

2018

Monthly GK Digest

April 2018

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RAMANDEEP SINGH



Monthly GK Digest April 2018

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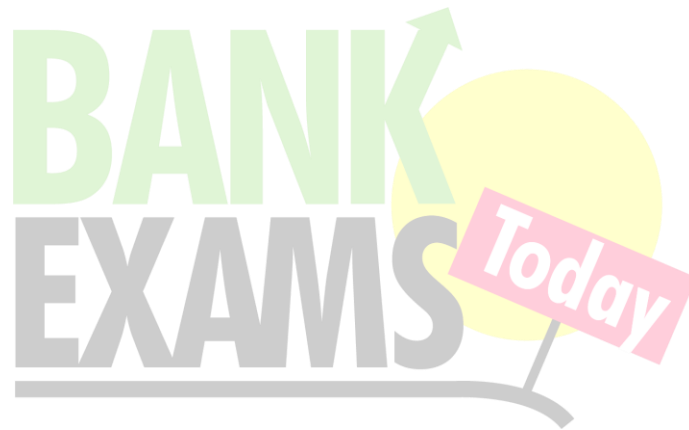
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MONTHLY GK DIGEST APRIL 2018

New Jersey Declares April as Sikh Awareness Month

New Jersey declared April as 'Sikh Awareness and Appreciation Month' in order to promote awareness of faith.

Reason

- State Assembly of New Jersey in a joint resolution declared to observe April as "Sikh Awareness and Appreciation Month" to combat increasing and unacceptable levels of anti-Sikh bigotry.
- The state wants to acknowledge the lasting contributions of the Sikh people and the essential role they play in New Jersey's diverse community. Indiana and Delaware adopted similar resolutions earlier in the month.

Background

- Despite of progressive principles and charitable deeds, the American-Sikh community commonly experienced discrimination, often by individuals who are unaware of the beliefs and practices of the faith. Nearly 60 per cent of Americans admit to knowing nothing about the religion or its practitioners, and national rates of anti-Sikh bigotry rose dramatically following the September 11th terrorist attacks.
- Sikhs disproportionately experience school bullying, with estimates indicating that over 50 per cent of all Sikh children, and roughly 67 per cent of turbaned-Sikh children, endure physical or verbal abuse while at school.

Continuation of Nutrient Based Subsidy and City Compost Scheme Approved

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi led Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its nod for the continuation of Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) and City Compost Scheme beyond 12th Five Year plan till 2019-20.

- The approval is given to the Department of Fertilizers. The continuation of the Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme and City Compost Scheme will ensure that adequate quantity of P&K is made available to the farmers at statutory controlled price.

Expenditure and Benefits

- The total expenditure for continuation of both the schemes till 2019–20 will be Rs. 61,972 crore.
- The subsidy on the P&K fertilizers and Market Development Assistant (MDA) on City Compost will be provided on the subsidy rates approved by the CCEA on annual basis.

Background:

- Government is making available fertilizers, namely Urea and 21 grades of P&K fertilizers to farmers at subsidized prices through fertilizer manufacturers/importers. The subsidy on P&K fertilizers is being governed by Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme w.e.f 01.04.2010.
- The Market Development Assistant is being governed by City Compost Scheme w.e.f. 10.02.2016. Accordingly, these schemes have been extended beyond the 12th Five Year Plan till 2019–20.

Hindon Elevated India's Longest Elevated Road Inaugurated in Uttar Pradesh

- Ghaziabad Elevated Road or the Hindon Elevated Road, the longest elevated road of India with 6 lanes was inaugurated by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.
- The Ghaziabad elevated road's construction began in November 2014 during Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party government.

About the Road

- The road is about 10.30 km single pillar elevated stretch.
- It connects city's Raj Nagar Extension to the border of Delhi at UP Gate near Vaishali. which will enable commuters to cover it in 10 minutes.
- The road was constructed by the Ghaziabad Development Authority (GDA) at a cost of Rs 1241.60 crore.
- It has been designed to enable fast traffic with an average speed of 80 km per hour, allowing direct and non-stop vehicular movement.
- The cost of the Ghaziabad elevated road project has been estimated at Rs. 1,147 crore.

- The project was started by the Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party government, which was voted out of power in March last year.
- It will shorten over an hour-long journey from Ghaziabad to Delhi to barely 18–20 minutes.
- It is built on 227 single pillars.

India Receives First LNG Consignment from United States

India received the first consignment of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from the United States at Dabhol terminal in Maharashtra.

Key Notes

- Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan along with US Minister Counselor for Commercial Affairs Patrick Santillo and Consul General to Kolkata Craig Hall received the first long-term cargo from the US through a GAIL chartered vessel **MV Meridian Spirit**. GAIL's first charter hired vessel arrived after 26 days voyage and docked for unloading at Dabhol terminal.

Significance

- The shipment of 1.2 lakh tonne LNG, under the 20 year-long-term contract marks a new beginning in the Indo-USA energy and trade partnership. Dabhol project, which will be expanded in the coming days, will help supply LNG to Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and many other states of this belt.
- GAIL shall be receiving 22–24 shipments every year till the construction of the breakwater facility is completed, after which it shall handle 80–90 ships a year.

India Ranks 37th in Global Startup Ecosystem in 2017

- Startup blink released the report called Global Startup Ecosystem in which India secured 37th place out of 125 countries.
- India's rank shows that a lot of efforts are required in terms of ease of doing business, startup policies, and complicated tax compliance. India ranked below Latin American countries Mexico and Chile which stood at 30 and 33 respectively. Bengaluru, New Delhi, and Mumbai featured in the list top cities in the

global ranking.

Highlights of the Report

1. Top Five Countries
 2. United States
 3. United Kingdom
 4. Canada
 5. Germany
- Small nations of less than 10 million inhabitants like Sweden (6th), Denmark (7th), Switzerland (8th), and Singapore (10th) were placed in the top 10.
 - In Asia, the list was topped by Singapore (10th) and was closely followed by China (12th), South Korea (17th), and Japan (20th). In Africa, the list was topped by South Africa (38th) followed by Kenya (53rd), Egypt (54th), and Nigeria (57th).



About the Report

- Startup blink is a global startup ecosystem map with various registered startups, coworking spaces, and accelerators. Its report prepared in association with ANSYS Startup Program measures startup ecosystem strength and activity.
- It includes the global ranking index of 125 countries and 900 cities, measuring their startup ecosystem strength and activity.
- The rankings of country are based on thousands of data points gathered from various sources, such as incubators and accelerators that appear on StartupBlink global ecosystem.

10% import Duty on Key Smartphone Parts Levied

- The government of India has imposed 10% import duty on key smartphone components. It includes populated printed circuit boards, which are at the heart of smartphones. A 10 percent customs tax was also imposed on the imports of camera modules for phones and connectors. The decision is taken to give a push to Make in India campaign.
- In the Budget 2018–19, the government increased the customs duty on mobile phones to 20 percent from 15 percent.
- India is now the second largest mobile phone producer in the world after China, as per information shared by the Indian Cellular Association (ICA) with Telecom Minister Manoj Sinha and IT Minister Ravi

Shankar Prasad. India covered 11 percent of global mobile production in 2017 compared to 3 percent in 2014.

- With the rise in mobile phone production, imports of the devices in the country also reduced to less than half in 2017–18.
- The government has already imposed 15 percent import duty on chargers, battery, headset, speaker, microphone, keypad etc as per Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP).

Bengal Introduces 'Rupashree' for Marriage of Poor Girls

- West Bengal has launched "Rupashree" Scheme for the marriage of poor girls. Said to be the dream project of Chief Minister Mamta Banerjee, the scheme will offer one-time financial support for the marriage of poor women.

Benefits

- For the 'Rupashree' scheme, a woman has to fill the application form before her marriage and submit it to the Block Development Officer (BDO) or Municipality Office. An amount of Rs 25,000 will be credited to her bank account before her marriage.

Eligibility

- The women must be a permanent resident of West Bengal.
- She should be above 18 years at the time of her marriage.
- The annual cap on an annual family income of should be Rs 1.5 lakh.

Funding

- This will benefit annually around six lakh families and a proposed fund of Rs 1500 crore in the for this scheme has been approved.

ESPN Multi-Sport Awards– Sindhu Bags Sportsperson of Year

- In the inaugural edition of ESPN Multi-Sport Awards, Indian sports-personalities were honoured for their excellent performances in their respective sports

Highlights of the Ceremony

- Indian shuttlers PV Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth were named 'Sportspersons of the Year' award in female and male category respectively.
- Pullela Gopichand being adjudged with 'best coach award'
- India's National Women's Hockey Team bagged the 'Team of the Year' title for their first Asia Cup triumph in 13 years.
- The 'Moment of the Year' award was awarded to Jeakson Singh for scoring a memorable goal against Columbia in the U-17 FIFA World Cup.

About the jury

- The awards recognised achievements across 11 categories, were selected by an independent 14-member jury comprising eminent sports personalities including Abhinav Bindra, Somdev Devvarman, Bhaichung Bhutia, Jagbir Singh, Rohit Brijnath, Venkatesan Devarajan, Nisha Millet, Aparna Popat, Jagdish Kaliraman, Manisha Malhotra, Anju Bobby George.

Vineet Joshi to Head National Testing Agency of India.

- Vineet Joshi, who served as the chairman of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), has been appointed the first director-general of the National Testing Agency (NTA) for the period of 5 years.

Joshi's Career

- Joshi is a 1992-batch IAS officer of the Manipur cadre. He is currently the resident commissioner of Manipur government.
- As CBSE chairman, he had introduced big changes such as the Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) and making the Class X board examination optional. Both decisions have been overturned by the incumbent government.

What is National Testing Agency?

- National Testing Agency (NTA) is an independent body dedicated to conducting entrance tests for higher education in India. It was approved by the Union cabinet in October 2017 to conduct entrance tests entrusted to it by any department or ministry.
- For starters, in 2019, it will take over all entrance examinations currently being organised by the CBSE, including UGC's National Eligibility Test (NET), Central Teacher Eligibility Test (CTET) and National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET).

World Autism Awareness Day: April 2

- World Autism Awareness Day is globally recognised on 2 April every year. The day encourages the Member States of the United Nations to take measures to raise awareness about people with autism throughout the world.

Background

- World Autism Awareness Day was designated by the United Nations General Assembly resolution "62/139. World Autism Awareness Day", passed in council on 1 November 2007, and adopted on 18 December 2007.
- World Autism Day is one of only four official health-specific UN Days. The day itself brings individual autism organizations together all around the world to aid in things like research, diagnoses, treatment, and overall acceptance for those affected by this developmental disorder.

Theme 2018

- 2018: "Empowering women and girls with autism."

Jio Payments Bank Commences Operations

- Jio Payments Bank Limited has commenced operations with effect from April 3, 2018. Reliance Industries Limited, Mumbai was one of the 11 applicants which were issued an in-principle approval for setting up a payments bank.
- Jio Payments Bank is a **joint venture between Reliance Industries** and the country's biggest lender, **State Bank of India**. While Jio has a 70 percent share while SBI has the remaining 30%
- "The Reserve Bank has issued a licence to the bank under Section 22 (1) of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 to carry on the business of payments bank in India,"
- **H. Srikrishnan**, who was earlier with HDFC Bank and Yes Bank, has been appointed MD and CEO of Jio Payments Bank.

Promotion of Payment Banks

- Reserve Bank of India is promoting Payments banks by giving services such as small savings accounts, payment or remittance services to migrant labour workforce, low-income households, small businesses and unorganised sector entities as well as other users.

Payment Banks

- Payment Banks are just like traditional banks working at a small scale. Payment banks provide all banking services except for credit providing services.
- Payments banks can accept deposits of up to Rs 100,000 per account from individuals and small businesses.
- Payments banks offer zero balance accounts or no minimum balance accounts without any extra charge.
- Recently, the Central government announced "Payments Banks and Small Finance Banks" will offer social security scheme Atal Pension Yojana (APY) to their subscribers.
- Bharti Airtel was the first one to start payments bank services in India in November 2016.

NIRF Rankings 2018: IISc Bangalore Tops

- Bengaluru-based Indian Institute of Science topped the National Institution Ranking Framework (NIRF) 2018 rankings for higher education institutes announced by the Union Human Resource Development Ministry for the second time.
- The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras, Bombay, Delhi and Kharagpur bagged the second, third, fourth and fifth positions, respectively.
- Under the law category, National Law University (NLU) Bangalore has been ranked top
- NIRF has added medical colleges as a new category this year and AIIMS Delhi has topped the list followed by PGIMER and Christian Medical College Vellore.

- Delhi's Miranda House was announced as India's best college, while the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, was ranked the top management institute.

About the Ranking

- National Institution Ranking Framework (NIRF) has nine categories — law, architecture and medical has been added to the existing list of universities, engineering colleges, pharmacy and best colleges.
- The NIRF also added several new criteria such as total budget and its utilisation, combined metric for quality of publications, university examinations and how many graduating students admitted into the top institution.

Here are the top 10 overall rankings:

NIRF Rankings	Name of Institute	City	State	Score
1	Indian Institute of Science	Bengaluru	Karnataka	82.16
2	Indian Institute of Technology, Madras	Chennai	Tamil Nadu	81.39
3	Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay	Mumbai	Maharashtra	79.2
4	Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi	New Delhi	Delhi	73.97
5	Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur	Kharagpur	West Bengal	71.39
6	Jawaharlal Nehru University	New Delhi	Delhi	67.57
7	Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur	Kanpur	Uttar Pradesh	65.39
8	Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee	Roorkee	Uttarakhand	64.93
9	Banaras Hindu University	Varanasi	Uttar Pradesh	63.52
10	Anna University	Chennai	Tamil Nadu	62.82

Top Five Universities

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NIRF Rankings	Name of University	City	State	Score
1	Indian Institute of Science	Bengaluru	Karnataka	82.16
2	Jawaharlal Nehru University	New Delhi	Delhi	67.57
3	Banaras Hindu University	Varanasi	Uttar Pradesh	63.52
4	Anna University	Chennai	Tamil Nadu	62.82
5	University of Hyderabad	Hyderabad	Telangana	60.54

Top Five Engineering Colleges

NIRF Rankings	Name of Engineering Colleges	City	State	Score
1	Indian Institute of Technology Madras	Chennai	Tamil Nadu	88.95
2	Indian Institute of Technology Bombay	Mumbai	Maharashtra	84.82
3	Indian Institute of Technology Delhi	New Delhi	Delhi	82.18
4	Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur	Kharagpur	West Bengal	77.78
5	Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur	Kanpur	Uttar Pradesh	75.24

Top Five Colleges

NIRF Rankings	Name of Colleges	City	State	Score
1	Miranda House	Delhi	Delhi	71

2	St Stephen's College	Delhi	Delhi	70.77
3	Bishop Heber College	Tiruchirappalli	Tamil Nadu	67.63
4	Hindu College	Delhi	Delhi	67.46
5	Presidency College	Chennai	Tamil Nadu	66.21

Top Five Management Institutes

NIRF Rankings	Name of Institute	City	State	Score
1	Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad	Ahmedabad	Gujarat	79.18
2	Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore	Bengaluru	Karnataka	77.33
3	Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta	Kolkata	West Bengal	77.08
4	Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow	Lucknow	Uttar Pradesh	68.63
5	Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay	Mumbai	Maharashtra	66.8

Top Five Medical Colleges

NIRF Rankings	Name of Institute	City	State	Score
1	All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi	New Delhi	Delhi	90.71
2	Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and	Chandigarh	Chandigarh	78.73

	Research			
3	Christian Medical College	Vellore	Tamil Nadu	73.61
4	Kasturba Medical College	Manipal	Karnataka	62.03
5	King George's Medical University	Lucknow	Uttar Pradesh	61.73

Top Five Law Colleges

NIRF Rankings	Name of Institute	City	State	Score
1	National Law School of India University	Bengaluru	Karnataka	75.79
2	National Law University	New Delhi	Delhi	74.58
3	Nalsar University of Law	Hyderabad	Telangana	70.95
4	Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur	Kharagpur	West Bengal	67.07
5	National Law University, Jodhpur	Jodhpur	Rajasthan	63.5

MAA Programme Launched in Himachal Pradesh

- Himachal Pradesh government has launched Mother's Absolute Affection Programme to promote breastfeeding in the state.

Reason

- The scheme is launched to make people aware of the significance and benefits of breastfeeding. Breastfeeding helps in reducing infant and early childhood mortality. The programme will achieve the goal that every child in the state is healthy.

Components

- Community awareness generation
- Strengthening inter-personal communication through ASHA worker
- Skilled support for breastfeeding at delivery points in public health facilities and workplaces

What does WTO Report say?

- A recent World Health Organisation (WHO) study has shown that India's budgetary allocation for encouraging breastfeeding and milk banks is less as compared to other countries. In India, less than 50 percent of children are breastfed within an hour of birth, whereas the exclusive breastfeeding rate in the first six months is 55 percent.
- According to the study, early initiation of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding can prevent nearly 99,499 deaths of children every year in India that are caused by diarrhoea, undernourishment and pneumonia.

About MAA Programme

- MAA is an intensified programme launched in the month of August 2016 by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The scheme attempt to bring undiluted focus on the promotion of breastfeeding, in addition to ongoing efforts through the health systems.

Government Constitutes Committee to Regulate News Portals

- Information and Broadcasting Ministry has set up a 10-member committee to recommend the formation of appropriate policy for establishing a regulatory framework for online media and news portals.

Constitutes of Committee

- The 10-member committee includes secretaries of the ministries of Home, and Electronics and Information Technology, and the departments of Legal Affairs, and Industrial Policy and Promotion along with the representatives from the Press Council of India, News Broadcasters Association and the Indian Broadcasters Federation.

Responsibilities

- The committee will recommend a suitable and strict policy for online media/ news portals and online content platforms.
- It will also analyse the international scenario on the existing regulatory mechanism with a view to incorporate the best practices.
- The Terms of the reference (ToR) of the committee include delineation of the sphere of online information dissemination which needs to be brought under regulation, on the lines applicable to the print and electronic media.

Background

- On April 2, the ministry announced norms to contain fake news which said that if publication or telecast of fake news was confirmed, accreditation of the journalist would be suspended for six months in case of first violation and for one year in case of a second violation.
- In case of a third violation, his or her accreditation would be cancelled permanently. However, the guidelines were withdrawn by the ministry on the direction of Prime Minister Narendra Modi after strong criticism.
- The content on private television channels is regulated by the Programme and Advertisement Codes, while the Press Council of India (PCI) has its norms to regulate the print media but there were no norms or guidelines to regulate the online media websites and news portals.
- Therefore, it has been decided to constitute a committee to frame and suggest a regulatory framework for online media/ news portals including digital broadcasting and entertainment/ infotainment sites and news/ media aggregators.

Himanta Biswa Sarma Elected as President of Badminton Association of India

- Himanta Biswa Sarma has been elected as the president of the Badminton Association during the federation's annual general body meeting in Goa.

About Sarma

- He is a cabinet-ranked minister and convener of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA). He served as the interim president of BAI last year after the demise of former president Akhilesh Das Gupta. He will serve as the president for a term of four years.

Other Appointment

- Former Tamil Nadu Badminton Association president and former Union minister, Anbumani Ramadoss was elected as the treasurer uncontested. Ramadoss is currently a sitting Lok Sabha MP from Dharmapuri constituency.
- Haryana Badminton Association president Devender Singh was elected unopposed as the senior vice-president.
- Omar Rashid, secretary of Assam Badminton Association was elected as the secretary (events) unopposed.

Election Process

- The electoral process took place under the eyes of retired Chief Justice of High Courts J&K and Sikkim, Aftab Hussain Saikia. A total of 61 votes were cast by the 31 member affiliates with each state casting two votes except for Telangana which is on a provisional affiliation.
- Pondicherry Badminton Association was barred from voting as they currently stand as a defunct body.

CBDT Forms Working Group to Assess Tax Risks of

Migrating HNIs

- A five-member committee has been formed by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) to look into the tax implications of the migrating high net worth individuals (HNIs).

Background

- As per the reports, 23,000 dollar-millionaires have left India since 2004, the highest in percentage terms among all countries. In recent times, there has been a trend of high net worth individuals are migrating from their country of residence to other jurisdictions.

- Such a migration is a “substantial tax risk since they may treat themselves as non-residents for taxation purposes in the first jurisdiction even though they may have strong personal and economic ties with that jurisdiction”.

Members and Responsibilities

- The group formed on the recommendations of CBDT Chairman Sushil Chandra constitutes Pragya Saxena, joint secretary, foreign tax and tax research (FT&TR) as the chairperson. The other members are
 - Ms Pragya Sahay Saxena
 - Mr Amitav, ADG-I
 - Mr Zakir Thomas
 - Mr. Rajesh Bhoot
 - Mr Navneet Manohar
- The group will formulate India's position on various aspects related to taxation of migrating HNIs. I
- The group will suggest a proposal to reduce tax leakage arising due to shifting of residency
- Also, it will be interesting to see how the Black Money Act could be extended to HNIs who have generated substantial wealth in India and moved abroad

RBI Delays Adoption of Ind-AS by 1 Year

- The Reserve Bank has postponed the adoption of the Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS) for commercial banks by one year as many banks are not prepared to migrate to the new accounting system. The earlier deadline for banks to switch to the Ind AS was from April 1 2018.

