with imprisonment for two years or a fine of Rs 2 lakh or both. Similarly, construction of permanent structure for residential, commercial and residential purposes in the active flood plain area of Ganga will be punishable with a two-year imprisonment or fine up to Rs 50 lakh or both.
- The draft makes it clear that no person or municipal authority will establish or take any steps to set up any industrial or residential or commercial premises or structure which may result in discharge of any sewage or trade effluent into the Ganga, otherwise he may face a five-year prison term or a fine of Rs 50,000 per day or both.

**Ganga Protection Corps (GPC)**
- The draft Bill envisages the Ganga Protection Corps as an armed force constituted and maintained by the Central government.
- Its personnel, the draft Bill says, will be provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs and will be deployed by National Ganga Rejuvenation Authority.
- Ganga Protection Corps (GPC) whose personnel will have powers to arrest those who pollute the river; treating a slew of actions — from obstructing the flow to commercial fishing — as cognizable offences that may attract a prison term of up to three years and a fine of up to Rs 5 lakh.
- If GPC has reason to believe that any person has committed an offence punishable under this Act, he may take such person in custody to the nearest police station. GPC will follow Code of Criminal Procedure.

**Background**
- Present environmental laws aren’t adequate to restore and protect the river. The Bill calls for a **National Ganga Council** and a **National Ganga Rejuvenation Authority** to enforce the law and protect the river which flows over 2500 km.
• In July 2016, a committee was constituted under retired judge of the Allahabad High Court Justice Girdhar Malviya who had submitted a draft Bill last year named The National River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Bill, 2017. Subsequently, a four-member committee was set up by the Ministry to examine that and the Ministry has circulated a Cabinet note which includes a revised version of that draft Bill.
• Incidentally, as judge of Allahabad High Court, Justice Malviya, in 1998, had called for a “River Police” to protect the Ganga.

10. MOBILISE YOUR CITY PARTNERSHIP

Why in news?
India and France on September 6, 2018 signed an implementation agreement on ‘Mobilise Your City’ (MYC) in New Delhi to support three Indian cities in their efforts to reduce Green House Gas (GHG) emissions. India is one of the very first countries to benefit from this initiative.

Highlights
• India and France have recently signed an implementation agreement under this initiative.
• This initiative will be implemented by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
• MYC aims at supporting three pilot cities viz. Nagpur (Maharashtra), Kochi (Kerala) and Ahmedabad (Gujarat) in their efforts to reduce their Green House Gas (GHG) emissions related to urban transport by implementing urban mobility plans at local level and to help India at national level to improve their sustainable transport policy.

Mobilise Your City Partnership
• The Mobilise Your City Partnership is a global and inclusive network of cities and countries as well as an umbrella brand of European development cooperation particularly related to the field of sustainable urban transport.
• It was launched as a part of COP 21 UNFCCC Paris climate conference.
• It seeks to provide support to 100 cities worldwide in 3 years to engage in sustainable urban mobility planning to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
• Furthermore, the Mobilise Your City Partnership is a global climate partnership for integrated urban mobility planning in emerging, developing and EU neighborhood countries, and an international transport alliance under the UN Marrakesh Partnership for Global Climate Action.
• It is a multi-donor action, jointly co-financed by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), the French Ministry of Ecological Transition and Solidarity (MTES), the French Facility for Global Environment (FFEM), and the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU).

11. GREAT BARRIER REEF SHOWING ‘SIGNS OF RECOVERY’

Why in news?
Following dire warnings of reef die-off after massive coral bleaching in 2016 and 2017, Tourism and Events Queensland has issued a “positive update” on the status of Australia’s Great Barrier Reef, reporting that some affected areas are showing “substantial signs of recovery.”

Background
• The Great Barrier Reef is the longest coral reef in the world and the first coral reef ecosystem to be awarded UNESCO World Heritage Status.
• It stretches more than 1,430 miles along Queensland’s spectacular coastline.
Coral bleaching occurs when coral experiences stress from heightened water temperatures or poor water quality.

In response, the coral ejects photosynthetic algae called zooxanthellae, which removes the coral’s distinctive color.

If the stress conditions persist, the coral will die.

But if conditions return to acceptable levels, some coral can reabsorb the substance and recover.

Deeper reefs are often considered a refuge from thermal anomalies such as those experienced in 2016 and 2017, but the report argues that both shallow and deep reefs are threatened by mass bleaching events.

The full impact of the 2016 bleaching, which damaged or destroyed 30 percent of the reef’s shallow water coral, has not yet fully been assessed.

**Conservation efforts**

- In April, the Australian Federal Government announced a A$500 million ($379 million) funding grant for the Great Barrier Reef in order to tackle challenges such as climate change, coral-eating starfish, and water quality affected by agricultural runoff.
- The Reef & Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC), a nonprofit organization, has reported signs of recovery due to a milder 2017-18 summer, as well as cooperation among science, industry, and government in supporting the reef’s recovery, according to the report issued on Wednesday by the Queensland State Government.
- Deloitte Access Economics valued the reef at A$56 billion in 2017, basing it on the fact that the reef supports tens of thousands of jobs and contributes A$6.4 billion annually to Australia’s economy.

**12. SINGPHAN WILDLIFE SANCTUARY**

**Why in news?**

The Nagaland government has declared the Singphan Wildlife Sanctuary as an elephant reserve making it the 30th reserve for jumbos in the country.

An important reserve in North Eastern States, Singphan Elephant Reserve has huge tracts of forest, strategically located in contiguity with the Abhaypur Reserve Forest of Assam which is frequented by the moving herds of elephants.

**Important points**

- The Singphan Elephant Reserve is located in Mon district of Nagaland and spreads over an area of 5825 acres (2357 hac).
- Elephant distribution habitat in Nagaland is a continuous stretch starting from Peren district running all along the foothills north westerly until Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh.
- "The declaration of the Singphan Elephant Reserve in Nagaland will boost the elephant conservation in the country especially north eastern region."
- As per recent census report (2017) Nagaland has around 446 elephants. The creation of new Elephant Reserve will result in protection and conservation of the elephants.

**13. WMO REPORT ON EL NINO**

**Why in news?**

There is a 70% chance of an El Niño developing by the end of this year, according to the latest
update from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). Its intensity is currently uncertain, but a strong event appears unlikely.

**Key points**
- Climate change is influencing the traditional dynamics of El Niño and La Niña events as well as their impacts. 2018 started out with a weak La Niña event but its cooling effect was not enough to reduce the overall warming trend which means that this year is on track to be one of the warmest on record.
- The organization sees increased odds of higher surface temperatures in most of Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America, Africa and along much of South America's coastline.
- Interior parts of South America, Greenland, many south Pacific islands and some in the Caribbean were identified as possible exceptions.

**El Nino**
- It favours eastern Pacific hurricanes and tropical storms. Record and unusual rainfall in Peru, Chile and Ecuador are linked to the climate pattern.
- El Nino reduces upwelling of cold water, decreasing the uplift of nutrients from the bottom of the ocean. This affects marine life and sea birds. The fishing industry is also affected.
- Drought caused by El Nino can be widespread, affecting southern Africa, India, Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Pacific Islands. Countries dependent on agriculture are affected.
- Australia and Southeast Asia get hotter.

**About World Meteorological Organization (WMO)**
- WMO is an intergovernmental organization and specialised agency of the UN for meteorology (weather and climate), operational hydrology and related geophysical sciences. It is a member of the United Nations Development Group.
- WMO was created in 1950 as an intergovernmental organization for Member States and Territories.
- Headquarters at Geneva, Switzerland.
- Indian Meteorological Department, Pune has recently been recognized as the Regional Climate Centre for providing regional climate services to South Asian countries.

14. **AAI SHELVES WATER AERODROME PROJECT IN CHILIKLA LAKE**

**Why in news?**
Chief Executive of the Chilika Development Authority (CDA), told reporters that the AAI has cancelled the seaplane project in the lake which, if implemented, would have negatively impacted the ecosystem and the surrounding human population at the world’s second largest brackish water lake.
Background
- Union Civil Aviation Ministry has given in-principle approval to set up water aerodromes in the country. To start with it has identified five states: Odisha, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Assam for development of water aerodromes.
- In the first phase of the project, Chilka Lake (Odisha), Sabarmati River Front and Sardar Sarovar Dam (Gujarat) have been identified for the development of such facilities.

Key points
- CDA in its report to the state government had said that the water aerodrome project would seriously jeopardise the habitat of Chilika’s nearly one million avian visitors which come from the Arctic and Eurasian regions.
- Operation of seaplane and water aerodrome at Chilika is likely to cause irrevocable damage to the ecosystem and livelihood of people dependent on it.
- Operation of the seaplane would be hazardous to about one million birds including the migratory species that throng the lake during winter. There is every possibility that these birds might either be sucked in the engines or get hit by the planes and pose a threat to the passengers. Besides, the seaplane would distract the endangered Irrawaddy dolphins.
- The cost involved in the operation of seaplane seems to outweigh the benefits likely to accrue from it. Besides, legally the project is not feasible.
- The AAI has decided to shelve the project following stiff opposition from environmentalists and the CDA.

Chilka lake
- It is largest coastal lagoon or brackish water lake in India and Asia and second largest lagoon in the world (after The New Caledonian barrier reef in New Caledonia).
- It spread over the Puri, Khurda and Ganjam districts of Odisha state on the east coast of India, at the mouth of the Daya River, flowing into the Bay of Bengal.
- It is the largest wintering ground for migratory birds on the Indian sub-continent. These birds travel great distances; migratory birds probably follow much longer routes than the straight lines, possibly up to 12,000 km, to reach Chilka Lake.
- Chilka Lake is designated as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.
- The Irrawaddy dolphin has been found in Chilka lake. It is a euryhaline species of oceanic dolphin found in discontinuous subpopulations near sea coasts and in estuaries and rivers in parts of the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia.
- Irrawaddy dolphins are classified as ‘Vulnerable’ in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

15. COOPERATION IN AGRICULTURE

Why in news?
India and Egypt will work together in the field of agriculture and allied sectors. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved signing of a MoU between the two countries.
Important points

- The MoU provides for cooperation in areas of agricultural crops (especially, wheat and maize), agricultural biotechnology, nanotechnology, irrigation and water management technology, etc. and other related areas of interest that are mutually agreed upon by both parties.
- Cooperation will also be effected through exchange of research scientists and experts; exchange of agricultural information and scientific publications (journals, books, bulletins, statistical data on agriculture and allied sectors); exchange of germplasm & agriculture technology; and conducting joint seminars, workshops, symposiums and other similar activities.
- Under the MoU, a Joint Working Group (JWG) will be formed to enhance cooperation on matters of mutual interest including consultations on bilateral issues. The JWG will meet at least annually in the initial two years, alternately in India and Egypt to formulate joint work programs, facilitation and consultation, including making additional supplementary engagements with regard to specific issues.

Note:

- Agriculture is a most important component of the Egyptian economy, contributing up to 14.5 percent of GDP and 28 percent of all jobs.
- It employs almost 45 percent of all women in the workforce. USAID’s program is focused on Upper Egypt, where over 55 percent of employment is agriculture-related.
- The agriculture sector in Egypt is dominated by small farms that use traditional practices that do not comply with internationally recognized standards. For example, farmers tend to overuse and misuse agricultural chemicals and use outdated technologies and tools for land preparation, irrigation and harvesting. As a result, farmers experience increased production costs, reduced yields, decreased soil fertility, and limited marketing opportunities. They are further constrained by lack of cold storage infrastructure, transportation systems, and market information.

16. HARYANA GOVT SIGNS MOU WITH INDIAN OIL TO SET UP ETHANOL PLANT

Why in news?
The Haryana government on Monday signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) to set up an ethanol plant in Panipat with an outlay of over Rs 900 crore.

Important points

- The proposed capacity of this ethanol plant will be of producing 100 kilolitres of ethanol per day.
- It will help to manage crop residue and prevent straw burning before upcoming paddy season. 10 cooperative and three private sugar mills in the state will provide raw fuel to this plant.
- There will be regular supply of raw material to this plant as paddy crop residue will be provided as raw material after end of paddy season in October and November and after that sugarcane crop residue will be supplied in cyclic manner.

Bioethanol

- The principle fuel used as a petrol substitute for road transport vehicles is bioethanol.
- Bioethanol fuel is mainly produced by the sugar fermentation process, although it can also be manufactured by the chemical process of reacting ethylene with steam.
- The main sources of sugar required to produce ethanol come from fuel or energy crops. These crops are grown specifically for energy use and include corn, maize and wheat crops,
waste straw, willow and popular trees, sawdust, reed canary grass, cord grasses, jerusalem
artichoke, myscanthus and sorghum plants.

- There is also ongoing research and development into the use of municipal solid wastes to
produce ethanol fuel.

17. SUPREME COURT: DEMOLISH ALL ILLEGAL STRUCTURES IN THE ARAVALLIS

Why in news?
The Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered the Haryana government to demolish any construction
made in Faridabad’s Kant Enclave after August 18, 1992, saying they were built on forest land

What was the issue?
- The area was developed by R Kant & Co after the Haryana government granted exemption
in 1984 for the construction of a film studio and residential complex.
- The permission was later withdrawn as the company failed to comply with terms. In March
1992, the company was allowed to construct, after it signed an agreement with the state
government that it will comply with all the terms, even though the area fell under
ecologically sensitive zone.

About the verdict
- A bench of Justices MB Lokur and Deepak Gupta ordered compensation to those who will
be adversely affected in the process.
- The court has set December 31 as the deadline to clear the land by demolishing the
structures and imposed a Rs 5 crore fine on the company to be deposited within a month
in the Aravali Rehabilitation Fund.
- The court, however, excluded from demolition the structures that were built between April 17,
1984, and August 18, 1992, as these structures were built on the basis of an exemption given to
Kant & Co. by the state’s town planning
department under the Haryana Development and
Regulation of Urban Areas Act, 1975.
- The judges said it is not only the future
generations that have to pay a heavy price for
this environmental degradation but even the
present generation, damage caused is
irreversible.
- It also directed the company to refund the
money invested by people to purchase plots along with an interest of 18% per annum from
the date of investment, and awarded a compensation of Rs 50 lakh to those who have
constructed houses.

