



CENTRE FOR AMBITION
(An Institute for Civil Services)

BACKGROUNDER DECEMBER 2016

TRADE COSTS OF INDIA REMAIN HIGH: UN BODY

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) said, in its recently released Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2016 that international and intra-regional trade costs of India remained higher compared with the trade costs of best-performing economies in Asia and the Pacific, although a declining trend has been observed since 2009.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT:

- FDI inflows to India expanded by 10% on average during 2010-2015, while in 2015 inflows recorded an even stronger expansion at 27.8%, which was significantly higher than the Asia-Pacific region's average 5.6%.
- The services, construction development, computer software and hardware, and telecommunications sectors attracted the highest investments.
- Overseas investment from India contracted considerably by 36% in this period, which may reflect FDI diversion as Indian investors start to invest more at home than overseas.
- In addition to India's robust economic growth and large domestic market, the Government's "Make in India" initiative and easing of FDI regulations for about 15 sectors including aviation, defence and pharmaceuticals may contribute to the FDI attractiveness of India.
- However, in 2015, Indian goods exports shrank by 17.2%, which was close to twice as much as the Asia-Pacific region decline of 9.7%. But, India was the largest partner with several economies in South Asia, such as Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Since

India is the fastest-growing emerging economy, it is somewhat expected to start filling the void in demand for intraregional exports that will emerge with the rebalancing of China's trade patterns.

PERFORMANCE OF ASIA PACIFIC:

Asia-Pacific trade flows were wavering amid sluggish global economic and trade growth, downward movement of world commodity prices and an uncertain policy environment, the report said. Sluggish growth in trade is expected to continue through to the end of 2016.

However, rebounding somewhat, exports from Asia-Pacific are expected to increase by 4.5% and imports by 6.5% in developing countries of Asia and the Pacific in 2017, but the Report forecasts more modest growth in exports and imports in volume terms, at 2.2% and 3.8%.

CONCERNS:

According to the report, a worrying trend is the increased usage of restrictive trade policies, especially non-tariff measures, within the Asia-Pacific region, which is partly driven by past distortive trade measures and current excess capacity in several key sectors. Additionally, the region is seeing a proliferation of preferential trade agreements (PTA), with Asia and the Pacific rim contributing to almost 63% of world PTAs, curbing a momentum towards region-wide free trade.

AFGHANISTAN, INDIA HOPE TO CORNER PAKISTAN

In the wake of the brazen Nagrota attack, India and Afghanistan are planning to seek to isolate Pakistan on terror at the upcoming two-day Heart of Asia conference in Amritsar as the two countries have pitched for a

regional counter-terror framework to effectively deal with the menace.

- Finance minister Arun Jaitley will lead the Indian delegation at the two-day Sixth Heart of Asia (HoA) conference to be held in Amritsar.
- Afghanistan has been pushing for finalising an effective counter-terror framework to deal with terror at the conference which will be attended by representatives from over 30 countries including China, the US, Russia, Pakistan and Iran.

BACKGROUND:

Tension over the cross-border terrorism has increased between India and Pakistan in the past few months. This is also seen as the biggest challenge to peace and security in the region.

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE:

The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process presents a new vision of cooperation and confidence building for the region with Afghanistan at its centre.

- The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process was launched in 2011 and the participating countries include Pakistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and the United Arab Emirates.
- The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process articulates a set of principles, such as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and promoting cooperation in the areas of common challenges and shared interests in the region.
- It provides a platform for discussing key regional issues among participating states.
- Since its inception in 2011, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process has been lead by two co-chairs: Afghanistan as a permanent co-chair, and one of the Heart of Asia countries hosting the annual ministerial meeting as the co-chair.
- As permanent co-chair of this regional process, Afghanistan has been recognized as the main focal

point/ coordinator of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

THE HEART OF ASIA-ISTANBUL PROCESS HAS THREE MAIN ELEMENTS:

- Political Consultation involving Afghanistan and its near and extended neighbours.
- A sustained incremental approach to implementation of the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) identified in the Istanbul Process document.
- Seeking to contribute and bring greater coherence to the work of various regional processes and organisations, particularly as they relate to Afghanistan.

AIRLINES SEEK STAY ON LEVY, HC ISSUES NOTICE

The Delhi High Court has issued notices to the Centre, the Airports Authority of India and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation as the Federation of Indian Airlines (FAI) sought a stay on the government's notification on levy of Rs.7,5000 to Rs.8,500 per flight operated by Indian airlines to create a regional connectivity fund (RCF).

- The court has sought the Centre's response on the plea challenging the levy of tax and the UDAN scheme.
- The FAI has sought quashing of the October 21 notification, by which a rule for such a levy was brought into the Aircraft Rules, 1934.

WHAT THE OPPONENTS SAY?

Such a levy mentioned under the scheme is not contemplated in the aircraft rules and cannot be brought in as an obligation. Since this levy of tax is also not an amount payable by passengers for provision of any service of facility to them, this levy is nothing but a tax, and therefore cannot be levied without statutory sanction.

ABOUT THE SCHEME:

The UDAN scheme is aimed at connecting under-served airports and regions. As per the government, a

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participating carrier — which would be extended Viability Gap Funding — has to bid for at least nine seats and a maximum of 40 seats. In the case of a helicopter, the operator has to bid for a minimum of five seats and a maximum of 13 seats.

The fund under the scheme will be used to develop regional airports and enhance regional connectivity under its Ude Desh Ka Aam Naagrik (UDAN) scheme.

NATIONAL ANTHEM MUST BE PLAYED BEFORE SCREENING OF FILMS: SUPREME COURT

The Supreme Court has ordered all cinema halls across the country to play the national anthem before the screening of films and that all present must “stand up in respect” till the anthem ended.

- The court has also asked the Cinema halls to display the national flag on screen when the anthem is played.

WHY SUCH MOVE?

According to the court, the practice would “instil a feeling within one a sense of committed patriotism and nationalism.” Also, the protocol of showing respect and honour to the anthem and flag is rooted in “our national identity, integrity and constitutional patriotism.”

The court observed that it is the duty of every person to show respect when the national anthem is played or recited or sung under the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act of 1951.

WHAT ELSE?

- In its interim order, while awaiting a detailed response from the Centre, the court has issued a complete ban on the commercial exploitation of the national anthem and the flag.
- The court also banned dramatisation of the anthem or it to be used in any part of any variety shows or for entertainment purposes.
- It also banned the display, recitation or use of the abridged version of the national anthem.

CABINET APPROVES INDIA’S NEGOTIATING POSITION ADOPTED AT KIGALI CONFERENCE

The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval to the negotiating position adopted by the Government of India at the recent Meeting of Parties (MoP) to the Montreal Protocol of the Vienna Convention for Protection of Ozone Layer that took place in October, 2016, in Kigali, Rwanda.

- The Cabinet has also approved the proposal of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to argue for adoption of an appropriate baseline years from out of 3 options within a range of 2024 to 2030 with freeze in a subsequent year.
- The flexibility of using any of the options within this range with a combination of the features of the proposed options in consultation with the Government has also been approved.

KEY FACTS:

- During negotiations held at Kigali India successfully negotiated the baseline years and freeze years which will allow sufficient room for the growth of the concerned sectors using refrigerants being manufactured domestically thus ensuring unhindered growth with least additional cost and maximum climate benefits.
- It was agreed at Kigali that there would be two set of baselines or peak years for developing countries and India will have baseline years of 2024, 2025, 2026. This decision gives additional HCFC allowance of 65% that will be added to the Indian baseline consumption and production.
- The freeze year for India will be 2028, with a condition that there will be a technology review in 2024/2025 and, if the growth in the sectors using refrigerants is above certain agreed threshold, India can defer its freeze up to 2030. On the other hand, developed countries will reduce production and consumption of HFCs by 70% in 2029.
- As per the decisions taken in Kigali, India will complete its phase down in 4 steps from 2032

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onwards with cumulative reduction of 10% in 2032, 20% in 2037, 30% in 2042 and 85% in 2047.

KIGALI CONFERENCE:

The negotiations at Kigali were aimed at including Hydrofluoro Carbons (HFCs) in the list of chemicals under the Montreal Protocol with a view to regulate their production and consumption and phase them down over a period of time with financial assistance from the Multilateral Fund created under the Montreal Protocol.

The Kigali amendments to the Montreal Protocol will, for the first time, incentivise improvement in energy efficiency in case of use of new refrigerant and technology. Funding for R&D and servicing sector in developing countries has also been included in the agreed solutions on finance.

CUBAN RUMBA AND UGANDAN MUSIC NOW ON UNESCO'S HERITAGE LIST:

- Cuba's sensual rumba dance and Belgium's thriving beer culture have been added to UNESCO's coveted list of "intangible" heritage.
- The list of "intangible" cultural treasures was created 10 years ago, mainly to increase awareness about them, while UNESCO also sometimes offers financial or technical support to countries struggling to protect them.

INDOLOGIST AWARD:

- The President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee recently presented the second ICCR 'Distinguished Indologist' Award to Prof. Yu Long Yu of the People's Republic of China.
- The annual 'Distinguished Indologist' Award has been instituted by ICCR to recognize eminent Indologists working abroad who have made outstanding contribution to the study/teaching/research of India's philosophy, thought, history, art, culture, languages, literature, civilization, society etc. The Award amount is US\$ 20000/-.
- The first 'Distinguished Indologist' Award was presented to Prof. Heinrich Freiherr Von Stietencron of Germany last year.

CHAIRMAN OF AUROVILLE FOUNDATION

Dr Karan Singh, an eminent scholar and Rajya Sabha Member has been re-nominated as the Chairperson of the Governing Board of Auroville Foundation. Dr Singh has been re-nominated for a term of four years.

ABOUT AUROVILLE FOUNDATION:

The Government of India notified the constitution of Auroville Foundation as a **Statutory** Body on 29th January, 1991 as per the Auroville Foundation Act, 1988.

- The Auroville Foundation, headed by a chairman, is an **autonomous** body under the **Ministry of Human Resource Development**.
- The Auroville Foundation consists of three authorities, the Governing Board, the Resident's Assembly and Auroville International Advisory Council.
- The Auroville Foundation Act vests the Governing Board with the responsibility and the authority for superintendence, direction and management of the Foundation's affairs.

WHAT IS AUROVILLE?

Auroville (City of Dawn) is an experimental township in Viluppuram district mostly in the state of Tamil Nadu, India with some parts in the Union Territory of Puducherry.

- It was founded in 1968 by Mirra Alfassa (known as "the Mother") and designed by architect Roger Anger.
- Auroville was meant to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realize human unity.
- Auroville is recognized as International living experiment in human unity, endorsed by the UNESCO and supported by the Government of India.
- It is also a centre for applied research in environmentally sustainable living practices,

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experimenting new system of education, social research and cultural activities.

FUNDS TRACKING SYSTEM WILL TRIM CENTRE'S COSTS

The Centre is planning to speed up the process of implementation of Public Financial Management System in the country.

- The new system, when implemented, will save a significant amount on interest costs. The system allows the government to monitor and access the more than Rs.1 lakh crore of idle funds lying with it under various heads.

BACKGROUND:

There are about Rs.1-1.5 lakh crore of idle funds lying with the government. Now, if the government can access these funds through PFMS, it need not borrow that amount. At 7% interest, that works out to a saving in interest costs of at least Rs.7,000 crore.

ABOUT PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM:

PFMS, administered by the department of expenditure, is an end-to-end solution for processing payments, tracking, monitoring, accounting, reconciliation and reporting. It is a web based application.

- The PFMS platform compiles, collates and makes available in real-time, information regarding all government schemes, and, significantly, provides the government real-time information on resource availability and utilisation across schemes.
- In addition, the platform will allow government expenditure to adopt a Just-in- Time (JIT) approach, with payments made only when they are needed.

CENTRE TAKES STEPS TO DRAIN EXCESS CASH

The Centre has decided to increase the limit of bonds that can be issued under a **market stabilisation scheme** to mop up excess liquidity from the banking system arising out of its demonetisation move.

KEY FACTS:

- In this regard, the government has decided to revise the ceiling for issue of securities under the Market Stabilisation Scheme (MSS) to Rs. 6,000 billion (6 lakh crore).
- The move is aimed to facilitate liquidity management operations by the central bank and the liquidity in the banking system was expected to rise further for some time.

BACKGROUND:

Following demonetisation, the banks received huge inflows of funds as people started depositing old Rs. 500 and Rs.1,000 notes in bank's and post offices. Till November 27, Rs. 8.45 lakh crore was deposited and exchanged in the banking system, according to RBI data.

ABOUT MARKET STABILIZATION SCHEME:

The MSS scheme was launched in April 2004 to strengthen the RBI's ability to conduct exchange rate and monetary management. The bills/bonds issued under MSS have all the attributes of the existing treasury bills and dated securities. These securities will be issued by way of auctions to be conducted by the RBI. The timing of issuance, amount and tenure of such securities will be decided by the RBI.

- The securities issued under the MSS scheme are matched by an equivalent cash balance held by the government with the RBI. As a result, their issuance will have a negligible impact on the fiscal deficit of the government.
- MSS (Market Stabilisation Scheme) securities are issued with the objective of providing the RBI with a stock of securities with which it can intervene in the market for managing liquidity. These securities are issued not to meet the government's expenditure.

NEW DELHI NOD FOR KARMAPA'S ARUNACHAL VISIT

The government has allowed Urgyen Trinley Dorje, the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, to address a public gathering at Mon in Arunachal Pradesh.

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- The move comes six months after the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, allowed the Karmapa to travel abroad.
- The Gyalwang Karmapa is the head of the Karma Kagyu school, one of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. He escaped from Tibet in 2000.

BACKGROUND:

In 2011, police had recovered Rs 1.2 crore of unaccounted foreign currency, including Chinese currency, from the Gyuto Tantric University and Monastery in Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh. The monastery is the temporary home of the Karmapa.

The police had registered a case against the Karmapa and the then UPA government placed further restrictions on his travel. After the NDA government came to power in 2014, the CCS reviewed the Karmapa's case and he was allowed to travel freely within as well as outside India.

ABOUT KARMA KAGYU SCHOOL:

The Karma Kagyu lineage belongs to one of the 4 main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. As a lineage of direct oral transmission it places particular emphasis on meditation and the realization of the direct experience of mind gained through the guidance of a teacher.

- The Karma Kagyu lineage has its roots in the teachings of the historical Buddha and developed into a practical way to enlightenment in India and Tibet.
- For over a 1000 years Buddhist Masters (Mahasiddhas) such as Naropa and Maitripa in India as well as the famous Tibetan Yogis Marpa and Milarepa shaped the lineage as a practical everyday practice for lay people.

KARMAPA:

Since the 12th century the Karmapas have been the heads of the Karma Kaygü lineage and responsible for the continuation of this direct transmission lineage.

The present 17th Gyalwa Karmapa Thaye Dorje was born in 1983 and in 1994 he managed to flee the oppression of Tibet and came to India.

NEW WAY TO PRODUCE NUCLEAR FUEL USING ELECTRICITY

Scientists in Russia have developed a unique, low-cost method for producing high-quality nuclear fuel using electricity.

BACKGROUND:

The main type of fuel for nuclear power reactors is the uranium oxide pellet composition. It is produced from a powder by granulation, pressing, and sintering with the subsequent control of the quality and size of the pellets.

ABOUT THE NEW METHOD:

The researchers have proposed an alternative mode of production, which forms the basis of powder metallurgy: electric pulse sintering under pressure.

The key idea in this method is heating by an electric current passing through the mold with the powder placed in. Under these circumstances, the uranium oxide fuel is simultaneously influenced by the powerful pulse discharge and mechanical pressure.

ADVANTAGES OF THE NEW TECHNOLOGY:

- The new technology allows one to obtain products of high quality and to reduce the number of production stages without increasing the cost.
- The new method increases the production rate and improves the product quality.
- Using the new method, the fuel pellets may be produced even from uranium dioxide powder, which is not suitable for the conventional technology.
- With its help it is possible to obtain high-quality samples of fuel, including that for fast breeder reactors.

SC OKAYS CENTRE'S ACTION PLAN TO TACKLE AIR POLLUTION IN DELHI-NCR

The Supreme Court has asked the Centre to put in place a pollution coding mechanism with a graded response system to tackle New Delhi's growing foul air.

- The grading system will ensure that certain steps can be automatically introduced. When air quality dips, the odd-even car rationing formula will kick in, along with closure of schools, a four-fold hike in parking fee, ban on entry of trucks, and halt in construction activities.
- The graded response also fixes responsibility on the agency that has to enforce the measure.
- The court also asked the CPCB to install real-time and manual pollution monitoring stations in Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan to check air quality for the graded response.

BACKGROUND:

The order came after the top court approved the Central Pollution Control Board's (CPCB) "graded response action plan" that outlines measures based on air quality — moderate to poor, very poor, severe, and severe-plus or emergency. A separate set of action plan has been suggested for each category.

KEYFACTS:

- The air quality index is measured on the basis of PM2.5 and PM10 in the atmosphere, which are tiny particles of dust that can cause grave respiratory disorder and damage the lungs.
- The situation becomes severe or emergency when PM2.5 level is above 300 microgram per cubic meter or PM10 crosses the 500-mark. In such a scenario, authorities will close schools, stop the entry of diesel trucks into the Capital, halt construction activities, introduce the odd-even scheme for private vehicles, and hike parking fees.
- Ban on diesel generators, construction and burning of garbage on landfill sites will kick in if the air index is very poor, with PM2.5 between 121 and 250.

- When air quality is moderate or poor, the steps to be taken are ban on garbage burning, watering of fly ash ponds, closure of brick kilns and polluting industries, and mechanised sweeping of roads.

MERCOSUR SUSPENDS VENEZUELA

Venezuela has been suspended from the Mercosur trade group over its failure to comply with its commitments when it joined the group in 2012. In this regard, the Foreign Ministers of the four founding members of Mercosur— Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay — notified Venezuela's government of the decision in a letter.

BACKGROUND:

Mercosur accepted Venezuela as a member when South America was dominated by Leftist governments in an effort to link the region's biggest agricultural and energy markets. But, Venezuela had failed to meet a Dec. 1 deadline to adopt certain standards required for membership.

WHY VENEZUELA WAS SUSPENDED?

Venezuela has not adopted all the membership rules and treaties it had promised. It has failed to meet economic, human rights and immigration accords governing the group.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS MOVE:

- The suspension would not carry any sanctions against Venezuela, but would sideline its government from bloc meetings and trade negotiations.
- A suspension would also further isolate Venezuela as it struggles with food shortages and social unrest as its oil-dependent economy crumbles.

WHAT IS MERCOSUR?

Mercosur is an economic and political bloc comprising Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

- Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, and Suriname are associate members.
- Its purpose is to promote free trade and the fluid movement of goods, people, and currency. The

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official languages are Spanish, Portuguese and Guarani. It is now a full customs union and a trading bloc.

INDIA, QATAR INK FOUR PACTS ON VISAS, CYBERSECURITY, INVESTMENTS

India and Qatar have signed four pacts including in the field of visas, cyberspace and investments. These agreements were signed during the recent visit of PM Modi.

Agreements signed:

- Agreement on the exemption from visa requirement for holders of diplomatic, special and official passports.
- Protocol on Technical Cooperation in cyber space and combating cyber crime.
- Letter of Intent regarding negotiations on an Agreement on the grant of e-Visa for businessmen and tourists of the two countries.
- MoU between Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy of Qatar and Confederation of Indian Industry.

BACKGROUND:

India enjoys close and friendly relations with Qatar, which are based on mutually beneficial commercial exchanges and extensive people-to-people contacts.

Qatar is not only an important trading partner for India in the Gulf region but is also the largest supplier of LNG, accounting for 66% of the total imports in 2015-16. Indians form the largest expatriate community in Qatar and their positive contribution in the progress and development of their host country is well recognised. There are over expatriate 630,000 Indians in Qatar.

MEET ADOPTS RESOLUTION ON DRUG TRAFFICKING IN REGION

The **Amritsar Declaration** was adopted at the concluding day of 6th Ministerial Conference of Heart of Asia (HoA).

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DECLARATION:

- The declaration puts focus on the concerned countries to address terrorism and enhancing regional economic cooperation.
- The declaration recognises terrorism as the biggest threat to peace and security. And demands immediate end to all forms of terrorism and all support financial and safe havens providing sanctuary to it.
- The declaration states the urgency to respond to the nexus between drug menace and its financial support for terrorist entities in Afghanistan. The declaration also mentions the Haqqani Network.
- It also calls for early finalisation of the draft comprehensive convention on international terrorism. It also looks at the early meeting of experts to discuss a draft regional counter terrorism framework strategy, recently prepared by Afghanistan for its early finalisation.
- The declaration states the welcoming of the agreements between the international community and Afghanistan for continued financial support to the Afghanistan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) until 2020.
- The declaration welcomes the MOU on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road between China and Afghanistan.
- The declaration also expressed serious concern about opium, the base material for production of heroin in Afghanistan, a large chunk of which eventually finds its way into India through Indo-Pak international border in Punjab.

ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY POSTPONES FOREST POLICY INDEFINITELY

The Environment Ministry has indefinitely postponed an ambitious plan to update **India's forest policy**. It has also decided to abstain from committing to a timeframe by which it would have a third of India's land under forest or tree cover, a key promise of the forest policy.

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BACKGROUND:

The MoEFCC had tasked the Bhopal-based Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM), an affiliated organisation, with reviewing and revising the existing forest policy.

This was the first time that the policy was being re-looked since 1988 as it wanted to update the several changes in the forest laws and provide a forward-looking policy that talked about increasing India's forest cover and tackling the effects of climate change.

The organisation had submitted its report in June this year. However, the report was later rejected by the government.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT:

- It proposed levy of a green tax and called for safeguarding forest land by exercising strict restraint on diversion for non-forestry purposes like mining and industrial projects and practising responsible eco-tourism in forest areas to ensure safety of wildlife.
- On generating resources to manage the forest cover, it said the budget of the forestry sector should be appropriately enhanced so that the objectives enshrined in this policy can be achieved.
- It also proposed to levy environmental cess and carbon tax on certain products and services.
- On the contentious issue of diversion of forests for mining and industrial projects, it said, "Forest land diversion projects related to mining, quarrying, construction of dams, roads and other linear infrastructure needs to adopt special caution. Use of state-of-the-art technology which causes minimum pollution and damage should be promoted."

CHILDREN'S PEACE PRIZE:

- Teen environmental activist Kehkashan Basu has been awarded the prestigious International Children's Peace Prize.
- Basu was born in Dubai to Indian parents.

- Basu is being honoured for the work done by her child-run organisation Green Hope, based in the United Arab Emirates, which now has more than 1,000 volunteers in 10 countries around the world.
- The prize is awarded annually "to a child who fights courageously for children's rights. It also includes a 100,000 euro (\$106,000) investment for projects in the winner's home country.
- Past winners include Pakistani education campaigner Malala Yousafzai and the prize's first recipient, Nkosi Johnson, a South African boy who shone a light on the plight of children with HIV/AIDS.

ANCIENT SITE FOUND NEAR LADAKH:

- An ancient camping site used by pre-historic man and datable to circa 8500 BCE, has been found at an altitude of about 4,200 metres near Saser La in the Nubra Valley, Ladakh. Saser La leads to the Karakoram Pass.
- A camping site is a place where hunter-gatherers stayed temporarily before they moved on to another place.
- Charcoal pieces from hearth activity and remains of bones associated with it were found at the site. The charcoal pieces revealed that the site belonged to circa 8500 BCE.
- Such an early antiquity on the basis of a scientific date is the very first for that region. Only 6th century CE to 7th century CE remains were reported in Ladakh so far.

NAVY DAY:

- 45th Indian Navy Day was celebrated on December 4 to commemorate the launch of Operation Trident against Pakistan.
- On December 4 1971, the Indian Navy carried out Operation Trident, which was a devastating attack on Pakistan Naval Headquarters of Karachi. The attack was successful as it sank a minesweeper, a destroyer and an ammunition supply ship.

PROPOSAL TO AMEND LAW FOR CASHLESS WAGE PAYMENTS

The Centre has proposed amending a law to empower States and allow industries to pay wages by cheque or by direct credit into bank accounts.

- In this regard, the Union Labour ministry has proposed changes to the **Section 6 of the Payment of Wages Act of 1936**.
- The proposal states that State governments may specify the industry through official notifications where the payment of wages shall be made through cheques or direct credit in bank accounts.

BACKGROUND:

The present law states that all payment of wages should be made in cash, with a provision enabling employers to obtain written permission of the worker to pay either by cheque, or by crediting the wages to his or her bank account.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS MOVE:

One of the reasons for the ineffective enforcement of payments of wages to workers is the payment of wages in cash. So, the payment of wages only through cheque or through bank transfer in the bank account of employed persons will reduce the complaints regarding non-payment or less payment of minimum wages, besides serving the objectives of digital and less cash economy.

AMAZON ROLLS OUT LAUNCHPAD IN INDIA

Amazon Inc. has announced the launch of its global programme for start-up products, Launchpad, in India.

WHAT IS IT?

Launchpad is a destination for start-ups to showcase unique products to millions of consumers world over.

KEY FACTS:

- As part of the Launchpad programme, Amazon globally lists consumer products from start-ups to customers through its online marketplace.

- Amazon provides the marketing, discovery and logistics support for these products, which it claims get access to a global consumer base of over 300 million.
- India is the seventh country where Launchpad has started. Other countries include the US, Germany, China, France and UK, among others.
- Overall, Launchpad lists products from 600 start-ups across these seven markets.
- As minimum criteria, these start-ups are required to have a ready, consumer facing physical product that can be ordered and shipped.

PANEL SUGGESTS ONE-TIME LICENSING FOR DRUGS

The **drugs technical advisory board** recently recommended one-time licensing for manufacture and sales of drugs, with a rider that there be at least one annual inspection and in cases where risk is high, more.

BACKGROUND:

At present, the renewal of licences for each formulation rests with state regulators and is around three years.

OTHER PROPOSALS MADE:

- The board has also asked for separate rules for manufacturing, import, sale and distribution of cosmetics. It has suggested the European Union's model.
- It has proposed making influenza drugs Oseltamivir and Zanamvir available widely at all pharmacies, by putting it in the **Schedule H1 list**. The two drugs have been treated as **Schedule X drugs**, available at select pharmacies.
- Another recommendation is to retain the four-year approval threshold for 'new drugs'. The domestic industry felt if the definition of a new drug is extended to 10 years, innovation will take a back seat and wanting the four-year period to be retained.