Reason

- The format of the financial statements as prescribed in the Third Schedule of the Banking Regulation Act which is not amenable for reporting financial statements under Ind AS, and, therefore, RBI has requested the government to amend the Schedule.
- RBI will continue to have the proforma of financial statements from banks to monitor the progress lenders are making towards migration to Ind-AS.

Background

- Presently, banks and non-banking financial companies currently follow generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) standards. According to a February 2016 RBI circular, commercial banks, barring regional rural banks, had to implement the new accounting standards from April 1.
- A key change under the new rules was the need to provision for accounts based on expected loss, instead of when an account turns into a non-performing asset (NPA).

What is Ind As?

- Ind AS is global accounting practice on par with International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) 9. It governs the accounting and recording of financial transactions as well as presentation of statements such as profit and loss account and balance sheet of lender or a company.
- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) on 16 February 2015 notified 39 accounting standards and laid down an Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS) transition roadmap for companies. In January 2016, the MCA finally announced Ind AS roadmap for scheduled commercial banks (excluding regional rural banks [RRBs]), insurers/insurance companies and NBFCs.

Two Unknown Languages Walmiki and Malhar Discovered

- Prof Panchanan Mohanty of the University of Hyderabad has discovered two unknown languages called Walmiki and Malhar. Mohanty who is a professor of linguistics discovered the languages hidden from linguists.

About Walmiki and Malhar

- Walmiki and is spoken in the district of Koraput of Odisha and on the bordering districts of Andhra Pradesh. The analysis showed that the language is an “isolate”, and does not belong to a particular family of languages, The speech community claims descent from the great Indian saint-poet Valmiki”
- Malhar is spoken in a remote and isolated hamlet about 165 km away from Bhubaneswar. Malhar belonged to the “North Dravidian subgroup of the Dravidian family of languages” and that it has close affinities with the other North Dravidian languages like Malto and Kurux spoken in West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar.
- Though less than 100 speak the language Malhar, they are very fluent as they live completely detached from the Odia speaking neighbours. They survive on daily labour and collections from the nearby forest, said Mohanty.

Who discovered Walmiki and Malhar?

- The discovery has been made and announced by Panchanan Mohanty of the Centre for Endangered Languages and Mother Tongue Studies at the UoH. He has collected data, did a preliminary analysis and published a paper in the proceedings of the XX Annual Conference of the Foundation for Endangered Languages, UK.

India, Nepal Decide to Develop Inland Waterways

- India joined hands with Nepal to develop inland waterways for cargo movement. The decision was taken to boost cooperation in connectivity sector within the framework of trade and transit agreements.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Nepalese counterpart K P Sharma Oli vowed to step up overall engagement maintain the relationship of "equality, mutual trust and respect".
- The two leaders directed their respective officials to formulate and mutually agree upon the requisite procedures and modalities for including inland waterways as an additional means of transport in the protocol to the treaty of transit between India and Nepal.

Impact

- The new initiative would enable cost-effective and efficient movement of cargo. It will also positively impact the growth of business and economy of Nepal.

Highlights of State Visit of Prime Minister of Nepal to India

- K.P. Sharma Oli, Prime Minister of Nepal, was on a State visit to India from April 6–8, 2018. During his visit, the following events took place.
- The two Prime Ministers inaugurated the Integrated Check Post at Birgunj in Nepal that aims at enhancing cross-border trade and transit of goods and movement of people bringing greater opportunities for shared growth and development.
- The groundbreaking ceremony of the Motihari–Amlekhgunj cross-border petroleum products pipeline at Motihari, India was witnessed.

Joint Statements

India–Nepal Statement on Expanding Rail Linkages: Connecting Raxaul in India to Kathmandu in Nepal

- The two Prime Ministers agreed to construct a new electrified rail line connecting the border city of Raxaul in India to Kathmandu in Nepal. The rail line to be constructed with the help of India's financial

support will expand the connectivity to enhance people-to-people linkages and promote economic growth and development

- The two leaders noted that the stretch of railway lines from Jayanagar to Janakpur/Kurtha and from Jogbani to Biratnagar Custom Yard will be completed in 2018, and that work on the remaining stretch of the ongoing rail link projects: (a) Jayanagar-Bijalpura-Bardibas and (b) Jogbani-Biratnagar, will be taken forward on priority.
- The two leaders emphasized the importance of implementing the remaining three links under Phase-II of the India-Nepal cross-border rail link projects: (i) New Jalpaiguri-Kakrabhitta, (b) Nautanwa-Bhairahawa, and (c) Nepalgunj Road-Nepalgunj. Welcoming the ongoing Final Location Survey of the three links, the two leaders agreed to expedite completion of the remaining survey work.

India-Nepal Statement on New Partnership in Agriculture

- Prime Ministers of India and Nepal reaffirmed their resolve to promote cooperation in agricultural science and technology, agricultural production and agro-processing in line with the Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries for the mutual benefit of farmers, consumers, the scientific community as well as the private sector.
- Ministers for Agriculture of the two countries and will focus on collaborative projects in agricultural research & development, education, training and scholarships; strengthening of supply and value chain; climate resilience; research in seed technology; soil health; strengthening infrastructure of plant protection laboratories; research in indigenous genetic resources; animal husbandry; veterinary research and development facilities; agro forestry; bio pesticides, bio fertilizers; cooperative farming, and promoting exchanges between the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the Nepal Agricultural Research Council (NARC).

11 Public Sector Banks Placed Under RBI's PCA Framework

- The Reserve Bank of India has placed 11 public sector banks under Prompt Corrective Action restricting lending activities of the banks over the issue of non-performing assets.

List of Banks

1. Allahabad Bank
2. United Bank of India
3. Corporation Bank
4. IDBI Bank
5. UCO Bank

6. Bank of India
7. Central Bank of India
8. Indian Overseas Bank
9. Oriental Bank of Commerce
10. Dena Bank
11. Bank of Maharashtra

Impact

- PCA framework restricts the amount of loans banks can extend, this will definitely put pressure on credit being made available to companies especially the MSMEs. Large companies have access to the corporate bond market so they may not be impacted immediately.
- Small and medium enterprises will have to bear the brunt due to this move by RBI

What is PCA?

- Prompt Corrective Action was initiated by Reserve Bank of India in April 2017. It restricts the bank to indulge in lending activities.
- Banks under this framework are restricted from opening new branches, staff recruitment and increasing the size of their loan book depending on the risk thresholds set in PCA rules.

Health Ministry Bans Over-the-Counter Sale of 14 Steroid Creams

- Union Health Ministry has banned over-the-counter sale of 14 ointments containing steroids and antibiotics without a prescription. The decision is taken to prevent the indiscriminate sale of such products.

- The preparations were included under the Schedule H of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945, in a notification issued on March 23.

Background

- Drugs Technical Advisory Board recommended a ban on the sale of such creams without a prescription and also submitted their recommendations to the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation. The move comes after dermatologists complained that pharmaceutical companies were selling steroid-based creams to patients, who use them without medical guidance. Some ointments that have been banned are alclometasone, beclomethasone, desonide and fluocinonide among others.

UP Government Launches Ganga Hariteema Yojana

- The state government of Uttar Pradesh has launched Ganga Hariteema Yojana in 27 districts located on the bank of Ganga. Also called Ganga Greenery Scheme, will enhance green cover in catchment areas of river Ganga and control land erosion.

Highlights of the scheme

- Tree plantation will be carried out in 1 Km areas from banks of the river.
- People will also be encouraged for tree plantation on their private lands under 'One Person One Tree' slogan.
- Department of Forest will be the nodal agency to implement the scheme.
- High power committee under the chairmanship of Chief Minister will monitor implementation of the scheme.
- The scheme will be carried out by September 16, 2018, which is observed as Ozone Day.
- Seven state government departments have been engaged in the implementation of the scheme.
- A committee has been set up under the Chairmanship of the Chief Secretary Rajeev Kumar to look after the contribution of different departments.

Madhubani Railway Station gets a makeover with Mithila Paintings

- Madhubani railway station of Bihar which was once condemned for its filthy look has got a complete makeover with Mithila Paintings.
The paintings that exhibit the rich culture of the state now offer a gracious look for the walls of Madhubani Railway station.
- It is a unique initiative of the Indian Railways to experiment with local artists voluntarily painting the works in a short span of two months. More than 225 artists, 80 percent of them women, volunteered to paint the station free of cost.
- The total wall area of more than 14,000 sq ft has been fully painted with various themes under traditional Mithila painting style.

About Madhubani Paintings

- Madhubani painting/Mithila painting was traditionally created by the women of various communities in Mithila region of India and Nepal. It originated from Madhubani district of Mithila region of Bihar, and, it is popularly called Mithila painting or Madhubani painting. Madhubani is also a major export centre of these paintings.

RBI Switches Back to GDP Model from GVA Model

- The Reserve Bank of India has re-adopted the Gross Domestic Product based measure to offer its growth. Previously RBI was using Gross Value Added method for the same purpose.

Reason

- RBI cited the GDP method is globally the best method. While GVA gives a picture of the state of economic activity from the producers' side or supply side, the GDP model gives the picture from the consumers' side or demand perspective. The switch to GDP is mainly to conform to international standards.
- The government had started analysing growth estimates using GVA methodology from January 2015 and had also changed the base year to 2018 from January.
- The performance of most economies is gauged in terms of gross domestic product (GDP).
- This is also the approach followed by multilateral institutions, international analysts and investors, and primarily they all stick to this norms because it facilitates easy cross-country comparisons, Even the Central Statistical Office (CSO) has started using GDP as the main measure of economic activities since January 15 this year.

Assam Spring Festival organised at Manas National Park

- Assam Spring Festival was organised in Manas National Park to promote the local food and culture. During the two-day long festival, the visitors experienced the mesmerizing local food, music handloom and handcraft.
- The festival was organised by Indian Weavers' Association and the Swankar Mithinga Onsai Afat, an association of reformed poachers in Manas who are now engaged in wildlife conservation and preservation.

Highlights of the event

- About 32 households were trained for the maintenance of hygiene and the basics of the service industry. They managed home stays and serving the guest homemade food.
- With this initiative, the residents got a chance to provide the guests a stay at their homes and showcase and sell their products.
- The itinerary of the festival includes village tours, exposition of local handicraft and handloom, cultural showa, local folk music and tasting of local cuisines and delicacies.

Manas National Park

- Manas National Park or Manas Wildlife Sanctuary is UNESCO Natural World Heritage site, a Project Tiger reserve, an elephant reserve and a biosphere reserve in Assam, India. The park is known for its rare and endangered endemic wildlife such as the Assam roofed turtle, hispid hare, golden langur and pygmy hog. Manas is famous for its population of the wild water buffalo.

Tamil Nadu Launches Uzhavan App for Farmers

Tamil Nadu Government has launched bi-lingual Uzhavan App that will allow the farmers to have access to **nine types of services**, including details about their crop insurance.

- The app can be downloaded from Google Playstore.
- The farmers to get information on farm subsidies, book farm equipment and related infrastructure and get details on their crop insurance.
- It also shows weather forecast for the next four days

- It includes information on the available stocks of seeds and fertilisers in local government and private stores

Other schemes launched

- Edappadi K. Palaniswami, the CM of Tamil Nadu also launched the 'Amma Bio-Fertiliser' scheme, named after late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa to provide better management of natural farming, and help boost and maintain soil fertility.
- Farming machinery and equipment worth Rs14.10 crore, including 50 tractors procured by the government, that can be rented at low rates by farmers were launched
- He also inaugurated an environmental park, constructed at Kanniyakumari at a cost of Rs. 4 crores.

PM to Inaugurate 16th International Energy Forum Ministerial

- The 16th International Energy Forum Ministerial (IEF16) is being hosted by India and was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on 11th April 2018.
- IEF16 is the largest gathering of Energy Ministers from across the globe, industry leaders and heads of key international organizations who will debate the future of global energy.
- This Ministerial Meet holds a great significance as India's energy needs are primarily met through imports, with India importing 214 million tonnes of crude oil in 2016-17.
- Apart from the 72 members of the IEF, 20 countries are also participating in this meeting as special invitees.

Background

- India is the third largest consumer of energy after the US and China.
- IEF16 comes in the backdrop of a supply cut by OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) and Russia that has led to a rally in global oil price.
- This has resulted in an increase in the cost of Indian basket of crude which has its average price at around \$ 63.80 as compared to \$ 47.56 in 2016-17.

Aim

- The International Energy Forum (IEF) aims to foster greater mutual understanding and awareness of common energy interests among its members. It has 72 members which are signatories to the IEF Charter. The IEF Charter outlines the framework of the global energy dialogue through this inter-

governmental arrangement.

Highlights

- IEF16 is hosted by India and co-hosted by China and Korea.
- Accounting for around 90% of global supply and demand for oil and gas, IEF comprises not only consuming and producing countries of the IEA and Opec, but also Transit States and major players outside of their memberships, including Argentina, China, India, Mexico, Russia and South Africa.
- India fulfils the needs of the sellers for a steady and stable buyers' market.
- India has already been promoting a gas based economy. India is the fourth largest importer of LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas). India imported 19 million metric tonnes of LNG in 2016–17.
- IEF16 delegates are invited to consider how global market shifts and energy transition will shape the future of energy security.

Rakesh Bharti Mittal: New President of CII (Confederation of Indian Industry) for 2018–19

- Bharti Enterprises Vice-Chairman Rakesh Bharti Mittal has been appointed as the new President of CII (Confederation of Indian Industry) for the year 2018–19. He has succeeded Shobana Kamineni, Executive Vice Chairperson, Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Ltd.
- Uday Kotak, Founder and CEO of Kotak Mahindra Bank took over as President–Designate of CII for 2018–19, whereas Vikram Kirloskar is the new Vice–President of CII for the current fiscal. Vikram Kirloskar is the Chairman and Managing Director of Kirloskar Systems.
- Rakesh Mittal is also the Chairman of Bharti AXA Life Insurance, Bharti AXA General Insurance, FieldFresh Foods and Centum Learning as well as a Board member of Bharti Airtel and MD of Bharti Realty Holdings, CII.
- He also served as member, India–Pakistan Joint Business Forum (IPJBF) and several Government Committees and Governing Councils of Institutions of Excellence like ICAR.
- He had been elected as a member of the National Council of CII several times since 1999.

What is CII?

- It is a business association in India which was founded 123 years ago in 1895. It is a non–government, not–for–profit, industry–led and industry–managed organization which works with the Government on policy issues. It has over 8,300 members, from the private as well as public sectors, including SMEs and MNCs and an indirect membership of over 200,000 enterprises. Its headquarter is located in New Delhi. CII works to create and sustain an environment conducive to the development of India, partnering industry, Government, and civil society, through advisory and consultative processes.

- CII Theme for 2017–18 is: “India@75: Inclusive. Ahead. Responsible.”
- CII Theme for 2018–19 will be– “India RISE: Responsible. Inclusive. Sustainable. Entrepreneurial”

Rishad Premji Appointed New Chairman of NASSCOM

- Rishad Premji has been appointed the new Chairman of NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Services Companies) for the year 2018–19.
He is the Chief Strategy Officer as well as a Board member of Wipro Ltd.
- Rishad Premji has succeeded Raman Roy who served as the Chairman for the year 2017–18.
- Premji has been a member of the Executive Council of NASSCOM as well as the Vice Chairman for the year 2017–18.
- Keshav Murugesh has been appointed as the Vice Chairman for 2018–19.
- Chairman Premji along with Vice Chairman Murugesh and President Ghosh, will lead NASSCOM to carry out its diverse array of priorities to achieve the 2025 vision for the industry.
- Key focus areas for the new leadership team will be the global free movement of talent, to embrace new, emerging markets and to help the industry foray into newer geographies and domains.

What is NASSCOM?

- NASSCOM stands for National Association of Software and Services Companies which is a trade association of Indian Information Technology (IT) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry.
- NASSCOM is a non-profit organization which was established on 1st March, 1988. It is the apex body for the 154 billion dollar IT BPM industry in India.
- IT BPM industry has made a phenomenal contribution to India's GDP, exports, employment, infrastructure and global visibility and NASSCOM is focussed to develop the IT BPM sector.
- NASSCOM was registered under the Indian Societies Act, 1860. It facilitates business and trade in software and services and encourages the advancement of research in software technology.
- NASSCOM is headquartered in New Delhi, India, with regional offices in the cities– Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Pune and Trivandrum.

List of previous Chairman of NASSCOM

- Rishad Premji (2018–19)
- Raman Roy (2017–18)
- C P Gurnani (2016–17)
- B V R Mohan Reddy (2015–16)

MoU signed between India and World Expo 2020

- An MoU has been signed between India and World Expo 2020 in order to showcase the inventions of the Industrial Revolution.
Setting up of its pavilion at the expo will give India a great opportunity to accomplish its objective of becoming a \$ 5 trillion economy by 2025.
- The contract was signed by Manoj K. Dwivedi, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce, on Indian side and Najeeb Mohammed Al Ali, Executive Director, Dubai Expo 2020 Bureau on behalf of Expo 2020.
- The world Expo 2020 is held once in 5 year, with a vision to foster creativity, innovation and collaboration globally.

Key Features

- India has designated Binoy Kumar, Special Secretary in the Department of Commerce, as Director General of World Expo 2020 Dubai.
- According to the contract signed, India will set up a pavilion at the Expo 2020 on a plot of about one acre in the 'Opportunity' segment.
- Setting up its pavilion at the Expo would help India to showcase its strength in high technology areas like artificial intelligence, fintech, space and green energy.
- The pavilion will be developed in public-private partnership mode.
- Significant focus areas will be – India's advances in Space, Pharma, IT, Renewable Energy and Telecom sectors at the pavilion.
- A number of state governments, various ministries of central government and major industry associations and businesses have shown interest in partnering and participating in World Expo 2020 which will take place for six months beginning October 2020.
- To participate in India's pavilion, leading industries and businesses will work closely with Central government and State governments.

India's 1st All Electric Superfast Train flagged off

- The All Electric Superfast Train manufactured under the Make in India project was flagged off by our honourable Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi.
- India's first all-electric high speed locomotive with 12,000 horsepower was flagged off in Bihar. It is considered to be a great boost to the Make in India initiative of the Modi government.
- The train was developed at Madhepura's Electric Locomotive Factory in collaboration with a French firm Alstom.

- With the launch of this high speed locomotive, India has joined the league of nations including Russia, China, Germany and Sweden where such locomotives are operational.

Aim

- To mark Mahatma Gandhi's Champaran Satyagraha anniversary, PM Modi has launched the "Satyagraha se Swachhagrah" campaign.
- This campaign is a fusion of two national concepts of Satyagraha and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. To mark this event, the superfast train was flagged off which primarily aims to stop open defecation in Bihar.
- It will not only give a boost to Clean India mission but also become a major source of employment in Bihar. It aims to reduce the greenhouse emissions as well as to reduce the costs for the railways.

Its features

- It is a part of the Make in India initiative.
- Place of development– Electric Locomotive Factory, Madhepura
- Manufacturer– Alstom
- Engine strength– 12,000 HP
- Maximum speed– 120 km per hour
- Energy efficient (would reduce greenhouse emissions)
- 40 such locomotives will be launched in 2020 by the end of March.
- Alstom plans to roll out 800 such engines in 11 years with an estimated cost of more than Rs 20,000 crore.
- The average cost of each locomotive is estimated to be Rs 25 crore.
- These engines will help decongest saturated routes by improving the speed and carrying capacity of freight trains.

12th April – International Day of Human Space Flight

- 12th April was declared as the International Day of Human Space Flight by the United Nations General Assembly.

Background

- The UN General Assembly, in its resolution of 7th April 2011 declared 12th April as the International Day of Human Space Flight so as to ensure the maintenance of the outer space for peaceful purposes.
- This day is celebrated each year to mark the beginning of human entrance in the space.

- The first human space flight was carried out by Yuri Gagarin on 12th April 1961 which is celebrated each year on this particular day. This first flight conducted was a beginning of space exploration by the mankind. Each year 12th April is celebrated to mark the importance of space science and technology in achieving the goals for sustainable development.

8th Regional 3R Forum inaugurated

- 8th Regional 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific was held in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India, from 9–12 April 2018.
- The forum provides a strategic platform for sharing best practices in 3R areas, including new and emerging issues of concern in waste management.
- The Regional 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific was launched in 2009 in Tokyo, Japan with the objective of integrating the 3Rs in policy, planning and development.

Aim

- The aim is to shift the global consumption and production patterns towards building a sound-material-cycle society, recognizing the importance of reducing barriers to the international flow of goods and materials for recycling and re-manufacturing, particularly in developing countries.