Aravali Range
- Aravallis Range literally meaning ‘line of peaks’ running approximately 800 km from
northeast to southwest across states of Rajasthan, Haryana, and Gujarat and Pakistan’s
provinces of Punjab and Sindh
- They are one of the oldest (very old) fold mountains of the world and the oldest in India.
{Fold Mountains – Block Mountains}
- The highest peak is Guru Shikhar in Mount Abu.
18. NITROUS OXIDE EMISSIONS FROM RICE FARMS ARE A CAUSE FOR CONCERN FOR GLOBAL CLIMATE

Why in news?
Rice farming across the world could be responsible for up to twice the level of climate impact relative to what was previously estimated, according to a study conducted in India.

Important points
- Rice is a critical source of nutrition for the world’s rapidly growing population, providing more calories to humans than any other food, researchers said. However, growing rice is also resource-intensive: rice cultivation covers 11 per cent of the Earth’s arable land, consumes one-third of irrigation water.
- According to a global analysis by Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) in the US, methane and nitrous oxide emissions from rice farms could have the same long-term warming impact as about 600 coal plants.
- Rice farming across the world could be responsible for up to twice the level of climate impact relative to what was previously estimated.
- The researchers found an inverse correlation between methane and nitrous oxide emissions from rice farming. Water and organic matter management techniques that reduce methane emissions can increase nitrous oxide emissions.

Solutions
- The researchers found that carefully chosen farming techniques at individual farms reduced net greenhouse gas emissions from rice cultivation by as much as 90 per cent by integrating shallow (mild-intermittent) flooding with co-management of nitrogen and organic matter.
- If all irrigated rice farmers only used the proposed shallow flooding instead of continuous or intense forms of intermittent flooding, estimates in the accompanying analysis shows that the rice farms with irrigation have the potential to reduce their global climate impact by 60 per cent.
- It is crucial because nitrous oxide is a long-lived greenhouse gas that traps several times more heat in the atmosphere than methane over both 20 and 100-year time frames.

19. PROPOSAL TO CREATE WHALE SANCTUARY DEFEATED

Why in news?
A proposal to create a whale sanctuary in the South Atlantic was defeated Tuesday at a meeting in Brazil of the International Whaling Commission, amid a clash between countries that think whales can be hunted sustainably and others that want more conservation measures.

About the proposal
- Environmental groups and conservationists argued that the sanctuary would protect whales from being hunted, trapped in fishing gear or struck by ships.
• The proposal received support from 39 countries but was opposed by 25. That was just a little less than the three-quarters majority needed for approval. Brazil first introduced the proposal in 2001.
• Japan and other nations argued that the sanctuary was not needed because countries are not currently doing commercial whaling in the South Atlantic.
• In addition to Japan, countries opposing the sanctuary included Iceland and Norway. They are pushing for the return of some sustainable whaling and are unlikely to change their vote unless their demand is met.
• The commission banned commercial whaling in the 1980s. Japan is proposing to bring it back this year with catch limits. Japan has hunted whales for hundreds of years as a less costly form of meat.
• sustainable commercial whaling could provide an important food for developing island nations. And, some countries have a cultural and nutritional use for whale meat that should be respected.

International Whaling Commission
• It is an international body set up by the terms of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (Signed in Washington, 1946)
• Aims to provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry
• In 1982 the IWC adopted a moratorium on commercial whaling.
• Japan, Russia etc. oppose this moratorium
• The IWC allows non-zero whaling quotas for aboriginal subsistence and also member nations may issue ‘Scientific Permits’ to their citizens.

What it does?
• Designate specified areas as whale sanctuaries;
• Set limits on the numbers and size of whales which may be taken;
• Prescribe open and closed seasons and areas for whaling; and
• Prohibit the capture of suckling calves and female whales accompanied by calves.

20. CPCB REPORT ABOUT WATER POLLUTION

Why in news?
The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has released a report on the extent of pollution in rivers in India.

Highlights of the report
• The number of polluted stretches of the country’s rivers has increased to 351 from 302 two years ago, and the number of critically polluted stretches — where water quality indicators are the poorest — has gone up to 45 from 34,
• While the ₹20,000 crore clean-up of the Ganga may be the most visible of the government’s efforts to tackle pollution, the CPCB says several of the river’s stretches — in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh — are actually far less polluted than many rivers in Maharashtra, Assam and Gujarat. These three States account for 117 of the 351 polluted river stretches.
• Based on the recommendations of the National Green Tribunal, the CPCB last month apprised the States of the extent of pollution in their rivers.

Graded scale
• The CPCB, since the 1990s, has a programme to monitor the quality of rivers primarily by measuring BOD, which is a proxy for organic pollution — the higher it is, the worse the
river. The health of a river and the efficacy of water treatment measures by the States and municipal bodies are classified depending on BOD, with a BOD greater than or equal to 30 mg/l termed ‘priority 1,’ while that between 3.1-6 mg/l is ‘priority 5.’

- The CPCB considers a BOD less than 3 mg/l an indicator of a healthy river.
- In its 2015 report, the CPCB identified 302 polluted stretches on 275 rivers, spanning 28 States and six Union Territories.
- Currently, the CPCB has 1822 monitoring stations on rivers and 473 on lakes/ponds/tanks.

Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)

- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) of India is a statutory organisation under the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF).
- It was established in 1974 under the Water (Prevention and Control of pollution) Act, 1974. CPCB is also entrusted with the powers and functions under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.
- It is the apex organisation in country in the field of pollution control, as a technical wing of MoEF. The board is led by its chairman, who is nominated by the Central Government.

BOD

Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD, also called Biological Oxygen Demand) is the amount of dissolved oxygen needed (i.e. demanded) by aerobic biological organisms to break down organic material present in a given water sample at certain temperature over a specific time period.

21. INDIA COOLING ACTION PLAN (ICAP)

Why in news?

Union Environment Minister released a draft India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP) during World Ozone Day celebrations.

India is the first country in the world which has come up with a document to address the cooling requirements across sectors and lays down actions which can help reduce such demand.

Need for ICAP

- The many high-temperature cities in India are only set to get hotter in the coming future.
- The requirement for cooling is thus being recognised as key to health and well-being.
- The ICAP comes as an effort to assess this requirement and plan ahead.
- The draft by the MoEF Ozone Cell provides a 20-year perspective, with projections for cooling needs in 2037-38.
- It aims to provide sustainable cooling while keeping in mind, the need to protect the ozone layer from substances that can deplete it

India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP)

India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP) aims to assess the cooling requirements and the associated refrigerant demand and energy use across sectors in next 20 years. The plan includes developing a research and development innovation ecosystem for indigenous development of alternative technologies.

MoEFCC sets following goals under ICAP draft:

- Reduction of cooling demand across sectors by 20 per cent to 25 per cent by the year 2037-38
- Reduction of refrigerant demand by 25 per cent to 30 per cent by the year 2037-38
- Reduction of cooling energy requirements by 25 per cent to 40 %by the year 2037-38
- Training and certification of 100,000 servicing sector technicians by the year 2022-23, in synergy with Skill India Mission
India's commitments

- Refrigerants used for cooling are regulated under the Montreal Protocol.
- It regulates on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and India is a signatory to it.
- In 2016, the Kigali Amendment to the Protocol was made.
- India and few other developing countries agreed to phase down hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) by 85% of their 2024-26 levels by 2047.
- HFCs are commonly used in air-conditioners and as refrigerants.

22. THE KERALA VETERINARY AND ANIMAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY (KVASU) STARTED FLIGHTLESS BIRDS STUDY CENTER.

Why in news?
With an aim to study physiology and artificial incubations of flightless birds, The Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) has started research center

- Flightless birds like Ostrich, Rhea, and Emu will be studied closely in the center. The center located at Pookode in Wayanad District is the first flightless bird research center in the state.
- Ostrich and other such flightless birds are transported from different parts of the country to the center.
- It has been set up at the instructional livestock farm of the university at a cost of Rs. 6.50 lakh with facilities such as separate shelters for the flightless birds and an artificial incubation centre to hatch their eggs.
- Study of Flightless birds are compelling, they have lost their ability to fly in the course of evolution and, the largest flightless bird is Ostrich. It produces the largest egg. Flightless birds have smaller wing bones as compared to flying birds.

23. LIONS DIED IN GIR FOREST.

Why in news?
Around 11 lions died within a week in Dalkhania range of Gir forest in Amreli district of Gujarat. It has been eight lions died owing to infections, one due to food poisoning and three due to infighting. Upon seeing the carcasses of the 11 dead lions in Gujarat’s Gir forest, the state government has ordered to conduct an inquiry.

Gir National Park & Wildlife Sanctuary

- Gir National Park & Wildlife Sanctuary is the last shelter to the surviving population of the Asiatic Lion in the wild.
- The park is located at 43 km (27 mi) north-east of Somnath, 65 km (40 mi) south-east of Junagadh and 60 km (37 mi) south-west of Amreli.
- The Government declared a big extent of Sasan Gir as wildlife sanctuary on 18th September, 1965 in order to conserve the Asiatic Lion.
Sasan Gir as wildlife sanctuary scattered in an area of 1412 square kilometers out of which 258 Km covers the core area of the National Park.

The forest area of Gir was the hunting grounds of the Nawabs of Junagadh. But when the population of lions declined drastically then Nawab Sir Muhammad Rasul Khanji Babi declared Gir as a "protected" area in 1900.

The 14th Asiatic Lion Census 2015 was conducted in May 2015. In 2015, the population has been 523 (27% up compared to previous census in 2010). The population was 411 in 2010 and 359 in 2005.

The carnivores group mainly comprises Asiatic lions, Indian leopards, Indian cobras, jungle cats, striped hyenas, golden jackals, Indian mongoose, Indian palm civets, and honey badgers.

Desert cats and rusty-spotted cats also seen but rarely.

The main herbivores of Gir are chital, Nilgai, Sambar, four-horned antelope, Chinkara and wild boar.

Blackbucks from the surrounding area are sometimes seen in the sanctuary.

Gir has a large population of marsh crocodile, which is among the 40 species of reptiles and amphibians recorded in the sanctuary.

24. HORNBILL WATCH INITIATIVE

The Hornbill Watch initiative (www.hornbills.in) is an interactive web interface that allows a person to report on hornbills anywhere in India. People can record the observation of a live hornbill, note its call or report a dead, hunted or captive bird.

About hornbill
- Hornbills are called the farmers of the forest
- It plays a very important role in the dispersal of seeds that grow into trees
- Hornbills are relatively large birds that are easily recognizable because of their large size, beaks and distinctive calls, and even untrained eyes can identify them with relative ease
- There are nine hornbill species in India, but experts say that information on hornbill distribution in the country is not very clear.
- Between June 2014 and February 2017, the website, Hornbill Watch, had received 938 records from 430 contributors across 26 States including the national capital and two Union Territories.
- “States from where the most sightings were recorded are Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh,” the paper states. Hornbills were reported from across 70 protected areas in the country. While 41% of the observations were made within protected areas, 59% were made outside.

25. WORLD WILDLIFE FOUNDATION’S (WWF) ‘TX2’ PROGRAMME

Why in news?
On the occasion of National Conservation Day today, Nepal announced that there are now an estimated 235 wild tigers in the country, nearly doubling the baseline of around 121 tigers in 2009

Highlights
- If these trends continue, Nepal could become the first country to double its national tiger population since the ambitious TX2 goal – to double the world’s wild tiger population by 2022 – was set at the St. Petersburg Tiger Summit in 2010.
- Nepal conducted its national tiger survey between November 2017 and April 2018 in the transboundary Terai Arc Landscape (TAL), a vast area of diverse ecosystems shared with...
India. Camera traps and occupancy surveys were used to estimate tiger occupancy and abundance, while line transect surveys were used to derive prey density. The last tiger survey in 2013 had estimated the tiger population at 198.

- In May this year, Nepal celebrated a new benchmark with the achievement of 365 days of zero poaching of rhinos on five occasions between 2011 and 2018
- Nepal was the first country to achieve global standards in managing tiger conservation areas, an accreditation scheme governed by the Conservation Assured Tiger Standards (CA|TS)

**Tx2 programme**

- It was launched by World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) at the 2010 St Petersburg Tiger Summit held in Russia. Under it, 13 tiger range countries had agreed to double the world tiger population by 2022, which is the year of tiger in Chinese calendar. These 13 countries are Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam.
- It aims at driving political momentum to ensure tigers remain top priority for world leaders, professionalise wildlife protection by training rangers, developing conservation standards (CA|TS) and technology (SMART) to achieve zero poaching, tackle illegal wildlife trade through partnership with TRAFFIC, focus efforts in key tiger landscapes and ensure there is space for both tigers and people in future.

### 26. WAYU

**Why in news?**

Union Minister for Science & Technology and Earth Sciences and Environment, Forest and Climate change, inaugurated air pollution control device WAYU (Wind Augmentation Purifying Unit) for traffic junctions at ITO intersection and Mukarba Chowk in Delhi.

**Air pollution in India**

- Air pollution is a grieve issue in India. WHO survey had declared India’s capital Delhi as world’s most polluted city. Delhi is two times more polluted than Beijing. Rests of the metropolitan cities are not far from high levels of pollutants in air. The survey had also revealed that India claims 10 of the world’s most polluted cities.
- Unfortunately, another report confirms that 44 lakh children in Delhi are suffering from various respiratory and lung disorders in one way or other due to inhalation of high level of pollutants with air.