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SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NEW MOVE:

It will help in 'ease of doing business' and the government's 'Make in India' initiative at a time when the country is slipping in the competitiveness index. It will give a boost to industry and give comfort to our customers.

MPS SUBMIT PLEA TO REMOVE HYDERABAD HIGH COURT JUDGE

Sixty-one Members of Parliament have submitted a petition to initiate removal proceedings against Justice C.V. Nagarjuna Reddy of the Hyderabad High Court, to Rajya Sabha chairperson, Hamid Ansari. Mr. Ansari is yet to give any ruling on it.

BACKGROUND:

There is an allegation made by a Mr. Rama Krishna, formerly principal junior civil judge, Rayachoty, Kadapa district, currently under suspension, that he was forced by Justice C.V. Nagarjuna Reddy to remove the name of a Mr. Pavan Kumar Reddy, who happens to be the brother of Justice Reddy, from a declaration recorded by Mr. Rama Krishna when he was posted as magistrate at Rayachoty. Mr. Pavan Kumar Reddy is the additional public prosecutor of Rayachoty courts.

REMOVAL OF JUDGES:

Article 124(4) and the Judges Inquiry Act 1968 determine the procedure of removal of the judges:

- A motion of impeachment addressed to the President is to be signed by at least 100 members of the Lok Sabha or 50 members of the Rajya Sabha and then delivered to the Speaker of Lok Sabha or the Chairman of Rajya Sabha.
- The motion is to be investigated by a Committee of 3 judges of the Supreme Court and a distinguished jurist.
- If the Committee finds the judge guilty of misbehavior or that he suffers from incapacity, the motion along with the report of the committee is taken up for consideration in the House where motion was moved.

- The judge is then removed by the requisite majority, i.e. majority of total and 2/3 of its members present and voting.

KEY FACTS:

- A member of the higher judiciary, which means the Judges and Chief Justices of the Supreme Court of India and the state High Courts, can be removed from service only through the process of impeachment under Article 124 (4) of the Constitution.
- A judge is removable from his office, only on the grounds of proved misbehavior or incapacity.
- Parliament is empowered to regulate the procedure for the investigation and proof of such misbehavior or incapacity.
- A judge may be removed from his office only by an order of the president.

KONKAN 16:

- KONKAN 16 is the 2016 edition of the **annual bilateral maritime** exercise between the **Indian Navy and the Royal Navy**. It is being held at Mumbai and Goa.
- Exercise **KONKAN**, named after the **Western coastal region** of India, was institutionalised in **2004**. Since then, the exercise hosted in rotation by both the Navies, has grown in complexity, scale and intensity.
- The exercise will involve sharing of best practices and lessons learnt from recent operations, especially in the field of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (**HADR**) and Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (**NEO**).
- KONKAN 16 will be an important chapter in the maritime interactions under the aegis of KONKAN series as it will familiarise both forces with each other's planning processes and further enhance synergy and inter-operability.

NIDHI AAPKE NIKAT PROGRAMME:

- Nidhi Aapke Nikat is a public **outreach** programme. It is held on the 10th of every month in all the 122 field offices of Employees' Provident Fund Organization (**EPFO**) and is presided over by the officer-in-charge.
- It is an endeavour by the Organization to bring together all its different stakeholders on a common platform.
- The various new initiatives in the interest of employees/employers taken by the Organization are explained during the programme.
- It encourages employees and employers to give their suggestions and feedback regarding the different issues affecting the Organization besides redressing grievances.
- Approximately 17,000 grievances were received by EPFO since its inception in July, 2015. Efforts are to resolve these grievances on the spot itself. Out of the total grievances, as on date, only 268 grievances are pending.
- Nidhi Aapke Nikat not only adopts participatory and broad-based approach in dealing with its stakeholders, but also disseminates information regarding the new initiatives taken in their interest. Such measures shall, in due course, bring about greater public awareness of the rights and responsibilities of all the stakeholders and will in turn, check the number of grievances

IIIDEM CONDUCTS TRAINING FOR SAARC NATIONS ON ELECTION MANAGEMENT

With the aim of conducting free, fair, peaceful and inclusive elections in the country, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has brought together delegates from Election Management Bodies (EMBs) of SAARC Countries.

- The officials from saarc countries are in India for training at the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM). The course is being sponsored by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

KEY FACTS:

- The 11 day course encapsulates several sessions on principles and practices for election management.
- During the program, the 28 participants from SAARC countries will share their experiences on election situation in their respective countries.
- Additionally, the program aims to train officials on various aspects of election management like capacity building of stakeholders, code of conduct, voter inclusion and registration et al.
- The participants have unanimously agreed on the continuous need for exchange of experiences and expertise between the SAARC Electoral Bodies for improved election management.

ABOUT IIIDEM:

It is an advanced resource centre of learning, research, training and extension for participatory democracy and election management. The institute is a national and international hub for exchange of good practices in election management.

It works for enhancing voter education, and developing human resource for efficient conduct of free and fair elections in India. Along with this it is also set to develop mutually beneficial partnership with other countries.

FINAL NOTIFICATION ON ECO-SENSITIVE ZONE IN SANJAY GANDHI NATIONAL PARK

The Government has issued the Final Notification for an Eco-Sensitive Zone area of 59.46 sq kms of which 19.25 sq km is forest land and 40.21 sq km is non-forest land in Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai suburb.

KEY FACTS:

- The extent (of ESZ) varies at different places taking into consideration its geographical area. No construction will take place in this (ESZ) area. This step has been taken with a view to avoid man-animal conflict.
- The Notification also provides that in areas around Housing Societies and with high human habitation,

and in view of the fact that the National Park has a large population of leopards, a high wall with fencing may be erected to ensure that man-animal conflict is avoided.

BACKGROUND:

The Eco-Sensitive Zone has a minimum extent of 100 metres and maximum extent of up to 4 km from the Park boundary. The objective of notifying Eco-Sensitive Zones is to create a buffer as further protection around Protected Areas (PAs) such as National Parks and Wildlife sanctuaries.

ABOUT SANJAY GANDHI NATIONAL PARK:

Sanjay Gandhi National Park is spread over three districts – Palgar, Thane and Mumbai Suburb. The National Park is home to a number of endangered species of flora and fauna and harbours approximately 800 species of flowering plants, 45 species of mammals, 43 species of reptiles, 38 species of snakes, 12 species of amphibians, 300 species of birds, 150 species of butterflies. Notable amongst them are large mammalian species such as leopard, wild boar, four-horned antelope, black-naped hare, wild cat, jackal and porcupine and many bird species such as Lesser grebe, Purple Heron, Smaller Egret, Lesser Whistling Teal, Pariah Kite. Many reptiles, including snakes as Indian Cobra and Viper are also found in the National Park.

TIFR DISCOVERY CHALLENGES THEORY OF SUPERCONDUCTIVITY

Researchers at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Mumbai, have made a landmark discovery that challenges the conventional understanding of superconductivity.

ABOUT THE DISCOVERY:

Researchers have discovered **bismuth semi-metal** in bulk form becoming a superconductor when the temperature is lowered to 530 microKelvin (about -273 degree C), which is three orders of magnitude higher than the theoretical prediction.

The **Bardeen-Cooper-Schrieffer (BCS) theory** [which explains superconductivity in most low

Tc superconductors] cannot explain the superconductivity seen in bismuth.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISCOVERY:

The discovery demands a new theory and a new mechanism to understand superconductivity in bismuth. This discovery provides an alternative path for discovering new superconducting materials which are very different from the conventional superconductors.

WHAT ARE SUPERCONDUCTORS?

Superconductors are materials that conduct electricity with no resistance whatsoever. To become superconductors, the element should have mobile electrons, and these electrons should come together to form pairs, known as Cooper pairs.

ABOUT BISMUTH:

- **Bismuth** is a chemical element with the symbol Bi and the atomic number 83.
- Unlike other elements in the periodic table, bismuth has unusual phenomenon — while metallic superconductors have one mobile electron per atom, bismuth has only one mobile electron per 100,000 atoms.
- Also, bismuth's electronic energy (Fermi energy) is comparable to the lattice (phonon) energy.

WHAT IS BCS THEORY?

The theory describes **superconductivity** as a microscopic effect caused by a condensation of **Cooper pairs** into a boson-like state. The theory is also used in nuclear physics to describe the pairing interaction between nucleons in an atomic nucleus. It was proposed by Bardeen, Cooper, and Schrieffer in 1957; they received the Nobel Prize in Physics for this theory in 1972.

- Superconductors abruptly lose all resistance to the flow of an electric current when they are cooled to temperatures near absolute zero. Cooper had discovered that electrons in a superconductor are grouped in pairs, now called Cooper pairs, and that the motions of all of the Cooper pairs within a single

superconductor are correlated; they constitute a system that functions as a single entity.

- Application of an electrical voltage to the superconductor causes all Cooper pairs to move, constituting a current. When the voltage is removed, current continues to flow indefinitely because the pairs encounter no opposition. For the current to stop, all of the Cooper pairs would have to be halted at the same time, a very unlikely occurrence. As a superconductor is warmed, its Cooper pairs separate into individual electrons, and the material becomes normal, or nonsuperconducting.
- Many other aspects of the behaviour of superconductors are explained by the BCS theory. The theory supplies a means by which the energy required to separate the Cooper pairs into their individual electrons can be measured experimentally. The BCS theory also explains the isotope effect, in which the temperature at which superconductivity appears is reduced if heavier atoms of the elements making up the material are introduced.

PRADHAN MOOTS ASIAN BUYERS FORUM TO COUNTER OPEC CLOUT

Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan has mooted the idea of a large Asian LNG buyers forum to negotiate more equitable trade deals and balance the influence of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

- This assumes significance in light of the ongoing increase in oil prices resulting in an adverse impact on the Indian exchequer and the government's commitment to move towards a gas-based economy.
- A number of large Asian LNG buyers, including India, could benefit by joining hands and thereby, possibly, bring in more equitable trade deals.

BACKGROUND:

Today a large number of LNG deals are linked to oil prices. Only geographies with LNG hubs have prices lower than the oil-linked prices. The view is that Asian LNG buyers pay higher rates since there is no LNG hub in Asia and there is no unity among consumers.

ABOUT OPEC:

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is a group of oil-producing nations that was first established in Baghdad, Iraq, in 1961. OPEC is one of the most powerful international organizations in the world and was a major player in the shift towards state control over natural resources.

- Before OPEC was formed, the oil market was dominated by a group of multinational companies. The formation of OPEC was a major act of sovereignty by the founding nations, and it helped ensure that private companies could not unilaterally cut prices throughout the world.
- Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela are the founding Members of the Organization.
- Today, OPEC is comprised of 13 members and still has a massive impact on oil production and price around the world.

BRICS NATIONS VOW TO AUTOMATIC SHARING OF TAX INFORMATION

BRICS nations, including India, have pledged to share tax information automatically and adopt global standards on tax transparency to check cross border tax evasion. This was taken during the recently concluded meeting of the heads of Revenue of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS).

KEY FACTS:

- BRICS leaders have also resolved to support other developing nations in increasing their tax administrations' capacity to implement the OECD/G20 standard on Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI).
- Expressing "deep concern" with the process of erosion of the tax base by aggressive tax practices including incomplete disclosure of information by MNCs, the group reaffirmed its resolve to work together to address them.
- They urged timely and consistent implementation of the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting Project across as many tax jurisdictions as possible and appealed

to all countries to join the framework and participate in the BEPS project. The OECD/G20 project on BEPS provides governments with solutions for closing the gaps in existing international rules that allow corporate profits to artificially shift to low or no-tax environments, where little or no economic activity takes place.

- They also discussed the potential areas of cooperation and exchange opinions and views based on their existing commitment to openness, solidarity, equality, mutual understanding, inclusiveness and mutually beneficial cooperation.
- They reiterated their commitment to actions taken to ensure the fairness of the international tax system particularly towards prevention of base erosion and shifting of profits, exchange of tax information and capacity building of developing countries.

WINTER FOG CAMPAIGN:

- To better understand the science of fog formation over New Delhi, the **Ministry of Earth Sciences** recently inaugurated the Winter Fog Campaign at the New Delhi Airport.
- This move is aimed at understanding different physical and chemical features of fog and factors responsible for its genesis, intensity and duration.
- The goal of the Winter Fog Experiment (WIFEX) is to develop methods for forecasting winter fog on various temporal and spatial scales, and help reduce its adverse impact on aviation, transportation and economy, and loss of human life due to accidents.
- The campaign is being conducted at the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA), with full cooperation and support of Airport Authority of India and GMR, IGIA. India Meteorological Department, National Center for Medium Range Weather Forecast under MoES and Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Mohali are participating in the observational campaign being led by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune.

45TH ALL INDIA POLICE SCIENCE CONGRESS:

- The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) and Kerala Police are jointly organizing the 45th All India Police Science Congress at Kovalam, Thiruvananthapuram.
- The main objective of this prestigious national event is to provide a common platform to the various police forces/units, social scientists, forensic experts and other stakeholders to deliberate on selected themes of topical interest to the Indian Police.
- It will also provide an opportunity to learn from each other's experience by understanding the best practices being followed in other States/UTs.
 - The deliberations of All India Police Science Congress will provide a future roadmap for all the police forces/services of the country to provide quality service to the people.
- The First All India Police Science Congress was held in 1960 at Patna.

DR. AMBEDKAR'S BIRTH DAY TO BE CELEBRATED AS WATER DAY:

Lauding the contribution of Dr. B R Ambedkar in **water resources management** of the country Union Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation Sushri Uma Bharti has announced that **his birth day 14th April will be celebrated as "Water Day"**.

MOU BETWEEN INDIA AND AFGHANISTAN

The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval to the MoU between India and Afghanistan on cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space.

- The MoU envisages cooperation between the two countries for application of space technologies in education, agriculture, weather forecasting, telecommunications, rural health, sanitation and urban development among others.

THE MOU WILL BENEFIT BOTH COUNTRIES IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER:

- Development of space sector in Afghanistan.
- Burnish India's credentials as a nation with advanced space technology, one that can also assist other countries.
- Afghanistan will move towards self-reliance in the space sector.
- Help deepen bilateral ties and mutual understanding and trust between India and Afghanistan.
- Provide India with a foothold in Afghanistan's strategic space and communication sector.
- It will boost high-tech jobs in the two countries in both core Science & Technology and R&D fields, and also the field of implementation.
- It will support project development activities, appraise, approve and sanction projects.
- It will also coordinate all central efforts for the development of Industrial Corridor projects and will monitor their implementation.
- DMICDC will function as a knowledge partner to NICDIT in respect of all the Industrial Corridors in addition to its present DMIC work, till Knowledge Partner(s) for other Industrial Corridors are in place.
- An Apex Monitoring Authority under the chairpersonship of the Finance Minister will be constituted to periodically review the activities of NICDIT and progress of the projects. It will consist of Minister-in-charge of Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Minister of Railways, Minister of Road Transport & Highways, Minister of Shipping, Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog and Chief Ministers of States concerned as Members.

EXPANSION OF THE MANDATE OF DELHI MUMBAI INDUSTRIAL CORRIDOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION TRUST FUND

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the expansion of the mandate of Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor Project Implementation Trust Fund (DMIC-PITF Trust) and its re-designation as National Industrial Corridor Development & Implementation Trust (NICDIT) for integrated development of Industrial Corridors.

- NICDIT has also been permitted to utilize financial assistance already sanctioned within extended period up to 31st March, 2022.

KEY FACTS:

- NICDIT would be an apex body under the administrative control of DIPP for coordinated and unified development of all the industrial corridors in the country.
- It will channelize Gol funds as well as institutional funds while ensuring that the various corridors are properly planned and implemented keeping in view the broad national perspectives regarding industrial and city development.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS MOVE:

The formation of the NICDIT will enable development and implementation of Industrial Corridor Projects across India by bringing in holistic planning and development approach and sharing the learning from development of Industrial Corridors, which will enable innovation in areas such as planning, design development and funding of such projects. This will help enhance the share of manufacturing in the country, attract investment in manufacturing and service industry sectors, which will have a catalytic effect on up-gradation and development of skills of the workforce and generation of employment opportunities.

BACKGROUND:

To accelerate the growth in manufacturing and for ensuring scientifically planned urbanization, Government of India (Gol) has adopted the strategy of developing integrated Industrial Corridors in partnership with State Governments with focus on manufacturing. Five Corridors namely, Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC), Amritsar Kolkata Industrial Corridor (AKIG), Bengaluru- Mumbai Economic Corridor (BMEC) and

Vizag-Chennai Industrial Corridor (VCIC) have been planned for development by Government of India.

The five Industrial corridors presently cover the States, namely, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu.

CENTRE TO REVIEW FERTILIZER SUBSIDY RATES AFTER 6 MONTHS

The government has approved the proposal of half-yearly review of nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) rates for phosphatic and potassic (P&K) fertilizers for 2016-17 against the present practice of annual review.

- The government has also decided to ensure that any fall in international prices will be reflected by the fertilizer companies with subsequent reduction in maximum retail prices.
- These moves are expected to result in increase in consumption of P&K fertilizers which will result in balanced fertilization.

BACKGROUND:

The government has been implementing Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) policy for decontrolled phosphate and potash (P&K) fertilisers since April 2010. Under this policy, MRP is fixed by the fertiliser companies as per market dynamics.

PSLV-C36 SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHES RESOURCESAT-2A REMOTE SENSING SATELLITE

In its thirty eighth flight (PSLV-C36), ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle has successfully launched the 1,235 kg RESOURCESAT-2A Satellite from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre SHAR, Sriharikota. This is the thirty seventh consecutively successful mission of PSLV.

- With this launch, the PSLV has yet again demonstrated its reliability. The total number of satellites launched by India's workhorse launch vehicle PSLV including today's RESOURCESAT-2A has now reached 122, of which 43 are Indian and the remaining 79 are from abroad.

ABOUT RESOURCESAT-2A:

RESOURCESAT-2A is a Remote Sensing satellite intended for resource monitoring. It is a follow on mission to RESOURCESAT-1 and RESOURCESAT-2, launched in 2003 and 2011 respectively.

- RESOURCESAT-2A is intended to continue the remote sensing data services to global users provided by RESOURCESAT-1 and RESOURCESAT-2.
- RESOURCESAT-2A carries three payloads which are similar to those of RESOURCESAT-1 and RESOURCESAT-2. They are a high resolution Linear Imaging Self Scanner (LISS-4) camera, medium resolution LISS-3 camera, and a coarse resolution Advanced Wide Field Sensor (AWiFS) camera.
- RESOURCESAT-2A carries two Solid State Recorders with a capacity of 200 Giga Bits each to store the images taken by its cameras which can be read out later to ground stations.
 - The data sent by RESOURCESAT-2A will be useful for agricultural applications like crop area and crop production estimation, drought monitoring, soil mapping, cropping system analysis and farm advisories generation.

SC SEEKS PARLIAMENTARY PANEL REPORT ON LOKPAL AMENDMENTS

The Supreme Court has asked the Centre to place before it a copy of the report of a Parliamentary standing committee suggesting amendments to the Lokpal law.

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

The court is hearing a petition filed by NGO Common Cause which has sought a direction to the Centre to make the appointment of chairperson and members of Lokpal as per the amended rules framed under Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

- The NGO in its plea has also sought a direction to the Centre to ensure that the procedure for selecting the chairperson and members of Lokpal must be transparent as envisaged under the Act.

- According to the NGO, the inaction of the government in making the appointment of Lokpal is arbitrary and unreasonable and hence violative of Article 14 of the Constitution.

BACKGROUND:

The appointment of anti-corruption ombudsman is hanging in balance since the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, which received Presidential assent on January 1, 2014 because the legislation provides for the LoP to be on the selection committee, but in the present Lok Sabha the largest opposition party does not have the required number of MPs for its leader to be designated as Leader of Opposition.

- Earlier, the court had said the requirement of LoP on the panel was “dispensable” and can be substituted with the leader of the largest opposition party.
- In Lok Sabha, the largest opposition party Congress has only 45 members and lacks the requisite 10% of total 545 seats, giving rise to the need to amend the present Lokpal Act.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS?

The law provides for selection of chairperson and members of Lokpal by a committee consisting of the Prime Minister, Lok Sabha Speaker, LoP in Lok Sabha, Chief Justice of India or a sitting SC judge nominated by the him, and an eminent jurist to be nominated by President of India on the basis of recommendations of first four members of selection panel.

VETERANS OUTREACH ANDROID APP:

- In an attempt to reach out to Army veterans, and create an interactive mechanism, the government has launched a mobile app called “Veterans Outreach App”. This will provide certain specific facilities to Army Veterans & Veer Naris on their android based mobiles.
- The app was prepared under the Directorate of Indian Army Veterans (DIAV), which functions under the Adjutant General Branch and runs a web portal specifically meant for veterans and Veer Naris called

‘Indian Army Veterans Portal’ (www.indianarmyveterans.gov.in).

- The Veterans Outreach App has specific features like “Ask a question” and “Locator Services” that enable locating Ex-Serviceman Cells, ECHS Polyclinics, Station Canteens and Sainik Aram Garh’s all across the country.
- The app also facilitates route guidance on a google map to any chosen service facility.
- The App also facilitates “Findings Coursemates” from amongst veterans who are registered on the Indian Army Veterans Portal and thereby enabling them to reconnect with old mates.
- An additional feature incorporates providing links to various web portals run by Directorate General Recruiting, Directorate General Resettlement, Kendriya Sainik Board, Indian Army. Portal and Principle Controller of Defence Accounts.

INDIA INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FESTIVAL (IISF-2016) INAUGURATED IN NEW DELHI:

- India International Science Festival (IISF-2016) was recently inaugurated.
- It is the largest festival of science in this country with its focus on “Science for the Masses”.
- India International Science Festival (IISF) as a major science event was conceptualized last year. It was a great success and also won the distinction of Guinness Book of World Record for successful conduct of Largest Practical Science Lesson by 2000 school students.
- The success of first IISF in 2015 gave the impetus to launch IISF-2016 with expanded scope, mandate and operation.
- IISF-2016 aims to encourage and develop scientific temper and attitude, promote exchange of knowledge and ideas among young minds including showcasing of recent developments and contributions of India in science and technology involving all our scientific departments.

- IISF-2016 will showcase India's S&T prowess, technological developments, history of Indian Science and science education involving more than 10000 young researchers, school students, academicians and top level Indian scientists.

SALE OF COTTON STOCKS BY CCI

According to the latest figures, during cotton season 2015-16 (1st October, 2015 to 30th September, 2016), Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) has purchased seed cotton (kapas) equivalent to 8.44 lakh bales at Minimum Support Price (MSP).

BACKGROUND:

During cotton season 2015-16, cotton prices in the country abnormally increased in the month of May/July 2016 due to damage by white fly pests in Northern region & pink boll worm attack in Gujarat region and panic buying by the mills to cover their lean season requirement.

In such situation, in order to safeguard the interest of the textile Industry including Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Government of India, Ministry of Textiles decided in July, 2016 to sell the balance unsold stock available with CCI to MSME units through e-sale so as to provide them some relief from cotton price volatility in the market and stabilize the market prices. Accordingly, all the cotton stocks of CCI has been sold.

ABOUT CCI:

Cotton Corporation of India or CCI is a Government of India agency, engaged in diverse activities related to trade, procurement, and export of cotton. CCI is a public sector agency responsible for equitable distribution of cotton among the different constituents of the industry and aid imports of cotton.

- It was established in 1970 under Companies Act 1956.
- CCI is governed by Textile Policy 1985 issued by Ministry of Textiles Organisation, Government of India.

DST-INTEL COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH FOR REAL-TIME RIVER WATER AND AIR QUALITY MONITORING

Recognizing the importance of developing the online River Water and Air Quality Monitoring (WAQM) systems, Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India and Intel are collaborating to jointly initiate "DST-Intel Collaborative Research for Real-Time River Water and Air Quality Monitoring" soliciting proposals from Academic/Research Institutions and providing grant-in-aid support to the selected project(s).

KEY FACTS:

- This will be a joint programme of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode.
- The aim of this initiative is to develop key technologies for sensing, communication and analysis of large-scale data collected from autonomous networks of perpetual/long-lived sensor nodes, followed by integration and deployment for water and air quality monitoring in real-time.
- The program will be administered by the binational Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF).

HIMACHAL PRADESH BECOMES 18TH STATE TO JOIN UDAY

Government of India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the State of Himachal Pradesh and the State DISCOM under the Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY), for operational and financial turnaround of the DISCOM.

- Himachal Pradesh is the 18th State to sign MoU under UDAY.

HOW WILL THIS MOVE HELP HIMACHAL PRADESH?

An overall net benefit of approximately Rs. 823 crores would accrue to the State by opting to participate in UDAY, by way of savings in interest cost, reduction in Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) and transmission losses, interventions in energy efficiency etc. during the period of turnaround.

ABOUT UDAY SCHEME:

UDAY is an effort to make these DISCOMs financially and operationally healthy, to be able to supply adequate power at affordable rates, and enable the Governments to make efforts towards 100% Village electrification and 24X7 Power For All.

- It envisages to reduce interest burden, cost of power and AT&C losses. Consequently, DISCOM would become sustainable to supply adequate and reliable power enabling 24x7 power supply.
- The scheme provides that States would take over 75% debt of Discoms, as on 30th September, 2015 in two years.
- UDAY has inbuilt incentives encouraging State Governments to voluntarily restructure their debts. These incentives include taking over of DISCOM debt by the States outside the fiscal deficit limits; reduction in the cost of power through various measures such as coal linkage rationalization, liberal coal swaps and priority/additional funding through schemes of MoP & MNRE.
- UDAY is different from earlier restructuring schemes in several ways including flexibility of keeping debt taken over outside fiscal deficit limit, reduction in cost of power and a series of time bound interventions for improving operational efficiency.
- UDAY also provides for measures that will reduce the cost of power generation, which would ultimately benefit consumers.

TRIPLE TALAQ IS ‘CRUEL’, ‘MOST DEMEANING’ TO WOMEN

Observing that the judicial conscience is “disturbed”, the Allahabad High Court has held that triple talaq is “cruel” and raised a question whether the Muslim Personal law could be amended to alleviate the sufferings of Muslim women.

IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS MADE BY THE COURT:

- Coming down heavily on the practice, the court has held that this form of “instant divorce” is “most

demeaning” which “impedes and drags India from becoming a nation”.