Background

- The United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) has been organizing International Regional Forum on 3Rs since 2009 with the support of Government of Japan to promote the concept of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle in industry, service and agriculture sector.
- The overall objective is to establish sound material-cycle society by adopting resource conservation, techniques and technologies.
- The Regional 3R Forum in Asia was successfully launched at the inaugural meeting held on 11–12 November 2009 in Tokyo, Japan by UNCRD with support from the Government of Japan.
- Since then, this Regional 3R Forum has been organized in Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, Maldives and Australia with the support from respective governments, Government of Japan, and UNCRD.

Key facts

- The Theme of the Forum was – “Achieving Clean Water, Clean Land and Clean Air through 3R and Resource Efficiency– A 21st Century Vision for Asia-Pacific Communities”.
- The Forum was co-organized by–

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India.
- The Ministry of the Environment, Government of Japan.
- United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD).
- The event saw participation of around 40 mayors of cities around the world and mayors of more than 100 cities across India.
- Government of Madhya Pradesh, Indore Municipal Corporation and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) were Organizing State Partner, City Partner and Industry Partner of the event.
- The Regional 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific was launched in 2009 in Tokyo, Japan with the objective of integrating the 3Rs in policy, planning and development.
- The forum members include governments, aid agencies, international agencies, private sector entities, research bodies, NGOs and other relevant parties.
- During the forum meetings, members hold discussions on policies, provided support for the implementation of 3R projects in member countries and share useful information and build networks for further promotion of 3R initiatives.
- The overall goal of the forum is to achieve low carbon and sound material cycle societies in Asia through facilitating bilateral and multilateral cooperation for increasing resource and energy efficiency through the 3Rs.

About UNCRD

- UNCRD (United Nations Centre for Regional Development) was established in 1971 based on an agreement between the Government of Japan and the United Nations. Its operations are supported by UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA). It aims to achieve sustainable living environment for all. Its mission is to assist developing countries to achieve sustainable development.

Global Economic Freedom Index 2018: India ranks 130

- India has jumped 13 places in the last one year to be at 130th spot in the latest annual Index of Economic Freedom.
This index is released by an American think-tank, Heritage Foundation.
- Last year in 2017 India was ranked at 143 among 180 countries with a score of 52.6
- India is now ranked 30th among 43 countries in Asia Pacific region.
- India's economic freedom score is 54.5, making its economy the 130th freest in the 2018 Index.
- Its overall score has been increased by 1.9 points due to the improvements in judicial effectiveness, business freedom, government integrity and Physical health.

Global Economic Freedom Index

- The index was released by top US-based Think Tank, The Heritage Foundation.

- It ranks countries based on their score ranging from 0 to 100. 0 indicates the least free economy whereas 100 indicates the most free economy.
- The score is based on 12 factors of economic freedom, which are separated into four categories, using statistics from international organizations like World Bank, IMF, Economist Intelligence Unit and Transparency International.
- These 12 factors are property rights, government integrity, tax burden, judicial effectiveness, government spending, fiscal health, business freedom, monetary freedom, labour freedom, trade freedom, investment freedom and financial freedom.
- The 5 different categories are–
 - Free (80–100)
 - Mostly Free (70.0–70.9)
 - Moderately Free (60.0–60.9)
 - Mostly Unfree (50.0–50.9)
 - Repressed (0–49.9)

Highlights of the 2018 Economic Freedom report

- The world economy overall is rated moderately free and world average has now risen three and a half points, from 57.6 to 61.1 since the first edition of the index was released in 1995.
- The index is topped by Hong Kong which has the freest economy according to this report.
- India is developing into open-market economy.
- The overall development of India is undermined by corruption, underdeveloped infrastructure, restrictive regulatory environment and poor financial and budget management.
- The Indian judiciary is independent but the courts lack staff and technology required to clear the backlog.

List of top 10 countries in Global Economic Freedom Index report

- Hong Kong
- Singapore
- New Zealand
- Switzerland
- Australia
- Ireland
- Estonia
- UK
- Canada
- UAE

“NITI Forum for North East” – 1st meeting conducted

- The first meeting of NITI Forum for North East was conducted in Agartala, Tripura. The meeting was organized by NITI Aayog, Ministry of DoNER (Development of North Eastern Region) and the North Eastern Council (NEC).
- The meeting was inaugurated by Minister of Development of North East Region Dr Jitendra Singh and Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog Dr Rajiv Kumar.
- Chief Ministers of Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya, senior officials of NITI Aayog and Union Government were also present in the meeting.

Highlights of the meeting

- In the meeting conducted, emphasis was given on infrastructure and connectivity. Mr. Rajiv mentioned five missions on which NITI Forum will focus. These missions will be conducted in a time-bound manner. These include development in the fields of Agriculture, Horticulture, Food Processing, Tourism, Bamboo use and 'Made in North East'.
- In his inaugural speech he also mentioned that there is a planning for UDAN 3 through which the state capitals will be interconnected.
- He said that the focus of development projects in the NER will be based on the concept of “HIRA” (Highways, Inland Waterways, Railways and Airways) as mentioned by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Apart from this, he also made it clear that emphasis will also be made on Education, Health and Skill Development in the region.
- In the meeting it was highlighted that the government has already initiated talks with a private airline for connecting Agartala with Dhaka and Chittagong.
- The main agenda of the meeting included–
 - Strategies for improving Road, Rail and Air Connectivity in the North East Region
 - NE States to encourage Organic Farming
 - Promotion of Tourism
 - Increased coverage under Crop Insurance
 - Strengthening of North East Tourism Development Council (NETDC)
 - Agriculture and allied sectors

NITI Forum

- The NITI Forum was formed to explore and formulate the framework for sustainable growth of the Northeast. It was constituted in February 2018. The secretariat for the Forum has been established in the DoNER Ministry.
- The Forum includes representation from all NE States, their Chief Secretaries and Secretaries of relevant Central Ministries or Departments, Directors of reputed institutions like IIT and IIM, experts and journalists have been included as members.

- NITI Forum aims to ensure the sustainable economic growth of the North Eastern Region (NER) of the country and periodically review the development status in the North Eastern region.

Kidambi Srikanth becomes world No. 1 badminton player

- Kidambi Srikanth replaced Viktor Axelsen of Denmark to become the No. 1 player in the Badminton World Federation (BWF) rankings. He topped the rankings with 76,895 points in men's singles category to displace current world champion Viktor Axelsen,
- The Padma Shri and Arjuna awardee is one of Dronacharya Pullela Gopichand's pupils.
- This is the second time when an Indian male Badminton player has achieved World rank No. 1 after Prakash Padukone did so in 1980.
- Srikanth bagged the mixed team gold in the ongoing Commonwealth Games 2018.
- The Indian shuttler won four Super Series titles last year, becoming the fourth person to do so—
 - Indonesia Open Super Series
 - Australia Open Super Series
 - Denmark Open Super Series
 - France Open Super Series

Badminton World Federation (BWF) Top 10 rankings (Men)

Rank	Player	Country
1.	KIDAMBI Srikanth	India
2.	Viktor AXELSEN	Denmark
3.	SON Wan Ho	Korea
4.	CHEN Long	China
5.	SHI Yuqi	China
6.	CHOU Tien Chen	Chinese Taipei
7.	LEE Chong Wei	Malaysia
8.	LIN Dan	China
9.	NG Ka Long Angus	Hong Kong

10.	Anthony Sinisuka GINTING	Indonesia
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ISRO launches IRNSS-1L

- The Indian Space Research Organization launched the navigation satellite IRNSS-1L from Sriharikota on 12th April 2018.
- This will be the 9th of the IRNSS satellite series and will be a replacement for IRNSS-1A as its rubidium atomic clocks have failed. These atomic clocks are necessary to provide the accurate positional data. The first mission to replace it with IRNSS-1H had failed.
- The navigation satellite IRNSS-1L is part of Indian satellite navigation system 'Navigation with Indian Constellation' (NavIC).

Features of IRNSS-1L

- It was carried by the PSLV (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle) rocket XL variant.
- The satellite weighs 1425kg.
- IRNSS-1L carries two types of payloads for navigation and ranging.
- The navigation payload will transmit navigation service signals to the users.
- The ranging payload will facilitate accurate determination of the range of the satellite.

What is NavIC?

- NavIC is also known as the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS).
- It is similar to the USA owned GPS system.
- It is basically an independent regional navigation satellite system designed to provide position information in the Indian region and 1,500 km around the Indian mainland.
- The Rs 1420 crore Indian satellite navigation system NavIC consists of nine satellites– seven orbit and two as substitutes.

Benefits of NavIC for India

- India has been till now dependent on the USA GPS (Global Positioning System).
- But there are issues related to safety and privacy due to which countries are opting for their own navigation systems.
- NavIC aims to enhance India's military and civilian navigation capability by providing two kinds of services– the Standard Positioning Service and the Restricted Positioning Service.

- Standard Positioning Service is for the civilian use and has an accuracy of up to 20 metres whereas the Restricted Positioning Service for the military use has an accuracy of up to 10 metres.

65th National Film Awards Announced

- The 65th National Film Awards were announced on 13th April 2018 at PIB Conference Room, Shastri Bhawan in New Delhi.
- The Award ceremony is to be conducted on 3rd May 2018 and the awards will be presented by the President of India Mr. Ram Nath Kovind.
- The awards were announced by the chairpersons of the three juries (Feature, Non-feature and Writing).
- The jury was headed by director Shekhar Kapur.
- The Jury Chairpersons of the 65th National Film Awards have submitted its report to the Minister of Information & Broadcasting, Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani on 12th April 2018.

List of winners–

- Best Actor – Riddhi Sen (for Nagar Kirtan)
- Best Actress – Sridevi (for Mom)
- Best Director – Jayaraj (for Bhayanakam)
- Best Film – Village Rockstars (Assamese movie)
- Best Children's Film – Mhorkya
- Best Child Artist – Anita Das (for Village Rockstar)
- Best Music Direction – AR Rahman for (Katru Veliyidayi)
- Special mention – Pankaj Tripathi (for his performance in the movie Newton)
- Dadasaheb Phalke Award – Late Vinod Khanna (for his immense contribution to Indian cinema)

Best Regional films–

- Hindi – Newton
- Marathi – Kachcha Limboo
- Tulu – Paddayi
- Malayalam – Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum
- Lakshadweep – Sinjar
- Assamese – Ishu
- Ladakh – Walking with the Wind
- Telugu – Ghazi
- Kannada – Hebbettu Ramakka

- Bengali – Mayurakshi

Mary Kom : 1st Indian woman to win CWG gold in Boxing

- Mary Kom clinched her maiden Commonwealth Games gold in the CWG 2018 being held in Gold Coast, Australia.
- She has become the 1st Indian woman to win a gold in the Commonwealth Games in any boxing event.
- She defeated Kristina O'Hara of Northern Ireland in the finals of the women's 48 kg boxing finals at the CWG 2018 claiming an unanimous verdict of 5-0.
- The 35-year-old, five-time world champion and Olympic bronze medallist MC Mary Kom was participating in her maiden Commonwealth Games.

About MC Mary Kom

- Mary Kom is an Indian Olympic boxer hailing from the Kom tribe in Manipur.
- She is a five-time World Amateur Boxing champion, and the only woman boxer to have won a medal in each one of the six world championships.
- She is the only Indian woman boxer to have qualified for the 2012 Summer Olympics and winning the bronze medal.
- She was nominated as a member of the Rajya Sabha by the President of India on 26th April 2016.
- In March 2017, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, appointed Mary Kom as national observer for boxing.
- She has been awarded with Padma Bhushan, Arjuna award, Padma Shri, Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award etc.

CWG 2018

- The 2018 Commonwealth Games are officially known as the XXI Commonwealth Games and commonly known as Gold Coast 2018.
- It is an international multi-sport event for members of the Commonwealth that is currently being held on the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia, between 4 and 15 April 2018.
- It is the fifth time Australia has hosted the Commonwealth Games.
- The motto for CWG 2018 is "Share the Dream".
- It will witness 275 events in 19 sports with an overall participation from 71 Commonwealth teams.
- Beach Volleyball, Para Triathlon and Women's Rugby Sevens have made their Commonwealth Games debuts and for the first time at a Commonwealth Games, an equal number of men's and women's medal events were contested.

AIIB to Invest \$140 Million to Improve Rural Connectivity

- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has approved a \$140 million loan for enhancing rural connectivity in Madhya Pradesh.
- The project, is co-financed with the World Bank.

Aim

- It aims to improve the rural road connectivity and management for residents of about 5,640 villages who use the rural roads for daily activities. It also aims to improve durability and accessibility and enhance resilience to climate change of gravel surfaced rural road in Madhya Pradesh. It will also employ more women, thus contributing to gender equality and income generation.

Advantages

- It will benefit around 1.5 million rural residents through improved livelihood, education and mobility.
- Livelihood of the rural population will be improved by expanding income earning opportunities through better farm-to-market road connections.
- It is expected that it will not only improve the attendance of children in schools but also increase their enrolment in higher education programmes.
- The road maintenance pilot under the project will employ more women, contributing to gender equality and income generation.
- Investment in rural infrastructure will promote sustainable growth in India.
- It would help in enhancing the overall development in the region and thus reducing the financial gap.
- It will provide sustainable and safe last-mile connectivity to small villages and improve mobility of rural population of Madhya Pradesh.

Planned activities

- Develop road safety management capacity with road accident data management system and pilot comprehensive road safety program.
- Upgrade gravel surfaced roads to sealed surface standard.
- Strengthen design and research and quality assurance capacity of implementing agency.
- Provide additional linkages to villages with potential for high growth.
- Enhance institutional capacity through implementing and upgrading rural road asset management system.

AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank)

- AIIB is multilateral development bank initiated by China with a purpose to provide finance to projects on infrastructure development and regional connectivity in Asia-Pacific region.
- AIIB was officially established in December 2015 and it opened its business in January 2016. It has its headquarters in Beijing, China. China is the largest stakeholder of AIIB whereas India is the second largest stakeholder.
- It aims to boost economic development in the Asia-Pacific region, provide infrastructure and promote regional cooperation and partnership.

NHAI Signs Agreement For Its First International Project

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has signed an agreement for upgradation of Yagyi – Kalewa section of highway in Myanmar to two-lane.
- This project is part of India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway and will be NHAI's first international project.
- The project has been funded by Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
- It would be executed on Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) mode at a cost of Rs.1177 crores.

Aim

- It aims to provide seamless vehicular movement for enhancing trade, business, health, education and tourism between Indian, Myanmar and Thailand.

Key Facts

- The project would be completed in three years.
- The project will have three new major bridges and two new minor bridges.
- Four existing major bridges and nine existing minor bridges will be repaired and strengthened and six existing minor bridges will be reconstructed.
- The Yagyi – Kalewa stretch will have 6 truck lay byes, 20 bus bays and passenger shelters and 1 rest area.

- The IMT (India–Myanmar–Thailand) highway is a regional highway being constructed under India's Act East Policy in order to boost connectivity in the region.
- It will connect Moreh in India with Mae Sot in Thailand via Myanmar. It is expected to boost trade and commerce in ASEAN–India Free Trade Area.

About NHAI

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHA) is an autonomous agency of the Government of India, responsible for management of national highways. It is a nodal agency of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.
- Deepak Kumar is the current chairman of NHA whereas Yogendra Narain was its first Chairman. It was set up by an act of the Parliament, NHA Act, 1988.
- Along with other minor projects, it has been entrusted with National Highways Development Project. NHDP is India's largest ever Highways Project in a phased manner.

Indian Mobile Congress to be Held in New Delhi

- India is going to host the India Mobile Congress (IMC) between 25–27 October 2018. This is going to be the second edition of the Indian Mobile Congress after the one held in 2017. The India Mobile Congress 2018, is to be hosted by the Department of telecommunications (DoT) and the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI).
- IMC was launched in 2017 to provide the platform for policymakers, industry and regulators to engage in meaningful deliberations to drive the future direction of the telecom sector.
- The first IMC held in September 2017 was attended by around 2,000 delegates, 32,000 visitors, 152 speakers, 100 exhibitors and 100 start-ups.

Key Facts

- The theme of second edition of IMC is NEW DIGITAL HORIZONS Connect, Create, innovate.
- It expects participation of more than 200,000 professionals from telecom industry, encompassing 5G, start-up ecosystem, Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Smart Cities and allied industry sectors.
- The conclave will comprise of Ministerial & Partner Programs in Digital India, Smart City, Emerging Technologies, Make in India Projects, Skill Harmonization, Business Innovation, Knowledge Sharing, etc.
- There will be a technology showcase offering a glimpse into Virtual Reality, Connected Cars, m-Health, Smart Wearables, Smart Home, Artificial Intelligence, Drones, Robotics, Smart Energy, Internet of Things, Block chain, Machine Vision, Cloud Computing, Holography etc.
- The exhibition would feature more than 1,300 exhibitors.

- IMC 2018 we will also see participation of countries from ASEAN (Association for Southeast Asian Countries) and BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) besides US, Canada and European Union (EU).

About IMC

- India Mobile Congress is one of the biggest Mobile, Internet and Technology event for the South-East Asia organized by COAI and DoT. It aims at building ideas, forging lasting Industry relationships, showcasing cutting-edge mobile technology & product trends, providing sectoral insights, industrial solutions, case studies & workshops.

e-FRRO Scheme Launched

- The Union Home Minister Mr Rajnath Singh launched the web-based application “e-FRRO” (e-Foreigners regional registration Office).
- The scheme was flagged off to expedite visa services for foreigners visiting India.
- With the help of this application, foreigners can apply online and obtain services through email or post without appearing in person at the FRRO office.

Aim

- It aims to build a centralized, transparent online platform for foreigners to avail visa related services and to provide faceless, cashless and paperless services to the foreigners with a user-friendly experience.

Key Facts

- It will allow foreign tourists/travellers to avail of paperless and cashless visa-related services online.
- Foreigners will be able to get as many as 27 visa and immigration-related services in India from the comfort of their place of stay.
- It will increase the ease of service delivery with respect to foreigners visiting and staying in India.
- e-FRRO is running successfully as a pilot project in four FRROs (Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai) since February 12, 2018. Now it has been rolled out in the remaining eight FRROs, – namely Kolkata, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Cochin, Thiruvananthapuram, Calicut, Lucknow and Ahmedabad.
- Foreigners are required to create their own User ID by registering themselves on this application.
- After registering themselves successfully, they can apply online through registered User-ID for various visa and immigration-related services in India.
- The necessary immigration or visa document will be sent by post on the address mentioned in the online application. It will also be sent electronically to the registered email ID.

Bhanu Pratap Sharma Appointed Chairman of Bank Board Bureau

- Former Secretary of DoPT, Bhanu Pratap Sharma was appointed as the Chairman of Banks Board Bureau (BBB).
He will hold the office as the Chairman of BBB for a period of two years.
- He will succeed the former Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) Vinod Rai who was appointed as the Chairman of BBB for a two year term. His two year term ended in March 2018.
- **The other members of the BBB are:** Vedika Bhandarkar (former MD Credit Suisse India), P Pradeep Kumar (former MD SBI) and Pradip P Shah (founder MD Crisil).

About Bhanu Pratap Sharma

- Mr. Sharma is a retired IAS officer, Bihar cadre, 1981 batch and a former Principal Secretary (Finance) in the Bihar government.
- He is presently chairman of the recruitment and assessment centre at the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- He had been health secretary and secretary for personnel and training at the Centre, before retiring in June 2017 from the civil service.

Banks Board Bureau

- Banks Board Bureau (BBB) is an autonomous body of the Government of India for the PSBs (Public Sector Banks).
- It was announced by the Union government in August 2015 as part of seven point Indradhanush Mission to revamp the PSBs.
- The Modi government has approved the setting up of BBB in February 2016 and BBB started functioning from April 2016.
- It replaced the Appointments Board of Government.
- It is housed in RBI's central office in Mumbai, Maharashtra.
- The BBB engages with the Public Sector Banks (PSBs) to help build capacity to attract, retain and nurture both talent and technology.
- It aims to help prepare PSBs to take on the competition, have the ability to appropriately manage and price risk across business cycles, develop resilience to generate internal capital etc.

UN Launches Initiative to Improve Road Safety Worldwide

- UN has launched a Road Safety Trust Fund to address traffic-related injuries and deaths in the developing countries.
With some 1.3 million drivers, passengers and pedestrians dying each year on the world's roads, the United Nations took a major step to address this tragedy.
- The launch of this fund was announced at the UN General Assembly where the Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed highlighted the opportunities offered by the UN Road Safety Trust Fund.
- The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on road safety in which it called for a host of measures to prevent road accidents and to minimize the resulting damage.

Trust Fund

- The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is the Organisation's development arm in the continent.
- UNECE is the secretariat for the Trust Fund.
- According to the UNECE, every \$1,500 contributed to the Fund could save one life, prevent 10 serious injuries and leverage \$51,000 towards investments in road safety.
- The Trust Fund will support efforts along the five pillars of the Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety.
- These include strengthened road safety management capacities, improved safety of road infrastructure and broader transport networks, enhanced safety of vehicles, improved behaviour of road users and improved post-crash care.
- The Road Safety Trust Fund will serve as a catalyst for much-needed progress towards the road safety targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Dealing specifically with road safety, SDG targets 3.6 and 11.2 aim to halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents; and to provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems as well as improve road safety for all, respectively.
- The Trust Fund has the potential to galvanize the global efforts to address the road safety situation.