**About the device**

- The newly invented device is named WAYU or Wind Augmentation and Air Purifying Unit that is developed in collaboration with IIT-Bomby, National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) and Maharashtra Pollution Control Board.
- In WAYU, the air passes through a thermal oxidizer, which heats up the air, breaking the carbon monoxide and Volatile Organic compounds (VOCs) into carbon dioxide. We can run this device on solar energy and the next set of tests will be done using only solar power.
- The prototype device that has been indigenously developed has the capacity to purify air in an area of 500-meter square. Dr. Vardhan further added that the device consumes only half a unit of electricity for 10 hours of running and has a maintenance cost of only Rs. 1500 per month.
- The device has filters for Particulate Matter removal and activated carbon (charcoal) and UV lamps for poisonous gases removal such as VOCs and Carbon Monoxide.
- The device has one fan and filter for sucking and removing Particulate Matter.
27. REPORT BY RAMSAR CONVENTION

Why in news?
Ramsar convention has recently issued its first-ever global report on the state of World’s wetlands. The report is titled as "Global Wetland Outlook".

About the report
• The 88-page report found that around 35 percent of wetlands — which include lakes, rivers, marshes and peatlands, as well as coastal and marine areas like lagoons, mangroves and coral reefs — were lost between 1970 and 2015.
• Today, wetlands cover more than 12 million square kilometres, the report said, warning that the annual rates of loss had accelerated since 2000.
• We are losing wetlands three times faster than forests
• While the world has been increasingly focused on global warming and its impact on oceans and forests, the Ramsar Convention said wetlands remain "dangerously undervalued"
• Directly or indirectly, they provide almost all of the world's consumption of freshwater and more than 40 percent of all species live and breed in wetlands.
• Animals and plants who call wetlands home are particularly vulnerable, with a quarter at risk of extinction, the report said.
• The Ramsar Convention stressed that wetlands are essential to reining in climate change, pointing out that peatlands store twice as much carbon as the world's forests, even though they cover just three percent of all land surface.

Ramsar convention
• Ramsar convention adopted in the year 1971 that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.
• This intergovernmental treaty came into force in 1975.
• It has been ratified by most of the world’s nations, including the U.S., China and India.
• It has designated more than 2,300 sites of international importance.
• In India, The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is the nodal Ministry for wetlands conservation.

28. SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE TOWARDS AFFORDABLE TRANSPORTATION (SATAT)

Why in news?
Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas has launched Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) aimed at providing sustainable alternative towards affordable transportation. The initiative was launched with PSU Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs i.e. IOC, BPCL and HPCL).
Government is keen to set up 5000 CBG plants in the next 5 years, and for this purpose, production offtake guarantee is being given for such plants.

The important features and highlights of sustainable alternative towards affordable transportation initiative is given as follows: -
• To give a boost to the availability of more affordable transport fuels as CBG is a green fuel.
• Ensuring better usage of agriculture residue, cattle dung and municipal solid waste.
• SATAT initiative will provide an additional revenue source to the farmers.
• Increased dependency on compressed bio-gas (CBG) would result in bringing down dependency on crude oil imports.
• Moreover, this initiative would also help in realizing the vision of increased farmers income, generation of employment in rural areas and entrepreneurship.
Bio-Gas

- Bio-gas is produced naturally through a process of anaerobic decomposition from waste / bio-mass sources.
- Bio-mass sources include agriculture residue, cattle dung, sugarcane press mud, municipal solid waste, sewage treatment plant waste, etc.
- After purification, it is compressed and called Compressed Bio-Gas, which has pure methane content of over 95%.
- CBG is exactly similar to the commercially available natural gas in its composition and energy potential.
- CBG’s calorific value (~52,000 KJ/kg) and other properties are similar to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG).
- CBG can be used as an alternative, renewable automotive fuel.
1. HOPE PROBE

Why in news?
UAE is preparing for its Mars mission- HOPE. In July 2014, the UAE leadership announced the launch of the Emirates Mars Mission project by the President of the UAE.

HOPE:
- The Hope Mars Mission or Emirates Mars Mission is a space exploration probe mission to Mars, set to be launched by the United Arab Emirates in 2020. Upon launch, it will become the first mission to Mars by any Arab or Muslim country.
- Under the Emirates Mars Mission, the United Arab Emirates will send an uncrewed probe to Mars by 2020. The probe has been named Hope probe or 'Al-Amal'. The spacecraft is set to arrive at Mars in 2021 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the founding of the UAE.
- The rocket must blast off from Earth during a brief “launch window” in July 2020. This is because the Earth and Mars orbit the Sun at different rates, and are aligned at their closest point only once every two years. If any part of the mission is not ready in time or fails at the last minute, there may be no second chance.

Objectives of the Probe Voyage:
The Emirates Mars Mission project will answer scientific questions that have long puzzled scientists:
- Questions about the Red Planet, which scientists have not been able to explain before because of the lack of data and information.
- It will work on drawing a clear and comprehensive picture of the Martian climate and the causes of the corrosion of its surface that has made it impossible for water to exist on the planet.
- The project will also provide insights about the weather on the Red Planet. It will observe weather phenomena such as dust storms and changes in temperature and how the atmosphere interacts with topography, from the highest volcano peaks to ice sheets to the vast deserts and the deepest canyons.
2. DRUG RESISTANT SUPER BUGS

Why in news?
Australian scientists have discovered a new superbug spreading in hospitals called Staphylococcus epidermidis that is resistant to all known antibiotics and can lead to severe infections or even death.

Key facts
- The bacteria, known as Staphylococcus epidermidis, is related to the better-known and more deadly MRSA superbug.
- It’s found naturally on human skin and most commonly infects the elderly or patients who have had prosthetic materials implanted, such as catheters and joint replacements.
- It’s usually in patients who already are very sick in hospital. It's quite hard to eradicate and the infections can be severe
- Strains of the bug make a small change in its DNA which leads to resistance to two of the most common antibiotics showed the need for better understanding of how infections spread.
- Some hospital superbugs are growing increasingly tolerant to alcohol-based disinfectants found in handwashes and sanitisers used on hospital wards.

What is a super bug?
"Superbugs" is a term used to describe strains of bacteria that are resistant to the majority of antibiotics commonly used today. Resistant bacteria that cause pneumonia, urinary tract infections and skin infections are just a few of the dangers.

Why is this a cause for concern?
Antibiotic resistance is rising to dangerously high levels in all parts of the world. More than 50 per cent of some groups of bacteria are resistant to almost all the antibiotics. Soon we may not be able to treat even common infections.

How can we prevent the spread of superbugs?
- Slow the spread of the superbugs by taking antibiotics properly and only when needed.
- Only use antibiotics when prescribed by a certified health professional.
- Never demand antibiotics if your health worker says you don’t need them.
- Never share or use leftover antibiotics.
- Physicians should prescribe and dispense antibiotics only when they are needed, according to current guidelines.

3. HEALTH MINISTRY COMES OUT WITH DRAFT RULES ON SALE OF DRUGS BY E-PHARMACY

Why in news?
The Union Health Ministry has come out with draft rules on sale of drugs by e-pharmacies with an aim to regulate online sale of medicines across India and provide patients accessibility to genuine drugs from authentic online portals.

Objective:
Ensure accessibility and availability of drugs to the people across India.

Key Highlights:
- The rules state that any person who intends to conduct the business of e-pharmacy shall apply for the grant of registration to the Central Licensing Authority through the online portal of the Central Government. The application of registration of e-pharmacy will have to be accompanied by a sum of Rs 50,000.
• The e-pharmacy holder will have to adhere to provisions of the Information Technology Act.
• The rules also propose that those who want to do online pharmacy will have to register with the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO), the country's apex drug regulator and central licensing authority.
• Sale of tranquillisers, psychotropic drugs, narcotics and habit forming drugs have been prohibited through these portals.
• The rules also state that the premises from where the e-pharmacy business is conducted shall be inspected, every two years, by a team of officers authorised by the Central Licensing Authority, with or without the experts in the relevant field or the officers authorised by the concerned State Licensing Authority.
• The rules also state that the registration issued to any person for e-pharmacy will remain valid for a period of three years from the date of its issuance and a renewal of registration will have to be done in case they want to continue.
• No e-pharmacy shall advertise any drug on radio or television or internet or print or any other media for any purpose adding that there are provisions of suspension and cancellation of registration of the e-portal if the latter contravenes any provision of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
• It would binding on the e-pharmacies to deliver the drugs in the specific time that will be told to the patient during the time of purchase while the e-portals are mandatorily required to have 24/7 call centres.

4. MINI SPACE ELEVATOR

Why in news?
A Japanese team has developed a “space elevator” and will conduct a first trial in September, blasting off a miniature version on satellites to test the technology.

Key facts:
• The test equipment, produced by researchers at Shizuoka University, will hitch a ride on an H-2B rocket being launched by Japan’s space agency from southern island of Tanegashima next week.
• The test involves a miniature elevator stand-in—a box just six centimetres (2.4 inches) long, three centimetres wide, and three centimetres high.
• If all goes well, it will provide proof of concept by moving along a 10-metre cable suspended in space between two mini satellites that will keep it taut.
• The mini-elevator will travel along the cable from a container in one of the satellites.
• It may use carbon nanotube technology, which is more than 20 times stronger than steel, to build a lift shaft 96,000 kilometres (roughly 60,000 miles) above the Earth.

How the idea came into being?
• The idea was first proposed in 1895 by Russian scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky after he saw the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and was revisited nearly a century later in a novel by Arthur C. Clarke. But technical barriers have always kept plans stuck at the conceptual stage.
• Japanese construction firm Obayashi, which is collaborating with the Shizuoka university project, is also exploring other ways to build its own space elevator to put tourists in space in 2050.
5. THE NEED FOR GROWTH IN INDIAN BIOSIMILARS

Why in news?
An alarming spike across developing countries in the prevalence of non-communicable diseases which emphasises the need for growth in Indian biosimilars

What are biosimilars?
A biosimilar (also known as follow-on biologic or subsequent entry biologic) is a biologic medical product that is almost an identical copy of an original product that is manufactured by a different company.

What are biologics?
A biopharmaceutical, also known as a biologic(al) medical product, biological, or biologic, is any pharmaceutical drug product manufactured in, extracted from, or semisynthesized from biological sources.

Need for biosimilars:
- The growth in the biosimilars market is welcome from a human development standpoint because they are more affordable than biologics, the high cost of which often puts them out of reach of many patients
- Promoting the production of complex generics and biosimilars can have a positive development impact given how targeted they are toward treating non-communicable diseases such as cancer, asthma, and arthritis
- An alarming spike is being seen across developing countries in the prevalence of non-communicable diseases. For example, diabetes is fast becoming an epidemic in developing countries, with rates rapidly catching up with those of the developed world

Way ahead:
It is increasingly clear that the segment of the pharmaceutical market where demand will grow the fastest in the coming years is products that treat non-communicable diseases. Government should therefore, strive to promote strong, indigenous producers of complex generics and biosimilars as this has enormous potential to improve public health in emerging markets.

6. TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVES FOR COFFEE STAKEHOLDERS

Why in news?
Minister for Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation, launched Coffee Connect - India coffee field force app and Coffee KrishiTharanga - digital mobile extension services for coffee stakeholders

Coffee Connect:
- The mobile app Coffee Connect has been developed to ease the work of field functionaries and to improve the work efficiency.
- This application provides solution by harnessing the power of mobility comprising the latest technology in easing the whole process of the field activities like digitization of Coffee Growers & Estates with Geo Tagging, collecting the Plantation details.
- It will also help in transparency in the activities of the extension officers and officials, transparency in subsidy disbursement and real time report generation.
Coffee Krishi Tharanga
- The Coffee Krishi Tharanga services are aimed at providing customized information and services to increase productivity, profitability, and environmental sustainability.
- The service is pilot tested in the Chikmagalur and Hassan districts of Karnataka State covering 30,000 farmers during the first year and will be extended to remaining growers in a phased manner.
- NABARD has partly funded the Pilot project.
- The solution will help in to reach maximum growers in limited period, efficient, timely, customised advisory, improve the efficiency through digitization and leverage existing mobile reach for wider delivery of improved technology.

Coffee in India:
- The saga of Indian coffee began on a humble note, with planting of ‘Seven seeds’ of ‘Mocha’ during 1600 AD by the legendary holy saint Baba Budan, in the courtyard of his hermitage on ‘Baba Budan Giris’ in Karnataka. For quite a considerable period, the plants remained as a garden curiosity and spread slowly as back yard plantings.
- It was during 18th century that the commercial plantations of coffee were started, thanks to the success of British entrepreneurs in conquering the hostile forest terrain in south India. Since then, Indian coffee industry has made rapid strides and earned a distinct identity in the coffee map of the world.
- Coffee in India is grown under a canopy of thick natural shade in ecologically sensitive regions of the Western and Eastern Ghats. This is one of the 25 biodiversity hotspots of the world. Coffee contributes significantly to sustain the unique bio-diversity of the region and is also responsible for the socio-economic development in the remote, hilly areas.
- The two main varieties of coffee viz., Arabica and Robusta are grown in India:
  - Arabica is mild coffee, but the beans being more aromatic, it has higher market value compared to Robusta beans.
  - On the other hand Robusta has more strength and is, therefore, used in making various blends.
  - Arabica is grown in higher altitudes than Robusta.
  - The cool and equable temperature, ranging between 15 degree Celsius to 25 degree Celsius, is suitable for Arabica while for Robusta, hot and humid climate with temperature ranging from 20 degree Celsius to 30 degree Celsius is suitable.
  - Arabica requires more care & nurture and is more suitable for large holdings whereas Robusta is suitable irrespective of size of the farm.
  - The harvest of Arabica takes place between November to January, while for Robusta it is December to February.
  - Arabica is susceptible to pests & diseases such as White Stem Borer, leaf rust etc., and requires more shade than Robusta.

7. CASSINI SPACE CRAFT

Why in news?
Using data from NASA's Cassini spacecraft, scientists have spotted a surprising feature emerging at Saturn's northern pole as it nears summertime — a warming, high-altitude jet stream with a hexagonal shape.