- The court said the view that “the Muslim husband enjoys an arbitrary, unilateral power to inflict instant divorce” does not tie in with Islamic laws.
- The court observed that “divorce is permissible in Islam only in case of extreme emergency. When all efforts for effecting a reconciliation have failed, the parties may proceed to a dissolution of marriage by Talaq or by Khola”.
- The court also noted that personal laws of any community cannot claim supremacy over the rights granted to the individuals by the Constitution that provides for equality and non-discrimination.

BACKGROUND:

The constitution allows Muslims, the biggest religious minority group in the country, to regulate matters such as marriage, divorce and inheritance through their own civil code. Even the Supreme Court has been examining how much it can interfere in Muslim laws governing family-related issues as it hears a plea to end the practice which permits Muslim men to divorce their wives by saying talaq three times.

Besides, the centre had recently informed the Supreme Court that it is opposed to the Muslim practice of triple talaq. It had also described this practice as “misplaced in a secular country.”

A MORE MUSCULAR RICE VARIETY TAKES ON WHEAT

A rice variety that packs more protein to match wheat has been released by Karnataka’s University of Agricultural Sciences – Bengaluru.

- The rice strain, which offers an option to those who are not comfortable switching over to wheat for supplementary protein, is now available for commercial cultivation.
- The high-protein variety has been under development at UAS-B for nearly 10 years, with Rs. 92 lakh in funding from the Union Department of Biotechnology.

WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT THE NEW STRAIN?

- The new strain has 12 to 13% protein content, which is higher than the 6 to 7.5% in normal rice. Wheat has about 14% of protein.
- Using conventional breeding, researchers raised the amount of lysine, an amino acid that helps synthesize proteins, by about 20%. The higher protein leads to a decrease in starch, benefiting diabetics.
- The rice protein is also easier to digest compared to what comes from non-vegetarian sources. It is particularly good for children and the elderly.
- For the farmer, the new entrant is a lucrative option that can be grown like any other cereal, without extra costs.

INDIA, U.S. TALK DEFENCE PARTNERSHIP

Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar and United States Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter have finalised India's designation as a Major Defense Partner of the United States. This was announced in the recent India-US joint statement on Carter's visit to New Delhi. This status puts India on a par with the closest allies and partners of the U.S.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS MOVE:

The designation as a Major Defense Partner is a status unique to India and institutionalises the progress made to facilitate defence trade and technology-sharing with India to a level at par with that of the United States' closest allies and partners, and ensures enduring cooperation into the future.

BACKGROUND:

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trip to Washington in June, the United States said it recognised India as a Major Defense Partner. The joint statement issued then had acknowledged the US-India defence relationship as a possible "anchor of stability", with the United States saying it will "continue to work toward facilitating technology sharing with India to a level commensurate with that of its closest allies and partners".

However, there were differences between the two sides about the level of technology transfer and cooperation permissible under the Major Defense Partner status. Besides, India was seeking benefits granted to the closest allies of the US, such as Australia and the UK which the Pentagon was hesitant to concede.

INDIA AMENDMENT IN THE NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT, 2017 (NDAA):

India's Major Defense Partner status has been made a part of the India Amendment in the National Defense Authorization Act, 2017 (NDAA), approved by the US Congress to allocate funds annually to the US military. This Bill is expected to be passed shortly which will put a formal, official stamp on India's status.

Under the India Amendment in the NDAA 2017, the US government will, consistent with its conventional arms transfer policy, inform the review of requests to export defence articles, defence services, or related technology to India under the Arms Export Control Act, and inform any regulatory and policy adjustments that may be appropriate.

Besides recognising India's status as a Major Defense Partner, the India Amendment will designate an American official to ensure the success of the Framework for the United States-India Defense Relationship which was signed last year, to approve and facilitate the transfer of advanced technology, and to strengthen the effectiveness of the US-India Defense Trade and Technology Initiative and the durability of the India Rapid Reaction Cell in Pentagon.

SHILP GURU AWARDS:

- The Shilp Guru Awards were launched by the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) on 15th November, 2002, to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the resurgence of Handicrafts in India.
- Since 2002 up to 2014, 117 artisans responsible for maintaining craft traditions have been selected for the award.
- The selection of Shilp Guru is done from amongst those who are hereditary masters, who received the

National Award at the very inception of the scheme and who are alive or whose children are carrying on with the tradition and have made a valuable contribution in the development, creativity and expansion of knowledge in their craft.

- Selection of Shilp Guru has to be from among some extraordinarily skilled masters whose work has not been recognized and who deserve the title of Shilp Guru because of their contribution in keeping alive the craft skill, reviving a languishing craft, setting up of institutions for training of Master Craftspersons.
- Under exceptional circumstances Shilp Guru Award can be presented to a person who may not be a hereditary craftsperson, but who has mastered the technique and has been responsible for the revival of tradition, training of masters and contributing to the development of technology.
- Individuals who have not trained masters to carry on the tradition shall not be considered for awarding the title of the Shilp Guru. One important criterion of selection is the contribution of the Shilp Guru to the welfare and development of crafts community and to craft sector as a whole.
- The Award consists of a gold coin, Rs.2,00,000/- in cash, a Tamarapatra, an Angavastram and a certificate.
- It will be awarded to a craftsperson only once in a lifetime, to encourage master craftspersons to maintain excellence in craftsmanship and keep alive our old tradition.
- The Award consists of Rs.1,00,000/- in cash, a Tamrapatra, an Angavastram and a certificate.
- Since 1965 to 2014, 1193 National Awards have been given, out of which 189 are women.
- The main crafts in which Awards have been given are Metal Engaving, Terracotta, **Warli Painting, Madhubani Painting, Paper Machie, Punjabi Tilla Juti, Miniature Painting, Gold Leaf Painting, Pichawai painting, Phad Painting**, Hand Block Printing, Bone Carving, Sandal Wood Carving, Tie and Dye Clay Modelling, coconut shell carving, Lac work, Stone Dust, Patta chitra paddy Jewellery & Straw craft & Maru Embroidery.
- It will be awarded to a craftsperson only once in a lifetime, to encourage master craftspersons to maintain excellence in craftsmanship and keep alive our old tradition.

SIMCON 2016:

- The Ministry of Information & Broadcasting is organising the 28th State Information Ministers Conference. Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, Minister for I&B will chair the conference.
- The two day conference will promote partnership in the dissemination process between Centre and States, enabling effective communication to the people and on sector specific collaboration in the Films, Broadcasting & Information sector.
- Being organized after 2009, the conference will deliberate on key policy issues in the Films & Broadcasting sector and new key initiatives undertaken in the information domain.
- The conference is being organised on the theme – “Reform, Perform & Transform – A New Dimension of Communication” and is expected to provide a synergy for a robust communication outreach process.

VARDAH:

- It is the season’s third cyclonic storm.
- Vardah has formed in the Southeast Bay of Bengal.

NATIONAL AWARDS FOR MASTER CRAFTSPERSONS:

- The Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) is implementing a scheme of National Awards for Master craftspersons since 1965.
- The main objective was to give recognition to the outstanding craftspersons in the Handicraft sector. The awardees represent almost all states of the country, apart from different crafts styles of different locations in the country.

- It has already hit Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The cyclonic storm is expected to further intensify into a severe cyclone and will continue to move towards the north and then recurve in the northwest direction towards Andhra Pradesh Coast.
- Warm sea surface temperatures of the Bay of Bengal and longer sea travel will help in the further intensification of the storm.

SALE OF COTTON STOCKS BY CCI

According to the latest figures, during cotton season 2015-16 (1st October, 2015 to 30th September, 2016), Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) has purchased seed cotton (kapas) equivalent to 8.44 lakh bales at Minimum Support Price (MSP).

BACKGROUND:

During cotton season 2015-16, cotton prices in the country abnormally increased in the month of May/July 2016 due to damage by white fly pests in Northern region & pink boll worm attack in Gujarat region and panic buying by the mills to cover their lean season requirement.

In such situation, in order to safeguard the interest of the textile Industry including Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Government of India, Ministry of Textiles decided in July, 2016 to sell the balance unsold stock available with CCI to MSME units through e-sale so as to provide them some relief from cotton price volatility in the market and stabilize the market prices. Accordingly, all the cotton stocks of CCI has been sold.

ABOUT CCI:

Cotton Corporation of India or CCI is a Government of India agency, engaged in diverse activities related to trade, procurement, and export of cotton. CCI is a public sector agency responsible for equitable distribution of cotton among the different constituents of the industry and aid imports of cotton.

- It was established in 1970 under Companies Act 1956.
- CCI is governed by Textile Policy 1985 issued by Ministry of Textiles Organisation, Government of India.

DST-INTEL COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH FOR REAL-TIME RIVER WATER AND AIR QUALITY MONITORING

Recognizing the importance of developing the online River Water and Air Quality Monitoring (WAQM) systems, Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India and Intel are collaborating to jointly initiate “DST-Intel Collaborative Research for Real-Time River Water and Air Quality Monitoring” soliciting proposals from Academic/Research Institutions and providing grant-in-aid support to the selected project(s).

KEY FACTS:

- This will be a joint programme of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode.
- The aim of this initiative is to develop key technologies for sensing, communication and analysis of large-scale data collected from autonomous networks of perpetual/long-lived sensor nodes, followed by integration and deployment for water and air quality monitoring in real-time.
- The program will be administered by the binational Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF).

HIMACHAL PRADESH BECOMES 18TH STATE TO JOIN UDAY

Government of India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the State of Himachal Pradesh and the State DISCOM under the Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY), for operational and financial turnaround of the DISCOM.

- Himachal Pradesh is the 18th State to sign MoU under UDAY.

HOW WILL THIS MOVE HELP HIMACHAL PRADESH?

An overall net benefit of approximately Rs. 823 crores would accrue to the State by opting to participate in UDAY, by way of savings in interest cost, reduction in Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) and transmission losses, interventions in energy efficiency etc. during the period of turnaround.

ABOUT UDAY SCHEME:

UDAY is an effort to make these DISCOMs financially and operationally healthy, to be able to supply adequate power at affordable rates, and enable the Governments to make efforts towards 100% Village electrification and 24X7 Power For All.

- It envisages to reduce interest burden, cost of power and AT&C losses. Consequently, DISCOM would become sustainable to supply adequate and reliable power enabling 24x7 power supply.
- The scheme provides that States would take over 75% debt of Discoms, as on 30th September, 2015 in two years.
- UDAY has inbuilt incentives encouraging State Governments to voluntarily restructure their debts. These incentives include taking over of DISCOM debt by the States outside the fiscal deficit limits; reduction in the cost of power through various measures such as coal linkage rationalization, liberal coal swaps and priority/additional funding through schemes of MoP & MNRE.
- UDAY is different from earlier restructuring schemes in several ways including flexibility of keeping debt taken over outside fiscal deficit limit, reduction in cost of power and a series of time bound interventions for improving operational efficiency.
- UDAY also provides for measures that will reduce the cost of power generation, which would ultimately benefit consumers.

TRIPLE TALAQ IS ‘CRUEL’, ‘MOST DEMEANING’ TO WOMEN

Observing that the judicial conscience is “disturbed”, the Allahabad High Court has held that triple talaq is “cruel” and raised a question whether the Muslim Personal law could be amended to alleviate the sufferings of Muslim women.

IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS MADE BY THE COURT:

- Coming down heavily on the practice, the court has held that this form of “instant divorce” is “most

demeaning” which “impedes and drags India from becoming a nation”.

- The court said the view that “the Muslim husband enjoys an arbitrary, unilateral power to inflict instant divorce” does not tie in with Islamic laws.
- The court observed that “divorce is permissible in Islam only in case of extreme emergency. When all efforts for effecting a reconciliation have failed, the parties may proceed to a dissolution of marriage by Talaq or by Khola”.
- The court also noted that personal laws of any community cannot claim supremacy over the rights granted to the individuals by the Constitution that provides for equality and non-discrimination.

BACKGROUND:

The constitution allows Muslims, the biggest religious minority group in the country, to regulate matters such as marriage, divorce and inheritance through their own civil code. Even the Supreme Court has been examining how much it can interfere in Muslim laws governing family-related issues as it hears a plea to end the practice which permits Muslim men to divorce their wives by saying talaq three times.

Besides, the centre had recently informed the Supreme Court that it is opposed to the Muslim practice of triple talaq. It had also described this practice as “misplaced in a secular country.”

A MORE MUSCULAR RICE VARIETY TAKES ON WHEAT

A rice variety that packs more protein to match wheat has been released by Karnataka’s University of Agricultural Sciences – Bengaluru.

- The rice strain, which offers an option to those who are not comfortable switching over to wheat for supplementary protein, is now available for commercial cultivation.
- The high-protein variety has been under development at UAS-B for nearly 10 years, with Rs. 92 lakh in funding from the Union Department of Biotechnology.

KOLKATA-MIZORAM TRADE ROUTE TO OPEN VIA MYANMAR

A deep water port built in Myanmar's Sittwe on the Bay of Bengal by India is ready to be commissioned. An inauguration ceremony for this strategically important facility will be held soon.

- Construction of the sea port is the first phase of an integrated \$500-million project being funded by a long-term interest-free loan provided by India.

WHERE IS SITTWE LOCATED?

Sittwe is the capital of Rakhine State (which has been in the news for the plight of Rohingya Muslims) in south-western Myanmar. It is located at the mouth of the Kaladan river, which flows into Mizoram in north-eastern India.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PORT FOR INDIA:

India has for years sought transit access through Bangladesh to ship goods to the landlocked north-eastern States. At present, the only route to this region from the rest of India is a rather circuitous one through a narrow strip of Indian territory nicknamed the Chicken's Neck in West Bengal, sandwiched between Bhutan and Bangladesh. The new route through Sittwe would significantly lower the cost and distance of movement from Kolkata to Mizoram and beyond.

BACKGROUND:

The link was conceived by the UPA government and work began in 2010. The completion target of 2013 was missed.

MURDER RATE DECLINING IN INDIA

Official data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) show that the murder rate in India has been steadily declining over the past two decades.

BACKGROUND:

The murder rate (murders per lakh population) for 64 years (from 1952 to 2015) from the NCRB were compiled by the Clio Infra Project — a project which

has collected worldwide data on social, economic, and institutional indicators.

However, the NCRB numbers are based on FIRs alone. Crimes for which FIRs are not registered are not accounted for in the official data.

KEY FACTS:

- Murder rate has declined from 4.6 in 1992, the peak year of violence (in terms of murder rate) to 2.6 in 2015. The rate saw a steady rise from 2.7 in 1952 to the highest rate in the early nineties.
- Among mega cities, Patna turns out to be the least safe, having a murder rate of 11.3 — four times that of the national average in 2015. Meerut, Ludhiana, Faridabad and Agra come next. Kolkata, Kochi and Mumbai happen to be the safest, all having a rate of less than one murder per lakh population.
- Absolute numbers, however, are still high — 32,127 murders were recorded in 2015, which means 88 people were killed every day. In fact, murders in 2015 alone were almost similar in number to terrorism-related fatalities in India over the last two decades.
- Between 2006 and 2015, the figure was between 32,000 and 35,000. In the decade before, 1996-2005, recorded murder incidents were between 32,000 and 38,000. As per NCRB data from 1952-2015, 1992 saw the maximum number of deaths in one calendar year—40,105.
- In 2015, the major motive of murder was 'Personal vendetta or enmity' (4,758 cases), accounting for 14.8% of the total murder cases followed by 'property dispute' with 3,540 cases (11.0%).
- Murder rate for India in 2012 (3.5) was almost half compared to the world average (6.2). Among 209 countries for which comparable data was available, India ranked 133 (higher rank means higher murder rate).

CANCEL ILLEGAL SALT PANS IN SAMBHAR LAKE: NGT

The central zonal bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Rajasthan government to cancel allotments of salt pans in the Sambhar Salt Lake that fall within the wetland and run contrary to the mandate of Wetland Rules, 2010.

- NGT has also directed the State government to not to make any further allotments or permit new salt pans within the wetland areas or in the ‘no construction zone’ identified for the said purpose in accordance with the Wetland Rules, 2010.
- It has further asked the authority to examine the sensitive issue in light of observations and recommendations made by the two expert committees in the year 2010. The bench gave six months’ time to implement the recommendations which should not be later than the 2017 monsoon.

BACKGROUND:

It has been alleged that in and around the Sambhar Lake, commercial and other activities detrimental to the ecosystem of the wetland were being carried out contrary to the provisions of the Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules framed under the Environment Protection Acts of 1986 and 2010. Salt manufacturers in the region are also accused of digging unauthorised borewells around the lake and exploiting the groundwater.

ABOUT THE LAKE:

The Sambhar Salt Lake is India’s largest inland salt lake. The lake encircles historical Sambhar Lake Town located 96 km south west of the city of Jaipur in Rajasthan. It is the source of most of Rajasthan’s salt production. It produces 196,000 tonnes of clean salt every year, which equates to around 9% of India’s salt production.

Sambhar has been designated as a Ramsar site. The wetland is a key wintering area for tens of thousands of flamingos and other birds that migrate from northern Asia.

PARLIAMENTARY PANEL SAYS SC SHOWING A ‘ZEAL FOR PRIMACY’

A Parliamentary Standing Committee report accusing the Supreme Court of distorting the original constitutional mandate and showing an “unnecessary zeal” for primacy in judicial appointments has been tabled in the parliament.

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievance, Law and Justice has directly contradicted the Supreme Court’s judgment on the National Judicial Appointments Committee (NJAC) law, which upheld the concept of judicial primacy.

BACKGROUND:

The committee had taken suo motu cognisance of the “sad state of affairs” caused by the “inordinate delay in filling the vacancies in the Supreme Court and High Courts”. Nearly 43% of the approved strength of judges in High Courts is vacant. The draft Memorandum of Procedure for judicial appointments has been in limbo for almost a year.

The report may act as a trigger for kick-starting legislative efforts to overcome the impact of the Supreme Court’s October 16, 2015 judgment scrapping the NJAC law.

KEY FACTS:

- The report concludes that the judiciary’s zeal for primacy over the government had led to the “present unfortunate situation”.
- It recommends that the original constitutional position on judicial appointments be brought back. It also notes that the appointment of High Court judges is “essentially” an executive function and a shared responsibility of the government and the judiciary.
- The committee also asked the government to reverse the distortion created in the original mandate of the Constitution arising from the judgments of the apex court in the Second Judges Case and subsequent cases.
- The committee said the Constitution’s makers believed that only an equal involvement of multiple constitutional authorities in judicial appointments

would mould an independent judiciary. On this, the committee quotes Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who said that “after all, the Chief Justice is a man with all the failings, all the sentiments and all the prejudices which we as common people have”.

- It refers to how the Supreme Court itself, in the NJAC judgment, had concluded that the Collegium system lacked transparency.
- The report has also hinted that the NJAC judgment was not heard by a sufficient quorum of judges. It recommended that the Supreme Court ought to set up a Bench of a minimum 11 judges while deciding the validity of a constitutional amendment.

JAPAN LAUNCHES MAGNETIC TETHER TO CLEAN UP SPACE JUNK

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency launched a spacecraft from the Tanegashima Space Center that carried a magnetic tether designed to move vast amounts of space junk from the Earth’s orbit.

KEY FACTS:

- The automated cargo ship – called Stork or Kounotori in Japanese – which is carrying the junk collector is bound for the International Space Station and blasted off from Tanegashima Space Center in the North Pacific.
- The tether, made of aluminium strands and steel wire, is designed to slow the debris, pulling it out of orbit.
- The innovative device was made with the help of a fishing net company.
- Researchers say the lubricated, electro-dynamic tether will generate enough energy to change an object’s orbit, pushing it towards the atmosphere where it will burn up.
- The experiment is part of an international initiative designed to make space safer for astronauts by getting rid of space junk.

BACKGROUND:

There is estimated to be more than 100 million pieces of space junk in orbit, including discarded equipment from

old satellites, tools and bits of rocket.

Many of these objects are moving at high velocity around the Earth at speeds of up to 28,000km/h (17,500mph) and could cause catastrophic accidents and damage to the world’s orbital telecommunications network.

The junk has accumulated in the more than 50 years of human space exploration since the Soviet-launched Sputnik satellite in 1957. Collisions between satellites and the testing of anti-satellite weapons have made the problem worse.

‘100 MILLION FOR 100 MILLION’ CAMPAIGN:

- ‘100 Million for 100 Million’ Campaign was recently launched by President Pranab Mukherjee.
- It was organized by the Kailash Satyarthi Children’s Foundation.
- The ‘100 Million for 100 Million’ Campaign aims to mobilise 100 million youth and children for 100 million underprivileged children across the world, to end child labour, child slavery, violence against children and promote the right of every child to be safe, free, and educated, over the next 5 years.

ISRO SIGNS DEAL FOR FIRST PRIVATELY BUILT SATELLITE:

- The Indian Space Research Organisation has roped in a consortium of six companies to deliver the country’s first industry-built spacecraft by late 2017.
- In this regard, ISRO recently signed an agreement. The contract includes assembly, integration and testing (AIT) of two spare navigation satellites consecutively in around 18 months.
- The contract was signed between SRO Satellite Centre (ISAC) and the consortium lead, Alpha Design Technologies P Ltd.
- Alpha is a defence manufacturing contractor while the others are small and medium-sized vendors that already supply components to ISRO. The others in the consortium are Newtech Solutions, Aidin Technologies and DCX Cables of Bengaluru, Vinyas

(28)

Technologies of Mysuru and Avantel Systems of Hyderabad.

- The work will start around January and the first spacecraft will be brought out in around nine months.

LONGEST RAIL TUNNEL OPENS IN SWITZERLAND:

- The famed 57km Gotthard Base Tunnel (GBT) has been opened for passengers.
- The 57-kilometre (35-mile) Gotthard Base Tunnel (GBT) is longest tunnel now. It runs from Erstfeld in the central canton of Uri, to Bodio in the southern Ticino canton.
- With its opening, the GBT has surpassed Japan's 53.9-kilometre Seikan tunnel as the world's longest train tunnel. The 50.5-kilometre Channel Tunnel that links England and France has been bumped into third place.

NDRF TEAMS PRE-POSITIONED IN ANDHRA PRADESH AND TAMIL NADU FOR CYCLONE VARDHA

In view of development of cyclone Vardah over Bay of Bengal, 19 flood rescue teams of NDRF have been prepositioned in coastal areas of Andhra Pradesh & Tamil Nadu as a proactive deployment.

ABOUT NDRF:

The Disaster Management Act has made the statutory provisions for constitution of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) for the purpose of specialized response to natural and man-made disasters.

- Two national calamities in quick succession in the form of Orissa Super Cyclone (1999) and Gujarat Earthquake (2001) brought about the realization of the need of having a specialist response mechanism at National Level to effectively respond to disasters. This realization led to the enactment of the DM Act on 26 Dec 2005.

ROLE AND MANDATE OF NDRF:

- Specialized response during disasters.

- Proactive deployment during impending disaster situations.

- Acquire and continually upgrade its own training and skills.

- Liaison, Reconnaissance, Rehearsals and Mock Drills.

- Impart basic and operational level training to State Response Forces (Police, Civil Defence and Home Guards).

- Community Capacity Building Programme.

- Organize Public Awareness Campaigns.

WHY IT IS SAID TO BE UNIQUE?

- It is the only dedicated disaster response force of the world.

- The only agency with comprehensive response capabilities having multi-disciplinary and multi-skilled, high-tech, stand alone nature.

- Experienced paramilitary personnel specially trained and equipped for disaster response.

- Capabilities for undertaking disaster response, prevention, mitigation and capacity building.

RAILWAYS MULLS EXCLUSIVE SUBURBAN TRACKS

Indian Railways is planning to build exclusive rail tracks for suburban trains in a bid to ease congestion.

WHY NOT USE EXISTING RAIL TRACKS?

Since running suburban services on existing tracks adversely affects the capacity of freight trains and long-distance trains, it would not be possible for Railways to use existing infrastructure for the purpose of suburban services.

BACKGROUND:

At present, the Railways is running suburban train services in certain sections on the tracks laid primarily for long-distance trains. The Railways has framed the

draft guidelines to address the demand for more suburban trains from the state governments.

GUIDELINES FOR SUBURBAN RAILWAY PROJECTS:

- Suburban railway projects are proposed to be implemented and operated through a special purpose vehicle (SPV) with equal equity participation from the respective state governments and the Railways.
- SPV would be empowered to propose a surcharge on passengers for recovering operating losses and capital costs of such projects.
- State governments would set up a dedicated urban transport fund through “levy of dedicated taxes, levies, betterment tax, impact fee”, among others in the “influence zone of proposed railway station” to finance the capital cost of suburban train projects.
- The Indian Railways, on request from the SPV, may restructure fares on suburban trains and impose a surcharge to recover the operating losses and the capital cost “if operating losses are not recovered from the dedicated urban transport fund.”
- The state governments will be required to conduct feasibility studies of the project at their own cost which will be examined by zonal Railways and subsequently sent to Indian Railways.
- States will also have to ensure there is no delay in land acquisition and Indian Railways will only contribute its equity share to the SPV once 70% of the land to be acquired is made available by the state government.
- Additionally, states will have to bear the complete cost of land acquisition, leasing of railway land and resettlement and rehabilitation.

THE INDO-PACIFIC POTENTIAL

Indonesian President Joko Widodo, or Jokowi as he is known is on his official visit to India.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS VISIT:

Though Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Jokowi met on the sidelines of the 9th East Asia Summit in Myanmar in 2014, this is the first time in the two years that they have been in power that they will meet substantively.

WHY IS INDONESIA IMPORTANT FOR INDIA?

- Indonesia is a latent Asian power. It is the world’s largest archipelago, straddling the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It can potentially control virtually all the straits linking the southern Indian Ocean to the South China Sea.
- Indonesia can play a stabilising role in the Indo-Pacific region as China is showing its naval muscle in the South China Sea and its strategic and commercial reach through the One Belt One Road initiative.
- Medan industrial zone in north Sumatra is strategically important for India. A shipping service from Chennai or Krishnapatnam to Medan via the Andaman Islands could be used to export Indian goods to offset, at least partly, the large imbalance in India’s trade with Indonesia.
- India could also learn lessons on tourism promotion from Indonesia — from Bali, for instance, where Indians rank high in the list of nationalities visiting that island. India could also learn from Bali about a more ‘simple’ Hinduism that is relatively free from caste and sectarian divisions.