UNECE

- The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe was established in 1947 to encourage economic cooperation among its member States. Its parent organization is the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
- It is one of five regional commissions under the administrative direction of United Nations headquarters. It has 56 member States, and it reports to the ECOSOC. It has its headquarters located in Geneva, Switzerland.

DefExpo 2018 : India & Russia sign 7 MoUs

- Indian companies and Russian Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) signed 7 MoUs at the DefExpo 2018 held in Thiruvudanthai, Chennai.
Earlier, at the third India–Russia Military–Industrial Conference, discussions were made on improvement of after–sales support of Russian origin defence platforms used by Indian defence forces.
- The ministry of defence had identified 48 items covering all major platforms which can be made in India with Russian collaboration.
- The MoUs were signed during third India–Russia Military–Industrial Conference held on the sidelines of DefExpo 2018.

7 MoUs signed were–

- Larsen & Toubro Ltd and joint stock company Rosoboronexper: for underwater platforms of Indian Navy and Heavy Weight Torpedo and future–ready combat vehicles.
- Ananth Technologies and JSC Concern Radio–Electronic Technologies (KRE): for product support for defence systems and upgrade of optoelectric sighting and navigation complex for Su–30MKI aircraft).
- Ananth Technologies and Research and Production Corporation: to set up technical and logistic support in India for T90 S&T72 tanks in service with the Indian Army.
- Space Era and KRET: to set up technical and logistics support in India.
- OSKROSOMARINE and Russian company JSC AGAT: for post–sale support for Fregat radar installed onboard naval frontline warships.
- Krasnet Defence Technologies and JSC Concern AGAT: for co–operation in the field of after–sales support of equipment manufactured by JSC AGAT and installed on board Indian ships.
- Aviatech Enterprises and JSC AGAT: for co–operation in after–sales support of equipment manufactured by JSCAGAT and installed on board Indian naval ships.

About the Defence Expo 2018

- The Defence Expo, formally inaugurated by Narendra Modi was held from 11–14th April 2018 in Chennai.
- It was an elaborate ceremony to ‘hand over’ key technologies by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to the industry.
- Defence Expo event witnessed the transfer of eight technologies to the private and public sector by defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman.
- It aims to project India as a defence manufacturing hub that is gearing up to even export products.
- Some of the technologies showcased and transferred during the conclave were –

- Identification of Friend or Foe (IFF)
- Sonar Dome
- Heavyweight Torpedo Varunastra
- ASTRA Missile
- HUMSA – UG Sonar & ABHAY Sonar

7th Edition of Home Expo India to be Inaugurated

- The seventh edition of Home Expo India 2018 will be inaugurated on 16th April at India Expo Centre & Mart in Greater Noida.
- The three-day Expo is organised by the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH).
- The fair will be inaugurated by the Union Minister of Textiles Smriti Irani.
- The Minister of State for Textiles, Ajay Tamta will be the guest of honour.

Key Facts

- The Expo is based on three segmented categories shows comprising Housewares, Textiles and Furniture.
- This will be one of leading business-to-business shows where more than 650 Indian exporters will be displaying a wide range of tableware, home textiles, and kitchenware, houseware and bathroom accessories.
- International buyers, leading manufacturers and exporters will share the same platform and will exchange various ideas related to this industry.
- The expo will showcase the finest artistic elements and craftsmanship in harmony with innovative designs and latest products.
- Home Expo India 2018 is expected to generate business deals for direct import.
- Nowadays as far as the international markets are concerned, the emphasis is on the product-segmented specialised trade shows. Therefore there was a need for Home Expo India generate/promote business deals for direct import.

EPCH (Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts)

- EPCH is the nodal export promotion body for handicrafts in India. It was established under Companies Act in the year 1986-87.
- It is a non-profit organisation which aims to promote, support, protect, maintain and increase the export of handicrafts.
- It is engaged in promotion of handicrafts from India and project India's image abroad as a reliable supplier of high quality handicrafts abroad as a reliable supplier of high quality handicrafts.

- It is an apex body of handicrafts exporters for promotion of exports of Handicrafts from country The Council is run and managed by team of professionals headed by Executive Director.

“Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Vyakti Nahin Sankalp” – Book released

- The Vice President of India, Mr. Venkaiah Naidu formally released the book titled “Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Vyakti Nahin Sankalp” at the Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi.
- The first copy of the book was handed over to the President of India, Mr. Ram Nath Kovind.
- The book was released to mark Dr B.R. Ambedkar’s 127th birth anniversary.
- Dr Ambedkar’s 125th birth anniversary was commemorated at the United Nations in 2016.

Key Facts

- The book released is a slim volume book covering the inspiring life of Dr Ambedkar and several dimensions of his ideas and personality.
- The book is edited by Shri Kishor Makwana who was also present at the occasion.
- Other dignitaries present were the Lok Sabha speaker, Smt. Sumitra Mahajan and the Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment, Shri Thaawar Chand Gehlot.
- The book also references how Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had been inspired by the life and message of Dr Ambedkar.
- The book is an accessible resource to understand the Father of Indian Constitution, Dr Ambedkar.
- Mr. Ram Nath Kovind expressed hope that Ambedkar's thoughts compiled in the book would motivate people to work together in peace and harmony.
- He also mentioned that Dr. Ambedkar is an inspiring figure for all humanity and there is need to do justice to his legacy.

About Dr. B R Ambedkar

- Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar popularly known as Babasaheb, was an Indian jurist, economist, politician and social reformer.
- He was born on 14th April 1891 in a small town in Madhya Pradesh.
- He inspired the Dalit Buddhist movement and campaigned against social discrimination against Untouchables (Dalits).
- He was Independent India's first law minister who remained in office from 15 August 1947 – September 1951.
- He was the principal architect of the Constitution of India and a founding father of the Republic of India

- He posthumously received the highest civilian award, Bharat Ratna in the year 1990.
- Ambedkar published his book Annihilation of Caste on 15 May 1936 which strongly criticised Hindu orthodox religious leaders and the caste system in general.
- Dr. B R Ambedkar was the first Indian to pursue a doctorate in economics abroad.

CWG 2018 conclusion : India at No. 3

- India has showcased a tremendous participation and victory in the XXI Commonwealth Games being held in Gold Coast, Queensland.
- The next CWG 2022 are to be held in Birmingham, England from 27th July to 7th August.

Key facts about CWG 2018

- Venue = Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia
- Edition = 21st
- Motto = share the dream
- Mascot = Blue koala BOROB
- Nations participating = 71

List of top 10 countries

Rank	Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1.	Australia	80	59	59	198
2.	England	45	45	46	136
3.	India	26	20	20	66
4.	Canada	15	40	27	82
5.	New Zealand	15	16	15	46
6.	South Africa	13	11	13	37

7.	Wales	10	12	14	36
8.	Scotland	9	13	22	44
9.	Nigeria	9	9	6	24
10.	Cyprus	8	1	5	14

India's performance in CWG 2018

- With 26 gold medals, the 2018 Commonwealth Games has become India's third most successful of all time.
- India's best remains 101 in New Delhi (2010), followed by 69 in Manchester (2002).
- With 200 athletics, India performed brilliantly throughout the tournament.
- India finished third on the medal tally with the most number of Gold medals achieved in Shooting.
- India performance in different categories–

GAMES	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
Athletics	1	1	1
Badminton	2	3	1
Boxing	3	3	3
Para Powerlifting	–	–	1
Shooting	7	4	5
Squash	–	2	–
Table Tennis	3	2	3
Weightlifting	5	2	2
Wrestling	5	3	4
TOTAL	26	20	20

- The flag bearer for India in the inaugural ceremony was P V Sindhu whereas in the closing ceremony it was M C Mary Kom.
- India won 16 medals in shooting (highest).

Commonwealth Heads of Govt. Meeting

- The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting begins in London from 16–18th April 2018.
- It has begun with four forum events, bringing together representatives from the worlds of business, civil society and government.
- PM Modi is expected to take part in the event on 19th and 20th April 2018.

Key facts

- Theme of the Summit = “Towards a Common Future”
- Modi’s visit will mark India’s enhanced engagement with the multilateral organisation, including increased financial and other contributions.
- The summit is held every two years. An Indian PM would attend the summit, having skipped the one in Perth, Colombo and Malta since 2009.
- The nations will come together to reaffirm the common values, address the shared global challenges being faced and to work to create a better future for the Commonwealth’s 2.4 billion citizens, particularly young people who account for 60% of the population.
- The week will begin with three days of Commonwealth Forums around four topics: Business, Women, People and Youth. The event will witness four major forums where the discussions would be enriched by a variety of events –
 - Commonwealth BUSINESS Forum
 - Commonwealth PEOPLE’S Forum
 - Commonwealth WOMEN’S Forum
 - Commonwealth YOUTH Forum
- The event will be followed by a dinner hosted by the Head of Commonwealth, The Queen at Buckingham Palace.
- **The four themes of the summit are–**
 - A more sustainable future
 - A fairer future
 - A more secure future
 - A more prosperous future
- Commonwealth leaders will then gather at Windsor Castle for the Leaders’ Retreat – a day when leaders engage in frank dialogue and set the course for future Commonwealth co-operation.
- The Royal Commonwealth Society is supporting CHOGM 2018 and the Commonwealth Youth Forum’s (CYF) International Youth Task Force in a special social media campaign.

- This aims to encourage as many Commonwealth young people as possible to participate in the summit by sharing their priorities for Commonwealth action and their vision for the future.

IAF Conducts War Exercise “Gagan Shakti”

- The Indian Air Force conducts its biggest war exercise “Gagan Shakti” at Hindon airbase.
- Gagan Shakti 2018 is IAF’s biggest ever exercise that mobilised more than 1100 combat, transport and rotary wing (helicopter) aircraft. More than 300 officers and 15000 air warriors are participating in the exercise.

Aim

- The aim of this exercise is real time coordination, deployment and employment of Air Power in a short and intense battle scenario. Indian Air Force will exercise the entire machinery during the exercise to validate its concept of operations and war waging capability. It will hone the war fighting skills of the air warriors in a real time scenario.

Key facts

- The exercises will be conducted from 14th–22nd April 2018 in two stages.
- The first stage will test the war preparedness along the northern border whereas the second stage would involve the western border.
- 300 officers along with 15,000 soldiers of the Air Force, 1100 fighter and transport aircrafts from Air Force and navy are participating in this exercise.
- All types of fighter jets from the Indian Air Force fleet are participating in the exercises.
- For the first time “Tejas”– the indigenously made light combat aircraft will be participating in the exercise.
- Other aircrafts participating in the exercise are – Sukhoi–30 S, MiG–21, MiG–29, Jaguar, Miraj, C–17 helicopters, C–130 J super Hercules etc.
- Considering the future threats, and recognising the need of participation by the Air Force for actions in the marine region, the Indian navy also has been included in the exercises.
- Paired with the Air Force jets, the ‘MiG–29K’ of the Indian Navy will conduct war exercises in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands region.

Centre Raises NABARD Authorised Capital to Rs 300 Billion

- Lok Sabha has recently passed a Bill to enable exit of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) from NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) as well as to increase the authorised capital to Rs 30,000 crore.
- The authorised capital has been increased to approximately six times in order to increase its lending to the rural economy.
- The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Amendment) Bill, 2017 introduced by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.
- The bill proposes to empower the central government to increase authorised capital of the NABARD from Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 30,000 crore.

Key facts

- The increase in authorised capital will enable NABARD to respond to its commitments with respect to the Long Term Irrigation Fund and on-lending to cooperative banks.
- It will help NABARD to augment its business and enhance its activities, thus facilitating promotion of integrated rural development and securing prosperity of rural areas, including generation of more employment.
- RBI currently holds 0.4 per cent of the paid-up capital of NABARD and the remaining 99.6 per cent is held by the central government and this causes conflict in the central bank's role as banking regulator and shareholder in NABARD.
- RBI sold almost all its holding in NABARD to the central government in 2010.
- In the Budget 2018, corpus of the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIFD) was enhanced by the government to Rs 280 billion with an overall objective of doubling farmers' income by 2022.
- This Bill is one of the major steps towards doubling the income of the farmers by 2022
- NABARD has been financing a variety of rural infrastructure projects and plays an important role in rural India's growth.

About NABARD

- NABARD was set up in 1982 on the recommendations of B Sivaraman Committee to promote sustainable and equitable agriculture and rural development through participative financial and non-financial interventions, innovations, technology and institutional development for securing prosperity.
- It is headquartered in Mumbai with branches all over India.
- The formation of NABARD was approved by the Parliament through Act 61 of 1981.
- NABARD refines as well as regulates the financial institutions which finances the rural sector.
- Undertakes monitoring and evaluation of projects refinanced by it.
- It provides training facilities to the institutions working in the field of rural upliftment.
- It regulates the cooperative banks and the RRB's (regional Rural Banks).

Exoplanet-Hunting Telescope TESS launch by NASA

- NASA is all set to launch the Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Florida on 18th April 2018. It was earlier scheduled to be launched on 16th April.
- It was launched with the help of the launch vehicle SpaceX Falcon 9.
- Over the course of its two-year prime mission, it is expected to discover thousands of worlds.

Key features

- TESS is designed to hunt for alien planets circling stars relatively close to the sun.
- It will identify exoplanets orbiting the brightest stars just outside the solar system.
- TESS will follow in the footsteps of NASA's prolific Kepler space telescope, which has discovered 2,650 alien worlds to date — about 70 percent of all known exoplanets.
- Sixty days after TESS establishes an orbit around Earth, after instrument tests, the two-year mission will officially begin.
- TESS will orbit Earth (on a looping, 13.7-day path), whereas Kepler circles the sun.
- Like Kepler, TESS will use the "transit method" to find exoplanets, noticing the tiny dips in brightness when these worlds cross their parent stars' faces from the telescope's perspective.
- Soon, Kepler's mission will end, and it will be abandoned in space, orbiting the sun and never getting any closer to Earth than the moon.
- TESS will survey an area 400 times larger than what Kepler observed. This includes 200,000 of the brightest nearby stars.
- TESS will begin by looking at the Southern Hemisphere sky for the first year and move to the Northern Hemisphere in the second year.
- At the top of TESS there are the cameras beneath a cone that will protect them from radiation.
- The cameras can detect light across a broad range of wavelengths, up to infrared. This means TESS will be able to look at many nearby small, cool red dwarf stars and see whether there are exoplanets around them.

Dharmendra to be Conferred with Raj Kapoor Lifetime Achievement Award

- Veteran actor Dharmendra will be conferred with the prestigious Raj Kapoor Lifetime Achievement Award. The names of the winners for this award were announced by Maharashtra Culture Minister Vinod Tawde.
- The lifetime achievement awards carry a citation and cash reward of five lakh rupees.

- The state government-instituted awards will be given away at the 55th Maharashtra State Marathi Film Festival.
- Apart from him, filmmaker Rajkumar Hirani will be conferred with the Raj Kapoor Special Contribution award.

About Dharmendra

- Dharmendra is a Hindi film actor who has more than 250 films to his name. His 6-decade old career boasts of over 100 box-office hits.
- The 82-year-old actor received the Filmfare Lifetime Achievement Award for his contribution to Hindi cinema in 1997.
- He was also a member of the 14th Lok Sabha of India, representing Bikaner constituency in Rajasthan from Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).
- In 2012, he was conferred India's third highest civilian honour Padma Bhushan by the then President Pratibha Patil.

Other awardees

- Veteran Marathi actor Vijay Chavhan has been chosen for the V Shantaram Lifetime Achievement award. He is a well-known Marathi stage actor, has appeared in many Marathi films.
- Actor-Director Mrinal Kulkarni has been chosen for the V Shantaram Special Contribution award.
- The special contribution awards carry a citation and cash prize worth Rs 3 lakh each.

World Bank: India's GDP growth to be 7.3% for 2018-19

- The World Bank has projected India's economic growth to accelerate to 7.3% in FY19 and 7.5% in 2019-20.
- The World Bank India report, however, observed that a GDP growth of over 8% will require a continued reform and a widening of their scope.

Key facts

- It said that India's GDP growth rate will return to 7.5% in two years' time.
- In order to sustain an 8% GDP growth rate, India requires a decisive structural reform momentum that succeeds in stimulating investment and export growth while maintaining macroeconomic stability.

- The only durable episode of growth sustaining at levels above 8% for five continuous years is the one which lasted from 2004 to 2008, with the average growth rate reaching an unprecedented high of 8.8% a year.
- The World Bank, in its twice-a-year South Asia Economic Focus report stated that the growth is expected to accelerate from 6.7% in 2017 to 7.3% in 2018.
- The growth will be subsequently stabilised supported by a sustained recovery in private investment and private consumption.
- The World Bank noted that the country's economy has recovered from the effects of demonetisation and the Goods and Services Tax.
- It acknowledged that disruptions from demonetisation and events surrounding the implementation of GST led to a setback in economic activity and a potentially larger negative effect on the poor and vulnerable.
- It further stated that every month, the work force increases by 1.3 million people and India must create 8.1 million jobs a year to maintain its employment rate, which has been declining based on employment data analysed from 2005 to 2015, largely due to women leaving the job market.

About World Bank

- The World Bank is an international financial institution that provides loans to countries of the world for capital projects.
- It was formed in July 1945 with a goal "reduction of poverty". With 189 member countries, staff from more than 170 countries and offices in over 130 locations, the World Bank Group is a unique global partnership of five institutions working for sustainable solutions that reduce poverty and build shared prosperity in developing countries.
- Its main objective is to end extreme poverty and to promote shared prosperity.
- The five institutions of the World Bank Group are –
 - IBRD (International Bank for Reconstruction & Development)
 - IDA (International Development Association)
 - IFC (International Finance Corporation)
 - MIGA (Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency)
 - ICSID (International Centre for Settlement of Investments Disputes)

Delhi Launches "Mission Buniyaad" to Improve the Learning Skills of Students

- Deputy Chief Minister (CM) and Education Minister of Delhi Manish Sisodia launched another ambitious project of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) – "Mission Buniyaad".

- This mission is basically for children of classes III to IX in government and municipal corporation schools.
- Addressing the low learning level of children in these classes, the government decided to launch a three-month campaign at the beginning of the academic year 2018–19 to make all students be able to read, write and do basic math operations.
- This three-month campaign will continue through May and June 2018.

Highlights

- As per the National Achievement Survey 2017 data released by NCERT last month, Delhi government school students were found to have lowest learning levels in these classes.
- During the campaign, two–three hours of focused activities will be conducted by the school teachers every day with all those students of classes III to IX who cannot read their textbooks or solve basic numerical problems to strengthen their reading, writing and math skills.
- Special efforts are being made by the government to reach out to the parents through advertisements on FM channels, mega parent teachers meetings (PTMs) and letter to the parents to convince them to stay back in Delhi for the entire duration of the campaign and send their child to school.
- Under the programme, children will undergo a reading level assessment based on which they will be enrolled in specialised classes.

International Day for Monuments and Sites' or 'World Heritage Day'

- 18th April is celebrated all over the world as International Day for Monuments and Sites (IDMS).
- IDMS was established by the ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) on 18th April 1982. The theme for the 2018 IDMS is "Heritage for Generations".

Aim

- The aim of the International Day for Monuments and Sites is to encourage local communities and individuals throughout the world to consider the importance of cultural heritage to their lives, identities and communities, and to promote awareness of its diversity and vulnerability and the efforts required to protect and conserve it.

Background

- On 18 April 1982 on the occasion of a symposium organised by ICOMOS in Tunisia, it was suggested that the IDMS should be celebrated throughout the world. This idea was also approved by the UNESCO General Conference. It passed a resolution at its 22nd session in November 1983 recommending the member states to examine the possibility of declaring 18th April each year as the IDMS. IDMS had been traditionally known as the World Heritage Day.

Key facts

- ICOMOS, the International Council for Monuments and Sites makes a number of suggestions on how to celebrate the World Heritage Day:-
 - Visits to monuments and sites and restoration work
 - Articles in newspapers and magazines as well as television and radio broadcasts
 - Hanging banners in town squares to spread awareness about the preservation of our cultural heritage.
 - Inviting local and foreign experts for conferences and interviews.
 - Organizing discussions in cultural centres, city halls and other public spaces.
 - Exhibitions
 - Publications of books, post-cards, stamps, posters etc.
 - Inaugurate a recently restored monument.
 - Conducting awareness increasing activities amongst school children and youth.
 - Awarding prizes to organizations or persons who have made an outstanding contribution to the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage.

Lt Gen PP Malhotra Appointed as the New Director-General of NCC

- Lt Gen PP Malhotra takes charge as the Director-General of NCC (National Cadet Corps).
- He replaced Lt Gen BS Sahrawat to assume office as the new DG of NCC.
- The NCC (National Cadet Corps) is the largest uniformed youth organisation in the world.