Key facts:
- The vortex is akin to the famous hexagon seen deeper down in Saturn's clouds
• The results suggest that the lower-altitude hexagon may influence what happens above, and that it could be a towering structure hundreds of miles in height.
• The edges of this newly-found vortex appear to be hexagonal, precisely matching a famous and bizarre hexagonal cloud pattern seen deeper down in Saturn's atmosphere.
• The spacecraft spied a broad, warm high-altitude vortex at Saturn's southern pole but none at the planet's northern pole.
• The new study reports the first glimpses of a northern polar vortex forming high in the atmosphere, as Saturn's northern hemisphere approached summertime.
• This warm vortex sits hundreds of miles above the clouds, in the stratosphere.

Cassini Huygens mission:
The Cassini–Huygens mission, commonly called Cassini, was a collaboration between NASA, the European Space Agency (ESA), and the Italian Space Agency (ASI) to send a probe to study the planet Saturn and its system, including its rings and natural satellites. The Flagship-class robotic spacecraft comprised both NASA's Cassini probe, and ESA's Huygens lander which landed on Saturn's largest moon, Titan.

Objectives of the mission:
• Determining the three-dimensional structure and dynamic behavior of the rings of Saturn.
• Determining the composition of the satellite surfaces and the geological history of each object.
• Determining the nature and origin of the dark material on Iapetus's leading hemisphere.
• Measuring the three-dimensional structure and dynamic behavior of the magnetosphere.
• Studying the dynamic behavior of Saturn's atmosphere at cloud level.
• Studying the time variability of Titan's clouds and hazes.
• Characterizing Titan's surface on a regional scale.

8. APSARA-U REACTOR

Why in news?
Apsara, the first research reactor in Asia that worked nearly five decades before shutting down in 2009, is now operational as 'Apsara-U' on Trombay campus of Maharashtra.

About Apsara Reactor:
• Apsara is the oldest of India's research reactors. The reactor was designed by the Bhabha Atomic Research Center (BARC) and built with assistance from the United Kingdom (which also provided the initial fuel supply consisting of 80 percent enriched uranium). Apsara first went critical on 4 August 1956.
• Apsara is a light water swimming pool-type reactor with a maximum power output of one megawatt thermal (MWT). The reactor burns enriched uranium in the form of aluminum alloyed curved plates.
• Fuel for the reactor is supplied under contract from the United Kingdom, provided that the fuel is safeguarded. The reactor itself is not under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.
• The Apsara reactor is utilized for various experiments including neutron activation analysis, radiation damage studies, forensic research, neutron radiography, and shielding experiments.
• The reactor is also used for research and the production of radioisotopes. After nearly half a century of operation, BARC plans to refurbish and modify the aging reactor to test a new indigenous design of a 5-10MWt research reactor.

**About Apsara U reactor:**
• The upgraded version, like its ancestor, is indigenously made.
• It uses plate type dispersion fuel elements made of Low Enriched Uranium (LEU). It will help to increase indigenous production of radio-isotopes for medical application by about 50% mainly due to higher neutron flux.
• It will also be extensively used for research in nuclear physics, material science and radiation shielding.
• The radioisotopes produced by it will be also used in the field food preservation, agriculture, and other industries apart from medicine for diagnosis and therapy

9. MODEL INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR TRANSFORMATIVE AI (ICTAI)

**Why in news?**
NITI Aayog, Intel, and Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) announced on 7th September that they are collaborating to set up a Model International Center for Transformative Artificial Intelligence (ICTAI) towards developing and deploying AI-led application-based research projects.

This initiative is part of NITI Aayog’s ‘National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence’ Discussion Paper that focuses on establishing ICTAI in the country through private sector collaboration.

**Aim:**
• To conduct advanced research to incubate AI-led solutions in three important areas – healthcare, agriculture and smart mobility – by bringing together the expertise of Intel and TIFR.
• It also aims to experiment, discover and establish best practices in the domains of ICTAI governance, fundamental research, physical infrastructure, compute and service infrastructure needs, and talent acquisition.

**ICTAI key features:**
• Through this collaborative effort, the model ICTAI is chartered to develop AI foundational frameworks, tools and assets, including curated datasets and unique AI algorithms. The intent is to develop standards and support policy development related to information technology such as data-storage, information security, privacy, and ethics for data capture and use.
• The model Centre also plans to develop AI foundational technologies to promote applied research that can scale for national impact and will lead to the creation of a vibrant and self-sustaining ecosystem.
• Another key area of its focus will be collaboration with industry leaders, startups, and AI services and product companies to productize technologies and IP that are developed at the model ICTAI. And finally, the goal is to support skilling and talent development for world-class AI talent.

10. INDIA’S FIRST MISSILE TRACKING SHIP IS READY TO HIT HIGH SEAS

**Why in news?**
Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL) is gearing up to undertake sea trials of India’s first missile tracking ship by the first week of October.
VC 11184:
- The VC 11184 is the first of its kind for the Indian Navy as a part of the country’s strategic weapons programme aimed at strengthening the country’s defences. It will also be the first ship to be a dedicated resource for Phase-II of India’s ballistic missile defence. The name may sound a little bland, but the ship will be renamed once it’s officially inducted into the Indian navy.
- The VC11184 is being built for the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO). This technical intelligence agency works directly with the Prime Minister’s Office and the National Security Advisor.
- Powered by two diesel engines, the VC11184 can carry a crew of 300 and has a large deck which can accommodate a helicopter landing. Basin trials were already successful a while ago. The ship’s also equipped with hi-tech gadgets and communication equipment.
- The objectives of the VC11184 are two-fold. One, track missiles using the two sensors on-board, the X-Band AESA primary radar and S-Band AESA secondary radar. And, two, gather electronic intelligence.
- Between those two tasks, the VC11184 will be the most advanced tracking and surveillance ship in India’s arsenal.

11. NASA’S ORION SPACECRAFT
Why in news?
NASA successfully completed the final test to qualify Orion spacecraft’s parachute system for flights with astronauts, in an important milestone on the path to send humans on missions to the Moon and beyond.

- The system has 11 parachutes, a series of cannon-like mortars, pyrotechnic bolt cutters, and more than 30 miles of Kevlar lines attaching the top of the spacecraft to the 36,000 square feet of parachute canopy material. In about 10 minutes of descent through Earth’s atmosphere, everything must deploy in precise sequence to slow Orion and its crew from about 300 miles per hour to a relatively gentle 20 mph for splashdown in the Pacific Ocean, NASA said.
- The parachute system is the only system that must assemble itself mid-air and must be able to keep the crew safe in several failure scenarios, such as mortar failures that prevent a single parachute type to deploy, or conditions that cause some of the parachute textile components to fail,

Orion:
The Orion Multi-Purpose Crew Vehicle (Orion MPCV) is an American-European interplanetary spacecraft intended to carry a crew of four astronauts to destinations at or beyond low Earth orbit (LEO). It is built together with the ESA

12. INMAS ANTI NUCLEAR MEDICAL KIT
Why in news?
Scientists of Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS) have succeeded in preparing the first anti-nuclei medical kit in the country. It will be treated by the severely injured people due to nuclear war or radioactive radiation.
According to INMAS, the kit has been developed for the armed, paramilitary and police forces only as they are the first ones likely to get exposed to radiation -- be it during nuclear, chemical and biomedical (NCB) warfare or a rescue operation after a nuclear accident.

**Contents in the kit:**
- The contents include an advanced form of Prussian blue tablets, highly effective in incorporating Radio Cesium (Cs-137) and Radio Thallium, among the most feared radioisotopes in nuclear bombs that destroy human body cells.
- The tablet provides 100 per cent absorption from the gut and other portals of entry to the human body, according to documents inside the medical kit accessed by PTI.
- The kit also has an Ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA) injection that traps uranium in the guts and blood of victims during a nuclear accident or warfare.
- The kit also has Ca-EDTA Respiratory Fluid, which is the inhalation formula for chelation, or grabbing, of heavy metals and radioactive elements deposited in lungs through inhalation at nuclear accident sites. When EDTA is injected into the veins, it “grabs” heavy metals and minerals and removes them from the body.
- The kit also has a radioactive urine/biofluid collector which is cost-effective, easy to store and can safely dispose of the urine of a person affected by radiation.
- The kit has anti-gamma ray skin ointment that protects and heals the radiation damage on the skin.
- Another medicine in the form of a tablet is Indranil 150 mg. It is being introduced as a reserve emergency drug for services, rescue workers and places where high acute exposures are expected and lives will be at stake.

**INMAS:**
- Institute of Nuclear Medicine & Allied Sciences (INMAS) is a laboratory of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- Located in New Delhi, it is involved in Nuclear medicine research and responding to nuclear accidents and explosions.
- The department of nuclear medicine under the institute offers a two-year diploma in radiation medicine since 1968, making it the first formal training program in nuclear medicine in the world.

**Significance:**
- The medicine reduces the body burden of radioactivity by 30-40 per cent in controlled conditions and is highly useful for the rescue teams and victims after a nuclear accident.
- Drugs in the medical kit are ‘Made in India’, without any foreign counterpart and come with the tag of cost-effective and industrial networking.
- It’s an alternative to kits that were till now being procured from advanced nations such as the US and Russia at much higher prices.

13. **2 UK SATELLITES LAUNCHED BY ISRO**

**Why in news?**
India successfully put into orbit two British earth observation satellites, NovaSAR and S1-4, in copy book style.
- Two satellites aboard the Indian rocket – Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) – belonged to Surrey Satellite Technologies Ltd (SSTL), UK.
• The satellites were put into sun synchronous orbit under commercial arrangement with Antrix Corp Ltd, the commercial arm of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), the Indian space agency. The total lift off weight of the two satellites was 889 kg.

**About the satellites:**
• NovaSAR weighing 445 kg is a S-Band Synthetic Aperture Radar satellite intended for forest mapping, land use and ice cover monitoring, flood and disaster monitoring.
• S1-4 weighing 444 kg is a high resolution Optical Earth Observation Satellite, used for surveying resources, environment monitoring, urban management and for disaster monitoring.

14. WORLD’S FIRST HYDROGEN TRAIN

**Why in news?**
The world’s first hydrogen-powered trains have begun running in Germany. The new trains will run 100-kilometer trips and can travel up to 140 kilometers an hour.

**About the train:**
• A French railroad company called Alstom built the two trains. Teams in Germany and France cooperated on the project, which was supported by the German government. The new train model, called the Coradia iLint, signals the beginning of efforts in Germany and other nations to move away from pollution-producing diesel trains.
• The Coradia iLint is designed to run on non-electrified train lines with low levels of noise. It uses a process that combines hydrogen and oxygen to produce electrical power. If the system produces more energy than the train needs at that time, it can store the extra energy in batteries. The only emissions are water and steam.
• A single tank of hydrogen can run a Coradia iLint train for about 1,000 kilometers. This is very similar to the distance a diesel-powered train can run on with a single tank.

15. MPATGM

**Why in news?**
India’s Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) conducted the first successful test firing of a new indigenously designed and developed man portable anti-tank guided missile (MPATGM) at the Ahmednagar test range in the western Indian state of Maharashtra.

**MPATGM:**
• The MPATGM is a third-generation anti-tank guided missile (ATGM), which has been under development by DRDO in partnership with Indian defense contractor VEM Technologies Ltd. since 2015. Fitted with a high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT) warhead, the MPATGM reportedly boasts a top attack capability and has a maximum engagement range of about 2.5 kilometer.
• This missile is considered as major boost to Make-in-India initiative. It has strike range of 2.5 km. It weighs around 14.5 kg to maintain man portability. It is capable of being fired from shoulder and can be used during day and night. It has minimum lateral centre and gravity offset.
16. MEDICAL CYCLOTRON FACILITY

Why in news?
India’s largest Cyclotron, a type of particle accelerator that produces radioisotopes, for medical applications i.e. Medical Cyclotron Facility Cyclone-30 Became Operational at Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre (VECC), Kolkata

About Medical Cyclotron Facility:
- The Cyclotron facility became operation after a 30 MeV beam reached the Faraday Cup — a metal cup designed to catch charged particles in vacuum. The beam was then used to produce FDG. In its future stages, the machine will also work on the production of Iodine 123 isotopes, which can help detect thyroid cancer.
- This facility will provide for affordable radio isotopes and related radiopharmaceuticals for the entire country especially, for Eastern India and also have export potential for Germanium-68/Gallium-68 generator for in-situ production of Gallium-68 and Palladium-103 isotopes, used for breast cancer diagnosis and prostate cancer treatment, respectively.
- Cyclone-30 will become the first and only facility in the country to produce Germanium 68 isotopes, which is used in the diagnosis of breast cancer.
- In future production of Palladium 103 isotopes will take place, which is used for the treatment of prostate cancer
- Cyclone-30 commissioning re-emphasises the capability of Indian scientists and engineers to deliver at the highest level of science and technology.

17. DAC APPROVES PROCUREMENT OF EQUIPMENT WORTH RS 9,100 CRORES

Why in news?
The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), accorded approval for the procurement of equipment for the Defence Forces valued at over Rs 9,100 crores.

Highlights:
- Pursuing the goal of indigenisation and self-reliance, the DAC approved procurement of two Regiments of Akash Missile Systems under 'Buy (Indian)' category from M/s BDL. The Missile to be procured is an upgraded version of the previously inducted Akash missiles and will include seeker technology, possess 360 degree coverage and will be of compact configuration with reduced signature. The upgraded Akash Weapon System is operationally critical equipment which will provide protection to vital assets.
- The DAC also accorded approval for progressing Design and Development of Individual Under Water Breathing Apparatus (IUWBA) for T 90 Tanks. Developed by DRDO Lab DEBEL, the IUWBA is used by the crew of Tanks as a safety gear and is required by the Tank crew for emergency escape when negotiating water obstacles while deep fording.
- The DAC also accorded approval for Design and Development of Test Equipment for Guided Weapons System of T 90 Tank. The equipment is being developed by DRDO and will give an indigenous solution to the Test Equipment used for checking the Guided Weapon System of Tank T 90. The equipment earlier procured from foreign OEMs, has been developed indigenously and is in pursuit of the Government’s 'Make in India' initiative.