WHY INDIA IS IMPORTANT FOR INDONESIA?

- Indonesia is a maritime axis requiring a strong naval force to protect its territorial integrity, fishing waters and energy interests, supported and funded by strong economic growth. India can help Indonesia in this regard.
- India could recognise Indonesia’s centrality in the Indo-Pacific region and help work towards a future where both countries can be partners for security in the region.

- There is, at present, a battle being waged in Indonesia over the role of religion, ethnicity and language that in some ways mirrors India's own. India has a stake in the diversity of Islam found in Indonesia against exclusive and homogenising influences. Indonesia and India can provide complementary models for the coexistence of religious minorities with majoritarian communities in Asia based on their own traditions of coexistence.
- Without entering into a domestic debate on religion, India can strengthen Indonesia's democratic credentials by advocating its admission in a revived India-Brazil-South Africa forum as a pluralist democracy that is an alternative to what appears to be a rise of intolerance in many democracies.

WAYAHEAD:

The India-Indonesia relationship has been one of potential rather than realisation. Notwithstanding the efforts made during the tenures of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the partnership has not yet gathered traction. Both countries should ensure that this visit is not just another diplomatic formality but is utilised to turn the relationship into one of the defining ones in Asia.

BEYOND THE COURT'S REMIT

The Uttarakhand High Court has crossed its legal remit by extending a government policy of prohibiting liquor outlets in the vicinity of places of worship, to cover Rudraprayag, Chamoli and Uttarkashi from April 2017. This decision is based on a petition filed in the court.

- With this, the Uttarakhand High Court has drifted outside the confines of law and entered the domain of morals and desired behaviour.

BACKGROUND:

In doing so, the court has cited Article 47 of the Constitution. It says it is the duty of the state to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living of the people and improve public health, and to prohibit the consumption of intoxicating drinks and drugs.

WHAT'S THE CONCERN NOW?

According to some experts, such judgments set a wrong precedent. Earlier this year the Supreme Court also refused to entertain a petition seeking a nation-wide ban on alcohol, observing that this was a matter of policy into which it cannot venture.

- It is one thing to cite constitutional goals to justify state action against liquor or drugs; it is quite another to cite them as a justification for judicial directions.
- The Supreme Court has also cautioned judges against assuming powers based on individual perceptions or notions. Because, howsoever noble an idea may be, courts should be wary of making rules on their own, as it would amount to transgressing into the policy domain.

ISLAMIC STATE RETAKES ANCIENT CITY OF PALMYRA

Islamic State militants have recaptured the ancient city of Palmyra from Syrian troops. In winning back Palmyra, the extremist group appeared to be taking advantage of the Syrian and Russian preoccupation with Aleppo, timing its attack to coincide with a major government offensive to capture the last remaining opposition-held neighborhoods in the northern city.

BACKGROUND:

Islamic State militants were expelled by Syrian and Russian forces from the city nine months ago. The militants had spent 10 months in Palmyra, during which they blew up a number of temples and caused other destruction – severing the heads of statues and partially damaging two temples and famous arch.

ABOUT PALMYRA:

Palmyra contains the monumental ruins of a great city that was one of the most important cultural centres of the ancient world. From the 1st to the 2nd century, the art and architecture of Palmyra, standing at the crossroads of several civilizations, married Graeco-Roman techniques with local traditions and Persian influences.

Palmyra is a UNESCO designated World Heritage site and home to some of the world's most magnificent ancient

ruins. The city is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and was eventually incorporated into the Roman Empire, before passing to almost all empires to have operated in the region over some 2,000 years.

GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE LISTS DIGITAL MEASURES TO CUT CASH USAGE

A committee, headed by former finance secretary Ratan Watal, has suggested ways to encourage digital payments.

BACKGROUND:

The government has been pitching for a less-cash economy after it demonetised old Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes on November 8.

KEY FACTS:

- It has asked for a 30-90 days' timeline for implementing a number of measures that the committee hopes can cut in half India's cash usage from 12% of GDP in three years.
- The committee has suggested an independent mechanism within the overall central banking structure.
- The committee has pitched for greater use of Aadhaar and mobile numbers for making digital payments as easy as cash.
- It has also called for inter-operable payments between bank and non-banks as well as within non-banks.
- To give the entire digital payments effort a focused boost, in its most significant recommendation it has proposed to make regulation of payments independent from the function of central banking.
- The Board for Regulation and Supervision of Payment and Settlement Systems (BPSS) can be given an independent statutory status within the overall structure of the RBI and called Payments Regulatory Board, the committee has suggested. The BPSS currently functions as a sub-committee of the Central Board of RBI.
- The committee has called for amendments to the Payments and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 to

provide for this board apart from giving an explicit mandate for competition and innovation, open access and interoperability, consumer protection, regulations on systemic risks and data protection.

- It has suggested encouragement to digital payments within the government, a suggestion that has already rolled out with government prescribing thresholds and waiving charges. A 'DIPAYAN' fund is proposed from savings generated from cashless transactions to expand digital payments along with a ranking of states, government departments, districts and panchayats to encourage digital payments.
- Operations of payment systems like Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) and National Electronic Fund Transfer (NEFT) could be outsourced after a cost benefit analysis. These payment systems should be upgraded to 24x7 in due course of time, the committee has suggested.

NEW ITALY PRIME MINISTER:

Paolo Gentiloni has been named as Italy's new prime minister following reformist leader Matteo Renzi's resignation in the wake of a crushing referendum defeat.

NEW ZEALAND'S PRIME MINISTER:

New Zealand's ruling National Party has appointed Bill English as the country's new prime minister following last week's shock resignation of his popular predecessor John Key.

NEW ISI CHIEF:

Pakistan's new army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa has appointed Lt Gen Naveed Mukhtar as director-general of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), replacing Lt Gen Rizwan Akhtar.

NEW UN SECRETARY GENERAL:

- Former Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres was recently sworn in as Secretary-General of the United Nations.
- He is the ninth U.N. chief in the body's 71-year history.

- N. chiefs are charged with promoting sustainable development, working for peace around the globe, protecting human rights and dealing with humanitarian catastrophes.

INDIA SIGNS GRANT AGREEMENT WITH THE IBRD

An agreement for Global Environment Facility Grant of USD 5.19 Million for “Additional Financing for Financing Energy Efficiency at MSMEs Project- Programmatic Framework for Energy Efficiency” was recently signed between India and IBRD.

KEY FACTS:

- The proposed additional financing (AF) would be used to help further scale up the initiatives taken up under the parent project- India: Financing Energy Efficiency at MSME Project (FEEMP).
- The additional financing will also contribute to bridge the current gap in understanding between different stakeholders, mainly energy professionals/ technology suppliers, entrepreneurs, banks and financial institutions.

The project will focus on tapping Energy Efficiency (EE) benefits through a three pronged approach which includes:

- Awareness/capacity building.
- Direct intervention to increase EE investments at MSME level, facilitating active involvement of service providers and Financial Institutions.
- Expanding the EE knowledge base to scale up and replicate the project initiatives, especially through establishing key performance indicators.

BACKGROUND:

The parent project – India: Financing Energy Efficiency at MSME Project (FEEMP) became effective on September 29, 2010 with an original GEF Grant amount of US\$ 11.3 million. The Development Objective of the project was to increase demand for energy efficiency investments in select micro, small and medium enterprise

clusters and to build their capacity to access commercial finance.

The parent project currently has a Satisfactory rating towards achievement of Project Development Objective (PDO), and implementation performance.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HOUSING & URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Union Urban Development Minister M Venkaiah Naidu recently inaugurated an international conference on housing and urban development in Asia Pacific region.

KEY FACTS:

- The sixth edition of ‘Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing & Urban Development (APMCHUD)’ seeks to address issues ranging from crowded city centres to peripheral expansion, metropolitan based urban population growth, megacities and urban corridors, among others.
- During the conference, ministers and senior officials from 68 countries in the region will deliberate on challenges of urban planning and management.
- The conference will come out with a Delhi Declaration and implementation plan for aligning urban development strategies of member countries with the New Urban Agenda adopted at Quito, Ecuador for the next 20 years.
- The theme of the declaration will be on ‘Emerging Urban Forms Policy Responses and Government Structures’.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONFERENCE:

- The APMCHUD is the first such conference after UN Habitat-III global conference on sustainable development held in Quito this September.
- It will help in furthering the new urban agenda adopted at the recent conference of UN Habitat-III.
- The conference assumes significance considering that APAC region accounts for 60% of the world population and 55% of global urban population.

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTRE FOR TRIBAL LIVELIHOOD TO BE LAUNCHED

Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs in collaboration with UNDP and National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC) is all set to launch “Vanjeevan” the National Resource Centre for Tribal Livelihood issues at Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

ABOUT VANJEEVAN:

Vanjeevan will be a programme to identify the problems in livelihood issues in select districts of six states having low HDI of tribal people in the first phase. The states are Assam, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Odisha and Telangana.

- In the second phase the programme will be implemented in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Meghalaya and Tripura.
- The programme will focus on the identification of local resources, keeping in view the existing skill level.
- The programme will facilitate utilization of funds under various Government programmes for the above purpose.
- The National Resource Centre will serve as a platform for livelihood mapping, skill gap analysis and knowledge hub where consolidation of best livelihood and entrepreneurship models will be accessible for tribal entrepreneurship development.

‘WAR AGAINST MALARIA FAR FROM OVER’

According to the recently released **World Malaria report by the World Health Organization (WHO)**, the global fight against malaria is in “urgent need” of more funding.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT:

- There were 212 million new cases of malaria and 4,29,000 deaths worldwide in 2015. Further, nearly 78% of Plasmodium vivax malaria cases in 2015 occurred in just four countries: Ethiopia, India, Indonesia and Pakistan.

- Despite the billions of dollars spent on malaria programmes, too many people are missing out on available resources like medicines and bed nets that protect against mosquitoes that spread the disease.
- Surveillance systems catch fewer than 20% of cases. The vast majority cases are in Africa. About 70% of deaths are in children under the age of five.

BACKGROUND:

WHO had set a goal of cutting malaria cases to “near zero” by the end of last year. It fell far short, and now is aiming to reduce malaria cases and deaths by at least 90% by 2030.

CENTRE TO REVIEW IT ACT TO BOLSTER CYBERSECURITY

The government is mulling a review of the more than 15-year-old Information Technology (IT), Act to strengthen cybersecurity infrastructure, following the push for digital payments post-demonetisation.

KEY FACTS:

- A closed group, under IT Secretary Aruna Sundarajan, has been set up to look into various aspects of the Act in line with the changing times.
- The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) has also set up a separate ‘digital payments’ division under Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) — its cyber security arm — to monitor and strengthen cashless transactions.
- All digital payments agencies have also been asked to report to CERT-In any unusual activity that they see on their platforms.

WHY REVIEW OF IT ACT IS NECESSARY?

The IT Act came out in 2000. Since then, it has not been reviewed. However, since we are moving towards a digital economy now, the act should be reviewed to see if there is a need to re-look at the IT Act architecture to make it more of a deterrent for cyber criminals.

Besides, Venezuela, which like India has withdrawn its highest currency note from the market, has also cautioned

New Delhi about cybercrimes that target the digital economy.

CENTRE TO FINANCE DIGITAL DISCOUNTS

The Centre has decided to bear the burden imposed on public sector firms on account of the many discounts and incentives offered to promote digital payments. Public sector insurers, oil-marketing firms and others will thus not take a hit on their books for the Centre's cashless push.

BACKGROUND:

The government has offered many discounts on transaction charges and merchant discount rates that accompany payments using cards or online last week.

WHAT'S BEING DONE?

- A new expenditure head in the exchequer's accounts that will absorb the costs of incentives provided will be created.
- A non-tax receipt portal, bharakosh.gov.in, has been developed to enable users to make non-tax payments to the government for 237 categories including spectrum charges, RTI application fees, and purchase forms online, without going to either a bank or a government office.
- Mobile banking through interoperable automatic teller machines (ATM) has been launched, 81,000 ATMs or 12 banks are already live and another 15,000 machines are expected to go live shortly".
- All 5.5 lakh fair price shops run by the government are being equipped with micro ATMs/PoS terminals, which will enable them to undertake digital payment transactions or even be banking correspondents.
- A standardised, interoperable multi-purpose, multimodal National Common Mobility card is being developed for smart cities and is ready for testing on a pilot basis.

WAYAHEAD:

These measures are being put in place to enable a cashless transactions ecosystem. Going forward, all government organisations, public sector undertakings

and authorities have been advised to review rules and regulations to support digital payments, adopt payment-related solutions and absorb transaction fees and activate payments facility through the 'Pay Gov India' if they have such a facility.

EKUVERIN:

- Seventh edition of Exercise EKUVERIN will shortly be held at Kadhdhoo, Laamu Atoll, Maldives.
- The Exercise is a 14 day platoon level joint military exercise between the Indian Army & the Maldives National Defence Force conducted on a yearly basis.
- The aim of the exercise is to conduct military training with emphasis on amphibious & counter insurgency/ counter terrorism operations with a view to enhance interoperability between the two armies.
- The previous edition of the exercise was held in India at Trivandrum, Kerala.

INDRA NAVY – 2016:

- INDRA NAVY is a bilateral maritime exercise between the **Indian and Russian navies** and epitomizes the strategic relationship between the two countries. Initiated in 2003, the exercise has matured over the years with increase in scope, complexity of operations and level of participation.
- The 9th edition of exercise INDRA NAVY, an annual bilateral maritime exercise between Indian Navy and Russian Navy has begun in the Bay of Bengal.
- The primary aim of exercise INDRA NAVY-16 is to increase inter-operability amongst the two navies and develop common understanding and procedures for maritime security operations.
- The scope of the exercise includes wide-ranging professional interactions in harbor phase and a diverse canvas of operational activities across a spectrum of maritime operations at sea.

MAHILA POLICE VOLUNTEER INITIATIVE LAUNCHED IN HARYANA

The Mahila Police Volunteer initiative was recently launched in Haryana. By launching the initiative in Karnal and Mahendragarh districts, **Haryana became the first state to adopt this scheme.**

- Haryana has inducted the first batch of 1000 Mahila Police Volunteers. These volunteers have already been trained by the state State Police Authorities on their role and responsibility.

ABOUT THE SCHEME:

Originally conceived by the **Union Ministry of Women & Child Development**, Mahila Police Volunteer is a **joint initiative with the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.**

- The Mahila Police Volunteers scheme envisages creation of a link between the police authorities and the local communities in villages through police volunteers who will be women specially trained for this purpose.
- Their primary job will be to keep an eye on situations where women in the village are harassed or their rights and entitlements are denied or their development is prevented.
- In order to provide a link between police and community and facilitate women in distress, one Mahila Police Volunteer (MPV) is envisaged per Gram Panchayat across the country. These will be selected through a laid out procedure from among the empowered, responsible, socially aware women who will facilitate police outreach on gender concerns.
- The Chief Secretaries/UT Administrators have been requested by the WCD Ministry to adopt the scheme in their respective States/UTs.

MOU BETWEEN INDIA AND KYRGYZSTAN FOR STRENGTHENING COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry

of Tourism and Ministry of Cultural, Information & Tourism of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic for strengthening cooperation in the field of Tourism.

The main objectives of the Memorandum of Understanding include:

- To expand bilateral cooperation in the tourism sector.
- To exchange information and data related to tourism.
- To encourage cooperation between tourism stakeholders including Hotels and Tour operators.
- To establish exchange programme for cooperation in Human Resource Development.
- To invest in the Tourism and Hospitality sectors.
- To exchange visits of Tour Operators / Media / Opinion Makers for promotion of two way tourism
- To exchange experiences in the areas of promotion, marketing, destination development and management.
- To promote safe & honourable and sustainable tourism.

BENEFITS OF THIS MOU:

This would enable both parties to enter into a constructive dialogue for development and promotion of tourism in each other's country for the economic development of two nations.

MAJOR PORT TRUST AUTHORITIES BILL, 2016

The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal of Ministry of Shipping to replace the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963 by the Major Port Authorities Bill, 2016.

- This will empower the Major Ports to perform with greater efficiency on account of full autonomy in decision making and by modernizing the Institutional structure of Major Ports.

ABOUT THE MAJOR PORT TRUST AUTHORITIES BILL, 2016:

The bill aims at decentralizing decision making and infuse professionalism in governance of ports. It aims to impart faster and transparent decision making benefiting the stakeholders and better project execution capability.

- The Bill is also aimed at reorienting the governance model in central Ports to landlord port model in line with the successful global practice. This will help in bringing transparency in operations of Major Ports.

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE BILL:

- The Bill has proposed a simplified composition of the Board of Port Authority which will comprise of 11 members from the present 17 to 19 Members representing various interests. A compact Board with professional independent members will strengthen decision making and strategic planning.
- Provision has been made for inclusion of representative of the State Government in which the Major Port is situated, Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Defence and Customs, Department of Revenue as Members in the Board apart from a Government Nominee Member and a Member representing the employees of the Major Ports Authority.
- The role of Tariff Authority for Major Ports [TAMP] has been redefined. Port Authority has now been given powers to fix tariff which will act as a reference tariff for purposes of bidding for PPP projects. PPP operators will be free to fix tariff based on market conditions. The Board of the Port Authority has been delegated the power to fix the scale of rates for other port services and assets including land.
- An independent Review Board has been proposed to be created to carry out the residual function of the erstwhile TAMP for Major Ports, to look into disputes between ports and PPP concessionaires, to review stressed PPP projects and suggest measures to review stressed PPP projects and suggest measures to revive such projects and to look into complaints regarding services rendered by the ports/private operators operating within the ports would be constituted.

- The Boards of the Port Authority have been delegated full powers to enter into contracts, planning and development, fixing of tariff except in national interest, security and emergency arising out of inaction and default. In the present MPT Act, 1963 prior approval of the Central Government was required in 22 cases.

- Provisions of CSR & development of infrastructure by Port Authority have been introduced.

MOU BETWEEN MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (MORD) AND FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANISATION (FAO)

The Union Cabinet has approved the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to improve the effectiveness of rural development programmes in India and to facilitate knowledge sharing.

KEY FACTS:

- The MoU will facilitate South-South cooperation mechanisms around Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)'s experience through exchange visits and dialogues, and establishment of a good-practice Learning Centre.
- It will strengthen the vertical upscaling of the livelihoods of rural populations that are supported by DAY-NRLM, help to develop inclusive and sustainable value chains for key crops and agro-industrial products, employment diversification, skills development, especially for rural youth, strengthening of social protection, risk management mechanisms and enhanced resilience building, especially in arid and disaster risk-prone districts.
- The MoU will provide for collaboration on activities of common interest to support an integrated approach to rural poverty reduction through activities aimed to promote the economic empowerment of rural women, access of rural poor to natural resources and their sustainable use and social protection.

- The MoU will also provide for exchange of visits and dialogue for knowledge and experience sharing.

BACKGROUND:

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) is a flagship rural poverty reduction program of Ministry of Rural Development launched nationwide with the objective of social mobilization, financial inclusion and sustainable livelihoods promotion.

- DAY – NRLM aims at creating efficient and effective institutional platforms for the rural poor enabling them to increase household income through sustainable livelihood enhancements and improved access to financial services.
- One of the major focus areas of DAY – NRLM is promotion of existing livelihood portfolios of the rural poor in farm and non-farm sectors. Upgradation and sharing of knowledge on agricultural practices for sustainable income is therefore, considered a valuable input for poverty alleviation and higher income generation.
- DAY – NRLM recognizes the importance of achieving the post-2015 agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as other global priorities, that relate to rural poverty reduction, sustainable rural livelihoods, rural employment, social protection, good governance and gender equality.

MOU BETWEEN ICAI AND CBFS, OMAN

The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval of the MoUs signed in 2008 and 2011 and the renewal of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS), Oman.

KEYFACTS:

- The MoU will facilitate working together for strengthening the accounting, financial and audit knowledge base within Oman.
- The MOU aims at providing assistance to CBFS by admitting Omani Nationals to the membership of

ICAI. The aim is to work together to develop a mutually beneficial relationship in the best interests of members, students and the institutes.

- The MoU is also expected to provide an opportunity to the ICAI members to expand their professional horizons and, simultaneously, ICAI is expected to become an entity which aids and strengthens professional capabilities of Omani nationals.

BENEFITS OF THIS MOU:

- The MoU is expected to make a positive impact for the Indian Chartered Accountants currently working in Oman and other markets and for those Indian professionals who intend to move to Oman for pursuing their profession there.
- Also, enhanced employment opportunities are expected to be created for Indian professionals in the Sultanate of Oman.
- Through such activities, substantial goodwill is expected to be generated for India, Indian citizens and Indian Chartered Accountants in the Sultanate of Oman. It is also expected to lead to enhancement of remittances by Indian nationals to India.

ABOUT ICAI:

The ICAI is a statutory body established by an Act of Parliament of India- The Chartered Accountants Act, 1949, to regulate the profession of Chartered Accountancy in India.

NSG WAIVER HAS ATTENDANT RISKS, GOVT. TELLS LOK SABHA

The government recently informed the Lok Sabha that it is looking for full membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) as the current arrangement with the elite club carries “attendant risks”.

- The government’s statement is significant as it is the first time that it has declared the waiver in such terms.

BACKGROUND:

India is currently engaged in nuclear trade with international partners based on a waiver from the NSG in 2008. The waiver is in the form of a concession without

according India the status of a full member and therefore has an element of unpredictability and attendant risks in the long run for India's long-term nuclear power programme.

- The NSG took a consensus decision in September 2008 to permit its members to engage in civil nuclear cooperation with India despite India not being a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
- Since then, India has been trying to upgrade the "waiver" into a full member status and the government accordingly made two attempts this year to become member of the elite organisation. India has been engaging nuclear energy producing countries in civil nuclear deals since getting the waiver.

BENEFITS OF FULL MEMBERSHIP:

Full membership of the NSG would enable India to have enhanced and predictable global access to nuclear technology, fuel, materials and components required for our expanding civil nuclear programme. It would advance energy security, contribute to India's growth strategy based on clean energy to combat climate change, and strengthen global nuclear non-proliferation.

WAYAHEAD:

The NSG will take up India's membership issue at its next plenary session in June 2017.

ABOUT NSG:

Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is a multinational body concerned with reducing nuclear proliferation by controlling the export and re-transfer of materials that may be applicable to nuclear weapon development and by improving safeguards and protection on existing materials. Interestingly, the NSG was set up in 1974 as a reaction to India's nuclear tests to stop what it called the misuse of nuclear material meant for peaceful purposes.

RS PASSES DISABILITIES BILL WITH MORE BENEFITS

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill 2014, which was introduced in Rajya Sabha in 2014, was recently cleared with 119 amendments.

- The legislation, drafted to make Indian laws compliant with the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, will replace the Persons with Disabilities Act 1995.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BILL:

- The number of disabilities listed rises from seven in the 1995 Act through 19 in the 2014 bill to 21 after the amendments, including acid attack and Parkinson's disease.
- The Bill has also laid down provisions to allow the central government to notify any other condition as a disability.
- Now individuals with at least 40% of a disability are also entitled to benefits such as reservations in education and employment, preference in government schemes and others.
- The bill sets the government a two-year deadline to ensure persons with disability get barrier-free access in all kinds of physical infrastructure and transport systems.
- It recognises the need for reservation for them in promotion and makes special mention of the rights of disabled women and children.
- It defines many terms vague in previous versions, including what constitutes discrimination.
- According to the bill, the District courts may bestow upon two types of guardianship: limited guardian (who has to take joint decisions with mentally ill person) and plenary guardian (who can take decisions on behalf of mentally ill person, without consulting them).
- A penalty will also be slapped for violating the rules of the Act. The 1995 Act did not have any such penal provision. However, 2014 Bill had made

violation of any provision of the Act punishable with a jail term of up to 6 months, and/or a fine of Rs 10,000.

NITIAAYOG ANNOUNCES LAUNCH OF THE SCHEMES – LUCKY GRAHAK YOJANA AND DIGI-DHAN VYAPAR YOJANA – FOR INCENTIVISING DIGITAL PAYMENT

NITI Aayog has announced the launch of the schemes Lucky Grahak Yojana and the Digi-Dhan Vyapar Yojana to give cash awards to consumers and merchants who utilize digital payment instruments for personal consumption expenditures.

Key facts:

- The primary aim of these schemes is to incentivize digital transactions so that electronic payments are adopted by all sections of the society, especially the poor and the middle class.
- It has been decided that National Payment Corporation of India (NPCI) shall be the implementing agency for this scheme.
- The schemes have been designed keeping in mind all sections of the society and their usage patterns. For instance, the poorest of poor will be eligible for rewards by using USSD. People in village and rural areas can participate in this scheme through AEPS.
- The scheme will become operational with the first draw on 25th December, 2016 (as a Christmas gift to the nation) leading up to a Mega Draw on Babasaheb Ambedkar Jayanti on 14th April 2017.
- To ensure that the focus of the scheme is on small transactions (entered into by common people), incentives shall be restricted to transactions within the range of Rs 50 and Rs 3000.

The announcement comprises of two major components, one for the Consumers and the other for the Merchants:

1. Lucky Grahak Yojana [Consumers]:

- Daily reward of Rs 1000 to be given to 15,000 lucky Consumers for a period of 100 days.

- Weekly prizes worth Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10,000 and Rs. 5000 for Consumers who use the alternate modes of digital Payments.
- This will include all forms of transactions viz. UPI, USSD, AEPS and RuPay Cards but will for the time being exclude transactions through Private Credit Cards and Digital Wallets.

2. Digi-Dhan Vyapar Yojana[Merchants]:

- Prizes for Merchants for all digital transactions conducted at Merchant establishments.
- Weekly prizes worth Rs. 50,000, Rs 5,000 and Rs. 2,500.

SECOND MEETING OF INTERIM BOARD OF CEPI

The Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Ministry of Science & Technology, Government of India is partnering in the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovations (CEPI), a new global alliance between governments, industries, academia, philanthropy, inter-governmental institutions, the World Health Organization, and civil society.

- The DBT is hosting the Second Meeting of the Interim Board of CEPI at New Delhi. The meeting is focused on identifying disease priorities, future strategy and setting of Permanent Secretariat for CEPI.
- The meeting will be attended by Board members from countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, South and North America as well as civil society organizations including Medecins Sans Frontiers as well as the World Health Organization.