About PP Malhotra

- He is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Pune.
- He was commissioned in the CORPS OF ENGINEERS of the Indian Army on 18 Jun 1983.
- He graduated from the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, and did the prestigious National Defence College course at New Delhi.

- His qualifications include B.Tech from College of Military Engineering, Pune, and M.Tech from IIT, Powai, and M.Phil from DAVV, Indore and M. Phil from Madras University.
- Prior to assuming his present appointment, he was the Chief Engineer of the Army's premier Northern Command.
- His distinguished professional career includes various regimental, staff and command appointments.

What is NCC?

- The National Cadet Corps is the Indian military cadet corps with its Headquarters at New Delhi, Delhi, India.
- It is open to school and college students on voluntary basis. National Cadet Corps is a Tri-Services Organization, comprising the Army, Navy and Air Force, engaged in grooming the youth of the country into disciplined and patriotic citizens.
- The NCC in India was formed with the National Cadet Corps Act of 1948. It recruits cadets from high schools, colleges and universities all over India. It follows the motto "Unity and Discipline".

Pulitzer Prize 2018

- The winners of the Pulitzer Prize 2018 were announced at Columbia University in New York City.
- Pulitzer Prize is an award for achievements in newspaper, magazine and online journalism, literature and musical composition in the United States. It is one of the biggest US prize for arts.
- It was established in 1917. Prizes are awarded in 21 categories. The winner in the public service category of the journalism competition is awarded a gold medal.
- Pulitzer Prize has been named after Joseph Pulitzer.

List of winners

- **Pulitzer Prize for Fiction** – Less by Andrew Sean Greer
- **Pulitzer Prize for Drama** – Cost of Living by Martyna Majok
- **Pulitzer Prize for History** – The Gulf: The Making of an American Sea by Jack E Davis
- **Pulitzer Prize for Biography** – Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder, by Caroline Fraser
- **Pulitzer Prize for Poetry** – Half-light: Collected Poems 1965–2016, by Frank Bidart
- **Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction** – Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America, by James Forman Jr.
- **Pulitzer Prize for Music** – DAMN. by Kendrick Lamar
- **Pulitzer Prize for national Reporting** – staff of The Washington Post and of The new York Times
- **Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing** – Rachel Kandi Ghansah, a freelance reporter for GQ

- **Public Service** – The New York Times & The New Yorker

US Puts India on Currency Watch List

- The US Treasury has recently announced that Indian currency will be included in their Currency Watch list.
- The US Treasury has sighted two major reasons for that – India's foreign exchange net addition and its bilateral trade surplus with the US.

Highlights

- USA has included total 6 countries in the watchlist– China, Mexico, Japan, South Korea, Switzerland and India.
- The US Treasury Department in a report to Congress said that foreign exchange policies of these countries needed to be closely monitored.
- The US Treasury Department uses three parameters to include a currency in their Currency Watch List
 - Bilateral trade surplus with the US to be \$20 billion
 - current account surplus at 3% of country's GDP
 - Net purchases of foreign currency to be at least 2% of country's GDP over a year.
- India's net annual purchases of foreign exchange reached \$56 billion in 2017, equivalent to 2.2 percent of GDP — which breached the third criterion.
- India's goods trade surplus with the United States was \$23 billion in 2017, which breached the first criterion.
- The Report on Macroeconomic and Foreign Exchange Policies of Major Trading Partners of the United States concluded that no trading partner was found to have met the legislative standards for currency manipulation during the current reporting period.
- According to the Department, the findings and recommendations are intended to prevent unfair currency practices, support the growth of free and fair trade, and secure stronger and more balanced global growth.
- Achieving these goals require that all economies durably avoid macroeconomic, foreign exchange, and trade policies that facilitate unfair competitive advantage.

India and World Bank Sign a loan Agreement of \$48 Million for Meghalaya

- The Finance Ministry of India has signed a loan agreement of \$48 million for Meghalaya Community – Led Landscapes Management Project (MCLLMP).
- The Loan Agreement was signed by Mr. Sameer Kumar Khare, Joint Secretary (MI) in the Department of Economic Affairs on behalf of the Government of India and Mr. Hisham A Abdo Kahin, Acting Country Director, World Bank (India) on behalf of the World Bank.

Aim

- The project aims to strengthen community-led landscapes management in selected landscapes in Meghalaya by 2023. The Government of India is committed to the economic development of the North East and supports the measures adopted by the states to reduce risks posed because of climate change.

Highlights

- The Project consists of three components–
 - Strengthening Knowledge and Capacity for Natural Resource Management
 - Community-led landscape planning and implementation
 - Project Management and Governance.
- The Project will directly benefit at least one lakh rural people, half of whom are women.
- In addition, some 30,000 youth will gain from training, capacity-building and access to knowledge, innovation, and technology.
- The Project will support the state's unique community-based natural resource management (NRM) system, which relies primarily on its population (the Khasi, Garo, and the Jaintia tribes) to manage its forests and natural resources.
- The forests are designated as 'unclassified forests' in the state records and for the most part do not receive technical or financial support from state institutions. There are no water-related institutions or legal frameworks for water management in the state.
- The Government of Meghalaya recognizes the importance of supporting community-led interventions to restore and sustainably manage forests, land and water resources, as well as Meghalaya's rich biodiversity, on which 80 percent of the population depend.
- The project will prioritize around 400 villages located in 'very critical' and 'critical' (degraded) landscapes, over a period of five years, for their treatment.
- Extensive training would be conducted for communities and project management staff at the field level in order to expand the reach of the project.
- Small grants will be given to kick-start innovation around natural resource management.
- A special emphasis will be on creating climate resilient livelihood opportunities for communities, particularly youth and women.

Benefits of the project

- It will help manage these depleting resources, by strengthening communities and traditional institutions. The Restoration of degraded and highly degraded landscapes under the project will increase water for local communities and improve soil productivity which will in turn increase incomes and reduce poverty.

GITC (Global IT Challenge for Youth with Disabilities) 2018 to be Held in New Delhi

- The Global IT Challenge for Youth with Disabilities (GITC), 2018 will be held in New Delhi during 8th to 11th November, 2018.
- A MoU in this regard was signed between Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and Rehabilitation International Korea.
- As per MoU, both the parties have agreed to cooperate in making all arrangements for the successful events in providing all necessary financial, logistics, manpower and other facilities.

Highlights

- This event will have around 300 participants including 120 Youth with disabilities from 24 Asia Pacific countries.
- India is hosting the event along with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Korea, and its organising partners are Rehabilitation International, Korea, and the LG Group.
- The event will also have a seminar in which countries will present their work and achievements in ensuring accessibility to persons with disabilities in the IT sector
- GITC is an annual event and has been held in Asia-Pacific region countries such as Korea, China, Thailand and Vietnam in the past.
- This GITC competition is amongst four categories of disabilities namely, Physical, Visual, Hearing and Intellectual.
- It is a testing ground for individual as well as group competencies in the field of IT.
- Awards will be given to the most successful candidates from different categories of event.
- This competition is expected to enrich further the IT skills of Youth with Disabilities further and help them emerge as future leaders.
- DEPwD will also involve major stakeholders in this event. These include the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and Ministry of Human Resource Development etc.

Environment Ministry Releases Draft of National Clean Air Programme

- The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has released the details of the NCAP (national Clean Air Programme).
- The draft proposes multiple strategies to reduce air pollution.

Aim

- It aims to tackle increasing air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner.
- The basic objective of NCAP is to meet prescribed annual average ambient air quality standards at all locations in the country in a stipulated time frame. It does not mention of any specific target and time frame.
- Under NCAP, the MoEFCC plans to take host of measures to bring down air pollution.
- It aims to have efficient data dissemination and public outreach mechanism for timely measures for prevention and mitigation of air pollution.
- Augment and evolve effective and proficient ambient air quality monitoring network across country to ensure comprehensive and reliable database.
- To have feasible management plan for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution.

Key Facts

- The Union Environment minister Harsh Vardhan said that under this plan, the ministry hopes to bring down air pollution in around 100 non-attainment cities by 50 percent in the next five years.
- Non-attainment cities are those considered to have air quality worse than the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.
- There is an absence of absolute pollution reduction targets of 35 percent in three years and 50 percent in five years which is a matter of concern.
- The NCAP has proposed a budget and time-bound targets for its components.
- Specific targets would be introduced after accessing how many targets can be met practically.
- Under this proposed plan, the MoEFCC will augment air quality monitoring network, identification of alternative technology for real-time monitoring, set up of 10 city super network, indoor air pollution monitoring and management and air pollution health impact studies.
- Other measures include air quality forecasting system, issuance of notification on dust management, three-tier mechanism for review, assessment and inspection for implementation and national emission inventory.
- NCAP has outsourced all the responsibilities to states by only focusing on 100 cities, and has ignored sectors like industry and coal thermal power plants, which are regulated by the central government.

- For the NCAP to be effective, it has to take a regional approach and emissions from industry and power sectors have high impact at the regional-level and not at the city-level.

India Wins 6 Elections to UNECOSOC Bodies

- India has won six elections to United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) bodies, five of them were won unanimously.
- In the polls held, India won places on the executive boards of four UN bodies, three commissions and a committee.

India's election to the NGO Committee

- India faced an election within the Asia-Pacific group only for the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) Committee.
- India polled the highest number of votes, receiving 46 votes, followed by Pakistan with 43, while China received 39.
- The NGO committee is considered influential because it scrutinises the NGOs applying for consultative status with ECOSOC and can recommend or block them.
- After the Asia-Pacific vote, India was elected by acclamation in all the six elections by the entire ECOSOC, which comprises all the 193 members of the UN.
- India will serve a four-year term on the panel starting January 2019.

India's election to the Executive Boards

- India also won elections to the Executive Boards of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS).
- India will serve three-year term from January 2019 on those executive boards.
- India was also elected separately on the Executive board of UN-Women for a three-year term starting from January 2019.
- UN-Women works for the Empowerment of Women and Gender Equality.

India's election to the Commissions

- India was elected on UN Commission on Population and Development and it will have term till September 2021.

- The UN Commission on Population and Development assists UNECOSOC by arranging for studies and advising it on population issues and trends, integrating population and development strategies and population and related development policies and programmes.
- India was also elected on the UN Commission for Social Development and shall have four-year term starting immediately.
- The UN Commission for Social Development advises UNECOSOC on social policies of general character and in particular on all matters in social field not covered by specialised inter-governmental agencies.
- India was also elected UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and will serve three-year term starting January 2019.
- The UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice acts as principal policymaking body of UN in field of crime prevention and criminal justice. It aims to improve international action to combat national and transnational crime and efficiency and fairness of criminal justice administration systems.

UNECOSOC

- The United Nations Economic and Social Council is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations.
- It was formed in 1945 and has its headquarters in New York.
- It responsible for coordinating the economic, social, and related work of 15 UN specialized agencies, their functional commissions and five regional commissions.
- The ECOSOC has 54 members. It holds one four-week session each year in July
- It also holds an annual meeting in April with finance ministers heading key committees of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- ECOSOC serves as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues and formulating policy recommendations addressed to member states and the United Nations system. India is one of the members of the UNECOSOC.

Communications Ministry Launches DARPAN-PLI App

- The Union Ministry of Communications has launched DARPAN-PLI application for seamless collection of premium for Postal Life Insurance (PLI) and Rural Postal Life Insurance (RPLI) policies.
- The DARPAN (DIGITAL ADVANCEMENT OF RURAL POST OFFICE FOR A NEW INDIA) project was launched by the Department of Posts.
- This app launched under the DARPAN project, will help in collection of premium of these two policies at branch post offices anywhere in India, with online updation of the policies.

DARPAN Project

- The acronym DARPAN stands for "DIGITAL ADVANCEMENT OF RURAL POST OFFICE FOR A NEW INDIA".

- The project was launched by the Department of Posts.
- It was launched to achieve total digitisation of postal operations in the country, under IT Modernisation Plan, Department of Posts (DoP).
- It aims to connect all 1.29 lakh Rural Branch Post Offices in the country, to enable them to do online Postal and Financial Transactions.
- Under it, hand held devices with SIM connectivity and solar power backup are installed in all Branch Post Offices across the country to ensure improvement in quality of Postal services being offered in remote rural areas.

Key Facts and benefits

- With launch of this app, indexing of maturity claims of PLI and RPLI policies can be done at Branch Post Office itself, upon which insurant will immediately be provided with request number for further references.
- This will help in providing better after-sales service to customers of PLI and RPLI, particularly those living in rural areas of country.
- The project seeks to increase rural reach of Department of Posts (DoP) and enable BOs to increase traffic of all financial remittances, savings accounts, RPLI policy and cash certificates.
- It also will improve mail operations processes by allowing for automated booking and delivery of account.
- This project will help to improve quality of service, add value to services and achieve financial inclusion of un-banked rural population.
- Customers in these areas can now avail the facility of online Core Banking, booking of Registered and Speed Post articles, booking of Money Orders, deposit of Postal Life Insurance and Rural Postal Life Insurance premium through these hand-held devices.

SBI India's Most Trusted bank, ICICI Tops in Private Sector

- According to the TRA Brand Trust Report 2018 which was released on 18th April 2018, the State Bank of India was the most trusted bank (both public and private sector) in India.
- ICICI topped the list among the private banks.

Highlights

- According to the report, this year the State Bank of India has topped the chart of BFSI (Banking and Financial Services Institutions) super category despite seeing a dip in its overall brand trust index rankings from 13th (in 2017) to 21st (this year).
- ICICI bank rose 9 ranks to become the topmost bank as far as the private banks are considered.

- In the overall ranking comparing brands, ICICI Bank ranked 38th in 2018.
- The survey was carried out during November–January and it did not take into account the recent reports of irregularities involving the ICICI bank.
- It was observed that 51 brands from the BFSI sector got listed amongst the 1000 most trusted brands in India in 2018 as compared to 23 brands listed last year.
- The 19 new brands entering the list show that the general trust in the BFSI sector is rising.
- The public sector bank PNB (Punjab National Bank) which in February 2018 witnessed a multi-crore fraud, was ranked 6th among the PSBs and 297th in the overall rankings. Since the survey was carried out during November–January and it did not take into account people's opinions after the scam. The fraud might affect next year rankings for the PNB.

Govt. forms Defence Planning Committee (DPC)

- A Defence Planning Committee (DPC) has been formed by the Union Government to formulate military, security strategy, to draft capability development plans and to supervise foreign deals.
- The Committee will be under the Chairmanship of the National Security Advisor, Mr. Ajit Doval.
- The Modi government has revamped the existing defence planning system by establishing a Defence Planning Committee (DPC).

Background

- Considering the complex security environment and volume of expenditure on national defence, it was imperative to have strong defence planning mechanism. The present system was found insufficient to provide rigour necessary for planning process.
- So it was mandated to create an institutional mechanism which can undertake comprehensive and integrated planning of higher defence matters.

Key Facts

- The DPC will be a permanent body that will prepare military doctrines defining Indian military objectives for the future.
- It will drive the country's military and security strategy, draft capability development plans as well as guide and accelerate defence equipment acquisitions.
- The new measure is likely to have a far reaching consequence on the way defence planning is undertaken and on defence preparedness.

Composition of the Committee

- The Committee will be chaired by NSA Ajit Doval and will include Chairman Chiefs of the Staff Committee (COSC), three service chiefs, the Defence Secretary, Secretary Expenditure (in the Finance Ministry) and Foreign Secretaries in the team.
- It will be a permanent body and it will prepare draft national security strategy besides undertaking strategic defence review and formulating international defence engagement strategy.
- **The Committee will operate through four sub-committees on-**
 - Policy and Strategy
 - Defence Diplomacy
 - Plans and Capability Development
 - Defence Manufacturing Ecosystem
- The membership and the terms of reference of the sub-committees will be finalized separately.
- Foreign Secretary and Expenditure Secretary being member of DPC will help to overcome problems of coordination between various ministries on matters of national security.

Functions of the DPC

- The task of the committee is to prepare draft reports on “national security strategy, international defence engagement strategy, roadmap to build (a) defence manufacturing ecosystem, strategy to boost defence exports, and priority capability development plans.
- The committee will report to Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.
- It is expected to meet for the first time on April 21 after Doval returns from Germany.
- To analyse and evaluate all relevant inputs relating to defence planning.
- It will identify means and ways across ministries, obtain Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approval for capability development plan and provide guidance for budgetary support.

Govt. Launches Study in India Programme to Attract Foreign Students

- The “Study in India” programme has been approved by the Union Ministry of Human Resources Development (HRD) in collaboration with Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).
- This programme aims to attract foreign students to pursue higher education in India.

Aim

- The “Study in India” programme aims to boost India’s share of the international students and subsequently improve global reputation and rankings of Indian educational institutions.
- Its basic objective is to encourage more and more foreign students to choose India as a destination to pursue their higher education.

- It aims to double India's market share of global education exports from less than 1% to 2%. It is likely to improve the global ranking of Indian educational institutes.

Key Facts

- The 'Study in India' programme is similar to the initiative launched by Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and Canada.
- It is aimed at attracting foreign students in 160 public and private universities which will offer 15,000 seats to them in the academic year 2018–19. About 55 per cent of these seats will offer fee waivers to students from abroad.
- Currently, India is home to about 45,000 international students, which accounts for just 1 per cent of the global student mobility.
- With 'Study in India', the government hopes the country will start attracting 1.5 lakh to 2 lakh international students by the year 2022.
- The programme will target students from 30 countries, primarily in Asia and Africa, including Nepal, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Thailand, Malaysia, Egypt, Kuwait, Iran, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Rwanda.
- The government, at present, permits a provision of 10 per cent to 15 per cent supernumerary seats for foreign students in higher education.
- To attract talented foreign students, the government will offer complete fee waiver to top 25 per cent meritorious applicants, 50 per cent fee waiver to the next 25 per cent applicants and 25 per cent waiver to the next 25 per cent foreign students.
- The institutes concerned will bear expenditure on fee waiver based on cross-subsidisation or through its existing funding.
- The seats for foreign students will not affect number of seats which are meant for Indian students in any educational institute.
- External affairs minister Sushma Swaraj has launched a portal to help prospective students get information about the institutions and also register and apply to the programmes of their choice through it.

Commonwealth Innovation Index 2018

- Commonwealth Innovation Index 2018 was launched on the sidelines of the ongoing Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) as part of a new Commonwealth Innovation Hub.
- As per the index, India fetched 10th position and the index was topped by UK.

Details about the Commonwealth Innovation Index

- The Commonwealth Innovation Index has been created in partnership with the United Nations World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and its annual Global Innovation Index (GII).
- It will act as a tool through which member states, organisations and citizens will benchmark themselves against 53 countries of the Commonwealth.
- The index is a part of the Commonwealth Innovation Hub that offers a dedicated online space for Commonwealth countries to showcase what they have to offer and share with other members.
- The Global Innovation Fund (GIF) will work as the delivery partner to host a new Commonwealth Innovation Fund (CIF).
- The GIF will manage the fund and its investments, which will be targeted at innovative projects across Commonwealth countries.
- CIF will engage with member-countries to gain financial and other support for the fund and India is expected to be among the key countries to collaborate.
- The target size of the fund is expected to be 25 million pounds.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)

- It is a biennial summit meeting of the heads of the government from all the commonwealth nations.
- Every two years the meeting is held in a different member state and is chaired by that particular nation's PM or President who becomes the Commonwealth Chair-in-Office until the next meeting.
- The first CHOGM was held in 1971.

Ujjwala Diwas to be observed on 20th April 2018 in Telangana

- The District Nodal Officer of the IOC (Indian Oil Corporation), Rakesh Tikku informed that Ujjwala Diwas would be celebrated in Telangana under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY).
- Under this scheme, the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) would distribute 100 free gas connections to eligible women hailing from BPL and SC/ST families.
- As part of Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, the gas connections would be provided to the poor women under PMUY which is a flagship programme of the government of India to provide clean cooking fuel to BPL women.

Aim

- The PMUY aims to empower women and improve their health by easing out the burden of cooking on wood and 'Chulha'. The village Sanasar has also been identified to be made smoke free by May 5, 2018.

Background

- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) was launched in the state of Telangana on the birth anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar by the Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas and Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Dharmendra Pradhan.
- LPG connections were distributed to the BPL Women beneficiaries. The PMUY scheme has received an overwhelming response which has led the Government to revise the initial target of releasing 5 crore connections to 8 crore by the year 2020.