18. SPATUM SAMPLE TRANSPORTATION PROJECT

Why in news?
A pilot project for utilising services of Department of Post for transport of sputum specimen for TB Diagnosis in Karawal Nagar, Delhi was launched by the Health Ministry
What is sputum?
A mixture of saliva and mucus coughed up from the respiratory tract, typically as a result of infection or other disease and often examined microscopically to aid medical diagnosis.

Relevance of such a project:
- A significant number of TB patients cannot get their sputum tested because the specimen due to non-availability of specimen transport mechanisms. If a proper transport mechanism for collected specimen is in place, it spares the patients from travelling to the laboratory.
- Prompt transport of specimen followed by efficacious testing will enable appropriate management of tuberculosis patients and reduced disease transmission.

Other launches:
Web-based application of Nikshay Version 2.0, for monitoring of TB patients under the Revised National Tuberculosis Programme (RNTCP) effectively, with better user interface and data structures, was also launched during the event. Its mobile application is also available.

Tuberculosis
TB is disease caused by bacteria “Mycobacterium tuberculosis” that most often affect the lungs. It spreads from person to person through the air. It commonly affects lungs but can also affect other parts of the body. It is the second biggest killer disease worldwide next only to HIV/AIDS. India accounts for about a quarter of the global TB burden. Worldwide India is the country with the highest burden of both TB and MDR (Multi-drug resistant) TB. In March 2017, Government had set aim elimination of TB in India by 2025

19. MISSILE PRAHAR

Why in news?
An indigenously developed surface-to-surface short-range ballistic missile was test-fired from the Odisha coast. The sophisticated missile, christened 'PrahAR', was test launched from launch pad-3 of the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur, near Odisha’s Balasore

About Prahaar:
- Prahaar ("Strike") is an Indian solid-fuel road-mobile tactical ballistic missile developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). Prahaar is expected to replace the Prithvi-I short-range ballistic missile in Indian service.
- ‘PrahAR’ is a contemporary weapon system capable of carrying multiple types of warheads and neutralizing a wide variety of targets.
- It is a solid fuelled short-range missile fitted with inertial navigation system
- It is a quick reaction, all-weather, all-terrain, highly accurate battlefield support tactical weapon system.
- Various tracking radars as well as electro-optic equipment are engaged to track and monitor the missiles trajectory

20. ISRO SETTING UP LAUNCH PAD FOR GAGANYAAN MISSION

Why in news?
The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is setting up a third launch pad at Sriharikota to undertake the Gaganyaan manned space flight programme. In addition, ISRO is scouting for a location on the western sea coast near Gujarat to set up another launch pad for Small Satellite Launch Vehicles (SSLV).
Why a third launch pad?
- ISRO presently has two launch pads, which are already full.
- A third launch pad is being set up for the human space flight.
- ISRO will use its GSLV Mk-III launch vehicle, which can carry the heavier payload of the Gaganyaan, and this will take off from the new launch pad.
- In addition to the third launch pad at Sriharikota, ISRO is also scouting for a new location near Gujarat for the SSLV.

Small Satellite Launch Vehicles (SSLV)
- ISRO is developing the SSLV to offer affordable launch options for smaller satellites through Antrix, the space agency’s commercial arm.
- ISRO currently piggybacks smaller satellites on the PSLV and GSLV along with bigger satellites.
- The SSLV is expected to reduce the launch time as well as cost less to launch small satellites, which are much in demand.

21. Astra BVR Air to Air Missile

Why in news?
Astra, the indigenously developed Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM), was successfully test fired by the Indian Air Force from Su-30 aircraft, from Air Force Station, Kalaikunda

Astra missile:
- Astra (weapon) is an all weather beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation, India. It is the first air-to-air missile developed by India.
- It features mid-course inertial guidance with terminal active radar homing. Astra is designed to be capable of engaging targets at varying range and altitudes allowing for engagement of both short-range targets at a distance of 20 km (12 mi) and long-range targets up to a distance of 80 km (50 mi).
- Astra has been integrated with Indian Air Force’s Sukhoi Su-30MKI and will be integrated with Dassault Mirage 2000 and Mikoyan MiG-29 in the future. Limited series production of Astra missiles began in 2017.

22. NASA Balloon Mission

Why in news?
NASA balloon mission observed noctilucent clouds or polar mesospheric clouds (PMCs) clouds over the course of five days at their home high in Earth’s atmosphere.

Aim: To learn about the causes and effects of turbulence to help scientists understand not only the structure and variability of the upper atmosphere, but other areas as well. Turbulence occurs in fluids across the universe and the results will help scientists better model it in all systems. Ultimately, the results will even help improve weather forecast models.

What are noctilucent clouds?
- Noctilucent (also called night-shining) clouds coalesce as ice crystals on tiny meteor remnants in the upper atmosphere. The results make brilliant blue rippling clouds that are visible just after the sun sets in polar regions during the summer.
These clouds are affected by what’s known as atmospheric gravity waves — caused by the convecting and uplifting of air masses, such as when air is pushed up by mountain ranges. The waves play major roles in transferring energy from the lower atmosphere to the mesosphere.

23. HAYA BUSA 2

Why in news?
The Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency's intrepid Hayabusa 2 mission deployed the first of a series of asteroid landers and rovers.

What is the mission?
- In late 2014, Japan launched the Hayabusa2 spacecraft bound for Ryugu, a small asteroid that measures slightly more than half a mile and orbits near Earth. The spacecraft caught up with Ryugu in June after a three-year chase. Then, last week, it cozied up to the asteroid, coming within several hundred feet of its rocky surface, and dropped the two bots.
- Their successful deployment is a very impressive achievement. It’s not easy to land something on such a fast-moving, faraway object; a similar attempt on a comet in 2014 ended with a robot becoming permanently wedged in a dark crevice.

What is hayabusa?
- Hayabusa2 is an asteroid sample-return mission operated by the Japanese space agency, JAXA. It follows on from Hayabusa and addresses weak points identified in that mission. Hayabusa2 was launched on 3 December 2014 and rendezvoused with near-Earth asteroid 162173 Ryugu on 27 June 2018. It is in the process of surveying the asteroid for a year and a half, departing in December 2019, and returning to Earth in December 2020.
- Hayabusa2 carries multiple science payloads for remote sensing, sampling, and four small rovers that will investigate the asteroid surface to inform the environmental context of the samples collected.

24. PRITHVI DEFENCE VEHICLE (PDV) MISSION

Why in news?
India conducted a successful test of its indigenously designed ballistic missile defense system off the coast of Odisha. With the test, India achieved a major milestone in developing a two-layer Ballistic Missile Defence system.

The mission, named Prithvi Defence Vehicle (PDV) mission, aimed to engage targets in the exo-atmosphere region at an altitude above 50km of the earth's atmosphere. The test was conducted from Abdul Kalam Island, earlier known as Wheeler Island of the Integrated Test Range (ITR).

Highlights
- The mission involved test-firing of an inceptor missile of the coast of Odisha to intercept an incoming ballistic missile off the Bay of Bengal.
- The test was successful, as both the PDV interceptor and the target missile were engaged successfully.
- In the automated operation, the radar-based detection and tracking system detected and tracked the enemy's ballistic missile.
- The computer network with the help of data received from the radars predicted the trajectory of the incoming ballistic missile. The PDV that was kept fully ready took off once the computer system gave the command for lift-off.
• The interceptor guided by high-accuracy Inertial Navigation System (INS) supported by a Redundant Micro Navigation System moved towards the estimated point of the interception.
• Once the missile crossed the atmosphere, the heat shield ejected and the IR Seeker dome opened to look at the target location as designated by the mission computer.
• With the help of Inertial Guidance and IR Seeker, the missile moved for an interception.
• All events were monitored in real-time by the Telemetry/Range Stations, at various other locations.
1. **CONSULTATION PAPER OF LAW COMMISSION**

**Why in news?**
Law Commission has published a Consultation Paper on Family Law Reform. This consultation on family law reforms in India, discusses a range of provisions within all family laws, secular or personal, and suggests a number of changes to in the form of potential amendments and fresh enactments.

**Features:**
Introduction of new grounds for ‘no fault’ divorce accompanied by corresponding changes to provisions on alimony and maintenance, rights of differently-abled individuals within marriage, the thirty-day period for registration of marriages under Special Marriage Act; uncertainty and inequality in age of consent for marriage, compulsory registration of marriage, bigamy upon conversion etc.

**Under Hindu law:** It discusses problems with provisions like restitution of conjugal rights, and further suggests the inclusion of concepts such as ‘community of property’ of a married couple, abolition of coparcenary, rights of illegitimate children et al. There are further suggestions for addressing self-acquired property of a Hindu female.

**Under Muslim law:** It suggests the reform in inheritance law through codification of Muslim law on inheritance, but ensuring that the codified law is gender just. It also discusses the rights of a widow, and the changes application to general laws such as introduction of community of (self-acquired) property after marriage, inclusion of irretrievable breakdown of marriage as a ground for divorce.

**Under Parsi law:** There are suggestions relating to protecting married women’s right to inherit property even if they marry outside their community.
• The paper also suggests the expansion of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015, to make it into a robust secular law that can be accessed by individuals of all communities for adoption. There are suggestions for amending the guidelines for adoption and also a suggestion to alter the language of the Act to accommodate all gender identities.

• The paper discusses lacunae within custody and guardianship laws, statutory or customary, and suggests that the ‘best interest of the child’ has to remain the paramount consideration in deciding matters of custody regardless of any prevailing personal law in place.

• These amendments in personal laws include fixing the marriageable age for boys and girls at 18 years so that they marry as equals, making adultery a ground for divorce for men and women and to simplify divorce procedure.

• It suggested that nikahnamas make it clear that polygamy is a criminal offence and this should apply to “all communities. This is not recommended owing to merely a moral position on bigamy, or to glorify monogamy, but emanates from the fact that only a man is permitted multiple wives, which is unfair.

Commissions view on UCC:

• The commission said secularism cannot contradict the plurality prevalent in the country. It argued that cultural diversity cannot be compromised to the extent that our urge for uniformity itself becomes a reason for threat to the territorial integrity of the nation. A unified nation does not necessarily need to have uniformity. Efforts have to be made to reconcile our diversity with universal and indisputable arguments on human rights.

• It said the way forward may not be UCC, but the codification of all personal laws. This will bring to light the prejudices and stereotypes in every one of them would come to light and can be tested on the anvil of fundamental rights of the Constitution. By this, one can arrive at certain universal principles that prioritize equity rather than imposition of a Uniform Code, which would discourage many from using the law altogether.

What is UCC?
Uniform civil code is the ongoing point of debate within Indian mandate to replace personal laws based on the scriptures and customs of each major religious community in India with a common set of rules governing every citizen.

Article 44 of the Directive principles of the Constitution specifies, "The State shall endeavour to secure for citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India."

2. KRISHNA KUTIR

Why in news?
The Minister for Women & Child Development, alongwith Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, inaugurated the widows’ home ‘Krishna Kutir’ at a function at Vrindavan, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh

What is krishna kutir?

• Krishna Kutir is a special home for 1000 widows set up by the Ministry of Women & Child Development under Swadhar Greh scheme of the Ministry and is the largest ever facility of its kind created by a government organization.
• Vrindavan home will offer shelter and protection to the large number of helpless widows of Vrindavan. An area of 4 acres has now been allocated near the home by the district administration which will be developed into a park and which can be used by the widows of the home. Widows will be a part of various committees which will be formed to manage the widows’ home.

• The widows’ home has been constructed by the WCD Ministry to mitigate the plight of widows living in pathetic condition in Vrindavan. In order to provide a dignified and humane living conditions to them, the Ministry, as a special case, constructed the Krishna Kutir at the temple town of Vrindavan with all the required facilities.

Other UP government initiatives:
UP Government has become the first State to link the women’s helpline 181 to the One Stop Centres. UP has also provided rescue vans for women in distress in every district.

About Swadhar greh scheme:
The Ministry of Women and Child Development is implementing the Swadhar Greh Scheme which targets the women victims of difficult circumstances who are in need of institutional support for rehabilitation so that they could lead their life with dignity. The Scheme envisages providing shelter, food, clothing and health as well as economic and social security for these women.

How is the scheme implemented?
The State Governments/UT Administration invite applications from eligible organizations and the proposals which fulfill the norms are placed before a Project Sanctioning Committee (PSC) chaired by Secretary(WCD) of the State/UT concerned and comprising representatives from the Finance and Labour Department of the State/UT in addition to any other representative as the State Government/UT administration may decide.

As per guidelines of the Swadhar Greh Scheme, to seek financial assistance the agency should meet following requirements:
It should be either recognized by the State/ UT Administration under existing Scheme/law or should be well known with the experience of working in the field for at least 3 years and its work should be reported to be satisfactory by the State Government/Union Territory Administration concerned,

It should ordinarily have been engaged in the field of women’s welfare/social welfare/women’s education for a minimum period of two years prior to the request for grant-in-aid under the scheme,

It should have facilities, resources, personnel and experience to undertake the management of such a project,

Its financial position should be sound to take care of expenditure for a few months in case the grant is delayed.

It should run the Swadhar Greh on a no – profit basis.

The organization should have facilities like computers, internet connection etc. at Swadhar Greh

3. INTERNATIONAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS SUMMIT

Why in news?
The International Women Entrepreneurs Summit 2018 was inaugurated by the Vice President of Nepal in Kathmandu. The event is being organised by the South Asian Women Development Forum

Aim: It aims to bring onto a single platform, many influential women business leaders, international service providers, professionals and organisations, government representatives and other stakeholders to discuss on innovative economic transformation through collaboration.