ABOUT CEPI:

CEPI, Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, is a “public-private coalition that aims to derail epidemics by speeding development of vaccines”.

- The concept is to develop early phases of vaccines without knowing the details for the form in which the infection will appear, but will still cut down the

time to tailor the eventual vaccine to be effective to the epidemic.

- The structure of CEPI was laid on August 31, 2016 in London and there is an interim Board currently chaired by Prof. K. VijayRaghavan, Secretary DBT. It is the highest decision making body of CEPI, and has supreme decision-making authority for all funding, policy, and product development aspects of CEPI's operations.
- The scientific input to the Board is provided by a Scientific Advisory Council (SAC) where Indian scientists are members and the joint coordinating group (JCG) is the co-ordination mechanism between CEPI and stakeholders including the vaccine companies.
- The CEPI aim to finance and coordinate the development of new vaccines to prevent and contain infectious disease epidemics.
- CEPI is currently being steered by five founding partners. They are: Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science & Technology, GOI; Government of Norway; Wellcome Trust; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; and World Economic Forum.
- India's participation in CEPI would provide the opportunity to leverage vaccine development capacities in India, access to vaccines as and when needed, protection of our population and boost our ability to have a competitive vaccine industry.

SHRI RAJNATH SINGH CHAIRS A MEETING OF GORKHALAND TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATION

The Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh recently chaired a meeting with the delegation of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA).

- During the meeting, it was decided to sympathetically examine and appropriately consider the long pending demands of the Gorkhas, the Adivasis and other people of Darjeeling district and the Dooars region.
- In respect of granting ST Status to 11 Gorkha communities, the Minister informed that the

committee constituted for preparing a report for this purpose has been recently granted extension for a further period of four months. The Committee will be asked to try to give its report as per the schedule.

- Regarding setting up of a Central University in GTA region, it was discussed that there is a general mandate for having a Central University in each State. However, there can be an exception to this and accordingly it was decided that the demand of setting up the Central University in GTA region would be considered.

ABOUT GTA:

Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) is a semi-autonomous administrative body for the Darjeeling hills in West Bengal.

- GTA replaced the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, which was formed in 1988 and administered the Darjeeling hills for 23 years.
- GTA presently has three hill subdivisions Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Kurseong and some areas of Siliguri subdivision under its authority.
- The GTA has administrative, executive and financial powers but no legislative powers.

LIQUOR VENDS ON NATIONAL, STATE HIGHWAYS BANNED

The Supreme Court has banned States and Union Territories from granting licences for the sale of liquor along National and State highways across the country, noting that drunken driving was the main culprit behind a large number of road accidents in the country.

KEY FACTS:

- The court ordered that the prohibition on sale of liquor alongside highways would extend to stretches of such highways that fall within limits of municipal corporations, city towns and local authorities.
- The court also prohibited signages and advertising of availability of liquor on highways and ordered the existing ones to be removed forthwith from both national and State highways.

(41)

- It ordered that no shop for sale of liquor should be visible from the National and State highways. Neither should they be directly accessible from the highways nor should they be situated within a distance of 500 metres from the outer edge of the highways or service lanes.
- With this, the licences of liquor shops across the highways will not be renewed after March 31, 2017.

BACKGROUND:

The judgment is a result of the deep concern the court had expressed recently on the 1.5 lakh fatalities annually in road accidents. It had blamed the Centre and the States for not doing enough as lives were lost on the roads.

An analysis of road accident data 2015 reveals that around 1,374 accidents and 400 deaths take place every day on Indian roads, resulting in 57 accidents and loss of 17 lives on an average every hour.

WAYAHEAD:

The court ordered all the States and Union Territories to “strictly enforce the directions.” It gave the Chief Secretaries and the State police chiefs a month’s time to chalk out a plan for enforcement of the judgment.

FIFTH INDIA-ARAB PARTNERSHIP FORUM IN OMAN

Fifth India-Arab partnership forum is being held in Oman. Minister of State for External Affairs, M J Akbar is leading the Indian delegation to the fifth India-Arab Partnership Conference.

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE:

The conference is being organised by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in collaboration with Arab League Secretariat, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), General Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry in the Arab Countries (GUCCIAC) and Federation of the Arab Business (FAB).

- The **theme of the fifth India-Arab Partnership Conference is “Partnership towards Innovation and Information Technology Co-operation.”**

- The conference will hold panel discussions on the topics identified for the conference – technology and innovation, the renewable energy and clean technology, the health and drug industry, the higher education and skill development, food security and safety and tourism.

BABUR:

- It is an enhanced version of an indigenously-designed cruise missile that can hit targets at 700 kms with all kinds of warheads.
- It was recently test fired by the **Pakistan Army**.
- Called ‘Babur’ after Mughal invader and founder of the dynasty of same name, the missile is part of Babur Weapon System version- 2 and is an enhanced version of the earlier missile.
- It incorporates advanced aerodynamics and avionics that can strike targets both at land and sea with high accuracy.
- It is a low flying, terrain hugging missile, which carries certain stealth features and is capable of carrying various types of warheads.

J&K HAS NO SOVEREIGNTY: SC

Snubbing the Jammu and Kashmir High Court for asserting the state’s “sovereignty” and “sovereign powers”, the Supreme Court has said J&K “has no vestige of sovereignty outside the Constitution of India”.

- The court has also rejected the J&K High Court’s view that the J&K Constitution was equal to the Constitution of India.

BACKGROUND:

The apex court judgement came on the appeal by State Bank of India (SBI) against the high court verdict which had held that the SARFAESI Act would collide with the Transfer of Property Act of Jammu & Kashmir, 1920. The court held that provisions of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (SARFAESI Act) are within the legislative competence of Parliament and can be enforced in Jammu and Kashmir.

PREVIOUSLY, JAMMU AND KASHMIR HIGH COURT HAD HELD THAT ANY LAW MADE BY PARLIAMENT, WHICH AFFECTS THE LAWS MADE BY STATE LEGISLATURE, CANNOT BE EXTENDED TO JAMMU AND KASHMIR.

OTHER IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS MADE BY THE COURT:

The court observed, “Section 3 of the Constitution of Jammu & Kashmir, which was framed by a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise, makes a ringing declaration that the State of Jammu & Kashmir is and shall be an integral part of the Union of India. And this provision is beyond the pale of amendment. It is therefore wholly incorrect to describe it as being sovereign in the sense of its residents constituting a separate and distinct class in themselves. The residents of Jammu & Kashmir are first and foremost citizens of India and that there is no dual citizenship as is contemplated by some other federal Constitutions in other parts of the world.”

Underlining that the quasi-federal structure of the Constitution of India continues even with respect to J&K, the court said: “Article 1 of the Constitution of India and Section 3 of the Jammu & Kashmir Constitution make it clear that India shall be a Union of States, and that the State of Jammu & Kashmir is and shall be an integral part of the Union of India.” It said the J&K Constitution has been made to further define the existing relationship of the state with the Union of India as an integral part thereof.

SARFAESI ACT:

This act allows banks and financial institutions to auction properties (residential and commercial) when borrowers fail to repay their loans. It enables banks to reduce their non-performing assets (NPAs) by adopting measures for recovery or reconstruction.

KEY FACTS:

- Upon loan default, banks can seize the securities (except agricultural land) without intervention of the court.
- SARFAESI is effective only for secured loans where bank can enforce the underlying security. In such

cases, court intervention is not necessary, unless the security is invalid or fraudulent. However, if the asset in question is an unsecured asset, the bank would have to move the court to file civil case against the defaulters.

- The SARFAESI Act also provides for the establishment of Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) regulated by RBI to acquire assets from banks and financial institutions.
- The Act provides for sale of financial assets by banks and financial institutions to asset reconstruction companies (ARCs). RBI has issued guidelines to banks on the process to be followed for sales of financial assets to ARCs.
- The provisions of this Act are applicable only for NPA loans with outstanding above Rs. 1lac. NPA loan accounts where the amount is less than 20% of the principal and interest are not eligible to be dealt with under this Act.

THE ACT PROVIDES THREE ALTERNATIVE METHODS FOR RECOVERY OF NON-PERFORMING ASSETS, NAMELY:

- Securitisation
- Asset Reconstruction.
- Enforcement of Security without the intervention of the Court.

SINGLE TRIBUNAL TO ARBITRATE INTER-STATE WATER DISPUTES

The Centre has decided to set up a single, permanent Tribunal to adjudicate all inter-State river water disputes, a step which is aimed at resolving grievances of States in a speedy manner. This body will subsume existing tribunals.

- Besides the tribunal, the government has also proposed to float some Benches by amending the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956 to look into disputes as and when required. Unlike the tribunal, the Benches will cease to exist once the disputes are resolved.

KEY FACTS:

- The permanent tribunal will have retired Supreme Court judge as its chairperson.
- There will be benches formed as and when required. The benches though will be wound up once a dispute is resolved.
- Along with the tribunal, the amendment proposes to set up Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC). The DRC, comprising experts and policy-makers, is proposed to handle disputes prior to the Tribunal.
- In order to give more teeth to the tribunal, it is proposed that whenever it gives order, the verdict gets notified automatically. Until now, the government required to notify the awards, causing delay in its implementation.

BACKGROUND:

As per the current provisions of the 1956 Act, a tribunal can be formed after a state government approaches Union Government with such request and the Centre is convinced of the need to form the tribunal.

At present, there are eight tribunals, including those on Cauvery, Mahadayi, Ravi and Beas, Vansadhara and Krishna rivers.

WAY AHEAD:

A decision to approve an amendment to the Act was taken at the recently held Union Cabinet’s meeting. The amendment is likely to be introduced in Parliament in its next session.

EC SEEKS END TO NAMELESS DONATIONS

Seeking to stop financing of election campaigns using black money, the Election Commission has urged the government to amend laws to ban anonymous contributions of Rs. 2,000 and above made to political parties.

PRESENT SCENARIO:

There is no constitutional or statutory prohibition on receipt of anonymous donations by political parties. But there is an indirect partial ban on anonymous donations

through the requirement of declaration of donations under Section 29C of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. But, such declarations are mandated only for contributions above Rs. 20,000.

WHAT HAS THE ELECTION COMMISSION PROPOSED?

- As per the proposal, sent by the commission to the government, and made part of its compendium on proposed electoral reforms, “Anonymous contributions above or equal to the amount of Rs. 2,000 should be prohibited.”
- EC has also proposed that exemption of income tax should be extended only to political parties that contest elections and win seats in Lok Sabha or Assembly polls. Section 13A of the Income-Tax Act, 1961 confers tax exemption to political parties for income from house property, voluntary contributions, capital gains and other sources.
- EC has also asked the Law Ministry to ensure that political parties are made to register details of donors for coupons of all amounts on the basis of a Supreme Court order of 1996.

WHY THIS IS NECESSARY?

At present, only income under the head ‘salaries and income from business or profession’ are chargeable to tax in the hands of political parties in India. Utilizing this space, political parties are formed merely for availing of provisions of income tax exemption. Hence, to curb such moves EC has proposed these reforms.

New Army and Navy Chiefs:

- The government has announced Lt Gen Bipin Rawat as the next Chief of Army Staff. The appointment goes against the long held tradition of appointing the senior most eligible officer to the post.
- Air Marshal B.S. Dhanoa, presently the Vice Chief of Indian Air Force (IAF) has been appointed the next Air Chief.

WORLD'S FIRST CLONED GOAT WITH CASHMERE:

- The world's first cloned goat bearing superfine Cashmere wool was recently born in north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. The goat will be raised in a base for animal husbandry research.
- The Cashmere fibre from the goat is less than 13.8 micrometers thick, much finer than the average of 15.8 micrometers grown by the famous Erlang Mountain goats in Inner Mongolia.
- Cashmere wool is obtained from Cashmere goats and other types of goat.

CHINA OPENS 1ST FULLY-OWNED SATELLITE GROUND STATION:

- China has launched its first fully-owned overseas satellite ground station near the North Pole which could enable Beijing to collect satellite data anywhere on the Earth at a speed it said was the fastest in the world.
- The facility, located in Sweden about 200 kms north of the Arctic Circle, would allow China to collect satellite data anywhere on Earth at speeds that were more than twice as fast as before.
- The new facility would play an important role in China's Gaofen project – a network of observation satellites orbiting the Earth to provide global surveillance capabilities – which was due to be completed in 2020.
- Domestic ground stations have needed up to seven hours to download the data from satellites orbiting the Earth in the past, but with the facility in Sweden, the maximum delay for downloading data would be less than 3.5 hours. The shorter time is because the mapping, weather, reconnaissance and military satellites orbiting the North Pole are able to pass around the Earth about 12 times each day, while those flying over China can orbit the Earth only about five times each day.

CENTRE PLANS DEDICATED FUND FOR INFRA FINANCE

The government has decided to set up a dedicated fund of Rs.10,000 crore to provide credit enhancement for commercially viable infrastructure projects.

KEY FACTS:

- The dedicated fund will be in the form of a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) and will be categorised as an NBFC-Infrastructure Finance Company.
- The SPV will issue an array of credit enhancement products that will initially cover post-Commercial Operations Date (COD) projects (where construction is over and commercial operations have begun, with the project generating cash flows), and subsequently even the pre-COD projects (where the construction process is on).
- Its promoters are likely to include Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), General Insurance Corporation of India, State Bank of India, Bank of Baroda, Power Finance Corporation, Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency and India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd (IIFCL).
- The government is keen on roping in international financial institutions such as Asian Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, New Development Bank (formerly BRICS Development Bank), International Finance Corporation (World Bank Group), and talks are on in this regard.
- Also, other Indian public sector insurance companies, large state-owned banks and the National Investment & Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) are expected to contribute to the fund that will have an authorised capital of Rs.10,000 crore.
- The initial minimum paid-up capital will be Rs.500 crore, which will be quickly scaled up with regular capital infusion to Rs.10,000 crore.
- The public sector insurers, leading state-owned banks and multilateral lending agencies are being made part of the large fund as it needs deep-pocketed promoters with an understanding of the risks involved in investing in the infrastructure sector

— where projects have huge capital needs, but with long-gestation periods and returns coming in slowly.

BENEFITS OF THIS FUND:

The fund— through ‘unconditional and irrevocable partial credit guarantee’ — will help enhance the credit rating of bonds issued by infrastructure firms so that they, in turn, can attract long-term investments especially from global insurance, pension and sovereign wealth funds.

Besides, a majority of the around 1,500 infrastructure projects in the country in various stages of development are rated at BBB-level, and the dedicated fund can help enhance this rating and help them raise more funds, especially from overseas investors who invest only in higher-rated (AA) projects.

BACKGROUND:

The country infrastructure sector requires investments of more than \$1.5 trillion in the coming ten years. The development follows the announcement in the Budget 2016-17 on the proposed measures to deepen the corporate bond market.

WAYAHEAD:

Prior to the setting up of the dedicated fund, the Reserve Bank of India is expected to bring out a comprehensive regulatory framework for credit enhancement to infrastructure projects and Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFC) keen on the business. The central bank’s norms for credit enhancement products will include capital requirement and bad loans or asset classification.

GOVT MULLS MERGING CYBER TRIBUNAL WITH TDSAT

As part of plans to merge some of the tribunals into larger entities to avoid identical functions, the government is looking to converge the Cyber Appellate Tribunal (CyAT) and the Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT). A Cabinet note to this effect will be moved shortly.

ABOUT CYAT:

Cyber Appellate Tribunal has been established under the Information Technology Act under the aegis of Controller of Certifying Authorities (C.C.A.).

- As per the IT Act, any person aggrieved by an order made by the Controller of Certifying Authorities, or by an adjudicating officer under this Act may prefer an appeal before the Cyber Appellate Tribunal.
- This Tribunal is headed by a Chairperson who is appointed by the Central Government by notification as provided under Section 49 of the IT Act 2000.
- It was conceived to adjudicate cyber crimes and disputes such as hacking, sending of offensive or false messages, receiving stolen computer resource, identity theft, cheating by personation, violation of privacy, domain name disputes and other cyber fraud cases.
- The tribunal has been vested with the same powers as a civil court, the cases requiring punishment instead of financial penalty are transferred to the magistrate concerned.
- CyAT, however, has been headless since July 2011.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS MOVE:

With growing number of internet users and government move to push for digital payments, it is extremely important to have an efficient cyber dispute settlement mechanism. This move is aimed at making the dispute settlement mechanism more efficient.

BACKGROUND:

Seeking to cut red tape, an inter—ministerial group of secretaries had “unanimously” agreed to reduce the number of tribunals from 36 to 18 as the government feels that most of these bodies are performing “identical functions”.

- A Constitutional bench of the Supreme Court had some years ago suggested bringing tribunals under administrative control of the Law Ministry.
- The Department of Legal Affairs had also recently written to all Union ministries and departments to

furnish details of tribunals functioning under their administrative control and explain the “possibility of merging the functions of tribunals with some other tribunals”.

- There are 36 tribunals functioning in the country dealing with subjects such as income tax, electricity, consumer protection, company laws and railway accidents.

IN DIGITAL PUSH, TELECOM REGULATOR MOOTS FREE DATA FOR RURAL USERS

The Telecom Authority of India has recommended a scheme under which a reasonable amount of data say 100 MB per month may be made available to rural subscribers for free.

- The cost of implementation of the scheme may be met from Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF).
- This move is to bridge the affordability gap for persons residing in rural areas and to support the government’s efforts towards a cashless economy by incentivising digital means.

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE TRAI:

- The scheme for free data must be telecom service provider agnostic, and must not involve any arrangement between the service provider and the aggregator/content provider.
- The free scheme should not be designed to circumvent the guidelines on “The Prohibition of Discriminatory Tariffs for Data Services Regulations,” which bans various forms of zero-rating models or schemes that provide free access to data services for subscribers of a particular Internet Service provider for accessing specific content.
- There is a need to introduce third party (aggregator) to facilitate schemes which are telecom service provider (TSP) agnostic and non-discriminatory in their implementation. The aggregators, who should be a company registered under Indian Companies Act, 1956, need to register with the Department of

Telecom. The validity of this registration will be for five years.

- The registrant shall not either directly or indirectly, assign or transfer the registration in any manner whatsoever to a third party either in whole or in part.
- The free data scheme should be implemented for a definitive period with a clearly defined time limit for each subscriber — free benefit for a fixed number of months for each subscriber. After the expiry of 100 MB of data in a month on a mobile connection, the free data services should be suspended till the beginning of the following month.

BACKGROUND:

Of the over 367 million Internet and broadband users in India, only 32.60% are in rural areas.

ULTRASOUND DEVICES TO BE MAPPED

In an attempt to identify unauthorised and unregistered diagnostic centres in the country, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoFW) has decided that all ultrasound machines in States will be mapped. The mapping will be carried out by the authorities in States visiting every centre and recording details of the devices.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS MOVE:

While regularising the diagnostic facilities is the main aim, curbing sex determination tests and female foeticide is another important aspect of the move, which will help reduce the thousands of unregistered sonography centres that have mushroomed over the years.

Key facts:

- The exercise has already been undertaken by some States while others are in process. The idea is to regulate all centres and thus monitor them thoroughly and minimise malpractices.
- Mapping will be carried out through a ground-level survey of all centres and ultrasound machines.

WHY THIS IS NECESSARY?

Unregulated machines and centres are misused for carrying out illegal sex determination tests. Since they are not registered, they don't follow the rules of submitting Form F for every case, which is mandatory under the Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act. Form F is a document to be filled by radiologists carrying out ultrasound tests on any pregnant woman. While registered centres are mandated to keep all records, the centres running illegally get away with breaking the rules. This is where couples looking for identifying the sex of their baby head to.

SAANJHI SAANJH:

- It is a National Newspaper dedicated to Senior Citizen. The first issue of this bilingual newspaper was recently released.
- This Newspaper for Senior Citizen is edited by Ms. J.V Manisha Bajaj, Secretary, Harikrit, an NGO for elderly people.
- This newspaper has got 8 pages which will be published from Delhi by Harikrit publishers.
- This newspaper will carry important and useful news pertaining to elderly persons besides inspirational stories. It will serve as a bridge between old and new generations.

COUNTRY'S FIRST INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SKILLS:

- Aimed at making India the Skill Capital of the World, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid foundation stone of the country's first Indian Institute of Skills (IIS) at Kanpur recently.
- The IIS was conceptualised by Modi during his visit to Singapore's Institute of Technical Education.
- The institute is being opened by the Skill Development Ministry in partnership with the Institute of Technical Education, Singapore.
- The Ministry has decided to have six such institutes.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NEARLY 150 YEARS, INDIA'S ECONOMY SURPASSES THAT OF UNITED KINGDOM:

- Owing to Britain's recent Brexit-related problems and thanks to India's rapid economic growth, India has managed to overtake its erstwhile colonial master United Kingdom in terms of the size of the economy – the first time after nearly 150 years.
- This dramatic shift has been driven by India's rapid economic growth over the past 25 years as well as a downslide in the value of the pound over the last 12 months.

VASECTOMY FORTNIGHT:

- The government observed 'Vasectomy Fortnight' between November 21 and December 4 with the hope to create awareness about male sterilisation and, more importantly, to facilitate district administrations reach sterilisation targets through campaigns.
- At the end of the programme, it was concluded that men were unwilling to share the burden of birth control compared to women. This is besides the fact that sterilisation is simpler in men than women — recovery time and surgical risk are smaller, complications are rare and deaths rarer.
- It should be noted here that of the 40 lakh sterilisation procedures done in 2014-15, vasectomies accounted for minuscule 1.9%. Experts maintain that the gap between vasectomy targets and achievements remain unchanged over the years even as country's fertility and birth rates continue to fall, driven mainly by female sterilisation.

MEETING OF GOVERNING BODY AND GENERAL BODY OF DR. AMBEDKAR FOUNDATION HELD

The meeting of the Governing Body and General Body of the Dr. Ambedkar Foundation (DAF) was recently held under the Chairmanship of the Chairman DAF & Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Shri Thaawarchand Gehlot.

- A compendium on various activities organized by the Dr. Ambedkar Foundation during the Nationwide Celebration of 125th Birth Anniversary of Dr. B R Ambedkar was released during the meeting.

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION:

Dr. Ambedkar foundation was set up on 24th March, 1992, as a registered body under the aegis of the Ministry of Welfare to promote Babasaheb's ideals and also to administer some of the schemes which emanated from the Centenary Celebrations, such as the establishment of Dr. Ambedkar chairs in Universities and Dr. Ambedkar National Award for Social Understanding and up-liftment of Weaker Sections.

Apart from other aims and objects relating to research, development and educational programmes, it had to administer the following three special schemes which emanated from the Centenary Celebrations i.e. Scheme of Dr. Ambedkar National Award; Setting up of Dr. Ambedkar Chairs in Universities; Setting up of Dr. Ambedkar International Centre and Setting up of Dr. Ambedkar National Memorial.

GARV-II APPLAUNCHED

The government has launched GARV- II app to track Rural Household Electrification. This is the next step in Government of India's aim to provide access to electricity to all households in the country.

KEY FACTS:

- Under this module, village-wise and habitation-wise base line data on household electrification for all States, as provided by them, has been incorporated.
- The data in respect of about 6 lakh villages, with more than 15 lakh habitations having 17 crore people, has been mapped for tracking progress on household electrification in each of the habitations of these villages, which is a remarkable progress over the previous GARV App.
- In the earlier version of the 'GARV' App, launched in October 2015 for the effective and efficient monitoring of village electrification programme, the data of only 18,452 un-electrified villages had been

mapped and a 12-stage milestone-based monitoring mechanism was put in place.

- The status of village-wise works sanctioned under the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) and release of funds to the States for these projects has also been mapped in 'GARV-II' to monitor progress of works in each village. The progress is required to be updated by the implementing agencies of the States on day to day basis. All data would be made available in public domain to ensure transparency, enhance accountability of various stakeholders and facilitate view of near real time progress.
- This app is an important part of the 'Digital India Initiative' of Government of India and will contribute in further development of the villages. In order to bring more transparency, the Minister asked the Power Ministry officials to place more details regarding discoms, tenders and contracts in public domain.
- For places, where internet facilities are not available, information regarding rural electrification projects like contractor's name, amount sanctioned by the Government, deadline of the project etc. will be put on boards on the working sites in villages. This will help people in better monitoring of Government's work.

DIGITAL INDIA AWARDS 2016 – HEALTHY MINISTRY WINS GOLD IN THE WEB RATNA CATEGORY

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has won gold in the Web Ratna category in the recently concluded Digital India awards, 2016, conferred by the Ministry of Electronics & IT to promote more innovative e-governance initiatives by the government entities.

KEY FACTS:

- The website of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare conforms to the UUU trilogy. It is totally bilingual as per the directions of Parliamentary Committee of official languages and is accessible to all. Special features have also been incorporated in the website for visually challenged users.

- The website complies with the mandatory requirements of Guidelines for Indian Government Websites (GIGW).
- All relevant web policies have been implemented with due approvals. Content has been grouped systematically under drop down menus that result in easy navigation.
- The ministry has been awarded for comprehensive web presence in Web ratna awards in 2014 and appreciated by SUGAM Web e-Newsletter as usable, user-centric and universally accessible.

ABOUT AWARDS:

Digital India awards, earlier known as the Web Ratna Awards, were instituted under the Ambit of National Portal of India. The award acknowledges exemplary initiatives of various government entities in the realm of e-governance.

Web Ratna award felicitates a Ministry or Department of the Government of India which has a comprehensive web presence and display the level of accountability in terms of quantity, quality, spectrum of coverage, and innovation ascertaining user satisfaction. Level of convenience provided to the citizen for availing the services, usability and accessibility are also assessed.

CAN COURTS MAKE LIFE TERMS MORE RIGOROUS, ASKS SC

The Supreme Court has agreed to examine the question whether courts are statutorily empowered to make life imprisonments tougher for the convicts by adding 'rigorous' (harsh) to life sentence as the law does not provide for this.

- The court would consider whether the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) or any other penal law empowered the courts to add the term 'rigorous'.

BACKGROUND:

The court has taken up the issue based on a submission which said neither the penal provision dealing with the offence of murder, nor the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) provided that the term 'rigorous' can be added by courts while awarding life sentences.

NCRPB TELLS STATES TO SUBMIT ACTION PLAN TO CURB POLLUTION

With air quality deteriorating on a daily basis, the National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB) has asked Delhi and adjoining States to submit action plans to control air pollution in the Capital. The Board will soon file an affidavit before the Delhi High Court regarding the matter.