Key Facts

- The initial target of releasing LPG connection has been increased to 8 crore by the year 2020. To achieve this enhanced target, additional categories have been included under extended Ujjwala scheme viz. SC, ST, Most BC, Antyodaya Anna Yojana etc.
- The government is soon going to launch second phase of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) to cover additional households in the state.
- The expanded phase of PMUY will cover the households belonging to scheduled categories, beneficiaries of PMAY- Gramin, Antyodaya Anna Yojana, forest dwellers etc.
- PMUY has been a revolutionary initiative that has transformed the lives of more than 3.57 crore households all across the country.
- The initiative is in line with Government's aim to eradicate energy poverty, thereby promoting economic empowerment.
- Dharmendra Pradhan mentioned that the main mantra of PMUY is "Mahilaon KO Mila Samman, Swachh Indhan Behtar Jeevan".
- He further said that in order to educate the BPL families, Government is organizing 'Gram Swaraj Abhiyaan' from 14th April - 5th May across the country showcasing 7 schemes of the central government.
- On 20th April 2018, 'Ujjwala Diwas' will be celebrated by way of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Panchayats at 15000 locations in which large number of PMUY LPG connections will be distributed.
- LPG Panchayats will focus on the key themes of Health, Economic cost, Safety, Environment and Empowerment.

1st meeting of National Council under POSHAN Abhiyan

- The first meeting of National Council on India's Nutrition Challenges under POSHAN Abhiyaan was held in New Delhi.
- The meeting was chaired by Dr. Rajiv Kumar, Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog.

National Council

- The Council has been set up under POSHAN Abhiyaan which acts as an apex body to formulate overall policies, guide and monitor all nutrition based schemes.
 - The mandate of the Council is:
 - To provide policy directions to address India's Nutrition Challenges through coordinated inter-sectoral action.
 - To coordinate and review convergence among ministries.
 - To review programmes for nutrition on a quarterly basis.
- The Council will submit its report to the Prime Minister every six months.

Objectives of the POSHAN Abhiyaan

- The POSHAN Abhiyaan aims to target reduction in the level of under-nutrition and other related problems by ensuring convergence of various nutrition-related schemes. Its basic objective is to monitor and review the implementation of all such schemes. To implement that, the Abhiyaan seeks to utilize existing structural arrangements of line Ministries wherever available.

Highlights of the meeting

- Some important decisions were taken in the meeting which includes–
- 235 additional districts have been confirmed as part of Phase II of POSHAN Abhiyaan in financial year 2018–19.
- **These districts have been selected on the basis of the following criteria–**
 - The level of stunting
 - Ensuring that all LWE and aspirational districts are included.
 - Wherever a gap of 1 district was left to achieve saturation in the states/UTs.
- 315 districts were already covered under phase-I of POSHAN Abhiyaan. The balance of 167 districts out of 718 districts will be covered in Phase III of the Abhiyaan.
- Some states have highlighted problems in procurement of tablets for Anganwadi supervisors. The issue was discussed at the meeting and it was decided that smartphones may be procured for Anganwadi supervisors instead of Tablets.
- The Vice Chairman of the Niti Aayog, Dr. Rajiv Kumar stressed on the need for ground level work and participation from all sectors, for converting the mission into Jan Andolan and achieving the goals.
- It was also mentioned in the meeting that Home-based Care for Young Child (HBYC) would be a crucial component of POSHAN Abhiyaan.
- In HBYC, ASHAs supported by Anganwadi workers (AWW) will visit the homes of children aged between 3 to 15 months and sensitive mothers on energy density and diet of child.
- The pilot project will be conducted in 10 districts for conditional cash transfer (CCT) through direct benefit transfer.
- States/UTs would continue their existing system of providing supplementary nutrition under Anganwadi services.

- To encourage Anganwadi workers to use mobile phones for real-time monitoring (ICT-RTM), incentive funds shall be provided for each Anganwadi worker per month. It will be linked to the achievements of certain targets.
- Centralized call centre will be established for monitoring, grievance redressal, and interventions.
- E-learning module has also been created for Anganwadi workers. Comprehensive Guidelines and Manuals are now available at State Level for all Abhiyaan Components.
- The first lot of 40 Swasth Bharat Preraks would be dispatched by the end of the month and would be available at District level to assist the staff in the smooth roll-out of the Abhiyaan.
- Under the POSHAN Abhiyaan, Swasth Bharat Preraks will be deployed one in each District. These Preraks would coordinate with District officials and enable fast and efficient execution of the Abhiyaan across the country.
- Swasth Bharat Preraks would function as a catalyst for fast-tracking the implementation of the Abhiyaan.
- It is expected that by July 2018, 315 Swasth Bharat Preraks would be deployed in 315 districts of Phase I of the POSHAN

21st April 2018 to be Celebrated as World Creativity and Innovation Day (WCID)

- On April 21, 2018, the first official World Creativity and Innovation Day (#WCID) will be celebrated. It aims to encourage creative multidisciplinary thinking to help us achieve the sustainable future that we want.
- April 21, the day before Earth Day, April 22, was chosen as World Creativity and Innovation Day to emphasize the importance of using new thinking to create a decent life for all on a sustainable planet.

Background

- On April 27, 2017, the United Nations resolved to include World Creativity and Innovation Day, April 21 as a Day of Observance to encourage people to use creativity in problem-solving for all issues related to achieving the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals. 2018 marks the first year the UN will observe WCID.

Key Facts

- During World Creativity and Innovation Day, April 21 (WCID) and Week April 15 – 21 (WCIW) individuals, families, teams, leaders, nations, organizations, students, and communities are acknowledged, informed, inspired and encouraged to use their creativity – to be open to and generate new ideas, to be

open to and make new decisions and to be open to and take new actions – that make the world a better place and to make their place in the world better too.

- The World Creativity and Innovation Day (WCID) was included in 2017 by the United Nations as a Day of Observance.
- This was done to encourage people to use creativity in problem-solving to approach solving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.
- WCID brings opportunity and encouragement
 - To find new solutions
 - To open new pathways to the future
 - To view the past and present differently
 - To connect with new people
 - To tell new stories
 - To understand how to access your creative abilities to generate new ideas, take new actions and achieve new outcomes.
 - To make plans to start something new.
- It connects people all over the world to express their passions and express their gifts to make the world a better place and to make their place in the world better too.
- It help to open the door for many new conversations, connections, collaborations and community.

Uniform Road Tax Structure for Vehicles Across India: GoM

- The Group of Ministers (GoM) constituted by the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has recommended a One Nation One Tax Policy to ensure a seamless movement of commercial vehicles across the country.
It was a two day meeting which was held in Guwahati, Assam.
- The GoM is headed by Rajasthan transport minister Yoonus Khan.
- The meeting was attended by transport ministers from Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Goa, Kerala, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Meghalaya and Jharkhand.
- If accepted, the recommendations will allow the transfer of vehicles from one state to another without levying road tax.

The recommendations

- India should have a uniform structure of road tax for vehicles across states.
- A uniform tax structure will put a check on people registering their vehicles in low tax states and running them in other states.
- It will also bring necessary relief to genuine cases requiring transfer of vehicles.

- The panel has proposed liberalisation of permit system for electric vehicles so as to promote alternative fuel for vehicles.
- The panel has also recommended a national bus and taxi permit on the lines of such a permit for goods transport.
- Centre has the powers to decide principles on which motor vehicles tax can be levied. The uniform tax should be based on invoice price of vehicles.
- The GoM has recommended three tax slabs, 8 percent tax on vehicles below 10 lakhs, 10 percent for vehicles costing between 10 –20 lakh, and 12 percent for vehicles above 20 lakh.
- Diesel vehicles may have to pay 2 percent extra taxes, while electric vehicles will be given a two percent discount.
- The annual growth rate in the public transport of the country is only 2% whereas in the private transport it is around 20%.
- Therefore the GoM has recommended to give the much needed fillip to public transport and help reduce road congestion and its attendant problems.
- A committee of five secretaries from the states of Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Rajasthan has been asked to submit a report within 15 days to build further consensus on other charges and fee which vary from state to state.

Malaria Summit Held in London

- Malaria Summit was held in London alongside the 25th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).
- The summit was conducted to make game-changing commitments towards beating malaria.
- It was organized by the non-profit organization 'Malaria No More' in collaboration with 'Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation'.
- The summit is supported by the British Prime Minister Theresa May.
- High-level political commitment to beat malaria were made by the heads of government and Ministers from 19 Commonwealth countries.

Highlights

- The summit coincided with Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London.
- CHOGM is a biennial convening of 53 Commonwealth leaders. These countries are disproportionately affected by malaria.
- The summit aimed to highlight the stalled progress in fighting the disease.
- The meeting was attended by a range of heads of state as well as the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York and Bill Gates.
- A total of £2.9bn was pledged to fight the disease which included £1.45bn from countries affected by malaria, £700m from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and £160m from the UK government. Commonwealth leaders also promised to halve the impact of malaria within five years, preventing 350m cases of the disease and saving 650,000 lives.

- In the summit, the malaria-risk countries expressed their commitment to beat the disease worldwide.
- The summit expected the world leaders to renew their financial and political commitments to continue the fight against malaria, which is showing signs of fighting back. Malaria cases rose to 216 million globally in 2016, five million more than a year ago.
- India did not attend the Malaria Summit. There was no Indian representative to participate in the Summit.
- India is expected to share its strategy to eliminate malaria by 2030.
- India has the third largest malaria cases in the world after countries like Congo and Nigeria

Specific commitments feature at the summit were–

- High level political commitment towards malaria elimination
- The significant increase in investment from malaria-endemic countries to leverage and complement donor funding
- New innovative tools to overcome the growing threat of resistance.
- Improved methods to track the disease to enable more effective and efficient intervention and to prevent resurgence.

Civil Services Day Event Inaugurated by Vice President

- The Vice President of India inaugurated the two-day Civil Services Day event in New Delhi.
- It was the 12th Civil Services Day which was inaugurated on 20th April 2018 and the Vice President of India Mr Venkaiah Naidu was the Chief Guest of the event.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will present awards for excellence in public administration on a concluding day on April 21.

Background

- April 21, is commemorated as the Civil Services Day in India.
- The Government of India observes this day every year as one dedicated to the civil servants since it was on this day in 1947 when Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, independent India's first home minister, had addressed the soon-to-be independent country's first batch of civil servants at Metcalf House in Delhi.
- In his speech, Sardar Patel had referred to the bureaucrats as the "steel frame of India".
- April 21 is thus remembered as the day when the civil servants dedicate themselves to the cause of the country's people and renew their commitment to people's service and excellence in work. The day is being observed regularly since 2006.

Keys facts

- Vice President also inaugurated an exhibition put up by Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances on identified priority programmes and innovations.
- A book was also released by him titled “Emulating Excellence– Takeaways for Replication”.
- The book contains 9 chapters on best practices for priority programmes in which PM Awards were given on CSD, 2017 and are being given on CSD, 2018.
- A film on Journey to PM–Awards was also screened during the function.
- In this film complete selection process of PM awards including changes made in the process during 2016, 2017 and 2018 have been showcased.
- The Civil Services day is celebrated for the civil servants to rededicate themselves to the cause of citizen and renew their commitments to public service and excellence in work.
- The PM awards given during the event are for the effective implementation of identified priority programmes and innovation and are given to districts or implementing units and other central or state organisations.
- Four priority programmes have been chosen for the awards.
 - Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana
 - Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban & Rural.
 - Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana
 - Promoting Digital Payments
- In addition to these awards, there are awards for innovation for central and state organisations.
- Eleven awards for the four identified priority programmes will be given this year while two awards shall be presented to organisations of central or state governments or districts for innovations.
- During the awards event, the Prime Minister will release two books --
- “New Pathways”– comprising success stories on the implementation of identified priority programmes and innovations
- “Aspirational Districts: Unlocking Potentials”, on evolving strategies for transforming Aspirational Districts.

Highlights of Mr Naidu’s speech

- Mr Venkaiah Naidu delivered an inaugural address at the two-day event.
- He mentioned that a clean, competent, people-friendly, proactive administrative leadership is the need of the hour.
- He further said that ‘Swarajya’ has to be meaningful for each Indian and, for this ‘Surajya’ is inevitable.
- There is a need for honest introspection into the effectiveness and efficiency of our administrative structures and processes.
- There is a dire need to collectively transform India into a nation to be proud of.
- The Vice President called on officers of Civil Services to reorient their approach to look upon themselves as catalysts of change, as facilitators of change, as inspirational leaders for an aspirational India.

VP Venkaiah Naidu Launches Atal Amrit Abhiyaan in Assam

- The Vice President of India, Mr Venkaiah Naidu has recently launched the Atal Amrit Abhiyaan in Assam.
- It is a cashless scheme which will cover 92% of the state's population with annual income below Rs 5 lakh.
- It is an ambitious health assurance scheme which seeks to provide access to quality medical care to 3.2 crore people of Assam.

Need for the scheme

- There is a dire need to create health coverage schemes that would provide widest coverage to the young, aged and infirm and to those suffering from both critical acute and chronic ailments.
- The modern day lifestyle is such that it is leading to various non-communicable diseases. According to WHO survey half of the people of the world cannot obtain quality health care facilities and 7 per cent of the people of the country run out of money because of emergency health situations.
- Therefore some efficient efforts are required in this direction to arrest the growing incidence of such disease which is affecting even the young.
- There has to be concerted efforts from all stakeholders in healthcare to raise awareness among the people on the dangers of leading sedentary lifestyles, eating junk food, harmful use of alcohol and tobacco.

Key Facts

- Atal-Amrit Abhiyaan is a comprehensive coverage for six commonly prevalent and high cost diseases involving 438 procedures under which every individual of every eligible family per annum will be entitled to financial benefits of Rs 2 lakh.
- Launching Atal-Amrit Abhiyaan for the people belonging to BPL (Below Poverty Line) and APL (Above Poverty Line) is a noble endeavour for making health care facilities within the reach of everybody.
- The people covered by the scheme will get quality tertiary medical care for six specialties requiring hospitalization for surgeries and therapies.
- They will be getting the medical care through an empanelled network of hospitals—public and private hospitals within and outside the State.
- Around 438 procedures with the six specialties have been approved for treatment in empanelled network hospitals.

- The six disease groups identified for financial support are: Cancer, heart disease, kidney disease, neurological disorder, neonatal diseases and burns.
- The enrolment is free for those from BPL families while members from APL families will have to pay a nominal sum of Rs.100 for enrolment and renewal.
- Mr. Maidu mentioned that though diseases like polio, tetanus and others have been controlled, non-communicable diseases are still prevalent. This increase in the number of non-communicable diseases is due to the changing lifestyle and people's increased indulgence in sedentary lifestyle.
- He, therefore, urged upon the State Government to make physical exercise and yoga as a mandatory component in school curriculum.
- He urged the Assam government to open medical colleges and healthcare centres in rural areas since there is a shortage of medical manpower and medical facilities.
- The state government has earmarked Rs 400 crore for the scheme in the financial year 2018-19.

Commonwealth Countries Adopt Commonwealth Cyber Declaration

- At the conclusion of the CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting) in London, the Commonwealth countries have adopted the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration.
- Commonwealth countries have agreed to work closely together to strengthen their cybersecurity frameworks and response mechanisms by 2020.
- The declaration is considered as world's largest inter-governmental commitment on cybersecurity cooperation.

Aim

- The Declaration aims to tackle criminal groups and hostile state actors who pose a global threat to security. The declaration sets out a first-time common vision for the Commonwealth to ensure that the internet remains open and free.

Key Facts

- 53 commonwealth countries have agreed to work closely to evaluate and strengthen their cyber security frameworks and response mechanisms.
- With the internet increasingly central to global commerce, the Declaration sets out a shared vision of cyberspace in areas such as economic and social development, and online rights.
- The Prime Minister of UK has announced that the UK government will give up to £15 million to the Commonwealth countries to help them strengthen their cyber-security capabilities and help tackle cyber-criminal groups.

- The new funding will support Commonwealth partners as they prevent and respond to cyber-security risks affecting governments, businesses and citizens.
- Before the next CHOGM in 2020, £5.5 million of this money will be used to enable low and middle income Commonwealth members to carry out national cyber-security capacity reviews.
- It will underpin projects across the Commonwealth to provide technical assistance, training and advice to address a wide range of cyber-security and cyber-crime threats.
- With transnational cybercrime becoming an increasing challenge for the world, the Commonwealth countries are taking a lead role to combat cybercrime and promote good cyber security.
- By promoting digital inclusion and a safer cyberspace, the declaration sets out practical steps that will enable the countries to advance their economic and social development.
- The Commonwealth countries commit to support businesses to implement appropriate measure to protect themselves and their customers from cyber security threats.

22nd April – Earth Day

- Earth Day is an annual event celebrated worldwide on April 22. It was first celebrated in the year 1970 and is now celebrated annually on global basis in more than 193 countries.
- Earth Day is celebrated in order to increase the awareness among people about the environmental safety as well as to demonstrate the environmental protection measures.
- The Earth and its ecosystems are our home. In order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social, and environmental needs of present and future generations, it is necessary to promote harmony with nature and the Earth.

Background

- World Earth Day observance was started to celebrate as an annual event to get national support. This would help in taking better take care of the environmental safety by solving its issues.
- In 1969, there was a peace activist of the San Francisco named John McConnell who actively involved in starting this event and proposed a day to get together for the environmental safety. I
- n 1969 at a UNESCO Conference in San Francisco, he proposed a day to honour the Earth and the concept of peace which was 21st March 1970.
- Later United States Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson chose this event to be celebrated on 22nd of April in 1970. Most of the earth day communities celebrate it for the whole week with the name Earth Week to focus on many environmental issues.

Key Facts

- Earth Day is significant as it's a day of political action and civic participation towards preserving the planet.

- People march, sign petitions, meet their elected officials, plant trees, and clean up their towns and roads.
- Earth Day Network is the organisation that leads Earth Day worldwide.
- Earth Day 2018 is the 48th edition of the event whereas Earth Day 2020 will be the 50th edition.
- The theme for Earth Day 2017 was 'Environmental and Climate Literacy'.

Earth Day 2018

- This year is the 48th Earth Day and 2020 marks the 50th anniversary of the first Earth Day.
- Earth Day 2018 theme is 'End Plastic Pollution'. It is dedicated to provide the information and inspiration needed to fundamentally change human attitude and behaviour about plastics.
- This was announced by the Earth Day Network to create support for a global effort to eliminate single-use plastics along with global regulation for the disposal of plastics.
- EDN will educate millions of people about the health and other risks associated with the use and disposal of plastics, including pollution of our oceans, water, and wildlife, and about the growing body of evidence that decomposing plastics are creating serious global problems.
- The exponential growth of plastic is threatening the environment. Plastic is not only poisoning and injuring marine life but also disrupting human hormones. The presence of plastics in the food leads to major life-threatening diseases.
- **This end plastic campaign includes four major components–**
 - Leading a grassroots movement to support the adoption of a global framework to regulate plastic pollution
 - Educating, mobilising and activating citizens across the globe to demand that governments and corporations control and clean up plastic pollution
 - Educating people worldwide to take personal responsibility for plastic pollution by choosing to reject, reduce, reuse and recycle plastics
 - Promoting local government regulatory and other efforts to tackle plastic pollution.

Birmingham Organising Committee of CWG Decides to Exclude Shooting from 2022 Games

- The Birmingham Organising Committee has decided to exclude shooting from the 2022 Commonwealth Games.
- Dropping shooting from 2022 Commonwealth Games will be a huge setback for India, especially for its young shooters.
- Shooting is an optional sport and the Birmingham organisers said that they don't have the facilities to host shooting events.
- If Durban (South Africa) was to host the 2022 CWG, shooting would have been there.

- Durban was to originally host the 2022 CWG but it later expressed its inability to host the Games due to financial problems. The Commonwealth Games Federation later awarded the 2022 CWG to Birmingham.

Other facts

- Shooting, though an optional sport at the CWG, has been played in every edition since Kingston 1966, except once in Edinburgh in 1970.
- In the recently held CWG 2018, India's shooting squad bagged as many as 16 medals, 7 of which were Gold.
- India won the highest number of medals in shooting in the Gold Coast Games 2018.
- National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) President Raninder Singh had expressed his grievance saying that India should boycott the 2022 CWG if shooting was not reinstated.
- He mentioned that he would write to the Union Sports Minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore and the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and will urge them to boycott the 2022 CWG if shooting is not re-included in the Games.
- It is left upon the discretion of the host country to decide if they want to include shooting in the roster.
- The organisers of Birmingham Games have decided against including shooting but India are strongly opposing the decision.

2022 Commonwealth Games

- The 2022 Commonwealth Games, officially known as the XXII Commonwealth Games or Birmingham 2022 is scheduled to be held in Birmingham, England.
- The Games are expected to take place between 27 July and 7 August 2022.
- Motto for CWG 2022 is "Heart of the UK, Soul of the Commonwealth"
- 73 commonwealth nations with approximately 5000 athletes would be participating in the event.
- It will be the third time that England would be hosting the CWG.

Integration of e-SANAD portal and NAD (National Academic Depository)

- The Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) has launched integration of e-SANAD portal and NAD – National Academic Depository in order to make education system in India more transparent.
- This integration was launched by the Union External Affairs Minister, Smt Sushma Swaraj.

What is e-SANAD?