Theme: ‘Equality begins with Economic Empowerment’

Key objectives:
• Multiple collaborations and partnerships with a consortium of international organizations
• To address the challenges associated with advancing and promoting gender-responsive trade facilitation policies
• To promote business women through policy sharing for actionable reforms which can be developed as regional instruments for advocating the economic issues of women
• To create a more efficient, effective channel to identify, develop, and scale high-potential women entrepreneurs
• Learning and replication of an entrepreneurial model projects
• B2B meetings with suppliers and manufacturers in the textile sector (Pashmina and felt)

South Asian Women Development Forum:
• The South Asian Women Development Forum, is incorporated under the Organization Registration Act 1977, is an autonomous, nonprofit organization based in Kathmandu, Nepal.
• SAWDF was granted the status of SAARC Recognized Body by the 36th Session of the SAARC Council Ministers at the 18th SAARC Summit which was held in Kathmandu on 24th of November 2014.
As the first SAARC Recognized Body organisation, working on women entrepreneurs issues, SAWDF facilitates in taking forward the recommendations, drawn from the deliberations of national programs, as regional instruments for developing women SMEs friendly policies.

It is a member based regional body representing national women entrepreneurs’ associations/organizations; institutions working towards the economic issues of women entrepreneurs in the SAARC Region. SAWDF membership is based on organizations with extensive work around women’s entrepreneurship.

4. DRAFT CHARTER OF PATIENTS’ RIGHTS

Why in news?
The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare released the draft charter of the rights of the patients prepared by the National Human Rights Commission. The Central Health Ministry will implement this charter in the states by the State Governments.

Aim: This charter will help the Center and States to establish solid mechanisms for the protection of patient rights. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has released this draft on its website. Under this charter, it has been said to give 17 rights to patients.

Along with promoting their rights, the charter also states that “patients and caretakers should follow their responsibilities so that hospitals and doctors can perform their work satisfactorily”.

- Patients should provide all required health related information to their doctor, in response to the doctor’s queries without concealing any relevant information, so that diagnosis and treatment can be facilitated.
- Patients should cooperate with the doctor during examination, diagnostic tests and treatment, and should follow doctor’s advice, while keeping in view their right to participate in decision making related to treatment.
- Patients should follow all instructions regarding appointment time, cooperate with hospital staff and fellow patients, avoid creating disturbance to other patients, and maintain cleanliness in the hospital.
- Patients should respect the dignity of the doctor and other hospital staff as human beings and as professionals. Whatever the grievance may be, patient / caregivers should not resort to violence in any form and damage or destroy any property of the hospital or the service provider.
- The patients should take responsibility for their actions based on choices made regarding treatment options, and in case they refuse treatment

Significance of the charter
- In India all states do not have the same rules regarding the rights of the patient. Some states have accepted the National Clinical Establishment Act, 2010 while other states have created their own state-level rules.
- All patients will be treated without any discrimination in the health sector; patients will not be discriminated against on any illness or health status such as HIV status, caste and religion. i.e Right to non-discrimination is an important right. Every patient has the right to receive treatment without any discrimination based on his or her illnesses or conditions, including HIV status or other health condition, religion, caste, ethnicity or sexual orientation.
Way forward
This charter is expected to act as a guidance document for the Union Government and State Governments to formulate concrete mechanisms so that Patients’ Rights are given adequate protection and operational mechanisms are set up to make these rights functional and enforceable by law. The onus is now on the States to follow the charter effectively.

5. MINOR RAPE VICTIMS ENTITLED TO COMPENSATION

Why in news?
The Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled that rape victims who are minors will now be entitled for compensation starting October 2

- The apex court extended the National Legal Services Authority’s (NALSA) compensation scheme for women rape and sexual assault survivors to minor children.
- The NALSA scheme would be made applicable to minor victims from October 2 until the Centre frames compensation guidelines under the POCSO.
- This is the first time that such a provision has been created. The ruling comes after the Centre told the court that the POCSO Act does not provide for any compensation.

Details of the NALSA SCHEME:
- As per NALSA’s scheme, a victim of gang rape in any part of the country would get a minimum compensation of Rs 5 lakh and up to a maximum of Rs 10 lakh.
- In case of rape and unnatural sexual assault, the victim would get a minimum of Rs 4 lakh and maximum of Rs 7 lakh as compensation.
- The scheme also says that the victims of acid attacks, in case of disfigurement of the face, would get a minimum compensation of Rs 7 lakh, while the upper limit would be Rs 8 lakh.
- In acid attack cases, if the injury is more than 50 per cent, a minimum compensation of Rs 5 lakh would be given, while the maximum would be Rs 8 lakh.

NALSA:
- The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) has been constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 to provide free Legal Services to the weaker sections of the society and to organize Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes.
- In every State, State Legal Services Authority has been constituted to give effect to the policies and directions of the NALSA and to give free legal services to the people and conduct Lok Adalats in the State.
- In every District, District Legal Services Authority has been constituted to implement Legal Services Programmes in the District.

6. BOOK ON MAHATMA GANDHI’S 'NAI TALIM' LAUNCHED

Why in news?
Union HRD Minister released the curriculum on Experiential Learning – Gandhiji’s Nai Talim in New Delhi.

Experiential Learning – Gandhiji’s Nai Talim
- The curriculum was brought out in 13 languages -- Assamese, Tamil, Bengali, Odiya, Kannada, Malayalam, Punjabi, Marathi, Telugu, Gujarati, Urdu, Hindi, and English.
• The Book has work and education curriculum for Schools DEd, BEd and faculty development programmes for teachers.
• It was done in consultation with the state councils of educational research and training along with the universities in the country.

Nai talim:
• Nai Talim or basic education is a principle promoted by Mahatma Gandhi which states that knowledge and work are not separate.
• It can be translated with the phrase 'Basic Education for all'. However, the concept has several layers of meaning. It developed out of Gandhi’s experience with the English educational system and with colonialism in general. In that system, he saw that Indian children would be alienated and 'career-based thinking' would become dominant. In addition, it embodied a series of negative outcomes: the disdain for manual work, the development of a new elite class, and the increasing problems of industrialization and urbanization.

7. SECTION 377

Why in news?
In its decision in Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India, the Supreme Court has finally struck down the colonial-era law (section 377 of IPC) criminalising homosexuality and the lives of LGBTQ person.

What is section 377?
Section 377 of the IPC states: “Whoever voluntarily has carnal inter-course against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with 1[imprisonment for life], or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.” This archaic British law dates back to 1861 and criminalises sexual activities against the order of nature.

The verdict:
• The Supreme Court has decriminalised sex between consenting adults in private under Section 377
• Section 377 IPC is irrational, indefensible and arbitrary, the Supreme Court ruled
• The sexual orientation of each individual in the society must be protected on an even platform, for the right to privacy and the protection of sexual orientation lies at the core of the fundamental rights guaranteed by Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution
• The LGBT community possess the same human, fundamental and constitutional rights as other citizens do since these rights inhere in individuals as natural and human rights
• Respect for individual choice is the very essence of liberty under law
• Bestiality will continue as an offence. Any kind of sexual activity with animals shall remain penal offence under Section 377 of the IPC.

The Judgement overrules the Suresh Kaushal Judgement pronounced in 2013 by the apex court. The judgement is based on the interpretation of Article 14 (Right to Equality); Article 15 (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth); Article 19 (Freedom of Speech and Expression); and Article 21 (Right to Life and Right to Privacy) of the Indian Constitution.
Earlier use of section 377:

- Section 377 IPC assumes the characteristic of unreasonableness, for it becomes a weapon in the hands of the majority to seclude, exploit and harass the LGBT community.
- It shrouds the lives of the LGBT community in criminality and constant fear mars their joy of life.
- They constantly face social prejudice, disdain and are subjected to the shame of being their very natural selves.

Impact of the judgment:

- It has freed the LGBTQI communities from the yoke of a colonial law.
- The LGBTQI communities can now walk tall and openly with their heads proud and held high as equal citizens with dignity, liberty and fraternity.

Conclusion:
One has to understand that the fight cannot be achieved only through legal amendments. It should be accompanied by awareness campaigns to educate parents, teachers and friends to adopt a healthy and supportive attitude towards homosexuals. What is needed is the broad consensual acceptance of gay lifestyle being as normal as any other lifestyle. Although the road ahead is not easy.

8. HIV/AIDS ACT IN FORCE

Why in news?
The Act, safeguards the rights of people living with HIV and affected by HIV. The provisions of the Act address HIV-related discrimination, strengthen the existing programme by bringing in legal accountability, and establish formal mechanisms for inquiring into complaints and redressing grievances.

Highlights:

- The Act prohibits discrimination or unfair treatment of HIV-infected people on any grounds. It prohibits denial or discontinuation of healthcare services, right of movement, right to reside, purchase, rent or occupy property and hold public or private office etc.
- It prohibits isolation of segregation of an HIV-positive person. Every HIV-positive person has the right to reside in a shared household and use facilities in a non-discriminatory manner.
- The Act says No person shall, by words, either spoken or written, publish, propagate, advocate or communicate by signs or by visible representation or otherwise the feelings of hatred against any protected persons or group of protected person.
- Under the law, no HIV-affected person can be subject to medical treatment, medical interventions or research without informed consent. Further, no HIV positive woman, who is pregnant, can be subjected to sterilisation or abortion without her consent.
- No person is compelled to disclose his HIV status except by an order of the court. A breach of violation attracts a jail sentence of up to two years or a fine of up to Rs 1 lakh, or both.
- Every establishment is obligated to keep HIV-related information protected. Every HIV-positive person is compelled to take reasonable precautions to prevent the transmission of HIV to other persons.
- The state and Centre must make diagnostic facilities, anti-retroviral therapy and opportunistic infection management available to all HIV-infected people, and ensure wide dissemination of the same.
- Every state has to appoint one or more Ombudsmen to inquire into violations of the provisions of the Act. Within 30 days of receiving a complaint, the Ombudsman is required to pass an order as he deems fit. Failing to comply with the orders of the Ombudsman attracts a penalty of up to Rs 10,000.

### 9. FDC DRUGS

**Why in news?**
The government on Wednesday prohibited the manufacture, sale or distribution of 328 fixed dose combination (FDC) drugs for human use with immediate effect

**What are FDCs?**

- Fixed-dose combination (FDC) medicines are a cocktail of two or more active drugs packed in a single dose.
- The domestic pharmaceutical market size is pegged at around Rs 1.18-1.2 lakh crore, and FDCs reportedly make up nearly 50% of the sales.

**FDCs in India**

- The reason behind FDCs is to improve adherence, simplify therapy and/or to maximise benefit for the patient courtesy the added effects of the multiple medicinal products given together. Popular FDCs, now banned, include the painkiller Saridon, the skin cream Panderm, antibiotic Lupidiclox and combination diabetes drug Gluconorm PG.
• A government document titled 'Policy Guidelines for Approval of Fixed Dose Combinations in India', released in June 2013 had claimed that "FDCs have shown to be particularly useful in the treatment of infectious diseases like HIV, malaria and tuberculosis where giving multiple antimicrobial agents is the norm. FDCs are also of use in chronic conditions especially when multiple disorders often co-exist."
• For instance, several FDCs pack a combination of nimesulide and paracetamol and are sold under different brand names as an anti-pyretic, or medications to control fever.
• India reportedly boasts around 2,000 FDCs, four times more that what's available in the US.

Advantage of FDCs
• COST: Instead of buying two, or more, separate medicines, a patient can buy just one FDC medicine to treat multiple illness symptoms, which typically works out easier on the wallet.
• Pharma companies, are benefitted because it is far cheaper and quicker to combine existing active ingredients to make new products than to discover new medicines and manufacture them separately.
• Improved medication compliance by reducing pill burden of patients
• Reduces the adverse effect of a single drug

Why has the government banned them?
The health ministry took this decision after the Drugs Technical Advisory Board recommended that "there is no therapeutic justification" for the ingredients contained in the banned FDC drugs and that these medicines "may involve risk to human beings".

How will the pharma sector get affected by this ban?
Large pharma companies have reportedly said that the impact is expected to be negligible since the FDCs in question are less than 2% of the pie. Over the last couple of years, they have either phased out such drugs or changed the combination.

10. DISTRICT DISABILITY REHABILITATION CENTRE (DDRC)

Why in news?
The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment organised a ‘National Conference of District Disability Rehabilitation Centres’ at Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, New Delhi

DDRC:
• District Disability Rehabilitation Centre (DDRC) is an initiative by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of India, to facilitate comprehensive services to Persons with Disabilities in the rural areas.
• These units have a group of rehabilitation professions for providing services like identification of Persons with Disabilities, Awareness Generation, Early Detection and Intervention, Provision / Fitment, Follow-up and repairing of Assistive Devices, Therapeutic Services like Physiotherapy, Speech Therapy etc., and facilitation of Disability Certificates, Buss Passes and other concessions/ facilities for Persons with Disabilities.

The salient features of the District Disability Rehabilitation Centres are as under:-
• 310 districts have been identified and 263 DDRCs have been set up
• Awareness generation, early intervention and assessment of the need of assistive devices to divyangjans.
Therapeutic services such as Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy etc. to divyangjans through rehabilitation professionals.

Equipment for rehabilitation services.

Cost norms of the Scheme has been revised and enhanced to 2.5 times

11. SWAYANGSIDDHA

Why in news?
West Bengal government has launched swayangsiddha initiative to combat human trafficking

Swayangsiddha initiative:

- Swayangsiddha means self-reliance. It envisions empowering young girls and boys with knowledge and skills so that they are aware, alert, able to make informed choices and are less vulnerable to violation and abuse of their rights.
- Swayangsiddha initiative by West Bengal Police aims to combat human trafficking and prevent child marriage.
- Swayangsiddha Groups have been formed in schools and colleges with interested students. These groups were formed with students between the age group of 12 to 21 years. Child Protection Committee is monitoring and guiding these groups.