BACKGROUND:

Air pollution in Delhi is a matter of serious concern and Delhi, along with Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and Punjab are acting in unison to mitigate the suffering of the people.

ABOUT NCR:

National Capital Region (NCR) is a unique example of inter-state regional planning and development, covering the entire National Capital Territory of Delhi, thirteen districts of State of Haryana, seven districts of State of Uttar Pradesh and two districts of State of Rajasthan, with the Nation Capital as its core.

The National Capital Region (NCR) in India was constituted under the NCRPB Act, 1985 with the key rationale to promote balanced and harmonized development of the Region, and to avoid any haphazard development.

THIRUVALLUVAR'S STATUE UNVEILED IN HARIDWAR

Uttarakhand Chief minister Harish Rawat has unveiled the statue of renowned Tamil poet and philosopher Thiruvalluvar on the premises of Mela Bhawan in Haridwar. The ceremony was attended by members of the Tamil Sangam, in addition to officials from the Uttarakhand administration.

KEY FACTS:

- Thiruvalluvar is a celebrated Tamil poet and philosopher whose contribution to Tamil literature is the Thirukkural, a work on ethics.

- Thiruvalluvar is thought to have lived sometime between the 4th century BC and the 1st century BC.
- The Tamil poet Mamulanar of the Sangam period mentioned that Thiruvalluvar was the greatest Tamil scholar and Mamulanar also mentioned the Nanda Dynasty of northern which ruled until the 4th century BC.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR PROTECTION OF CHILD RIGHTS GETS SKOCH AWARDS FOR POCSO E-BOX:

- The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) of Ministry of Women and Child Development has been conferred the Skoch Silver and Skoch Order-of Merit award.
- The two awards were received by NCPCR for applying technology to develop an electronic drop box, POCSO e-Box for registering complaints on Child Sexual Abuse.
- The competition saw more than 3000 participants and NCPCR's project, POCSO e-box was considered among the top 30 entries.
- POCSO e-box is a unique endeavour by NCPCR for receiving online complaint of Child Sexual Abuse directly from the victim. The system maintains confidentiality of the victim/ complainant.
- Through a well defined procedure complaints are directly followed up by a team which counsels the victim, providing further guidance for required legal action. Through a short animation film embedded in the e-box it assures the victim not to feel bad, helpless or confused as it's not her fault. With the e-box, it is easy to register complaint through a step-by-step guided process.

KHANJAR-IV:

- During the recently held bilateral talks, India and Kyrgyzstan have finalised plans for joint military exercises in the New Year.
- The annual joint military exercises named "Khanjar-IV" will be held in February-March. The "Khanjar-

II" exercises were held in March 2015 in Kyrgyzstan and "Khanjar-III" in March-April 2016 in Gwalior.

INDIAN ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

The Government has approved cadre review and formation of the Indian Enterprise Development Service (IEDS) in the Office of the Development Commissioner, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

- The creation of the new cadre and change in structure is aimed at strengthening the organisation. It will also help achieve the vision of Startup India, Stand-up India and Make in India.
- The measure will also enhance the capacity and efficiency of the organisation and also help in achieving growth in the MSME sector through a focussed and dedicated cadre of technical officers.

BACKGROUND:

The Service has been created by absorbing 11 trades, recruitment to which had been done differently, following different rules. All these trades were created in the 1950s and 1960s when industries got developed under the regulation regime. The work of the officers of the department has changed over the years and there is need to have a cadre which works for the development of enterprise and thinks holistically.

WAYAHEAD:

The Indian Enterprise Development Service, to start with, will have a cadre strength of 617 officers, 6 of which will be at the level of joint secretaries. These officers will man 72 field offices of the Development Commissioner and the headquarters in Delhi. Out of the 72 field offices, 30 are MSME development institutes and 28 branch institutes.

UTTAR PRADESH SENDS FIRST PROPOSAL FOR CONSTRUCTION OF HOUSES FOR URBAN POOR UNDER PMAY (URBAN)

Uttar Pradesh has become the 29th State to send proposals for construction of affordable houses for urban poor to the Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation.

- The first such proposal for construction of 11,286 houses for urban poor in 34 towns of Uttar Pradesh was approved by the Ministry of HUPA recently.
- Total investment involved in construction of these houses is Rs.384 cr. The Ministry has approved central assistance of Rs. 160 cr in this regard.

ABOUT PMAY-URBAN:

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

The Mission seeks to address the housing requirement of urban poor including slum dwellers through following programme verticals:

- Slum rehabilitation of Slum Dwellers with participation of private developers using land as a resource.
- Promotion of Affordable Housing for weaker section through credit linked subsidy.
- Affordable Housing in Partnership with Public & Private sectors.
- Subsidy for beneficiary-led individual house construction /enhancement.

KEY FACTS:

- The beneficiaries are poor and people living under EWS and LIG categories in the country.
- The scheme is divided into three phases. In the first phase, a total of 100 cities will be covered from April 2015 to March 2017. In phase two, 200 cities will be covered from April 2017 to March 2019. In the third phase, the leftover cities will be covered from April 2019 to March 2022.
- The government is providing an interest subsidy of 6.5% on housing loans which can be availed by beneficiaries for 15 years from start of loan date.
- The government will grant Rs 1 lakh to all the beneficiaries of the scheme. In addition, Rs 1.5 lakh

will be given to all eligible urban poor who want to construct their houses in urban areas or plan to go for renovation in their existing houses. One can also avail loans under this scheme to build toilets in existing houses.

SC CRITICISES POOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SC/ST ACT

Criticising the government for its “indifferent attitude” towards the implementation of the Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the Supreme Court has directed the National Legal Services Authority to frame schemes for spreading legal awareness and free consultations to members of the SC/ST communities nationwide.

- The court has asked the authorities to discharge their duties to protect the SCs/STs to attain the constitutional goal of equality for all citizens.

ABOUT 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.

- The Chief Justice of India is patron-in-chief of NALSA while second seniormost judge of Supreme Court of India is the Executive-Chairman.

There is a provision for similar mechanism at state and district level also headed by Chief Justice of High Courts and Chief Judges of District courts respectively:

- 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. The State Legal Services Authority is headed by Hon’ble the Chief Justice of the respective High Court who is the Patron-in-Chief of the State Legal Services Authority.
- In every District, District Legal Services Authority has been constituted to implement Legal Services Programmes in the District. The District Legal

Services Authority is situated in the District Courts Complex in every District and chaired by the District Judge of the respective district.

PARDON, THE GENDER WAGE GAP IS SHOWING

Global Wage Report 2016-17 was recently released by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT:

Performance of India:

- India has among the worst levels of gender wage disparity — men earning more than women in similar jobs — with the gap exceeding 30%.
- In India, women formed 60% of the lowest paid wage labour, but only 15% of the highest wage-earners. This means not only are women poorly represented in the top bracket of wage-earners, the gender pay gap at the bottom is also very wide in India.
- In India, the top one per cent earned 33 times what the bottom 10% did. The top 10% also earned 43% of all wages. Since 2006, average wages rose by 60% in India, while they more than doubled in China.

GLOBAL SCENARIO:

- Singapore has the lowest wage disparity, at 3%. Among major economies, only South Korea fared worse than India, with a gap of 37%.
- The share of women among wage earners was among the lowest in South Asia. Compared to a global average of 40%, and an Asia-Pacific average of 38%, in South Asia (whose dominant economy is India), only 20% of wage earners were women.
- The gender pay gap is smallest (8%) in the group of countries where the collective bargaining rate is at least 80%, and widest in countries with weak collective bargaining and no or very low minimum wages.

REASONS FOR THE WAGE GAP:

- The report noted that typically, women's educational choices produced occupational segregation. For instance, since the majority of those who studied nursing were women, "this profession is over-represented among women".
- At the same time, care work is undervalued because it may be seen as a natural female attribute rather than a skill to be acquired. Thus, a higher representation of women in sectors where their work is undervalued results in a gender pay gap.

TOO HOT TO HANDLE — ALARMING RISE IN FOREST FIRES THIS YEAR

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology has submitted its report on forest fires. The report primarily focuses on the prevention and containing of fires in the Himalayan forests spread across Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir. In Himachal and Uttarakhand, over 17,502 acres have been ravaged this year due to forest fires — a rise of over 171%.

BACKGROUND:

The committee was formed after a series of devastating forest fires earlier this year, including the prolonged one that charred 4,000 hectares of forest land across 13 districts of Uttarakhand.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT:

- The frequency of forest fires in India has risen by a drastic 55% in the past year. The number has touched 24,817 in 2016 from around 15,937 fires in 2015.
- The increase is seen even though 2015, considered a drought year, had seen a decline in frequency of forest fires of around 16%.
- The three central States of Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh contribute a third of the forest fires. Madhya Pradesh has seen a nearly ten-fold increase, from just 294 in 2015 to more than 2,600 in 2016.

IMPORTANT SUGGESTIONS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE:

According to the report, accumulated Chir pine needles — which are inflammable due to their high-resin content — are believed to be a “prominent factor in occurring and spreading of forest fires”. Hence, the committee has recommended the procurement of sweeping machines to clear roadsides of Chir pine needles, while advocating large-scale incentives and programmes (including under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) to collect pines for use as fuel, and other incineration.

The committee has also suggested a national policy on managing forest fires.

NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP PROMOTION SCHEME (NAPS):

- Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi recently launched National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) at Kanpur.
- The scheme has an outlay of Rs 10000 crore and it involves incentivizing employers in sharing 25% of total cost of stipend paid to the apprentices.
- It is for the first time Govt. of India has come forward to incentivize the employers to participate pro-actively in apprenticeship training.

COAL MITRA:

- It is a Web portal for flexibility in Utilization of Domestic Coal. It was recently launched by the government.
- It has been designed to bring about flexibility in Utilization of Domestic Coal by transferring the reserves to more cost efficient State/Centre owned or Private sector generating stations, leading to lower generation costs and ultimately lesser cost of electricity for the consumers.
- The web portal would be used by the State/Central Gencos to display information about normative fixed and variable charges of electricity for the previous month as well as margin available for additional

generation so as to enable the utilities identify stations for transfer of coal.

- It would host data on Operational and Financial parameters of each coal based station; Quantity and source of supply coal to the power plant; and Distance of Power plant from the Coal mine.

NGT BANS OPEN WASTE BURNING

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has imposed a complete ban on burning of waste in open places, including at landfill sites and announced a fine of Rs. 25,000 on each incident of bulk waste burning.

WHAT ELSE HAS THE NGT SAID?

- All State governments and Union Territories shall prepare an action plan in terms of the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 and implement within four weeks. The action plan would relate to the management and disposal of waste in the entire State. The steps are required to be taken in a time-bound manner.
- Plants for processing and disposal of waste and selection and specifications of landfill sites which have to be constructed, be prepared and maintained strictly in accordance with the Rules of 2016.
- Non-biodegradable waste and non-recyclable plastic should be segregated from the landfill sites and should be used for construction of roads and embankments in all road projects.

BACKGROUND:

The green panel’s judgement came on a petition seeking directions to local bodies in states and the Centre for improving solid waste management methods.

China launches satellite to monitor global carbon emissions

China has launched a global carbon dioxide monitoring satellite to understand climate change.

KEY FACTS:

- The 620-kg satellite TanSat was put into orbit by Long March-2D rocket from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwest China's Gobi Desert.
- Besides TanSat, the rocket also carried a high-resolution micro-nano satellite and two spectrum micro-nano satellites for agricultural and forestry monitoring.
- The satellite was sent into a sun synchronous orbit about 700 kms above the earth and will monitor the concentration, distribution and flow of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere.
- The satellite will help understanding climate change and provide China's policy makers with independent data.
- On a three-year mission, TanSat will thoroughly examine global carbon dioxide levels every 16 days, accurate to at least 4 ppm (parts per million).
- The new satellite will enable China to obtain emissions data first-hand and share it with researchers worldwide.
- The satellite can trace the sources of greenhouse gases and help evaluate whether countries are fulfilling their commitments.
- TanSat means a louder voice for China on climate change, carbon reduction and in negotiations with a bigger say on carbon trading.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS MISSION:

This was the 243rd mission of the Long March series rockets. China is the third country after Japan and the US to monitor greenhouse gases through its own satellite.

CABINET APPROVES ORDINANCE TO PAY SALARIES VIA CHEQUES

The Centre recently approved the promulgation of an ordinance to enable industries to pay wages by cheque or by direct credit into bank accounts of workers earning up to Rs. 18,000 a month, without taking their explicit consent as required under the present 1936 law.

KEY FACTS:

- The ordinance proposes changes to Section 6 of the Payment of Wages Act of 1936. The Centre or State governments may specify the industry through official notifications where the payment of wages shall be through cheques or direct credit in bank accounts.
- Wage payment through the banking system would only be optional, until State governments or the Centre come up with a notification for specific industries. The current provisions of payment of wages through cash will remain.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS MOVE:

The move assumes significance in the context of the government's efforts to promote cashless transactions after its decision to scrap the old Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 currency notes.

BACKGROUND:

The Payment of Wages (Amendment) Bill, 2016 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 15, but it couldn't be cleared owing to the impasse in Parliament. The present law states that all payment of wages should be in cash, with a provision asking employers to obtain written permission of the worker to pay either by cheque, or by crediting the wages to his or her bank account.

CENTRE RECASTS PANEL HELPING KRISHNA BOARD

The Centre has reconstituted a committee that was tasked with assisting the Krishna River Management Board (KRMB).

KEY FACTS:

- The new committee will be headed by A.K. Bajaj, former chairman of the Central Water Commission.
- The committee is tasked with assisting the Krishna River Management Board prepare a manual on how projects, common to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, ought to be handled.

- It also has to weigh in on how the Godavari waters ought to be transferred to the Krishna Basin in accordance with the Godavari Water Disputes Tribunal Award.

BACKGROUND:

The committee's reconstitution comes even as the Board ruled that Krishna water be divided 70:30 between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana for the coming month. The Telangana government has strongly objected to this.

DIGITAL HURDLES

According to a new SBI report, card transactions have fallen to a nine-month low, posing a new challenge to the government's demonetisation drive.

- According to the report, the aggregate of debit and card transactions at point of source (PoS) terminals fell to a little more than Rs 35,000 crore in November, the lowest since February.

CONCERNS:

- That the decline happened even when most banks have reported an increase in the number of transactions involving swipe cards after the announcement of the demonetisation drive throws up issues which the government must address.
- It signifies a fall in consumer sentiment. People seem to be using their debit and credit cards for purchases of relatively inexpensive items, while there has been a sharp fall in big ticket purchases. This does not augur well for the economy.

CHALLENGES TO DIGITAL PUSH:

- A PoS machine costs between Rs 4,000 and Rs 8,000. There are low cost options but these require the use of smartphones. Given that only about 250 million people in the country have such phones, it's difficult to imagine that the seemingly low cost options will be adopted without sound incentives.
- The government took more than a month to announce incentives for cashless transactions. But these incentives did not address the problems at the level of digital infrastructure.

- Also, people prefer making their purchases in cash because they are not convinced about data safety in digital transactions. In fact, a security breach a few weeks before the demonetisation drive had forced the SBI to recall more than three lakh debit cards.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- The report points to the necessity of bolstering the digital transaction infrastructure. There are about 15 lakh PoS machines in the country. The report points out that the country needs an additional 20 lakh such machines. A vast majority of these should be in tier II and tier III cities, and in rural areas.
- The government should bring in a privacy law with strong liability clauses to allay people's fears. All this should be accompanied by robust awareness drives, hardly in evidence so far.
- Bank officials have to play a major role in this endeavour. But they have their hands full in the aftermath of demonetisation.

WAY AHEAD:

The SBI report is a warning that the economy needs a push. Sound digital infrastructure and robust privacy laws could be the first steps in that direction.

IN IT FOR THE SHORT HAUL

According to a study, the average turnover of the members of the Uttar Pradesh state assembly between 1957 and 2012 was 58.5%. In other words, it means that on an average, nearly 60% of the members of the legislative assembly are first-time MLAs, in every assembly.

- This number is high if one compares UP with most other democracies, where individual incumbency is the norm rather than the exception. In the United States Congress, for instance, individual incumbency can be as high as 90%, the incumbent candidate benefiting from their established reputation and party support.

WHAT'S THE MAIN CONCERN NOW?

In India, the phenomenon of anti-incumbency, or the propensity of voters to reject those they elected in the previous election, is well known. Even if governmental incumbency has increased in India in recent years, UP remains highly volatile: No government there has served two consecutive mandates since 1985.

REASONS BEHIND THIS VOLATILITY:

- The first reason is that less than half of incumbent MLAs re-run after their first election, as parties frequently deny them a ticket for their own re-election. Parties may do so to prevent anti-incumbency, or to punish non-performing representatives. They may also change their local caste alliance and ditch their representatives accordingly.
- The second reason for the high turnover is that in every election, a number of sitting MLAs change party affiliation, hoping to join a stronger party.
- The third reason for high individual anti-incumbency comes from voters themselves, who tend to reject the people they voted for in the previous election.

THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS HAS THREE IMPORTANT POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES:

- The first is that the assembly has to work with a majority of inexperienced MLAs. One can laud the democratic value of alternation or of the rapid renewal of political elites, but a high turnover of representatives means a loss of accumulated experience after every election.
- A second consequence is that, considering the costs incurred and the hardships undergone to enter into politics, a short political life expectancy acts as a powerful inducement for predatory behaviour. In other words, legislators who spent crores of rupees to get elected know that they have a little less than five years to recoup their investment.
- A third consequence is that political power tends to be concentrated within a few hands, as the stable political class, or those who succeed in being elected more than twice, comprises on average about a

hundred individuals at any point of time since Independence.

GOOGLE MAPS TOILET LOCATOR APP:

- It is a mobile app recently launched by the government to enable people to locate the nearest public toilet for use in five cities in National Capital Region and Bhopal and Indore in Madhya Pradesh.
- This facility now available in Delhi, Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Noida and the two cities of Madhya Pradesh would help in addressing open urination and open defecation.
- The App also gives information about the nature of the toilet seat available, free or pay for use, working hours etc. This facility will be extended to other cities in due course. Ministry of Urban Development has partnered with Google to enable this service.

NATIONAL MATHEMATICS DAY:

- The National Mathematics Day is observed every year on 22nd December to celebrate birth anniversary of Indian Mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan.
- 2016 marks the 129th birth anniversary of Srinivasa Ramanujan.
- He compiled more than 3,900 mathematical results and equations. His Ramanujam Prime and Ramanujam theta discoveries had also inspired further research on the subject.
- With almost no formal training in pure mathematics, he made extraordinary contributions to mathematical analysis, number theory, infinite series, and continued fractions.
- The Ramanujan Journal, an international publication, was launched to publish work in all areas of mathematics influenced by his work.
- Ramanujan's home state of Tamil Nadu celebrates 22 December as 'State IT Day', memorialising both the man and his achievements, as a native of Tamil Nadu.

NITI AAYOG LAUNCHES THE NATIONAL INDEX FOR PERFORMANCE ON HEALTH OUTCOMES

NITI Aayog has launched the National Index for Performance on Health Outcomes. With this, the NITI Aayog aims to nudge States towards transformative action in the Health sector.

ABOUT THE INDEX:

This initiative is envisioned to bring about the much required improvements in social sector outcomes, which have not kept pace with the economic growth in this country.

- It is meant to capture the annual incremental improvements by States, rather than focus on historical achievements.
- It includes indicators in the domains of health outcomes governance and information and a few key inputs and processes.
- It will be used to propel action in the States to improve health outcomes and improve data collection systems.
- The index has been developed, with inputs from domestic and international experts, including academicians and development partners.
- Monitorable indicators that form a part of Sustainable Development Goal in Health have been included in order to align these initiatives.
- The exercise involves the participation of several partners including technical assistance from the World Bank, mentor agencies to hand-hold States, where required, during the exercise and third party organizations to validate the data submitted prior to calculation of the index.
- Data will be entered and results published on a dynamic web portal hosted by NITI Aayog.

WAYAHEAD:

The features of the index, measures and methods of data submission will be disseminated to the States through these workshops.

It is anticipated that this health index will assist in State level monitoring of performance, serve as an input for providing performance based incentives and improvement in health outcomes, thereby also meeting the citizens' expectations.

FIRST 2G (SECOND GENERATION) ETHANOL BIO-REFINERY IN INDIA TO BE SET UP AT BATHINDA (PUNJAB)

The government is planning to set up the country's first Second Generation (2G) Ethanol Bio-refinery at village Tarkhanwala, Bathinda (Punjab), with an approximate investment of Rs 600 crores. Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL), a Central Government Public Sector Undertaking, is setting up the project.

BACKGROUND:

The Government of India is encouraging production of Second Generation (2G) Ethanol from agricultural residues to provide additional sources of remuneration to farmers, address the growing environmental concerns and support the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme for achieving 10% Ethanol Blending in Petrol.

KEY FACTS:

- The Bathinda Bio-refinery will be utilizing agriculture residues for production of 100 KL per day or 3.20 crore litres per annum of ethanol which may be sufficient to meet the 26% of the ethanol blending requirement of the State.
- The proposed Bio-refinery will generate employment for about 1200 -1300 persons in the Biomass supply chain and generate an additional income of approximately Rs 20 crores per annum for the farmers through purchase of their agriculture residues.
- The project shall also help in reducing CO2 emissions from the paddy straw which currently is being burnt after harvesting.
- One of the major outputs of this Bio-refinery shall be Bio-fertilizer approximating 30,000 tonnes per annum which shall be incorporated into the soil for improving soil fertility and overall productivity of farms in Punjab.

- The Bio-refinery shall also produce more than 1.00 lakh Kg of Bio-CNG per annum which can cater to transport and clean cooking requirements.

ABOUT 2G ETHANOL:

Second generation (2G) ethanol draws on previously unused (ligno-) cellulosic plant parts, such as straw or corn cobs. First generation biofuels are made from the sugars and vegetable oils found in arable crops, which can be easily extracted using conventional technology.

THE ENEMY PROPERTY (AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION) FIFTH ORDINANCE, 2016

The President of India has promulgated the Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Fifth Ordinance, 2016.

WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

After the Indo-China aggression in 1962, specific properties of Chinese nationals in India were vested in the Custodian in terms of Defence of India Rules, 1962. Subsequently, after the Indo-Pak conflict in 1965 & 1971, the movable / immovable properties of Pakistani nationals automatically got vested in the Custodian of Enemy Property for India and their vesting was continued in the Custodian by the Enemy Property Act, 1968.

- The Government of Pakistan has disposed of all the properties of Indians impounded by them in Pakistan, including in erstwhile East Pakistan. Taking advantage of the interpretations of various judgments passed by the courts, claims are being made to regain these properties by the legal heirs and successors of the enemy nationals.
- To prevent the vested properties, the Ordinance for the first time was promulgated on 7th January, 2016.
- The amendments in the ordinance are aimed at plugging the loopholes in the principal Act to ensure that the enemy properties worth thousands of crores of rupees vested in the Custodian do not revert to the enemy, enemy subject or enemy firm.

ENEMY PROPERTIES BILL:

Enemy Properties Bill includes amendments to plug the loopholes of the Enemy Property Act, 1968. The bill is lying in the parliament.

THE AMENDMENTS INCLUDE:

- Once an enemy property is vested in the Custodian, it shall continue to be vested in him as enemy property irrespective of whether the enemy, enemy subject or enemy firm has ceased to be an enemy due to reasons such as death and others.
- The law of succession does not apply to enemy property. There cannot be transfer of any property vested in the Custodian by an enemy or enemy subject or enemy firm and that the Custodian shall preserve the enemy property till it is disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the Act.
- A new section has been inserted in the Bill to say that “the Custodian, may, after making such inquiry as he deems necessary, by order, declare that the property of the enemy or the enemy subject or the enemy firm described in the order, vests in him under this Act and issue a certificate to this effect and such certificate shall be the evidence of the facts stated therein”.

JAPAN DRAGS INDIA TO WTO AGAINST STEPS ON IRON, STEEL IMPORTS

Japan has dragged India to the World Trade Organisation’s dispute settlement body for imposing safeguard measures on steel products and minimum import price on iron and steel products.

WHAT’S THE ISSUE?

India had imposed safeguard measures in steel in September 2015 and minimum import price (MIP) on iron and steel products in February this year.

- Under MIP, products cannot be imported unless their import prices are at or above the imposed minimum.
- Japan, world’s second largest steel producer, found these measures inconsistent with the WTO norms.

WHAT NEXT?

As Japan has filed the case, it will do bilateral consultations with India on the issue.

- As per the WTO's dispute settlement process, the request for consultations is the first step in a dispute.
- Consultations give the parties an opportunity to discuss the matter and to find a satisfactory solution without proceeding further with litigation.
- After 60 days, if consultations fail to resolve the dispute, the complainant may request adjudication by a panel.

CHINA OPEN TO INDIA JOINING ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

China has said it has an "open attitude" to India joining the \$46 billion economic corridor but it wants to know New Delhi's response to a top Pakistani army general's offer to participate in the project.

BACKGROUND:

Pakistan Southern Command Commander Lt Gen Amir Riaz had recently said that India should join the CPEC along with Iran, Afghanistan and other Central Asian countries and enjoy its benefits.

India's concerns over CPEC being laid through the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir is one of the three major issues bedevilled the relations between the two countries besides China blocking India's admission to Nuclear Suppliers Group, (NSG) and UN ban on JeM leader Masood Azhar.

ABOUT CPEC:

It is a 3,000-km corridor linking China's far-western region to Pakistan's south-western Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). It is massive project of road, rail, energy schemes, pipelines and investment parks.

- The corridor is also expected to serve as a terminal for China to pump oil procurement from Persian Gulf. It is also being seen as a project to strengthen China's connectivity with neighbouring countries and

an initiative set to aid strategic framework for pragmatic cooperation between the nations.

- The corridor would transform Pakistan into a regional hub and give China a shorter and cheaper route for trade with much of Asia, West Asia and Africa.
- The corridor — expected to be *ready* in three years and provide about 10,400 MWs of electricity — gives China direct access to the Indian Ocean and beyond.
- The corridor will pass through Pakistan's poor Baluchistan province, where a long-running separatist insurgency that the army has vowed to crush will raise questions about the feasibility of the plan.

NATIONAL CONSUMER DAY:

- The Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Consumer Affairs Food and Public Distribution is celebrating the National Consumer Day this year with the theme "**Alternate Consumer Disputes Redressal**" on 24th December, 2016.