- e-SANAD is a project being implemented by NIC (National Information Centre) in coordination with CBSE, state/UTs and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in a phased manner.
- It is aimed at online submission/verification of documents in order to extend contact less, cashless, faceless and paperless document attestation service.
- Using it any type of document viz personal, educational or commercial can be authenticated and apostilled. The document should be available in the digital repository for getting attestation/apostille through e-SANAD.
- Users need to register in the e-SANAD portal for accessing these services.
- This would be further extended to Indians residing abroad in a phased manner.
- e-SANAD is currently operational in five passport offices and in Attestation Section, CPV Division, Ministry of External Affairs.
- The e-Sanad, will start with CBSE depository (for years 2014 & onwards) and verification of the CBSE documents would be done online.

NAD (National Academic Depository)

- NAD is 24X7 online store house of all academic awards viz. diplomas certificates, degrees, mark-sheets etc. duly digitised and lodged by academic boards, institutions, eligibility assessment bodies.
- It ensures easy access to and retrieval of academic award and validates and guarantees its authenticity and safe storage.
- **NAD comprises of two interoperable digital depositories–**
 - NSDL Database Management Limited (NDML)
 - CDSL Ventures Limited (CVL)
- These digital depositories have ensured hardware, network facilities and software of prescribed quality for smooth and secured operationalisation of NAD.
- The UGC has signed a tripartite agreement with the NDML and CVL for operationalising NAD.
- NAD not only ensures easy access to and retrieval of an academic award but also validates and guarantees its authenticity and safe storage.

Govt. launches Central Project Monitoring Unit for e-Vidhan project at Parliament

- The Union Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs inaugurated the new office of Central Project Monitoring Unit for the e-Vidhan project of the Government.
- This was done as a part of Swachhata Pakhwada being observed by the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs from 16th to 30th April, 2018.
- It was launched by the Union Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs, Statistics and Programme Implementation, Shri Vijay Goel.

What is e-Vidhan project?

- e-Vidhan is a mission mode project to digitize and make the functioning of State Legislatures in India paperless.
- It is a part of the broader Digital India Programme of the Government and is likely to contribute to the cleanliness & environment by reducing the use of papers to a great extent.
- It will also make functioning of State Legislatures participative, responsive, transparent, productive and more accountable and efficient to public.
- It will digitize and make all the Parliament documents, including debates, speeches, committee reports and questions, on the internet.
- One of the major key component of the strategy devised for implementation is to create Project Monitoring Units both at Central as well as State levels.
- The nodal agency for e-Vidhan mission is the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs. It is taking all the necessary steps for rolling out the projects in all the states.
- The project e-Vidhan was started with an aim to make India's all government office paperless.
- This would save trees which in turn will ensure clean environment which is necessary for living healthy life.
- The initiative will also help India on a par with developed nations such as UK and the US, which have advanced digital archives online.

Significance of e-Vidhan

- **Go Green** – The project is in line with the 'Go Green' initiative of the Government which is the need of the hour. The environment-friendly initiative will make the process paperless and help in saving of trees.
- **Transparent functioning** – The project will make the functioning of Parliament and State Legislature participative, responsive, transparent.
- **Efficient** – The project will help in making the functioning more accountable to the public and the entire system more efficient.
- **Valuable resource** – The availability of government database online can be effectively used by researchers, historians, activists.

Cabinet Approves Ordinance for Death Penalty for Child Rapists

- The Union Cabinet has approved promulgation of Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance to provide death penalty for those convicted of raping girls below 12 years of age.

- The Ordinance amends the IPC (Indian Penal Code), Criminal Procedure Code, POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act and Indian Evidence Act.
- This was approved in a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by the PM Modi.
- The decision came a day after the Ministry of Women and Child Development told the Supreme Court that it was proposing the death penalty for those convicted of raping children.
- Death penalty has been provided for rapists of girls below 12 years of age.
- It has also been decided to put in place a number of measures for speedy investigation and trial of rape cases.
- The Ordinance was sent to the President for his approval and he has given his nod.
- The Cabinet move came in the backdrop of nationwide outrage over the rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl in Kathua in Jammu and Kashmir, and other instances in different parts of the country.

Salient features of the Ordinance

Criminal Law

- Minimum punishment in case of rape of women has been increased from an imprisonment of 7 years to 10 years which is extendable to even life imprisonment.
- In case of a rape of a girl below 16 years of age, the minimum punishment has been increased from 10 years to 20 years, extendable to life imprisonment.
- The punishment for gang rape of a girl under 16 years of age will be an imprisonment for the rest of the life of the convict.
- In case of a rape of a girl below 12 years of age – minimum 20 years imprisonment or imprisonment for the rest of the life or with death.
- In case of gang rape of a girl below 12 years of age – imprisonment for the rest of the life.

Speedy investigation and trial

- It provides for speedy investigation and trial, which must be completed in two months.
- It proposes 6 months' time limit for disposal of appeals in rape cases.
- It provides dedicated manpower for investigation of rape cases in time bound manner.

Restrictions on bail

- It has been prescribed that there will be no provision for anticipatory bail for a person accused of rape or gang rape of a girl under 16 years of age.
- The court has to give a notice of 15 days to Public Prosecutor and the representative of the victim before deciding bail applications in case of rape of a girl below 16 years of age.

Other measures

Strengthening the courts and prosecution

- New fast-track courts will be set up in consultations with the States/UTs and High Courts.

- Creation of new posts of public prosecutor and related infrastructure.
- Special forensic kits for rape cases for all police stations and hospitals.
- Setting up of special forensic labs in each State/UT exclusively for rape cases.
- Dedicated manpower will be provided for investigation of rape cases in a time bound manner.
- This new mission mode project will be launched within 3 months.

National Database

- The national database and the profiles of the offenders will be maintained by the NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau).
- This data will be regularly shared with the States/UTs for tracking, monitoring and investigation including police verification.

Assistance to victims

- The present scheme of One Stop Centre for the assistance of victims will be extended to all districts in the country.

CCEA Approves Restructured Centrally Sponsored Scheme for RGSA

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, gave its approval for restructured centrally sponsored scheme of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA).
- The restructured scheme will focus on training, building infrastructure, stepping up initiatives for e-governance under e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project (MMP) to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- It will be implemented during period from April 2018 to March 2022 with total proposed cost of the scheme is Rs. 7255 crore with the Central Share of INR 4500 crore and that of State Share of INR 2755.50 crore.

Background

- The Finance Minister, in his budget speech for 2016-17 had announced the launch of a new restructured scheme of RGSA, for developing governance capabilities of Panchayati raj institutions to deliver on the sustainable development goals. A committee under the chairmanship of the Vice Chairman-NITI Aayog was constituted to restructure the existing scheme of this Ministry as Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan.

Key Facts

- This scheme will extend to all States and UTs of the Country.
- It will also include institutions of rural local government in non-Part IX areas, where Panchayats do not exist.
- The scheme will have both Central Component – National Level activities including "National Plan of Technical Assistance", "Mission Mode project on e-Panchayat", "Incentivization of Panchayats" and State component – Capacity Building of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).
- The Central Component will be fully funded by the Government of India.
- However, Centre: State funding pattern for State Component will be 60:40 for all States, except North East and the Hill States where Centre: State funding pattern will be 90:10
- For all Union Territories (UTs) (with and without legislatures), the Central share will be 100 percent.
- The implementation and monitoring of the activities of the scheme will broadly be aligned for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The main emphasis will be on Panchayats identified under Mission Antyodaya and 115 Aspirational districts as identified by NITI Aayog.
- The Scheme will converge capacity building initiatives of other Ministries with the particular focus on those Ministries which will be impacted substantially by this Scheme.
- Sunset date for the Abhiyan would be 31st March 2030.
- The Central Government and the State Governments will take action for performing and completing the activities approved for their respective roles.
- The State Government will formulate their Annual Action Plans for seeking assistance from the Central Government as per their priorities and requirement.
- The scheme will be implemented in a demand driven mode.

Significance

- The restructured scheme will help more than 2.55 lakh Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to develop governance capabilities to deliver on SDGs through inclusive local governance with focus on optimum utilisation of available resources.
- It will strive to achieve key principles of SDGs, i.e. leaving no one behind, reaching farthest first and universal coverage, along with gender equality.
- It will give priority to subjects of national importance that affects the excluded groups the most, e.g. poverty, nutrition, education, primary health services, immunization, sanitation, water conservation, digital transactions etc.
- It is designed keeping in view programmatic convergence with Mission Antyodaya Gram Panchayats (GPs) and 115 Aspirational districts as identified by Niti Aayog.
- Strengthening of panchayats under it will help to promote equity and inclusiveness, along with Social Justice and economic development of the community.
- Increased use of e-governance by PRIs will help achieve improved service delivery and transparency.
- It will strengthen Gram Sabhas to function as effective institutions with social inclusion of citizens particularly vulnerable groups.
- The scheme will help to establish institutional structure for capacity building of PRIs at national, state and district level with adequate human resources and infrastructure.

- It will progressively strengthened PRIs through incentivisation on basis of nationally important criteria which will encourage competitive spirit among them.

23rd April – World Book & Copyright Day

- 23rd April is celebrated all over the world as the World Book Day. It is also known as the World Book and Copyright Day or the International Day of the Book.
- It is the most important event organized annually by the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in order to promote the reading, publishing and copyright among the public worldwide.
- Generally, it is celebrated by the authors, illustrators, books and to encourage reading among common public.
- It is the worldwide celebration of the books and readings and celebrated in more than 100 countries.

Background

- World Book Day is for school children of all ages, with the primary aim of encouraging children to explore book and the joy of reading.
- The idea of celebrating books at the end of April originally came from booksellers in Catalonia, Spain, in 1923.
- The writer Vicente Clavel Andres wanted to honour fellow author Miguel de Cervantes who died on this date. It is also coincidentally the anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare.
- The first ever World Book Day in the world took place on the 23 April 1995 in the United Kingdom.

World Book Day 2018

- This is the twentieth anniversary of World Book Day being recognised in the United Kingdom.
- The theme for World Book Day 2018 is "Share a Story".
- Adults, parents and older siblings are encouraged to participate by reading and sharing stories.
- The organizers will be encouraging the nation to 'Take 10' and recognise the positive impact that reading together for only 10 minutes a day can have on a child.
- In order to give parents and children ideas of what to read next, World Book Day have launched a nationwide poll to find the nation's favourite #storiestoshare.
- In the UK and Ireland, National Book Tokens are sent out so that kids can find a book of their very own. They can take their book token to a local bookseller and can use it to pick one of TEN (exclusive, new and completely free) books.

Significance of celebrating World Book Day

- World Book Day is used to celebrate to make the people to get much of the knowledge for their own benefit as well as the development and welfare of the Country.
- It encourages children for reading many of the Books by which they can generate lot positive attitude in them to develop and improve their society in a better way.
- It is used to make the kids know the National as well as International Conditions of the World.
- It helps them to get much of the knowledge from the experienced people who wrote the books.
- World Book Day is celebrated to provide the people to gather knowledge about many types of Books which makes them to get the specific knowledge about their requirements.
- People with a better knowledge have lots of abilities to manage the tasks properly.

4 Indians among TIME's 100 Most Influential People

- The TIME magazine has released the 100 Most Influential People List for 2018.
- The 2018 list features the names of four self-made Indians–
 - Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli
 - Deepika Padukone (Actress)
 - Bhavish Agarwal (Founder of Ola)
 - Satya Nadella (Microsoft CEO)

Other details

- Virat Kohli was only one of two sportspersons outside of the US to be included in the TIME's 100 most influential people list. The other being Swiss tennis legend Roger Federer.
- For the first time in history, a record number of 45 women and 45 people under the age of 40 have made it to the much-renowned list.
- **Some of the leaders who made it to the list are–**
 - Donald Trump (US President)
 - Kim Jong-un (North Korea Supreme Leader)
 - Emmanuel Macron (French President)
 - Xi Jinping (Chinese President)
 - Sheikh Hasina (Bangladesh's PM)
 - Shinzo Abe (Japanese PM)
- 14 year old English actress and model, Millie Bobby Brown has become the youngest person to be named as one of the world's 100 most influential people.

About TIME 100

- TIME 100 is an annual list of the 100 most influential people in the world who are in the best phase of their career at that particular time and are recognized for changing the world. It is compiled by the

American news magazine 'Time'. It was first published in the year 1999 as a result of a debate among American academics, politicians and journalists.

“Adi Shankaracharya: Hinduism’s Greatest Thinker” – Book released

- The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, received the first copy of the book “Adi Shankaracharya: Hinduism’s Greatest Thinker”, from the author Shri Pavan Varma, at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi.
- The book was released on 21st April 2018 to mark the birth anniversary of Adi Shankaracharya.

Key Facts

- The President said that the 21st century India is a synthesis of both the Upanishads and the Internet. Both are important for the Indian soul.
- Adi Shankaracharya instinctively understood this. Way back in the 8th Century, he combined pride in India’s earliest philosophical traditions with the realities of his age.
- The book is a meticulously researched and a comprehensive account of the life and philosophy of the child-saint Adi Shankaracharya.
- He was the first to give Hinduism a definite form.
- The book is highly readable and includes a select anthology of Shankaracharya’s seminal writings.
- The book also examines the startling endorsement that the contemporary science is giving to his ideas today.
- This book remind one of the remarkable philosophical underpinning of Hinduism making it one of the vibrant religions in the world.

About Adi Shankaracharya

- Adi Shankaracharya was an early 8th century Indian philosopher and theologian who consolidated the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta.
- He was the first to give Hinduism a definite form. He established four peethas – in the north, south, east and west which are not just a pilgrimage but a cultural exploration of the frontiers of the Indian civilization and of the diverse Indian society.
- He also explained the key difference between Hinduism and Buddhism, stating that Hinduism asserts "Atman while Buddhism asserts that there is "no Soul, no Self".

6th IONS (Indian Ocean Naval Symposium) – IONS 2018

- The 6th Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) has kicked off in Tehran with participation of 35 high-ranking military delegations from across the world.
- It is a two day event witnessing 35 high-ranking military delegations from across the world, including India, Turkey, and Australia.
- Iran will take over the presidency of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) for a two-year term.
- The previous rounds of the biennial event were held in India, the UAE, South Africa, Australia and Bangladesh.
- The IONS initiative aims to increase maritime cooperation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region.

Key facts

- The Chief of the Indian Naval Staff, Admiral Sunil Lanba is leading a four member Indian delegation for the event.
- His visit is aimed at consolidating bilateral naval relations between India and Iran and to explore new avenues for naval cooperation.
- Admiral Sunil Lanba will also hold bilateral discussions with the Commander IRI Navy, and other participating 'Chiefs of Navy/ Head of Maritime Agencies'.
- As the founder nation, India will also be conducting commemorative activities in November 2018 at Kochi, for celebrating the 10th anniversary of the IONS.
- The IONS was conceived by the Indian Navy in 2008.
- The forum seeks to enhance maritime cooperation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion on regionally relevant maritime issues that would lead to common understanding on the way ahead.
- **The previous editions held were–**
 - 2008 – inaugural edition held in New Delhi with Indian navy as the Chair for 2 years
 - 2010 – 2012 UAE
 - 2014 – 2016 Australia
 - 2016 – 2018 Bangladesh
 - Now 2018 – 2020 Iran

About IONS

- The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, commonly known as IONS, are a series of biennial meetings among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean region.
- It provides a forum to increase maritime security cooperation, providing a forum for discussion of regional maritime issues and promote friendly relationships among the member nations.
- The IONS was conceived by the Indian Navy in 2008.
- The inaugural edition of IONS was held in February 2008 at New Delhi, with Indian Navy as the Chair for two years.
- The IONS Charter of Business was agreed upon by the Conclave of Chiefs and brought into effect in February 2014.

Sunderban Reserve Forest to get Ramsar site status

- The Sunderban Reserve Forest is likely to be declared a Ramsar Site soon. The West Bengal government gave its approval to the State Forest Department to apply for recognition under the Ramsar Convention.
- Now, State Forest Department through Central Government will apply to Ramsar Convention Secretariat.

What is Ramsar convention?

- The Convention on Wetlands, called the Ramsar Convention, is an inter-governmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Adopted in 1971 in Ramsar, an Iranian city, the Convention came into force in 1975.
- Since then, almost 90% of UN member states have acceded to become "Contracting Parties".

Other facts

- Right now there is only one Ramsar site in West Bengal— East Kolkata Wetlands.
- Sunderbans was identified as UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987 for its exclusive biodiversity.
- Once it is conferred Ramsar site status, Sundarbans Reserve Forest will be largest protected wetland in the country.
- There are currently 26 sites in India recognised as Ramsar wetland sites of international importance.
- Sunderban Reserve Forest is spread across 4,260 sq. km. with over 2,000 sq. km. of mangrove forests and creeks making it ideal site of wetland.
- The status wetland of international importance under Ramsar Convention will help in conservation of Sunderban which is facing threat from climate change and rising sea level.

About Sunderbans

- Sundarbans is vast contiguous mangrove forest ecosystem in the coastal region of Bay of Bengal spread across India and Bangladesh.
- It covers approximately 10,000 square kilometres of area of which 60% is in Bangladesh and remaining in India.
- It comprise almost 43% of the mangrove cover in the country.
- It is located in delta region of Padma, Meghna and Brahmaputra river basins.
- It is the largest tidal halophytic mangrove forest in the world.
- It was recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987.

- Apart from being the world's largest tiger habitat, the mangrove forest in the Sunderbans is remarkable for the protection it provides to people from tidal surge generated by cyclonic depression in the Bay of Bengal.
- About one-third of the total area is used as protected area for the conservation of biological diversity.
- Sundarbans forests are known for its self- Royal Bengal Tiger and other numerous species of animals, including Chital Deer, Crocodile and Snakes.
- Threats such as climate change, sea level rise, widespread construction and clearing of mangrove forests for fisheries is posing a danger to the Sunderbans.
- Sunderbans is a contiguous ecosystem spread across India and Bangladesh and any adverse move will affect the entire ecosystem.

TCS becomes India's first \$100 billion IT company

- TCS (Tata Consultancy Services) has become the first Indian company to reach the \$100 billion market capitalization mark.
- The market value of the company stood at Rs 6.53 lakh crore.
- TCS shares gained as much as 4.6 per cent to hit a record high of 3,557.90 rupees.

Key fact

- The company reported a 4.4 percent rise in March quarter net profit and is guided towards a better show in fiscal 2019.
- The Tata group flagship contributes around 85 percent of the group's profit.
- It reported a revenue growth of 8.2 percent at Rs 32,075 crore for the three months to March.
- The company had its highest revenue growth in 14 quarters at 11.7 percent.
- With this, TCS joined the ranks of the world's 100 most valued organizations and now ranks 97th.
- TCS has also overtaken outsourcing and consultancy giant Accenture which has market cap of \$98.20 billion.
- TCS holds first position among most valuable international pure play technology services firms. INTL Business Machines Corp.
- IBM has market cap of \$133.48 billion, but it has both hardware and technology services operations.
- Currently there are 96 companies which have market cap of over \$100 billion.
- It also announced a 1:1 bonus of shares and a dividend of Rs 29 a share, taking the total payout to shareholders at Rs 50 for the year.
- The first Indian company to cross the \$100 billion mark was the telecoms-to-energy conglomerate, Reliance Industries Ltd. Mukesh Ambani led company did so in the year 2007.

AFSPA Removed from Meghalaya

- The Union Home Ministry has withdrawn the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) totally from Meghalaya as well as 8 out of 16 police stations in Arunachal Pradesh.
- This withdrawal will effect from 31st March 2018.
- Among the eight North Eastern states, AFSPA is now applicable only in Nagaland, Manipur (excluding Imphal), Assam and parts of Arunachal Pradesh.

What is AFSPA?

- AFSPA stands for the Armed Forces Special Powers Act which gives special rights and immunity to security forces in carrying out various operations in "disturbed" areas.
- It gives security personnel the power to search premises and arrest without warrant, to use force even to the extent of causing death.
- It also provides cover to forces from prosecution and legal suits without the Central government's sanction.

Key facts

- According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, till September 2017, 40 per cent of Meghalaya was under AFSPA.
- This included a 20 km stretch of the state's border with Assam which was later reduced to 10 km after a consultation with the state government in September 2017.
- Another review was held recently after which the decision to revoke AFSPA was taken.
- This decision has been taken due to significant improvement of the security situation in the state.
- AFSPA was totally withdrawn from all areas of Meghalaya from April 1.
- This decision has been taken due to the significant improvement of the security situation in the state in the last 4 years.
- The year 2017 recorded the lowest number of incidents of insurgency and casualties among civilians and security forces since 1997.
- Between 2014 and 2018, there has been a 63 percent decline in insurgency incidents in NE; 83% fall in civilian deaths; and 40 percent fall in security personnel killings.
- The Act has, however, been extended by another six months in three eastern districts of Arunachal Pradesh — Tirap, Longding and Changlang — which border Myanmar.
- These three districts have been under the AFSPA since January 2016.

29th Road Safety Week Being Observed

- The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways will observe the 29th road safety week from 23rd April 2018.