Objectives of the scheme:

- Raising awareness on human, gender and child rights and strengthening prevention of human trafficking and child marriage using a converging approach
- Engaging youth from different schools and colleges to combat human trafficking and child marriage
- Strengthening response mechanism in collaboration with Police and child protection committees to build safe community
- Strengthening access to schemes and entitlements on education, training, livelihood and food security for vulnerable groups

12. PRADHAN MANTRI MATRU VANDANA YOJANA (PMMVY)

Why in news?
Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana or PMMVY recently touched the one year mark. Matru Vandana Saptah was observed to celebrate the national level achievements of the scheme.

PMMVY:

- Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), previously Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY), is a maternity benefit program run by the government of India. It was introduced in 2010 and is implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- It is a conditional cash transfer scheme for pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for the first live birth. It provides a partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare and to provide conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices.
- In 2013, the scheme was brought under the National Food Security Act, 2013 to implement the provision of cash maternity benefit of ₹6,000 stated in the Act

Objectives:

- Promoting appropriate practice, care and institutional service utilization during pregnancy, delivery and lactation
- Encouraging the women to follow (optimal) nutrition and feeding practices, including early and Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months; and
- Providing cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and lactating mothers.

**Funding:**
- Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana is sponsored by the centre in collaboration with states and UTs.
- The Centre to State funding ratio is 60:40 while for north-eastern states and three Himalayan states, it is 90:10.
- For the union territories without Legislature, the scheme is sponsored 100 per cent by the centre.

**Benefits:**
The scheme ensures safe delivery and good nutrition for mothers having their first child. However, maternity benefits under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana are not available to women who are under regular employment with the central/state government or a public sector undertaking. The benefits of the scheme also do not extend to women who are receiving similar benefits under any law in that period of time.

13. **NACO**

**Why in news?**
NACO (National AIDS control organisation) released HIV Estimations 2017 report

**Highlights of the report**
- As per the report, in 2017, India had around 21.40 lakh people living with HIV (PLHIV) with adult prevalence of 0.22%.
- Around 87.58 thousand new HIV infections and 69.11 thousand AIDS related deaths happened in 2017 while around 22,675 mothers needed Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) for prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV.
- HIV Estimations 2017 corroborate the previous rounds in terms of characteristic of the HIV epidemic in India i.e. national prevalence and incidence remains low, but the epidemic is high in some geographical regions and population group. The report has noted that the rate of decline in annual new HIV infections has been relatively slower in recent years.

**Objective:**
- The objective of HIV Estimations is to provide updated information on the status of HIV epidemic in India at national and State/UT level. Estimations of adult HIV prevalence, annual new infections (HIV incidence), AIDS-related mortality and prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) needs are produced as outcomes of HIV estimations.
- The modelled estimates are needed because there is no direct reliable way of measuring these core indicators which are used to track the epidemic and monitor and evaluate the response in countries around the world.
- The report concludes that, overall, the impact of the programme has been significant with more than 80% decline in estimated new infection from peak of epidemic in 1995. Similarly, estimated AIDS related death declined by 71% since its peak in 2005. As per UNAIDS 2018 report, the global average for decline in new infections and AIDS related deaths from peak has been 47% and 51% respectively.
NACO:
- The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), established in 1992 is a division of India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare that provides leadership to HIV/AIDS control programme in India through 35 HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Societies, and is "the nodal organisation for formulation of policy and implementation of programs for prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in India.
- In 2010, NACO approved the Teach AIDS curriculum for use in India, an innovation which represented the first time that HIV/AIDS education could be provided in a curriculum which did not need to be coupled with sex education.

14. PORTALS TO STRENGTHEN WOMEN SAFETY

Why in news?
Union Home Minister launched two separate portals to strengthen Women Safety.
- Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) portal to check objectionable online content.
- National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO) to aid in monitoring & investigation of sexual crimes.

1st portal:
- The Cyber Crime Prevention Against Women and Children (CCPWC) portal is convenient and user friendly that will enable complainants in reporting cases without disclosing their identity.
- This will not only aid the victims/complainants but also help the civil society organizations and responsible citizens to anonymously report complaints pertaining to child pornography, child sexual abuse material or sexually explicit material such as rape and gang rape.
- Complainants can also upload the objectionable content and URL to assist in the investigation by the State Police. The complaints registered through this portal will be handled by police authorities of respective State/UTs. There are other features such as a victim or complainant can track his/her report by opting for “report and track” option using his/her mobile number.

2nd portal:
- The second portal unveiled by the Union Home Minister relates to the National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO). It is a central database of “sexual offenders” in the country which will be maintained by the NCRB for regular monitoring and tracking by the State Police.
- The database is accessible only to the law enforcement agencies for investigation and monitoring purpose. The database will include offenders convicted under charges of rape, gang rape, POCSO and eve teasing.

15. SABARIMALA TEMPLE OPENS TO WOMEN OF ALL AGES

Why in news?
The Supreme Court paved the way for entry of women of all ages into the Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala in Kerala. The five-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra, in its 4:1 verdict, said that banning the entry of women into the shrine is gender discrimination and the practice violates rights of Hindu women.
Issue:
The legend has it that the temple deity Ayyappa followed celibacy all through his life. Therefore, women devotees of menstruating age are considered “impure” by supporters of the ban and are prohibited from entering the temple, on the pretext that they would disturb the celibacy of the deity.

Favour of the judgement:
- The Chief Justice said that banning entry of women into the shrine is gender discrimination and devotion cannot be subjected to discrimination. Law and society are tasked with the task to act as levellers, CJI Misra said, adding patriarchal notions cannot be allowed to trump equality in devotion.
- Chief Justice Misra noted that since religion is a way of life and links life with divinity, the Sabarimala Temple practice of banning the entry of menstruating women violates the rights of Hindu women.
- Devotees of Lord Ayyappa do not constitute a separate denomination, the practice of exclusion of women of 10-50 age group cannot be regarded as essential religious practice. Kerala law denies rights to women on the ground of physiological reasons,”
- Sabarimala temple custom barring entry of women of 10-50 age is not supported by Article 25 and 26 of the Constitution while striking down Rule 3(b) of Kerala Hindu Places of Worship.

Against the judgement
- Justice Indu Malhotra, who gave a separate dissenting verdict, observed that it is not for the courts to decide which religious practices are to be scrapped except in issues of social evils like 'Sati'. It is important for maintaining the secular atmosphere in India that issues that have deep religious connotation are not tinkered with.
- Right to equality conflicts with the right to worship of devotees of Lord Ayyappa.
- “Notions of rationality cannot be brought into matters of religion. India has diverse religious practices and constitutional morality would allow anyone to profess a religion they believe,”
- She noted that the doctrine of equality cannot supersede the fundamental right to worship under Article 25. “Lord Ayyappa’s devotees form a separate religious denomination worthy of protection and it is not for the court to interfere in religious practices even if it appears discriminatory,”

16. #LOOREVIEW CAMPAIGN

Why in news?
The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has partnered with #LooReview for launching a toilet review campaign to evaluate and review public toilets on Google Map under Clean India Mission-Urban (SBM-U).

This campaign called #LooReview is a part of the facility for people to find public toilets on Google Maps, Search and The Assistant in their respective cities. People can also give their feedback on these. In more than 500 cities, more than 30,000 toilets are being seen on Google Maps under the name "SBM Toilet".

#LooReview Campaigns
- The objectives of the Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban (SBM – U) is to provide sanitation coverage through public toilet facilities across cities in India for achieving Open Defecation Free (ODF) status.
• With around 3400 cities already having achieved ODF status, and other cities gearing up towards the same.
• There is now a need to ensure that the ODF status is sustained through continuous usage and proper maintenance of public toilets.
• The joint campaign to be run throughout October and November 2018 is an effort to increase the awareness and ease of locating public toilets across India.
• The campaign will involve and engage Local Guides in India to rate and review public toilets on Google Maps.
• The use hashtag #LooReview for the chance to be featured on Google Local Guides’ social channels.

Local Guides are people who share reviews, photos, and knowledge on Google Maps to help people explore the world.
1. **ASI DISCOVERS 254 COPPER COINS OF MEDIEVAL ERA AT KHIRKI MOSQUE**

**Why in news?**
Over 250 copper coins belonging to the reign of Sher Shah Suri (1540-1545) and his successors have been discovered by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on the premises of Khirki Mosque here during the course of conservation of the monument.

**Important points**
- ASI (Delhi Circle) had taken up the task of cleaning up the area to initiate conservation of Khirki Mosque and during the cleaning, 254 coins were discovered near entrance of the monument, the Ministry of Culture said in a statement.
- A few coins were cleaned by the ASI experts and on the basis of preliminary observation, it can be said that some of the coins belong to the reign of Shershah Suri and his successors.
- In 2003, as many 63 coins were found on the same premises during cleaning and conservation.
- ASI (Delhi Circle) has started scientific clearance of the area under technical supervision of archaeologists. After cleaning of the coins, process to decipher the same will be initiated with the help of experts, the statement said.

**Archaeological Survey of India**
- The ASI is the premier organization for the archaeological researches and protection of the cultural heritage of the country.
- The prime objection of ASI is to maintain the archaeological sites, ancient monuments and remains of national importance.
- Headquarters at New Delhi.
- Established in 1861 by Alexander Cunningham.
- It regulates all archaeological activities as per the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.
- It functions under the aegis of the Union Ministry of Culture.
- It also regulates Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972.

**Khirki Fort**
- Khirki Fort, approached from the Khirki Village in South Delhi and close to the Satpula or the seven arched bridge on the edge of southern wall of Jahapanah (the fourth city of Medieval Delhi).
- Fort was built by Khan-i-Jahan Junan Shah, the Prime Minister of Feroz Shah Tughlaq (1351–1388) of the Tughlaq Dynasty and is believed to be one of the seven mosques built by him.
- The word 'Khirki' prefixed to fort is an Urdu word that means "window" and hence is also called "The Fort of Windows".
- The Fort, which is in a quadrangular shape, was built as a fortress with an unusual fusion of Islamic and traditional Hindu architecture. It is said to be the only monument style fort in North India, which is mostly covered.
2. MARBAT FESTIVAL

Why in news?
 Thousands of people thronged the streets of Maharashtra's Nagpur city to celebrate the Marbat festival.

About festival
- As per the tradition, the devotees took out a procession carrying effigies that represent evil forces. The clay effigies or 'Marbats' of Kali (black) and Pivli (Yellow) were the main attraction of the procession.
- The effigies were later taken to a Nehru Chowk ground and burned by the locals.
- The 150-year old festival is celebrated only in Nagpur. During the celebration, people gather to address social problems.
- Kali and Pivli are believed to be sisters who are made to meet each other on this day. While some believe that the festival has some historical value others consider Kali and Pivli as deities. 'Gheun Ja Ge Marbate' is a famous slogan during this festival
- A lot of people believe that the Kali and Pivli marbat will make their wishes come true during this festival. It also related to history during the British Raj

3. SWADESH DARSHAN SCHEME

Why in news
Union Ministry of Tourism has inaugurated India’s first tribal circuit project connecting 13 tourism sites in Chhattisgarh under Swadesh Darshan Scheme

Important points
- This is the second project under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme being inaugurated in the country.
- This project which is to be inaugurated was sanctioned by the Ministry of Tourism in February 2016 for Rs. 99.21 Crores. The project covers thirteen sites in Chhattisgarh
- Chhattisgarh is known for its exceptional scenic beauty and uniquely rich cultural heritage. The state has always been synonymous with tribes and tribal culture.
- Over one third of the state population is of tribes, the tribes here are unique in their lifestyles and have beautifully retained their own culture and traditions for centuries. Given the significant dominance of indigenous population in the region, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has selected Chhattisgarh to be included in the Swadesh Darshan Scheme under Tribal Circuit theme, with an objective to acknowledge the sovereignty of tribes, promote the rich and diverse primitive assets in the state.
- Major components sanctioned include eco log huts, craft haats, souvenir shops/ kiosk, tourist reception & facilitation centres, open amphitheatre, tribal interpretation centres, workshop centres, tourist amenities centres, last mile connectivity, wayside amenities, viewpoints, nature trails, solar illuminations, signages solid waste management etc.

Swadesh Darshan scheme
- Swadesh Darshan scheme is one of the flagship schemes of the Ministry of tourism, for development of thematic circuits in the country in a planned and prioritised manner.
- The scheme was launched in 2014 -15 and as on date the Ministry has sanctioned 74 projects worth Rs. 5997.47 Crore to 31 States and UTs. 30 projects / major components of
these projects are expected to be completed this year.

- Earlier, the first project under the scheme was inaugurated in Manipur.

4. **PARYATAN PARV**

   **Why in news?**
   The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in collaboration with other Central Ministries, State Governments and Stakeholders is organizing a “Paryatan Parv” across the country from the 16th to 27th September 2018.

   **Important points**
   - Thirty-two states and Union territories, along with different departments of the government, are collaborating with the ministry to organise 3,150 activities across India as part of the programme
   - The event will focus on domestic tourists especially to sensitize youth
   - This time, the ministry has also included yoga in the events. Its demonstration, training, therapy would be held by the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga everyday on the Rajpath lawns.
   - Paryatan Parv will have three main components as like last year, viz. Dekho Apna Desh, Tourism for All and Tourism & Governance. While stressing that this year also Paryatan Parv shall focus on domestic tourists especially to sensitize youth

   **Components of Paryatan Parv**
   - **Dekho Apna Desh**: It will encourage Indians to visit their own country. It will include video, photograph and blog competitions visited during event, stories of India through Travelers’ Eyes to promote travel to J&K and North Eastern states.
   - **Tourism for All**: It will promote tourism events at sites across all States in country. These will mainly be People’s events with large scale public participation.
   - **Tourism & Governance**: It will have interactive sessions and workshops with stakeholders on varied themes like Skill Development in Tourism Sector, Innovation in Tourism, Inducting Ex-servicemen as service providers for Taxi Operation and Developing Rural Tourism in locations near established destinations

5. **NUAKHAI FESTIVAL**

   **Why in news?**
   In western Odisha, the festival of Harvest Nuakhai is being celebrated. After harvest of new paddy of this season, rice has been processed and offered to Goddess Samaleswari in Sambalpur.