- The National Consumer Day is observed every year on December 24. On this day, the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 had received the assent of the President. The Day is an annual occasion for celebration and solidarity within the national consumer movement and is an opportunity to promote the basic rights of all consumers.

ANTI-AIRFIELD WEAPON

The Defence and Research Development Organization (DRDO) recently successfully flight tested the Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon (SAAW), from an Indian Air Force (IAF) aircraft.

KEY FACTS:

- SAAW is an indigenously designed and developed 120 kg. class smart weapon.
- It is developed by DRDO.
- It is capable of engaging ground targets with high precision up to a range of 100 kms.

- The light weight high precision guided bomb is one of the world class weapons systems.

LAND OF RELIGIOUS BODY CAN BE ACQUIRED: HC

Allahabad High Court has ruled that land belonging to religious body can be used for public purpose.

BACKGROUND:

High Court made its remark while asking the Church of North India Association and NHAI to “work out modality” for “demolition or shifting” of a church for construction of a six-lane road.

- In its plea, the petitioner had argued that acquisition of the land by NHAI violates the Place of Worship (Special Provisions) Act which safeguards “all religious properties”.
- The petitioner had also argued that the move violated the “right to freedom of religion” and the “freedom to manage religious affairs” guaranteed under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution.

WHAT ELSE HAS THE COURT SAID?

The court noted, “once there is public purpose for which land in question has been acquired, invoking provision of National Highways Act, 1956, then no relief can be accorded to the petitioner”.

The court also said that the Place of Worship (Special Provisions) Act only “bars any person from converting any place of worship of any religious denomination or different religious denomination” and that the “provision had been introduced to see that communal harmony is not disturbed and persons of one religious community may not take on the other”.

NEED TO LINK AADHAAR WITH DETAILS OF VOTERS

Noting that “there is an emergent need to link Aadhaar with the electoral details of voters”, the Election Commission of India has given a mixed response to the Supreme Court on providing absentee voting rights, like electronic voting and proxy voting, to over 300 million domestic migrants in the country, saying there is no

foolproof mechanism to verify their identity and block duplicity.

WHY IT IS DIFFICULT TO PROVIDE ABSENTEE VOTING RIGHTS?

“Domestic migrants” do not constitute a “uniquely identifiable and countable class.” There is also no reliable information or documentation on the number of domestic migrants in the country. The last one on them is the 15-year-old 2001 Census data of 314.5 million.

Therefore, any provision of absentee voting rights to the “loosely defined term domestic migrants” would become a logistical nightmare for the Commission, that is, for example, they are so spread out that an election in one Assembly constituency would mean electoral arrangements in 4,120 Assembly constituencies.

Besides, multiple vernacular data and “varying patterns of spelling” and difficulty in ascertaining the date of birth of voters have given rise to multiple entries of voters.

BACKGROUND:

The Supreme Court had asked the Election Commission to study the possibility for electoral reforms to allow inter-State migrants voting privileges like postal ballot available to government servants.

In this regard, EC had last year set up a committee to study the possibility of amending the electoral law to empower voters who have migrated to other States within the country.

WAY AHEAD:

EC has not totally negated the idea of providing domestic migrants with absentee voting rights. It is in favour of extending these rights only to a small subset of migrants who formed an identifiable and countable class of electors not delinked from their present place of registration and only “temporarily absent” from their place of ordinary residence.

Kuchipudi performers dance their way into Guinness Records

Andhra Pradesh’s own classical dance ‘Kuchipudi’ has found a place in the Guinness World Records yet again when a record 6,117 dancers came together to present

a show at the IGMC Stadium in Vijaywada recently. In 2012, a similar feat was achieved when 5,900 dancers performed 'Kuchipudi' in Hyderabad.

- The "Maha Brunda Natyam" (grand group dance) was organised as part of the '5th International Kuchipudi Dance Convention' organised by the state Department of Language and Culture.
- "Jayamu Jayamu" is one of the glorious items of 'Kuchipudi' dance choreographed by the legend Vempati China Satyam.

KUCHIPUDI:

Kuchipudi is one of the classical dance forms of the South India. Kuchipudi derives its name from the Kuchipudi village of Andhra Pradesh.

- Kuchipudi exhibits scenes from the Hindu Epics, legends and mythological tales through a combination of music, dance and acting.
- Like other classical dances, Kuchipudi also comprises pure dance, mime and histrionics but it is the use of speech that distinguishes Kuchipudi's presentation as dance drama.
- In its early form, the female roles were played by boys and young men of beautiful looks. The director (called Sutradhar) played the most important role. He combined the role of conductor, dancer, singer, musician, comedian, all in one. In modern times the Kuchipudi dance is considerably different than it originally used to be. Most of the performances are solo, done by female dancers.

ORIGIN:

- In 17th century Kuchipudi style of Yakshagaana was conceived by Siddhendra Yogi a Vaishnava poet and visionary who had the capacity to give concrete shape to some of his visions. He was steeped in the literary Yakshagaana tradition being guided by his guru Teerthanaaraayana Yogi who composed the Krishna-Leelatarangini in Sanskrit.
- It was Lakshminarayan Shastry (1886-1956) who introduced many new elements including solo dancing and training of female dancers in this dance style.

IMPORTANT FEATURES:

- Kuchipudi carries the sensuousness and fluidity of Odissi with the geometric line of today's Bharata Natyam.
- As in all other classical dance forms of India, the Kuchipudi dance is both interpretive and lyrical, making use of abstract dance sequences as well.
- Kuchipudi dance retains its devotional character with stress on dramatic outlook.

ACCOMPANYING MUSIC:

The music that accompanies the dance is according to the classical school of Carnatic music and is delightfully syncopatic. The accompanying musicians, besides the vocalist are: a mridangam player to provide percussion music, a violin or veena player or both for providing instrumental melodic music, and a cymbal player who usually conducts the orchestra.

PAKISTAN URGES WORLD BANK TO FULFIL COMMITMENT UNDER INDUS TREATY

Pakistan has urged the World Bank to fulfil its commitment in accordance with the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) under which no party can pause the performance of its role.

- The demand was made by Pakistan in response to the World Bank's decision to pause the process of empanelment of the Court of Arbitration.

BACKGROUND:

Recently, the World Bank had announced a pause in the separate processes initiated by India and Pakistan under the Indus Waters Treaty to allow the two countries to consider alternative ways to resolve their disagreements.

The decision halted the appointment of a neutral expert as requested by India and the Chairman of the Court of Arbitration as requested by Pakistan to resolve issues regarding two hydro-electric power plants under construction by India along the Indus Rivers system.

‘GOOGLE TAX’ DETRIMENTAL TO STARTUP ECOSYSTEM: EXPERTS

The equalisation levy, also known as Google Tax’ which the government is imposing on online advertising revenue by non-resident e-commerce companies earned in India, is expected to adversely affect the startup ecosystem going forward, according to tax experts.

WHY THIS TAX IS DETRIMENTAL TO STARTUP ECOSYSTEM?

The levy which is at 6% presently became effective on June 1. If passed on to startups, the applicable tax is expected to be in excess of 22%, including the 15% service tax and could further increase if GST comes into effect.

- Besides, the fact that the levy has been notified in addition to taxes payable by a businessman on imported online services unduly increases the cost of doing business for startups which in turn stifles innovation.
- Usually, small scale technology driven companies generally do not have enough capital to engage employees inhouse for all necessary business activities. Google tax adds to this problem.
- Also, emerging startups burn a lot of cash in the first few years before becoming profitable and when the levy is expanded to include a vast number of other digital services the burden is set to multiply exponentially, hampering even more serious cost to innovation.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

A cap should be placed on the rate of taxation at the very least, and the number of notified services subject to the levy should not be expanded until there is an impact study undertaken by the government.

AGNI 5, INDIA’S LONGEST RANGE NUCLEAR CAPABLE MISSILE, SUCCESSFULLY TEST FIRED

Agni-5, India’s longest range nuclear capable missile, was recently successfully test fired from the Kalam Island

off Odisha coast by the Defence Research and Development Organisation or DRDO.

- The intercontinental surface-to-surface nuclear capable ballistic missile, the latest in India’s “Agni” family of medium to intercontinental range missiles, has been through four trials now.
- The Agni 5 missile, with new technology for navigation and guidance, gives India the strategic depth it needs to contain its enemies, say scientists. After a few more trials, it will soon join India’s military arsenal.
- This was the first test of the Agni-5 missile after India became a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime, a 35-nation group to check the spread of unmanned delivery systems for nuclear weapons.

KEY FACTS:

- Agni-5 has a range of over 5,000 km and can carry about a 1,000-kg warhead. It can target almost all of Asia including Pakistan and China and Europe.
- The solid propellant driven missile will be tested from a canister which gives it all-weather and any terrain mobile launch capability.
- The 17-metre long Agni-5 Missile weighs about 50 tonnes and is a very agile and modern weapon system.
- The surface-to-surface missile is a fire-and-forget system that cannot be easily detected as it follows a ballistic trajectory.
- India describes the Agni – 5 missile system as a ‘weapon of peace’.
- The first missile of the series, Agni-I was developed under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Program and tested in 1989.

WORLD’S MOST HEAT RESISTANT MATERIAL FOUND

Scientists have identified materials that can withstand temperatures of nearly 4,000 degrees Celsius, an advance that may pave the way for improved heat resistant shielding for the faster-than-ever hypersonic space vehicles.

KEY FACTS:

- Researchers from Imperial College London in the UK discovered that the melting point of **hafnium carbide** is the highest ever recorded for a material.
- Tantalum carbide (TaC) and hafnium carbide (HfC) are refractory ceramics, meaning they are extraordinarily resistant to heat.
- Their ability to withstand extremely harsh environments means that refractory ceramics could be used in thermal protection systems on high-speed vehicles and as fuel cladding in the super-heated environments of nuclear reactors.

HOW THE MATERIALS WERE TESTED?

There is no technology available to test the melting point of TaC and HfC in the lab to determine how truly extreme an environment they could function in. Therefore, the researchers developed a new extreme heating technique using lasers to test the heat tolerance of TaC and HfC.

- They used the laser-heating techniques to find the point at which TaC and HfC melted, both separately and as mixed compositions of both.
- They found that the mixed compound was consistent with previous research, melting at 3,905 degrees Celsius, but the two compounds on their own exceeded previous recorded melting points. The compound TaC melted at 3,768 degrees Celsius, and HfC melted at 3,958 degrees Celsius.

ONLINE SAFETY CAMPAIGN BY GOOGLE:

- Google has teamed up with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs in India to launch a country-wide 'Digitally Safe Consumer' campaign in order to raise awareness and protect consumer interest on the internet.
- As part of the campaign, Google will work on educating consumer organisations in India, help in training members of the Consumer Affairs department, and also work with officials in the National Consumer Helpline.

- Google will start rolling out this year-long campaign in January 2017, and it will work towards organising 'Digital Literacy, Safety & Security' workshops. Google will rely on the 'Train the Trainer' model for this exercise, and plans to train around 500 people, including 250 consumer organisations across the country.
- The educational campaign will also feature write ups, posters, interactive quizzes and audio-visuals that will help educate users about the challenges of Internet safety and security.

LAST HURDLE FOR KEN BETWA LINK OVER

Wild life board has cleared the Ken Betwa river link project. Now, the government is all set to start the work once the funding pattern is decided.

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

The Ken and Betwa rivers in the states of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Madhya Pradesh (MP) are to be linked under an historic agreement that marks the first such project in India's ambitious and controversial national river-linking project.

- The project envisages construction of a dam across river Ken in Chhatarpur district in Madhya Pradesh to irrigate 6.35 lakh hectare area of land, drinking water purposes and generation of 78 MW hydropower.
- The project comprises two powerhouse of 2×30 MW and 3×6 MW each, two tunnels of 1.9 km long upper level, 1.1 km long tunnel lower level and a 221 km long Ken-Betwa link canal, proposed on the left bank of the river.
- The project will provide irrigation facilities for 6,35,661 hectares of land in Panna, Chhatarpur, Tikamgarh districts in Madhya Pradesh, and Banda, Mahoba and Jhansi districts in Uttar Pradesh.
- The project was first mooted in the early 1980s but was actively taken up by the NDA government under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. It was then challenged in the Supreme Court, which finally gave the nod in 2013.

SAGARMALA DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

The government recently inaugurated the Sagarmala Development Company (SDC). The Cabinet had approved the formation of the SDC under the administrative control of the Ministry of Shipping in July 2016.

KEY FACTS:

- The Sagarmala Development Company (SDC) has been incorporated under the Companies Act, 2013.
- The company has an initial Authorized Share Capital of Rs. 1,000 Crore and a subscribed share capital of Rs. 90 Crore.
- The main objective of the company is to identify port-led development projects under the Sagarmala Programme and provide equity support for the project Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) set up by the Ports / State / Central Ministries and funding window and /or implement only those residual projects which cannot be funded by any other means / mode.
- SDC would be raising funds as debt/equity (as long term capital), as per the project requirements, by leveraging resources provided by the Government of India and from multi-lateral and bilateral funding agencies. It would also aim to increase the scope of private sector participation in project development.

IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS TO BE PERFORMED BY THE COMPANY:

- The company would help in structuring activities, bidding out projects for private sector participation, identifying suitable risk management measures for strategic projects across multiple States / Regions and obtaining requisite approvals and clearances.
- The Company would act as the nodal agency for coordination and monitoring of all the currently identified projects under Sagarmala as well as other projects emerging from the master plans or other sources.
- It would also undertake the preparation of the detailed master plans for the Coastal Economic

Zones (CEZs) identified as part of the National Perspective Plan (NPP).

BACKGROUND:

The incorporation of SDC is part of the ambitious Sagarmala Programme by the Government of India which aims to harness India's 7,500 km long coastline, 14,500 km of potentially navigable waterways and strategic location on key international maritime trade routes. The concept of the Sagarmala Programme was approved by the Cabinet in March 2015.

CENTRE RELEASES SPECIAL STAMP ON FREEDOM FIGHTER "SHRI GAYA PRASAD KATIYAR"

Department of Posts, Ministry of Communications has brought out a Special Cover on freedom fighter "Shri Gaya Prasad Katiyar".

ABOUT GAYA PRASAD KATIYAR:

- He was one of the most dedicated soldiers of India's freedom struggle.
- He was born at Jagadishpur (UP). He joined Hindustan Socialist Republican Association in 1925 and got connected with Chandra Shekhar Azad and Bhagat Singh.
- Later he participated on Lahore Conspiracy Case and was arrested from Saharanpur in 1929. He joined the hunger strike at Lahore Jail with his co prisoners. Later he was transported to Cellular jail in Andaman and again he participated on hunger strike there.
- He was repatriated in 1937 but again arrested and transported to cellular jail from where he was released in 1946.

REMISSION POWER LIES WITH STATE: SC

Noting that the power to grant remission is exclusively that of the State government and not the judiciary, the Supreme Court refrained itself from allowing any reprieve to four convicts who have served 25 years of their life sentence in Kolkata.

- The court has declined to intervene, simply observing that “this is a power which can be exercised by the State.”

BACKGROUND:

The judgment is in sync with the Tamil Nadu government’s review petition on the question of who has the actual authority — the Centre or the State — in granting remission for life convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. Tamil Nadu has sought a review of the Constitution Bench verdict in the high-profile case.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS:

A pardon or remission can be given under Article 72 (by President) or 161 (by Governor) of the Constitution by the constitutional authority.

RESEARCHERS CREATE BACTERIA-POWERED BATTERY ON A SINGLE SHEET OF PAPER

Scientists have developed a bacteria-powered battery on a single piece of paper, which they say could be a cheap and easily manufactured power source for medical sensors in remote and developing areas.

KEY FACTS:

- The paper battery, which is foldable, is the latest example of what are known as bio-batteries, which store power generated by organic compounds. In this case, the power is generated by common bacteria found in wastewater.
- The paper-based design is part of a new field of research called papertronics, which like the name suggests, is a fusion of paper and electronics.

HOW WAS IT CREATED?

To make their battery, the researchers laid a ribbon of silver nitrate on a piece of chromatography paper. On top of this, they placed a thin layer of wax to create a cathode – the battery’s positive electrode.

- On the other side of the paper, the team made a reservoir out of a conductive polymer, which acts an anode (negative electrode), once filled with a

few drops of the bacteria-containing wastewater liquid.

- When the paper is folded so that the cathode and anode come into contact, the battery is powered by the bacterial metabolism, also known as cellular respiration.
- The amount of power output depends on how much paper you have and how it’s stacked and folded.

POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS OF THE NEW BATTERY:

- The battery is powerful enough to run simple biosensors for things like monitoring glucose levels in diabetes patients or detecting pathogens in patients, which could help bring urgent medical aid to people who need assistance in places without electric power.
- The simple components needed to make these kinds of paper-based electronics should be easy to come by in remote parts of the world, which could make them a reliable backup in places where grid electricity or conventional batteries aren’t available.

WAY AHEAD:

Right now, it would take millions of the paper batteries to generate enough power for a 40-watt light bulb, so this kind of technology probably isn’t going to be a solution for powering conventional electronics any time soon. A lot more work needs to be done to get more current out of the device.

FIRST FUNCTIONAL BIOLOGICAL PACEMAKER DEVELOPED

Scientists have developed the first functional pacemaker cells from human pluripotent stem cells which can regulate heart beats with electrical impulses, paving the way for an alternate, biological pacemaker therapy.

HOW THEY WERE DEVELOPED?

Pluripotent stem cells have the potential to differentiate into more than 200 different cell types that make up every tissue and organ in the body. These cells were coaxed in

21 days to develop into pacemaker cells by the researchers.

BACKGROUND:

Sinoatrial node pacemaker cells are the heart's primary pacemaker, controlling the heartbeat throughout life. Defects in the pacemaker can lead to heart rhythm disorders that are commonly treated by implantation of electronic pacemaker devices.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE FINDINGS:

- Biological pacemakers represent a promising alternative to electronic pacemakers, overcoming such drawbacks as a lack of hormonal responsiveness and the inability to adapt to changes in heart size in pediatric patients.
- Learning how to generate pacemaker cells could also help in understanding disorders in pacemaker cells, and provide a cell source for developing a biological pacemaker.

NEW REGIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION AT NELLORE:

- Ministry of Human Resource Development is opening a new Regional Institute of Education at Nellore (Andhra Pradesh). Presently NCERT, an apex body of Government of India on School Education, has five RIEs in the country at Ajmer, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Mysore and Shillong.
- The opening of the new RIE at Nellore will give an impetus to the strengthening of School Education and Teacher Education in the region and benefit not only Andhra Pradesh but also the adjoining States of Telegana, Tamil Nadu, Puduchery etc.
- The opening of the RIE fulfills the long-standing demand of the region. The new institution at Nellore shall offer teacher education programmes like B.Sc/BA B.Ed, M.Ed, Ph.D etc.
- It will undertake research and development of Resource Materials on school and teacher education, help capacity building of Teachers and Teacher Educators, strengthen implementation of Government of India Schemes like SSA, RMSA,

ICT in schools, and strengthen linkages among State Education Agencies besides addressing educational needs of the States.

ANTLERS COULD END UP IN MEDICINES

Kerala State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) has recommended the use of antlers of **spotted deer and sambar** in Ayurveda medicines. A proposal in this regard is pending with the National Board for Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

KEY FACTS:

- Antlers are the extensions of the skull of the deer. All the three deer varieties found in Kerala, including spotted deer, sambar, and barking deer, shed their antlers annually.
- Suitable amendments have to be made to the Wildlife Protection Act for using the antlers for medicinal purposes.
- The proposal, which was originally mooted a few years ago, was to collect the antlers annually shed by the ungulates after the breeding season.

CONCERNS ASSOCIATED:

In the long run, experts believe, the recommendation on antlers would lead to hunting of animals.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS?

The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, has included antler in the definition of wildlife trophy. A wildlife trophy is defined as the "whole or any part of any captive animal or wild animal".

- Section 39 of the Act also states that "no person shall, without the previous permission in writing of the Chief Wildlife Warden or the authorised officer acquire or keep in his possession, custody or control or transfer to any person, whether by way of gift, sale or otherwise or destroy or damage such property."
- Wildlife and wildlife trophies are considered as owned by the government. The Act also prescribes imprisonment up to three years and fine of RS. 25,000 for offences involving wildlife trophies.

STATUS OF TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT REMAINS POOR: MINISTRY REPORT

According to the latest annual report of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the tribal population in India lags behind other social groups on various social parameters, such as child mortality, infant mortality, number of anaemic women.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT:

- Tribal population, with a vast majority engaged in agricultural labour, has the largest number of anaemic women.
- The community also registered the highest child mortality and infant mortality rates, when compared to other social groups.
- While educational achievements on the whole has improved, the gross enrolment ratio among tribal students in the primary school level has declined from 113.2 in 2013-14 to 109.4 in 2015-16. Besides, the dropout rate among tribal students has been at an alarming level.
- While the overall poverty rates among the tribal population have fallen compared to previous years, they remain relatively poorer when weighed against other social groups.
- Health infrastructure has also been found wanting in tribal areas. At an all-India level, there is a shortfall of 6,796 Sub Centres, 1267 Primary Health Centres and 309 Community Health Centres in tribal areas as on March 31, 2015.
- Gap in rehabilitation of tribal community members displaced by various development projects is also high. Out of an estimated 85 lakh persons displaced due to development projects and natural calamities, only 21 lakh were shown to have been rehabilitated so far.
- In 2014, the Central government initiated the Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana for the holistic development and welfare of tribal population on a pilot basis. However, budgetary provisions made under the scheme is minuscule and barely sufficient

to meet the purpose of the Scheme given that it intends to cover 27 States across the country.

Nepal rejects India's 'open sky' offer

Nepal has rejected India's 'open sky' offer to allow unlimited flights between the two countries at a recently held meeting. Nepal said it was not yet ready for the agreement.

- However, India and Nepal signed a memorandum of understanding to set up a joint technical committee to examine Nepal's request for developing new air routes and air entry points at Janakpur, Bhairahawa and Nepalgunj. The committee will shortly meet to examine the feasibility of the proposed routes.

BACKGROUND:

Nepal has long been pushing for new airspaces to ease congestion on the existing routes and to save time and cost for air passengers.

WHAT IS OPEN SKY AGREEMENT?

Under the National Civil Aviation Policy, approved by the Union Cabinet earlier this year, India intends to enter into 'open-sky' agreements with SAARC countries and with those beyond the 5,000-km radius from Delhi.

- Countries sign air services agreements (ASAs) through bilateral negotiations to decide the number of flights airlines can fly. Under the 'open-sky' agreement, there is no restriction on flights or seats.
- Among SAARC countries, India doesn't have any 'open sky' agreement with Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan. It allows unlimited flights from Bangladesh and Maldives at 18 domestic airports, from Sri Lanka at 23 airports, and from Bhutan at all its airports.

PANEL MOOTS 'HANDLING' LEVY ON CASH PAYMENTS

The Committee on Digital Payments recently submitted its report to the finance ministry.

IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE:

- Union Budget 2017-18 should allow merchants as well as government departments to levy a handling charge for cash payments above a certain limit. The cash handling charge so collected should be exclusively used to fund new infrastructure for acceptance of digital payments (like PoS devices).
- Mandatory threshold for quoting PAN card numbers for cash transactions from Rs. 50,000 and Rs. 2,00,000 should be reduced. Aadhaar should be used as an alternate for KYC for people who don't have a PAN.
- To create parity between cash and digital payments, eKYC requirements in digital payments should be in consonance with KYC norms for transacting in cash. Transactions which are permitted in cash without KYC should also be permitted on prepaid wallets without KYC.
- Tax payments by debit cards and e-wallets should be allowed, against the current option of net banking only. CBDT and CBEC should develop an e-commerce based model where their web portals generate the tax challans and accept payments from all electronic modes.
- A recommendation has also been made to make Aadhaar numbers compulsory in Income Tax returns, although the committee has stressed such an amendment must only be made after seeking the Attorney General's opinion. Income tax payers already have PAN cards.
- The panel also recommended that when government acts as a merchant, it should bear the cost of electronic payments and not pass them on to consumers. Digital payments for low value transactions, such as parking charges, toll charges or health services at government hospitals and health centres, also need to be promoted.
- Pushing for adoption of digital payments for all government transactions, it has also proposed that utility bills and payments to government above a certain threshold be made only in digital mode. Also,

convenience or service charge levied by utility service providers, petrol pumps, railways, airlines on electronic payments should be withdrawn.

- Customs and excise duties on import of equipment which form a part of retail payment system infrastructure must be cut in the Budget. The list includes micro ATMs used by business correspondents; fingerprint readers and biometric readers either as spare parts or as integrated electronic data capture machines and point-of-sale (PoS) terminals.

NEED FOR DIGITAL PAYMENTS:

India is a cash heavy economy, with almost 78% of all consumer payments being effected in cash. This imposes an estimated cost of Rs. 21,000 crore, without factoring in other effects of cash reliance, such as counterfeit currency and black money. Therefore, transitioning to digital payments will bring about a significant reduction in costs incurred on account of inefficiencies associated with cash and other paper based payments.

N-PLANT: VILLAGERS 'SETTLE' FOR PACKAGE:

- A majority of people residing in Kovvada and surrounding areas are said to have agreed to accept the package proposed to be finalised soon by the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) and the State government, and part with their lands for the establishment of India's biggest atomic power plant that would attract Rs.1 lakh-crore worth investments.
- Officials had recently conducted a crucial meeting with Kovvada villagers to win their consent for the Social Impact Survey, which was mandatory to obtain permission from the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- Kovvada Atomic Power Project is a proposed 6,600 MW nuclear power station in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India.

BIHAR GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES 50 % RESERVATION IN JUDICIAL SERVICES:

- The Bihar Cabinet has declared 50% reservation in all judicial services for aspirants belonging to the Extremely Backward Classes, Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- Aspirants belonging to EBCs will get 21% reservation, OBCs will have 12% reservations, Scheduled Castes will have 16% reservation and Scheduled Tribes will be provided 1% reservation in all judicial services of the State.
- Also, there will be 35% 'horizontal reservation' for women and 1 per% reservation for disabled persons.
- The reservation will be in both Superior Judicial Services and Subordinate Judicial Services.