   **About Nuakhai festival**
   - Nuakhai or Nuankhai is an agricultural festival mainly observed by people of Odisha and Chhattisgarh in India. Nuakhai is observed to welcome the new rice of the season
   - Nuakhai generally falls during the months of August and September, where it is celebrated just a day after Ganesh Chaturthi.
   - The festival's literal translation sums up to new food where nua means new and khai means food.
Where the origins of the festival are said to date all the way back to the Vedic ages, the first records of its existence are believed to be from the 12th century.

This is the most important social festival of Western Odisha and adjoining areas of Simdega in Jharkhand.

6. DAKSHINA BHARAT HINDI PRACHAR SABHA

Why in news?
President Ram Nath Kovind has inaugurated centenary celebrations of Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha on 22 September 2018 in New Delhi. DBHPS is an autonomous body functioning under the grant from Union Government.

Key points
- "Hindi Prachar" was a movement that emerged as part of Freedom Movement and the leaders who led the nation to "FREE INDIA" felt the necessity of making a single Indian Language the National Language, and through that language unify the people and thereby intensify National Integration.
- The organisation Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha was established by Annie Besant in 1918 with support from Mahatma Gandhi, who became the founder president of the Sabha, who held the post till his death.
- In 1964, the institution was recognised by the Indian Government as one of the Institutes of National Importance.
- It was established to propagate the study of Hindi in the then Madras Presidency and princely states of Banganapalle, Cochin, Hyderabad, Mysore, Pudukkottai, Sanduru and Travancore.
- The first Hindi class was taken by Gandhi’s son Devdas Gandhi.

7. INDIAN CULINARY INSTITUTE (ICI) AT TIRUPATI

Why in news?
The Union Cabinet has approved setting up of the Indian Culinary Institute (ICI) at Tirupati in the State.

Highlights
- The first of its kind institution in the country will come up with an estimated investment of about Rs. 200 crore.
- Centre to locate it at Tirupati as the temple-town was a major educational centre with seven universities and easy connectivity to three major.
- The institute will promote research and innovation, documentation and propagation of Indian cuisine and develop cuisine tourism of India apart from providing quality education in the field of culinary art.
- There is no institute worth mention at present which imparts training/knowledge on culinary art and formal education specific to Indian cuisine. The existing institutes of hotel management (IHMs) were only offering generic courses without specialised laboratories and the training provided was on skill and entry level, the sources said.
8. INDIA ORGANISES 'GANDHI MARCH' TO MARK INTERNATIONAL DAY OF NON-VIOLENCE IN NETHERLANDS

1,000 people including over 20 Ambassadors from different countries participated in a "Gandhi March" in The Hague, the seat of the Dutch government, to mark the International Day of Non-Violence.

About the event
- The marchers for non-violence gathered at the iconic Peace Palace - home to the International Court of Justice and the Permanent Court of Arbitration.
- The Netherlands has a special connection to India and Mahatma Gandhi. There are around thirty streets in the country named after Mahatma Gandhi.
- A spark taken from the eternal 'World Peace flame' that burns outside the Peace Palace, (created using a flame from the Mahatma Gandhi memorial at Raj Ghat in Delhi) was handed over to Ambassador Venu Rajamony and the rally was led by Ambassadors of the US and South Africa, among others.
- The colourful march traversed through the city of the Hague and the participants congregated at the historic Grote Kerk or Big Church here.
- A movie on the life of Gandhiji was also screened.
1. ADDRESSING SOIL LOSS

Why in news?
As the rains abate in Kerala and parts of Kodagu district in Karnataka, the loss of lives and the devastation of infrastructure and crops is apparent.

Issue:
As rebuilding is planned, the soil that has been washed away also need to be considered. While roads and houses will be rebuilt, and crop losses compensated partially through insurance, the gradual loss of soil productivity can have a lasting impact on the local economy.

Some facts:
- A 2014 review of soil degradation in India by multiple institutions shows that an estimated 14 million hectares suffer soil degradation due to flooding annually.
- The impact of floods on soil was also studied in detail following the 2009 floods in North Karnataka, which killed over 170 people and caused an estimated loss of over ₹16,500 crore.
- Floods good or bad for soil? Not all floods are bad for the soil, as seen in the oft-occurring floods along the banks of the Ganga, Kosi, Brahmaputra and other rivers taking birth in the Himalayas. There, the gushing river emanating from the mountains carries with it loosened alluvial soil, and not only washes over farmlands, but also replenishes flood plains with fertile soil.
- In south and central India, floods wash away rich, weathered soil, which are deposited in reservoirs or as sand bars along the river bed or in the sea. Any rehabilitation programme must consider this lost soil.

Way ahead:
- A soil profile of a few affected districts, done under the State’s integrated watershed scheme. It shows large swathes of these areas having “shallow or very shallow” soil depth, organic carbon deficiency, and low productivity of the land.
- To recover and replace would take a “considerable” amount of time, and a steadfast programme of recovery. There is no comprehensive scheme for recovery, and the effect of the floods is still visible on the ground.
- Farmers need to be educated about the nature of their soil and what they can do to enrich the nutrient depleted soil. Crop rotation, organic manure, compost etc will help in replenishing the soil.

2. BATTLE OF HAIFA

Why in news?
The northern Israeli coastal city of Haifa on september 8 celebrated the centenary year of its liberation from Ottoman rule during World War I, honouring the brave Indian soldiers who laid down their lives in what is considered "the last great cavalry campaign in history".

Haifa day:
- Owing to its rail and harbour, Israeli port city of Haifa was a strategic supply base. In addition to Haifa, the Allied Forces also engineered a plan to annexe Nazareth and Damascus in present-day Israel and Syria.
On September 23, 1918, the 15th (Imperial Service) Cavalry Brigade comprising lancers from the regiments of princely states of Jodhpur and Mysore inflicted heavy assault on positions held by Ottoman Turks in and around the city of Haifa. Eventually, the Indian cavalry brigades fighting under the leadership of British General Edmund Allenby helped liberate Haifa from the clutches of the Turkish-German forces.

The victory was even more special as the Indian soldiers were armed only with lances (a kind of spear) and swords while the Turks had in their possession advance artillery and machine guns.

The Indian troops displayed exemplary cavalry skills and valour during what was considered to be the last major cavalry campaign in military history. “No more remarkable cavalry action of its scale was fought in the whole course of the campaign,” the Official History of the War observed while aptly describing the resilience of the Indian troops. “Machine gun bullets over and over again failed to stop the galloping horses even though many of them succumbed afterwards to their injuries.”

Teen murti chowk:

The Teen Murti Chowk and the Teen Murti Marg are to be known as the ‘Teen Murti Haifa Chowk’ after the Israeli city of Haifa. In a symbolic gesture of friendship with Israel, India renamed the iconic Teen Murti Chowk, a war memorial, to Teen Murti Haifa Chowk, during the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to New Delhi. The Teen Murti Chowk was named to mark the role of the three cavalry regiments.

The Teen Murti memorial was constructed in 1922 in the memory of the Indian soldiers from three princely states namely Jodhpur, Hyderabad and Mysore. They served present day Gaza strip, Israel and Palestine during the World War I under British India Army.

3. GOVT. GRANTS ‘TRUST’ STATUS TO ‘BHARAT KE VEER’ INITIATIVE

Why in news?
The government has granted the status of a trust to ‘Bharat Ke Veer’, a private initiative promoted by actor Akshay Kumar, which aids families of paramilitary personnel killed in action.

Highlights:

- Contributions to Bharat Ke Veer have been exempted from Income Tax
- Akshay Kumar and former national badminton champion Pullela Gopichand have been included as trustees.
- The initiative has now been formalised into a registered trust for providing a platform for all citizens to contribute and provide assistance to the families of martyred personnel.
- The public can visit the ‘Bharat Ke Veer’ application and website, and contribute to support the families of jawans who die in the line of duty.

Bharat ke Veer:

Bharat Ke Veer is a fund-raising initiative by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India on behalf of members of the Indian Armed Forces. The initiative was launched by Home Minister

4. OFFICIAL WEBSITE AND APP FOR KUMBH MELA 2019

Why in news?
In Uttar Pradesh, Rail Minister along with Chief Minister of State Yogi Adityanath launched the official website of Kumbh Mela, 2019 in Lucknow. They also launched a social media App related to the Mela.
Key facts
The website and App will help pilgrims and tourists to attend the Kumbh which will be held on the banks of Sangam in January next year. The website provides detail about location, trains, accessibility, weather and accommodations which will be a great help for pilgrims.

Kumbh Mela
- It is held once in every 12 years.
- The Mela is the largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on earth, and it represents a syncretic set of rituals related to worship and rituals cleansing in holy rivers in India.
- The knowledge and skills related to the Mela are transmitted through the ‘GURU SHISHYAPARAMPURA PARAMPURA’ (Teacher-Student Relationship).
- According to Hindu belief, During a battle between God and Demons over a pitcher containing nectar of immortality (Amrit), a few drops fell at four main locations- namely Haridwar, Ujjain, Allahabad and Nasik, are in India, and a great fair is held at each of these places in a 12 years cycle.
- Kumbh Mela has been listed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage under UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation).

5. WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT

Why in news?
The World Happiness Report (WHR) 2018, which ranked 156 countries, placed India at the 133rd place on the index of global happiness. There’s no denying the fact that there is an intrinsic relationship between law and people’s happiness.

- The World Happiness Report is an annual publication of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network which contains rankings of national happiness and analysis of the data from various perspectives.
- The World Happiness Report 2018 ranks 156 countries by their happiness levels, and 117 countries by the happiness of their immigrants.
- The main focus of this year’s report, in addition to its usual ranking of the levels and changes in happiness around the world, is on migration within and between countries.
- The overall rankings of country happiness are based on the pooled results from Gallup World Poll surveys from 2015–2017, and show both change and stability.
- Four countries have held the top spot in the last four reports: Denmark, Switzerland, Norway and now Finland.
- All the top countries tend to have high values for all six of the key variables that have been found to support well-being: income, healthy life expectancy, social support, freedom, trust and generosity

6. PROTOTYPE FAST BREEDER REACTOR (PFBR)

Why in news?
The country’s first indigenously developed 500-megawatt (mw) prototype fast breeder reactor at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu is expected to achieve criticality next year.
The indigenously developed prototype fast breeder reactor of 500 mw is now undergoing sodium commissioning. Achieving criticality means that the reactor is fully operational and safe.

**About Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR)**

- The Kalpakkam PFBR is using uranium-238 not thorium, to breed new fissile material, in a sodium-cooled fast reactor design.
- The power island of this project is being engineered by Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, largest power equipment utility of India.
- The surplus plutonium (or uranium-233 for thorium reactors) from each fast reactor can be used to set up more such reactors and grow the nuclear capacity in tune with India’s needs for power.
- India has the capability to use thorium cycle based processes to extract nuclear fuel.
- This is of special significance to the Indian nuclear power generation strategy as India has one of the world’s largest reserves of thorium, which could provide power for more than 10,000 year.
- Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam (Bhavini), a public sector company under DAE, has been given the responsibility to build the fast breeder reactors in the country.

7. **ELECTRIC CARS FOR OFFICIAL USE**

**Why in news?**

Jharkhand government Wednesday introduced electric vehicles for official use when its energy department got 20 such cars.

**Important points**

- With the development, Jharkhand has become the fifth state of India and the first state in eastern India to procure the eco-friendly vehicles for government use.
- Prior to Jharkhand, the governments of Delhi, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have procured electric cars for official purpose.
- In the first phase, the energy department got 20 cars procured by the Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), a joint venture of the PSUs under the Ministry of Power.
- Within the next two weeks, 30 more cars would be provided to the department
- With this fleet of 50 electric cars, JBVNL is likely to save over 1.20 lakh litres of fuel a year to lead to an annual reduction of over 1,400 tonnes of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.
- Energy department secretary said that 12 charging stations have been set up so far in Ranchi and more charging stations will come up.

8. **DELHI, SEOUL SIGN MOU TO TACKLE AIR POLLUTION, IMPROVE INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Why in news?**

The Delhi government on Friday entered into an agreement on the establishment of friendship and cooperation with Seoul Metropolitan Government on eleven areas, including environment, transport, education, solid waste management, infrastructure and public health.

**Important points**

- The Mou on the ‘Friendship and Cooperation Agreement’ was signed by Delhi Chief Minister and mayor of Seoul, the capital of South Korea. The Delhi CM particularly sought the city’s expertise in dealing with transport and air pollution.
- He expressed hope that Delhi will develop on the lines of Seoul which have emerged as a
beautiful city in the past 68 years despite being ravaged in the Korean War in 1950.

- It requires the two capital cities- New Delhi and Seoul- to set up and operationalise a 'Twinning Cell' and a committee to support the cell for easy communication and knowledge sharing.
- The cell will support activity related workshops, conduct community participation activities and help maintain documentation.
- The annual reports of the cell would be sent to the Ministry concerned of the two cities. In case of Delhi, the reports would be sent to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and the Ministry of External Affairs.

Concerns

- **Air pollution:** Air pollution is a major issue faced by Delhi almost throughout the year and especially during winter. Since the past two years, Delhi has witnessed very severe smog during winter.
- **Landfill Management:** Delhi with four towering landfills is still struggling when it comes to dealing with it.
- **Water Crisis:** The only river passing through Delhi- Yamuna- is facing serious water pollution problems. Hence, Delhi faces an acute water crisis every summer as it is dependent on neighbouring states for the supply.
- **Public Transport:** Though Delhi’s public transport system has seen the vast improvement with the advent of the new metro lines and low floor buses, the state government is still trying to improve the experience, as the use of public transport will be key to fighting pollution and reducing congestion.