SUPERCLUSTER OF GALAXIES NEAR MILKY WAY FOUND:

- An international team of astronomers has found one of the universe's biggest superclusters of galaxies near the Milky Way- the Vela supercluster.
- It had previously gone undetected as it was hidden by stars and dust in the Milky Way.
- This is one of the biggest concentrations of galaxies in the universe – possibly the biggest in the neighbourhood of our galaxy, but that will need to be confirmed by further study.
- The gravity of the Vela supercluster may explain the difference between the measured motion of the Milky Way through space and the motion predicted from the distribution of previously mapped galaxies.

CHAR DHAM HIGHWAY PROJECT:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently laid the foundation stone for the 900km Char Dham highway project in Dehradun, Uttarakhand. The project's main objective is to develop around 900 km of national highways.
- The Char Dham highway project involves building tunnels, viaducts, bridges and bypasses in the entire

state, along with way-side amenities that will include helipad for emergency evacuation and parking facilities, among others.

- The Char Dham Highway will cost the exchequer Rs. 12,000 crore and the all-weather road will improve connectivity between Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri.

DOPT'S FRESH GUIDELINES ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORKPLACE

The Department of Personnel and Training has issued fresh guidelines regarding sexual harassment of women at workplace.

Key facts:

- It has been asserted in the guidelines that the enquiry of cases must be completed within 30 days and under any circumstances within 90 days from the date of the complaint.
- The ministries and departments have to keep a watch on the complainant so as to ensure that she is not victimised in any manner because of her having filed the complaint.
- All ministries have to submit a monthly progress report to the Ministry of Women and Child Development so that the progress can be monitored.
- As per the guidelines the aggrieved woman has been given further option to send representation to the Secretary or head of the organisation in case she feels that she is being victimised because of her complaint. The concerned authority will be required to dispose of this complaint within 15 days.
- Brief details of the implementation of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act including the number of cases received and disposed shall form a part of the Annual Report of all ministries and departments.

THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AT WORKPLACE (PREVENTION, PROHIBITION AND REDRESSAL) ACT 2013:

The Act seeks to cover all women, irrespective of their age or employment status and protect them against sexual harassment at all workplaces both in public and private sector, whether organized or unorganized.

- Building on the Vishakha guidelines, the Act calls for the formation of an internal complaints committee and a local complaints committee at the district level. It came into force on December 9, 2013.

SOME IMPORTANT PROVISIONS OF THE ACT:

- The Act defines sexual harassment at the work place and creates a mechanism for redressal of complaints. It also provides safeguards against false or malicious charges.
- The definition of “aggrieved woman”, who will get protection under the Act is extremely wide to cover all women, irrespective of her age or employment status, whether in the organized or unorganized sectors, public or private and covers clients, customers and domestic workers as well.
- While the “workplace” in the Vishaka Guidelines is confined to the traditional office set-up where there is a clear employer-employee relationship, the Act goes much further to include organisations, department, office, branch unit etc. in the public and private sector, organized and unorganized, hospitals, nursing homes, educational institutions, sports institutes, stadiums, sports complex and any place visited by the employee during the course of employment including the transportation.
- Every employer is required to constitute an Internal Complaints Committee at each office or branch with 10 or more employees. The District Officer is required to constitute a Local Complaints Committee at each district, and if required at the block level.
- The Committee is required to complete the inquiry within a time period of 90 days. On completion of

the inquiry, the report will be sent to the employer or the District Officer, as the case may be, they are mandated to take action on the report within 60 days.

- The Complaints Committees have the powers of civil courts for gathering evidence.
- The Complaints Committees are required to provide for conciliation before initiating an inquiry, if requested by the complainant.
- Penalties have been prescribed for employers. Non-compliance with the provisions of the Act shall be punishable with a fine of up to 50,000. Repeated violations may lead to higher penalties and cancellation of licence or registration to conduct business.

CABINET APPROVES ROAD CONNECTIVITY PROJECT FOR LEFT WING EXTREMISM AFFECTED AREAS

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved a Centrally Sponsored Scheme namely “Road Connectivity Project for Left Wing Extremism (LWE) Affected Areas” to improve the rural road connectivity in the worst LWE affected districts from security angle.

Key facts:

- The project will be implemented as a vertical under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) to provide connectivity with necessary culverts and cross-drainage structures in 44 worst affected LWE districts and adjoining districts, critical from security and communication point of view. The roads will be operable throughout the year irrespective of all weather conditions.
- Under the project, construction/upgradation of 5,411.81 km road and 126 bridges/Cross Drainage works will be taken up at an estimated cost of Rs.11,724.53 crore.
- The fund sharing pattern of LWE road project will be same as that of PMGSY i.e. in the ratio of 60:40 between the Centre and States for all States except for eight North Eastern and three Himalayan States

(Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh & Uttarakhand) for which it is 90:10.

- Ministry of Finance will have to allocate to Ministry of Rural Development Rs.7,034.72 crore for this project during the period of implementation 2016-17 to 2019-20. Ministry of Rural Development will be implementing Ministry of this project.

ABOUT PMGSY:

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) was launched on 25th December, 2000 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with the objective to provide all-weather road connectivity to all eligible unconnected habitations in rural areas of the country.

- The programme envisages connecting all eligible unconnected habitations with a population of 500 persons and above (as per 2001 Census) in plain areas and 250 persons and above (as per 2001 Census) in Special Category States and in Select Tribal and Backward Districts (as identified by the Ministry of Home Affairs/Planning Commission).
- For most intensive Integrated Action Plan (IAP) blocks as identified by Ministry of Home Affairs the unconnected habitations with population of 100 and above (as per 2001 Census) are eligible to be covered under PMGSY.

CABINET APPROVES INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE (ISA)

The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval to the proposal of Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) for ratification of ISA’s Framework Agreement by India.

KEY FACTS:

- ISA was launched jointly by the Prime Minister of India and the President of France on 30th November, 2015 at Paris on the side-lines of the 21st CoP meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- The ISA aims to bring together more than 121 solar resource rich nations for coordinated research, low cost financing and rapid deployment.

- The foundation stone of the ISA Headquarters was laid at Gwal Pahari, Guragaon in Haryana.
- India has already committed the required support of operationalization of ISA. ISA will put India globally in a leadership role in climate and renewable energy issues. It will also give a platform to showcase its solar programmes.

BACKGROUND:

The Agreement was opened for signature on the sidelines of 22nd CoP meeting at Marrakesh, Morocco. The Agreement invokes the Paris Declaration on ISA and encapsulates the vision of the prospective member nations. UNDP and World Bank have already announced their partnership with the ISA. Till now, 25 nations have signed the Framework Agreement.

UNION HOME MINISTER CHAIRS SOUTHERN ZONAL COUNCIL MEETING

The Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh chaired the 27th meeting of the Southern Zonal Council at Thiruvananthapuram recently.

Key facts:

- The Council reviewed progress of implementation of various recommendations made in the last meeting relating to issues of fishermen, Peninsular Region Industrial Development Corridor, Extension of High Speed Rail Corridor and Amendments to the New Road Transport & Road Safety Bill.
- The Council also took up issues which relate to uniformity in allocation of funds for scholarships in proportion of population of SC/ST for all courses, revision of ceiling on profession tax by Government of India, prevention of communicable diseases, Naxalism, promotion of oilseeds and oil palm cultivation and development of Puducherry Airport.

BACKGROUND:

The five Zonal Councils were set up under the States’ Reorganization Act, 1956 to foster Inter-State cooperation and coordination among the States.

- The Zonal Councils are mandated to discuss and make recommendations on the matters of common interest in the field of economic and social planning, border disputes, linguistic minorities and inter-State transport etc.
- They are regional fora of cooperative endeavour for States linked with each other geographically, economically and culturally.
- Being compact high level bodies, especially meant for looking after the interests of respective Zones, they are capable of focusing attention on specific issues taking into account regional factors, while keeping the national perspective in view.

CENTRE'S NOD FOR APEX CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT BODY

The Centre has approved the re-designation of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor Project Implementation Trust Fund as National Industrial Corridor Development & Implementation Trust (NICDIT) — the apex body to oversee development of all industrial corridors across the country.

- Alkesh Kumar Sharma, the current chief executive of the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation, will have additional charge as the member secretary and the chief executive of the NICDIT.
- The body assumes importance as central government funds, meant for the development of all industrial corridors, will be routed through it.

KEY FACTS:

- As an apex body, the NICDIT will help streamline activities and better coordination of the industrial corridor projects.
- The DMICDC, which is currently developing the western corridor, will serve as the Knowledge Partner (KP) to the NICDIT for all the industrial corridors until the KPs for them are in place.
- The NICDIT has also been sanctioned an additional ¹ 1,584 crore besides the balance available from ¹ 18,500 crore already sanctioned to the DMIC-

Project Implementation Trust Fund for project activities.

- NICDIT will implement all the five proposed industrial corridors, together covering 15 States. The Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, the first of the planned corridors, is under development. The Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor, Bengaluru-Mumbai Economic Corridor, Amritsar-Kolkata Industrial Corridor and the Vizag-Chennai Industrial Corridor are in various stages of planning.
- The NICDIT's board of trustees will be chaired by the secretary of the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion. The board also includes secretaries of the departments of expenditure, economic affairs, road transport & highways and shipping, apart from the chairman of the Railway Board and the chief executive of the NITI Aayog as members.

ITS ILLEGAL TO HOLD OLD NOTES POST MARCH 31

The Cabinet has approved the promulgation of an ordinance extinguishing the Reserve Bank of India's liability for cancelled '500 and '1,000 notes as the logical conclusion to the government's demonetisation initiative.

KEY FACTS:

- The move will give the finance ministry enough time to factor into the budget the amount of cash that hasn't been returned to the system if required.
- It will provide a limited window for depositing the cancelled notes at select RBI branches until March 31 and also prescribes a monetary penalty for anyone holding such currency in large quantities after the deadline.
- The ordinance will end the central bank's liability with regard to the notes that are not returned to the system as also those that were deposited. The amount of extinguished currency that is not deposited is expected to flow to the government or be used by the central bank for any other purpose approved by its board.
- The ordinance also seeks to make possession of more than ten '500 or '1,000 notes after deadline a

penal offence attracting monetary fine of '10,000 or five times the cash held, whichever is higher.

CENTRE OKAYS RS 266 CRORE FOR AMRUT WORK

The Centre has approved Rs 266 crore for augmenting water supply and sewerage networks in Delhi under Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) in 2016-17.

KEY FACTS:

- The entire cost is being provided as central assistance to the Delhi government under AMRUT.
- Out of this, Rs 215 crore will be invested in improving water supply, and Rs 254 crore for augmenting sewerage networks and septage management. Another Rs 8 crore will be utilised for drainage networks and Rs 12 crore for developing open and green spaces.
- Delhi government is now required to submit AMRUT action plan for the remaining three years in one go for advance approval.

ABOUT AMRUT:

AMRUT is the new avatar of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). It adopts a project approach to ensure basic infrastructure services relating to water supply, sewerage, storm-water drains, transportation and development of green spaces and parks with special provision for meeting the needs of children.

- Under this mission, 10% of the budget allocation will be given to states and union territories as incentive based on the achievement of reforms during the previous year.
- AMRUT will be implemented in 500 locations with a population of one lakh and above. It would cover some cities situated on stems of main rivers, a few state capitals and important cities located in hilly areas, islands and tourist areas.
- Under this mission, states get the flexibility of designing schemes based on the needs of identified

cities and in their execution and monitoring. States will only submit state annual action Plans to the centre for broad concurrence based on which funds will be released. But, in a significant departure from JNNURM, the central government will not appraise individual projects.

- Central assistance will be to the extent of 50% of project cost for cities and towns with a population of up to 10 lakhs and one-third of the project cost for those with a population of above 10 lakhs.
- Under the mission, states will transfer funds to urban local bodies within 7 days of transfer by central government and no diversion of funds to be made failing which penal interest would be charged besides taking other adverse action by the centre.

AIRIA TIES UP WITH TRIPURA UNIVERSITY FOR IMPARTING RUBBER TECHNOLOGY PROGRAMMES

The All Indian Rubber Industries Association (AIRIA), the apex body of Rs 75000 crore rubber industry in India, has joined hands with Tripura University for imparting programmes in rubber technology.

KEY FACTS:

- The purpose of the collaboration is to facilitate rubber education, rubber skills training and research co-operation between the two organizations in rubber technology and polymer science.
- The collaboration is a win-win industry-academia venture. It will make available trained personnel at various levels to meet the demand for manpower and accelerate the development of the industry. At the same time, the courses would enhance the employability of students of TU by equipping them with industry/ business relevant skills.
- The MoU will also provide the university access to industrial environments for applied and problem based research activities.
- The agreement will also help existing work force in rubber in getting certified in the skills through RSDC making them readily employable.

GOVT MEETS PMUY TARGET OF 1.5 CRORE LPG CONNECTION ADDITIONS THIS FINANCIAL YEAR

The government has met the 1.5 crore target for LPG connections to be added in this financial year under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY). With this, LPG coverage across the country has been increased to 70% as of December 1.

KEY FACTS:

- Target of 1.5 crore connections fixed for the current financial year for Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) has been achieved within a span of less than eight months and the scheme is being implemented now across 35 States/UTs.
- The top five states with the highest number of connections are Uttar Pradesh (46 lakh), West Bengal (19 lakh), Bihar (19 lakh), Madhya Pradesh (17 lakh) and Rajasthan (14 lakh).
- The households belonging to SC/ST constitute large chunk of beneficiaries with 35% of the connections being released to them.
- 14 States/UTs with LPG coverage less than the national average, such as the hilly states of Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and all North-East states have been identified as priority states for implementing PMUY.

ABOUT THE PRADHAN MANTRI UJJWALA YOJANA:

Under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Rs.8,000 crore has been earmarked for providing 50 million LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to poor households.

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

- The scheme will be implemented over the next three years.
- The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

FINANCIAL DATA MANAGEMENT BODY MOOTED

The Committee, headed by Ajay Tyagi, has submitted its report and a draft bill titled 'The financial data management centre bill 2016'.

- The panel has suggested setting up a financial data management centre (FDMC) for managing the repository of financial regulatory data to ensure stability in the economy.

KEY FACTS:

- The powers of the Financial Data Management Centre (FDMC) will include the establishment, operation and maintenance of the financial system database along with collecting financial regulatory data and providing access to it.
- The body will also provide analytical support to the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) on issues relating to financial stability.

IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE:

- Efforts should be concentrated on framing the law, setting up of centre and standardizing processes around collection of data from central level regulators and entities.
- As the system matures and if it is decided to integrate data of state level financial sector regulators, the same has to be done with wide consultation with the states, which is a long drawn process.
- Centre should establish an electronic database for financial regulatory information. It should be in-charge of the day to day operations, maintenance and updating the electronic database, analyse the data submitted in the database and provide analytical support to FMDC.

(75)

- To ensure secrecy and avoid conflict of interest, member, employee or officer of the centre having access to confidential data should not be allowed to render advice or accept any employment with a financial service provider for a period specified in the act until the person has taken approval of the centre.
- The committee has also asked the government to grant the status of “public servants” to the members, officers and employees of the centre.
- Secretary to Government, Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion, Ministry of Commerce & Industry
- Secretary to Government, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry
- Secretary to Government, Economic Relations, Ministry of External Affairs
- Secretary to Government, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs.

FIPB CLEARS 6 FDI PROPOSALS WORTH RS 1,200 CRORE

Inter-ministerial body Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) has approved six investment proposals envisaging foreign investment of Rs 1,200 crore.

BACKGROUND:

India allows FDI in most sectors through the automatic route, but in certain segments considered sensitive for the economy and security, the proposals have to be first cleared by FIPB.

ABOUT FIPB:

The Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB), housed in the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, is an inter-ministerial body, responsible for processing of FDI proposals and making recommendations for Government approval.

MAIN TASKS:

- It considers and recommends foreign direct investment (FDI) which does not come under the automatic route.
- It provides a single window clearance for proposals on FDI in India.

FIPB COMPRISES OF THE FOLLOWING SECRETARIES TO THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA:

- Secretary to Government, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance – Chairperson

ON WHAT BASIS DECISIONS ON FDI ARE TAKEN BY THE FIPB?

The extant FDI Policy, Press Notes and other related notified guidelines formulated by Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry are the bases of the FIPB decisions.

SWACHH SWASTH SARVATRA INITIATIVE

The government has launched Swachh Swasth Sarvatra initiative. It was launched by the Union Health Ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation and Human Resource Development.

KEY FACTS:

- The initiative is aimed at strengthening health centres in open defecation-free blocks.
- The objective is to strengthen community health centres in 708 open defecation-free blocks across the country to enable them to achieve higher levels of cleanliness and hygiene.
- Under it, 10 lakh rupees of financial assistance will be given to the community health centres so that they can be strengthened to meet the standards of sanitation, hygiene and infection control.
- The initiative is a part of the Swachh Bharat Mission, under the National Health Mission. It is focused on the twin objectives of constructing toilets and enabling behavioural change, with the goal of making India free of open defecation by October 2, 2019.

WAGE PAYMENT THROUGH BANKS ORDINANCE GETS PRESIDENT'S NOD

President Pranab Mukherjee has approved the Payment of Wages (Amendment) Ordinance, 2016, to enable industries to pay wages through cheque or by direct credit into bank accounts of workers earning up to Rs. 18,000 a month without their permission.

KEY FACTS:

- The ordinance empowers the Centre or State governments to specify industries or establishments where wage payment can be made mandatory through the banking system.
- The ordinance doesn't make payment of wages mandatory through the banking system and employers can still pay salaries through cash. The Payment of Wages Act of 1936 required employers to take permission from employees before paying salaries through cheque or bank credit.

BACKGROUND:

The government introduced the Payment of Wages (Amendment) Bill, 2016 in the Lok Sabha on December 15, but it couldn't be cleared, owing to the impasse in Parliament.

WAY AHEAD:

An ordinance is valid for six months and the Centre needs to get it passed in Parliament within that period.

'MOBILE APP AND FACEBOOK PAGE' OF 'NATIONAL TRUST'

The government has launched the 'Mobile App and Facebook Page' of the National Trust to mark the 'National Trust Foundation Day' on the theme "Celebrating Inclusion".

BACKGROUND:

The National Trust Act for the welfare of persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities was passed in the Parliament on 30th December 1999. Thus-**30th December- the Foundation Day of National Trust**- is a day on which National Trust re-commits itself to the objectives set

before it for the welfare of persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities.

ABOUT NATIONAL TRUST:

The National Trust is a **Statutory Body** under Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

- The National Trust has been set up to discharge two basic duties – legal and welfare. Legal duties are discharged through Local Level Committee (LLC) set up at district level under the chairmanship of the District Collector/ District Magistrate and providing legal guardianship. Welfare duty is discharged through the schemes and activities.
- The schemes and activities of the National Trust inter-alia include training, awareness and capacity building programmes and shelter, care giving and empowerment.
- The National Trust is implementing 10 schemes for overall development of persons with disabilities which have been revised and launched last year.

INSERTION OF LEAP SECOND IN THE INDIAN STANDARD TIME

This year will have an extra leap second added to the end of it, making it slightly longer than 2015.

WHY IS IT ADDED?

The Earth's rotation around its own axis is not regular, as sometimes it speeds up and sometimes it slows down, due to various factors including the moon's gravitational Earth-braking forces that often results in ocean tides. As a result, Astronomical Time (UT1) gradually falls out of synch with Atomic time (UTC), and as and when the difference between UTC and UT1 approaches 0.9 seconds, a "Leap Second" is added to UTC through Atomic clocks worldwide.

Leap seconds are needed to prevent civil time drifting away from Earth time. Although the drift is small — taking around a thousand years to accumulate a one-hour difference — if not corrected, it would eventually result in clocks showing midday before sunrise. Therefore, a

“Leap Second” is added every now and then to Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) in order to synchronize clocks worldwide with the Earth’s ever slowing rotation.

KEY FACTS:

- Since 1972, 36 “Leap Seconds” have been added at intervals varying from six months to seven years. **37th “Leap Second”** will be added to UTC at the midnight of December 31, 2016 in the countries within this time zone. However, countries in other time zones will have “Leap Second” inserted according to their longitude.
- As the “Leap Second” is added simultaneously all over the world at UTC 23:59:59 on December 31, 2016, implying that in India the “Leap Second” will be inserted at IST 05:29:59 on January 1, 2017 (IST being five hours and thirty minutes ahead of UTC).
- The “Leap Second” adjustment is not so relevant for normal everyday life; however this shift is critical for applications requiring of time accuracies in the nanosecond e.g. astronomy, satellite navigation, communication networks etc.
- In order to provide certainty to investors, investments in shares made before 1st April, 2017 have been grandfathered subject to fulfillment of conditions in Limitation of Benefits clause as per 2005 Protocol.
- Also, a two year transition period from 1st April, 2017 to 31st March, 2019 has been provided during which capital gains on shares will be taxed in source country at half of normal tax rate, subject to fulfillment of conditions in Limitation of Benefits clause.
- The Third Protocol also inserts provisions to facilitate relieving of economic double taxation in transfer pricing cases. This is a taxpayer friendly measure and is in line with India’s commitments under Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) Action Plan to meet the minimum standard of providing Mutual Agreement Procedure (MAP) access in transfer pricing cases.
- The Third Protocol also enables application of domestic law and measures concerning prevention of tax avoidance or tax evasion.

INDIA AND SINGAPORE SIGN A THIRD PROTOCOL FOR AMENDING DTAA

India and Singapore have amended the *double taxation avoidance agreement (DTAA)* for the avoidance of double taxation and prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, by signing a Third Protocol.

- This is in line with India’s treaty policy to prevent double non-taxation, curb revenue loss and check the menace of black money through automatic exchange of information, as reflected in India’s recently revised treaties with Mauritius and Cyprus and the joint declaration signed with Switzerland.

Key facts:

- The India-Singapore DTAA at present provides for residence based taxation of capital gains of shares in a company. The Third Protocol amends the DTAA with effect from 1st April, 2017 to provide for source based taxation of capital gains arising on

transfer of shares in a company. This will curb revenue loss, prevent double non-taxation and streamline the flow of investments.

- In order to provide certainty to investors, investments in shares made before 1st April, 2017 have been grandfathered subject to fulfillment of conditions in Limitation of Benefits clause as per 2005 Protocol.
- Also, a two year transition period from 1st April, 2017 to 31st March, 2019 has been provided during which capital gains on shares will be taxed in source country at half of normal tax rate, subject to fulfillment of conditions in Limitation of Benefits clause.
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- The Third Protocol also enables application of domestic law and measures concerning prevention of tax avoidance or tax evasion.

RAILWAYS MAY BRING IN CESS ON TICKETS AGAIN

The Railways is planning to bring back a cess on tickets to finance its proposed Rs.1 lakh crore Rail Safety Fund after a rise in derailments this year.

BACKGROUND:

The Railways had asked the Finance Ministry to sponsor almost 93% of the fund. However, the Finance Ministry agreed to contribute only 25% and asked it to raise the rest.

ABOUT THE FUND:

Recently, the Railway Ministry requested the Finance Ministry to create a non-lapsable safety fund named ‘Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh’ worth Rs.1,19,183 crore.

- It asked the Finance Ministry to provide Rs.1,11,683 crore for safety improvement. However, despite multiple requests, it only agreed to give 25% of the amount.
- The fund is proposed to be utilised for track improvement, bridge rehabilitation, rolling stock replacement, human resource development, improved inspection system, and safety work at level crossing, among other things.

GOVT SETS UP HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE TO REVIEW ARBITRATION SYSTEM IN INDIA

The law ministry has formed a 10-member panel led by former Supreme Court judge B.N. Srikrishna to review and create an institutional framework for the arbitration mechanism in India. The committee will submit its report within 90 days.

- The committee includes judges, senior lawyers familiar with commercial laws, industry representatives and a member from a think-tank.

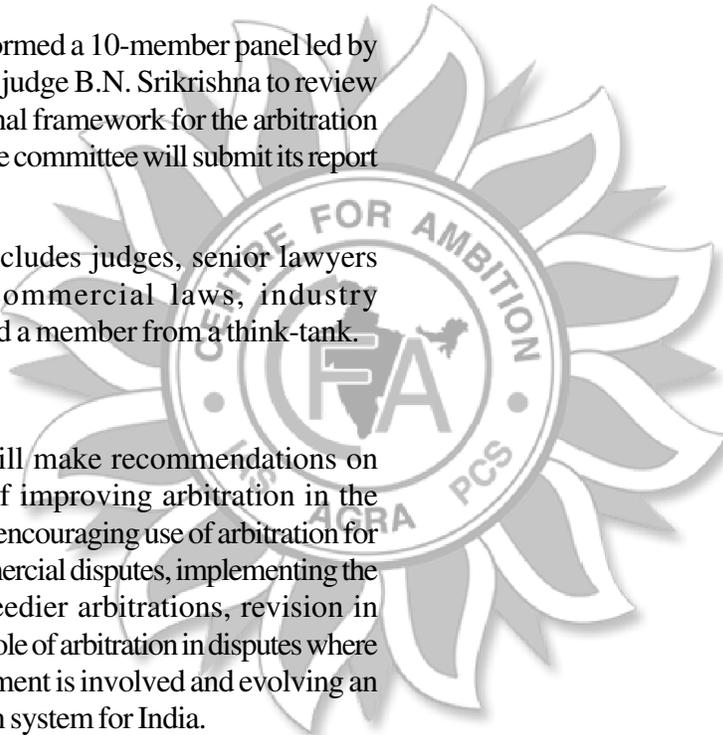
KEY FACTS:

- The committee will make recommendations on various aspects of improving arbitration in the country, including encouraging use of arbitration for international commercial disputes, implementing the law to ensure speedier arbitrations, revision in institutional rules, role of arbitration in disputes where the central government is involved and evolving an efficient arbitration system for India.
- The committee has been asked to suggest road map for further strengthening of research and development impacting the domain and focus on the role of arbitrations in matters involving government of India including bilateral investment treaties (BIT) arbitrations.

score in the World Bank's doing business rankings. In the 2016 rankings, India stood at 130 out of 190 countries.

POWER SUPPLY TO NEPAL:

- India is all set to Supply Additional 80 MW to Nepal from 1st January 2017. With this, the total supply of electricity to Nepal from India will be about 400 MW
- The power will be supplied to Nepal through the Muzaffarpur (India) – Dhalkebar (Nepal) transmission line.



Significance of this move:

With this, the government aims to make arbitration a preferred mode for settlement of commercial disputes. The move could also help improve India's