- The road safety week was inaugurated by the Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari in New Delhi.
- The theme for the road safety week for 2018 is “Sadak Suraksha – Jeevan Raksha”.
- **The accident prevention relies on 4Es –**
 - Education
 - Enforcement
 - Engineering
 - Emergency care

Highlights

- Motor vehicles’ population is increasing at a rate of 10% every year.
- Rising traffic on roads and resultant accidents were one of the leading causes of death, disability and hospitalization among people.
- Around 1.5 lakh people lose their lives in road accidents in the country every year, which causes economic hardships and emotional trauma for the families.
- Studies conducted by the Union ministry show that 78% of road accidents occur due to the fault of the drivers.
- The ministry has also proposed to provide a financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh and awards to NGOs, cooperative societies and other agencies for creating road safety awareness till March 31, 2020.
- The NGOs and cooperative agencies will have to submit the applications to the state transport commissioner.
- If the applicant is an NGO, it must be registered on DARPAN Portal of the Niti Aayog.
- The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has directed all the state governments as well as organizations and departments associated with road safety, to create awareness about the traffic rules during this Road safety week.
- The government is focusing majorly on schools and commercial drivers and efforts are being made to start driving training centres across the country.
- The training centres will not just teach drivers’ the basics of driving but will also teach them the rules of road safety.
- The United Nations organization has already decided to observe the Road Safety decade from 2011 to 2020.
- This campaign is an effort to realize the concept of road safety.

GI Tag for Telangana’s Adilabad Dokra, Warangal Dhurries

- Two more crafts form unique to the state of Telangana have been granted the GI (Geographical Indication) tag by the GI registry in Chennai.
- Adilabad Dokra, an ancient metal craft that is popular in the state’s tribal regions, and Warangal durries or rugs, which are woven in handloom clusters in Warangal and Pochampally among other areas, have now been declared unique to the region.

What is a GI Tag?

- GI tag is name or sign used on certain products which correspond to specific geographical location or origin.
- It is used for agricultural, natural and manufactured goods having special quality and established reputation.
- The registration of a GI is valid for 10 years after which it needs to be renewed.
- Violation of GI tags is punishable offence under law.
- GI is covered as element of intellectual property rights (IPRs) under Paris Convention for Protection of Industrial Property.
- GI is governed by WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) at the international level.
- In India, the GI Tag is governed by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection Act), 1999.
- This Act is administered by Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks, who is also Registrar of Geographical Indications.

Significance of the GI Tag

- The Technology Centre of CII has facilitated State Handicrafts Development Corporation towards the registrations of Adilabad Dokra and Warangal Durries as Geographical Indications.
- The centre has till now facilitated in registration of 24 products under GI, out of which nine are now registered from Telangana.
- The GI certification of these crafts will help the authentic producers to earn a premium on their products, thereby helping in improving their livelihood.
- GI tag can be used as a marketing tool to promote the products in India and abroad.
- GI Protection benefits both producers and consumers.
- The latter can have access to a genuine product, whereas the former can have opportunity to build brands. Apart from that, it will be protected against a loss of their business against individuals involved in counterfeit production.

Adilabad Dokra

- It is form of ancient bell metal craft practiced by Woj community native to the Adilabad district of Telangana.
- The Dhokra craftsmen belong to the Woj community, called Wojaris, and also called Otaris, in Telangana State.
- The uniqueness of Adilabad Dokra is that no two pieces are alike in shape as well as in size and hence replicas of the antiques are nearly impossible.
- The unique technique used is the cire perdue i.e. the lost wax casting technique. It is a technique in which duplicate metal sculpture is cast from an original sculpture.

- Adilabad Dhokra metal casting products mainly include idols of local deities, bells, dancing figures, jewellery, statues and other decorative items. Apart from these, they also make figures of animals and birds, and jewels.
- More than 100 families are involved in this hereditary craft in five villages of the Adilabad district.

Warangal Durries

- Dhurries is popular traditional thick cotton rug in which weavers create beautiful patterns and dye them using vegetable colours, which are washed in flowing water after the printing process.
- The main geographical factor that made Warangal famous as Durrie weaving centre is availability of cotton.
- Cotton is abundantly produced in Warangal for many decades and has a major pie in the cotton production in Telangana.
- Currently, there are more than 2000 weaving community members present in Kothawada, Warangal in spinning Dhurrie.
- The products are exported mainly to UK, Germany along with few other European and African countries.
- According to the Handloom Export Promotion Council, 80% of the handwoven durries sold in European and American markets are woven in India.

25th April – World Malaria Day

- 25th April is observed internationally as World Malaria Day. It is celebrated to recognize global efforts to control malaria.
- The World Malaria Day is aimed at taking an immediate and urgent action in malaria control, because the major gains in fight against malaria are under threat unless this is done.
- Hence, the WHO invites for bigger and greater investments and expanding coverage of tools that help in preventing, treating and diagnosing malaria.

Background

- Malaria is a life-threatening disease caused by parasites that are transmitted to people through the bites of infected mosquitoes.
- About half of the world's population is at risk of malaria, particularly those in lower-income countries.
- The World Health Assembly instituted World Malaria Day in May 2007.
- World Malaria Day gives people the chance to promote or learn about the efforts made to prevent and reduce Malaria around the world.
- It gives international partners, companies and foundations a chance to showcase their efforts.

World Malaria Day 2018

- The theme for World Malaria Day 2018 is "Ready to beat malaria".
- This theme projects the collective energy and commitment of the global malaria community in uniting around the common goal of a world free of malaria.
- The World Malaria Day this year coincides with activities that will mark the 70th anniversary of WHO (World Health Organization).
- In order to mark the day several awareness campaigns and events will be organized.
- WHO will share various interviews with leaders and advocates who have been involved in malaria control.
- These leaders will come together to reflect on key moments in fighting malaria over the past 70 years.
- According to the WHO, the current pace of malaria control is not sufficient as per its set target for 2020 under the WHO Global Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016–2030.
- The target is to reduce the incidence of malaria cases and death rates by almost 40% by 2020.
- Less than half (40) of the world's 91 countries with malaria transmission are on track to achieve these milestones.

Key facts

- Malaria is known to be a life-threatening disease which is caused by parasites that are transmitted to people through bites of infected female *Anopheles* mosquitoes.
- Malaria can be cured and prevented.
- In 2016, there were 216 million cases of malaria in 91 countries, 5 million more than the 211 million cases reported in 2015.
- The latest World Malaria report, which was released in 2017, says that the number of deaths caused by malaria among children under 5 years of age has reduced to 2,85,000 in 2016 from 4,40,000 in 2010.
- Children under 5 are particularly susceptible to malaria. The disease claims the life of a child every 2 minutes.
- According to the Who, it infects more than 500 million people each year and kills more than one million people.
- After an unprecedented period of success in malaria control, progress has stalled.
- The current pace is insufficient to achieve the 2020 milestones of the WHO Global Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016–2030.
- Countries with ongoing transmission are increasingly falling into one of 2 categories–
 - those moving towards elimination of malaria
 - those with a high burden of the disease that have reported significant increases in malaria cases.
- To speed progress towards these global targets, WHO is calling on malaria-affected countries and their development partners to boost investments in preventing malaria.
- To protect the people, there is a need for the National Malaria Control Programmes to take special measures.

World Bank: India highest recipient of remittances in 2017

- According to the World Bank's Migration and Development Brief reports, India has topped as the highest recipient of remittances globally in 2017, with its diaspora sending back \$69 billion.
- Remittances to low- and middle-income countries rebounded to a record level in 2017 after two consecutive years of decline.

Highlights

- As per the estimates, the officially recorded remittances to low- and middle-income countries reached \$466 billion in 2017, an increase of 8.5 percent over \$429 billion in 2016.
- Global remittances, which include flows to high-income countries, grew 7 percent to \$613 billion in 2017, from \$573 billion in 2016.
- Remittances are expected to continue to increase in 2018, by 4.1 percent to reach \$485 billion.
- Global remittances are expected to grow 4.6 percent to \$642 billion in 2018.
- It include flows to high-income countries. The stronger-than-expected recovery in remittances was driven by growth in Europe, Russia and US.
- The rebound in global remittances was due to higher oil prices and strengthening of Euro and Ruble.
- The transit migrants—who only stay temporarily in transit country, are usually not able to send money home. Migration may help migrants to escape poverty or persecution, but many also become vulnerable to exploitation by human smugglers during transit.

The top remittance recipients were –

- India (\$69 billion)
- China (\$64 billion)
- the Philippines (\$33 billion)
- Mexico (\$31 billion)
- Nigeria (\$22 billion)
- Egypt (\$20 billion)

Top International migrants (origin countries)

- India (\$16.4 million)
- Mexico (\$11.9 million)
- Russia Federation (\$11 million)
- China (\$10.1 million)
- Bangladesh (\$7.8 million)

Inter country removal and retention of children – recommendations of Justice Rajesh Bindal committee

- The Justice Rajesh Bindal committee has submitted on legal issues related to inter country removal & retention of children its report to Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD).
- The committee has been appointed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD).
- Along with its recommendation, Committee has also submitted a draft legislation– International Child Abduction bill to the Government. This bill was prepared by the Law Commission.
- The WCD Ministry will now be sharing the report with Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Law Ministry and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for their comments and inputs.

Recommendations of the committee

- Stressing upon the need for mediation as the first step, Justice Bindal Committee has recommended that the Government may establish an 'Inter Country Parental Child Removal Disputes Resolution Authority'.
- The authority will be chaired by retired High Court Judge and shall have members from Legal and Social sector background along with representatives from key Ministries.
- The authority has been envisaged to provide a one window solution in cases of inter country removal and retention of Children.
- The authority will examine inter country cases of removal and retention of children vis-a-vis cultural context, merit of case, and best interest of the Child.

Other related facts

- Protecting rights of parents and children has become a critical issue of national and international importance due to rise in transnational marriages.
- There are over three crore Indians living abroad having cross-border marriages.
- When such diverse marriage breaks down, their children suffer as they are dragged into international legal battle between their parents over their custody.
- Thereafter in due course of this battle, the children are abducted by one parent and taken to country with different culture.
- Currently, there is no specific legislation in India addressing issues related to abduction of children from and into India.
- The Hague Convention is multilateral treaty that seeks to protect children from harmful effects of abduction and retention across international boundaries by providing procedure to bring about their prompt return.
- 94 states are party to it. India is not signatory to it as it does not has its own domestic law in place for that.

- The Law Commission of India (LCI) in its 218th Report had prepared draft legislation to address the issue and support India's accession to "Hague Convention on Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction 1980".

Diu Smart City becomes first to run on 100% Renewable Energy

- Diu is a part of the Union Territory of Daman and Diu. It has become the first city in India that runs on 100% renewable energy during the daytime.
- It has set a benchmark for other cities to follow.

Key facts

- Diu had been importing 73% of its power from Gujarat till last year.
- It has developed a 9-MW solar park spread over 50 hectares rocky barren land, besides installing solar panels on the rooftops on 79 government buildings, generating 1.3 MW annually
- Diu also offers a subsidy of Rs 10,000 – 50,000 to its residents for installing 1–5 KW rooftop solar panels.
- It is saving about 13,000 tonnes of carbon emissions every year.
- Due to low-cost solar energy, power tariffs have been cut in residential category by 10% last year and 15% this year.
- There are plans to make the city fully self-sufficient day and night via the addition of a 6.8MW wind power unit by 2019.
- As of now, the solar energy is sufficient to take care of the day needs but for the night it still has to import from Gujarat.
- With windmill projects, Diu will be self-sufficient in its energy needs.
- Earlier this year, the Indian Government's Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), government of India, named Surat – the Diamond City – India's leading solar smart city.
- Surat is among one of the few cities in India to have met the expectations in the field of renewable energy after the launch of the 'Smart Cities Mission' by the government in 2015.

26th April – World Intellectual Property Day

- World Intellectual Property Day is observed every year on 26th April to learn about the role that intellectual property rights play in encouraging innovation and creativity.

Background

- “World Intellectual Property Day” or “World IP Day” was established by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in 2000.
- This day is observed annually to raise awareness about how the Intellectual Property patents, copyright, trademarks and designs impact on daily life.
- It is celebrated to mark the creativity and contribution made by creators and innovators to the development of societies across the globe.
- 26 April coincides with the date on which the Convention establishing the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) entered into force in 1970. Therefore this day was chosen as the World Intellectual Property Day.
- The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) works together with various government agencies, NGOs, community groups and individuals to hold different events and activities to promote World Intellectual Property Day each year.

World Intellectual Property Day 2018

- The theme for World Intellectual Property Day 2018 is “Powering Change: Women in Innovation and Creativity”
- This year’s campaign celebrates the brilliance, ingenuity, curiosity and courage of the women who are driving change in our world and shaping our common future.
- Breaking the barriers to women's creativity and helping to nurture their innovative ideas is the first step towards powering change in the field of innovation and creativity.
- Women need opportunities to innovate. In the past two decades several women scientists have come up with life changing innovations.
- A 2017 report on Gender Equality found that the number of women in the science, technology and innovation fields was low in the world's leading economies.
- World Intellectual Property Day focuses on increasing people's awareness and understanding of all aspects of intellectual property.

India – World Bank loan agreement for “Innovate in India for Inclusiveness Project”

- The Union Ministry of Finance has signed a Loan Agreement with the World Bank for IBRD credit of US\$ 125 for Innovate in India for Inclusiveness Project.
- The Loan Agreement was signed by Sameer Kumar Khare, Joint Secretary in the Department of Economic Affairs on behalf of Government of India and Hisham Abdo, Acting Country Director, World Bank (India) on behalf of the World Bank.

Objectives of the project

- The basic aim of the project is to nurture indigenous innovation, foster local product development and accelerate commercialization process. These aims would be achieved by bridging the critical skill and infrastructure gaps in order to promote affordable and innovative healthcare products generation. This would promote inclusive development and would help in increasing competitiveness in India.

Key facts about the project

- The project will support Government of India's Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Program (BIRAC).
- BIRAC was set up five years ago to support innovative start-ups and collaborations through strategic partnerships.
- BIRAC will now scale-up its efforts across the industry and focus on improving India's biopharma innovation ecosystem.
- It will facilitate a more collaborative research and development environment (R&D), leverage the expertise of local and international players from both the public and private sectors.
- The project will support consortia of public, private, and the academic institutions to overcome the key market failures.
- These failures are currently holding back the development of an innovative biopharmaceutical and medical devices industry in India.
- This will help India emerge as a low-cost healthcare provider for the world.
- The project consists of the following parts:
 - Strengthening of pilot-to market innovation ecosystem
 - Acceleration of the pilot -to-market process for specific products
 - Project Management and monitoring & Evaluation
- The \$125 million loan from the [International Bank for Reconstruction and Development \(IBRD\)](#), has a 5-year grace period, and a maturity of 19 years.
- The closing date of the project is 30th June, 2023.

"Adopt a Heritage Project" – Dalmia Bharat adopts Red Fort

- Dalmia Bharat Limited has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ministry of Tourism for adoption of Red Fort monument under the "Adopt a Heritage" project.
- With an estimate of over Rs. 5 crores per year, Dalmia Bharat Limited joins 'Monument Mitras' from other various private sector companies.
- It will look after the operations and the maintenance of this heritage site for the next five years.

Adopt a Heritage Project

- This project is a unique endeavour by the Union Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with the ASI (Archaeological Survey of India).
- The project was launched in September 2017 to preserve India's rich cultural heritage.
- It envisions in developing monuments, heritage and tourist sites across India so as to enhance their tourism potential and cultural importance.
- It aims to add value to India's heritage sites in every possible manner.
- Under it, selected public sector companies, private sector companies and individuals will develop tourist amenities at heritage sites.
- They are called as 'Monument Mitra' and they adopt the sites essentially under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Its objectives

- The basic objective of this scheme is to provide world class tourist facilities at various natural and cultural heritage sites, monuments and other tourist sites. It aims to make these selected sites tourist friendly, enhance their tourist potential and cultural importance in planned and phased manner across the country.

Features

- It seeks active participation of industry to ensure sustainable model formulation for tourism sector.
- The Monument mitra will look after their operations and maintenance initially for 5 years subject to review at any time.
- So far, 31 prospective monument mitras have been shortlisted for developing tourist friendly amenities at 95 monuments.
- Resources for capital and recurring cost for this project is proposed through industry participation, through CSR or any other funding option subject to review and approval of Oversight & Vision Committee.
- The heritage sites and monuments enlisted under this project are categorized as green, blue and orange on basis of tourist footfall and visibility.
- It is mandatory for monument mitra, opting for monument from green category to choose at least one site from either blue or orange category.

Key facts

- The Ministry of Tourism has awarded Letters of Intent to 9 agencies for 22 monuments under Phase-IV of Adopt a Heritage Project: Apni Dharohar, Apni Pehchaan scheme.
- Under the project, Dalmia Bharat will construct, landscape, illuminate and maintain activities related to the provisions and development of the tourist amenities at the Red Fort.

- This includes various basic and advanced amenities such as public conveniences, clean drinking water, cleanliness of the monument, accessibility for all, signage, cloakroom facilities, illumination and night viewing, surveillance system etc.
- In addition to this, Dalmia Bharat will also introduce other key amenities for the visitors like App based Multi lingual Audio-Guide, Digital Interactive Kiosk, Digital (LED) screening, free W-Fi and cafeteria etc.

India's 1st e-Commerce Think Tank Meet

- The first meeting of e-Commerce Think Tank was convened by the Union Commerce and Industry Minister, Mr. Suresh Prabhu.
- The think tank was set up by the government to deliberate on issues related to e-commerce sector and cross-border digital trade.
- Suresh Prabhu chaired the first meeting of the think tank setup to frame a national policy on e-commerce.

Aim of the Think Tank

- The think tank on the Framework for National Policy on E-commerce will seek to collectively deliberate the challenges confronting India in the arena of digital economy with a view to developing recommendations for a comprehensive and overarching national policy on e-commerce.

Key facts

- The think tank is set up by the department of commerce.
- The Think-tank is being led by Commerce and Industry Minister Suresh Prabhu and has officials from Ministries of Finance, Home Affairs, Corporate Affairs and Electronics & Information Technology.
- It comprises representatives from fifty organizations – both government and private to provide a forum to nurture domestic firms and create jobs in e-commerce.
- To partake in multi-trillion dollar digital economy and address emerging concerns of ecommerce, privacy and data security, Indian government has moved to develop a 'National Policy on e-Commerce'.
- Some of the issue discussed by the think tank include –
 - Physical and digital infrastructure
 - Regulatory regime
 - Taxation policy
 - Data flows and server localisation
 - IP rights protection
 - FDI
- Global developments on e-commerce and evolving appropriate national positions on the underlying issues, was another important dimension of the discussions of the think tank.

- One of the major outcomes of the meeting was to constitute a task force for preparing recommendations for India's national policy on e-commerce.
- The task force will be divided into various sub-groups, comprising representation from the Government of India, e-commerce industry and experts with domain knowledge.
- The task force will finalise its recommendations within six months.
- The setting up of this task force is important in view of the issues faced by the domestic industry and to help India articulate its stand on ecommerce at the WTO (World Trade Organization).
- While India is participating in the technical negotiations on the issues at the WTO, it has opposed taking any rule-making and commitments on the matter.

MHA to relax Protected Area Permit regime from Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur

- The home ministry has decided to relax the six-decade-old Protected Area Permit (PAP) regime from Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur.
- This would be with effect from 1st April 2018.
- The move is being initiated to promote tourism, create job opportunities for the locals and generate revenue for the states.
- Foreign tourists, except those from Pakistan, China and Afghanistan, would now be allowed to visit these places without a special permit.

What are Protected Areas?

- Under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958, all areas falling between the Inner line and the International Border of some states were declared as protected areas.
- The protected areas currently include whole of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim, besides parts of Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir.
- Some parts of Sikkim fall under the protected area regime while others under the restricted area.

Protected Area Permit

- As per MHA's December 2010 circular, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland were excluded from protected area regime initially for a period of one year from January 2011, subject to some conditions.
- Under Protected areas Regime, foreign nationals are not normally allowed to visit protected or restricted area unless Government is satisfied that there are extra-ordinary reasons to justify their visit.
- Except for the citizens of Bhutan, every foreigner who desires to enter and stay in protected or restricted area, is required to obtain special permit (PAP) from competent authority.
- In cases of the citizens of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan and foreign nationals of Pakistani origin, no permit can be issued without the prior approval of the Union Home Ministry.

- Necessary powers have been delegated to various authorities to issue such special permits without the prior approval of the Home Ministry to facilitate foreign tourists.
- In cases of foreign diplomats, including the members of the United Nations and international organisations holding diplomatic or official passports, the special permits to visit such protected or restricted areas are issued by the Ministry of External Affairs.

2nd Edition of Unnat Bharat Abhiyan Launched by HRD Ministry

- The second edition of the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan was launched by the HRD Ministry in New Delhi.
- Under this Abhiyan students from 750 higher educational institutions from across the country will adopt villages and visit them to get acquainted with the lifestyle of people there and the problems faced by them.
- Minister of Human Resource Development Prakash Javadekar said at the launch ceremony that the students are the real agents of change who can develop, empower and brighten the future of the country.

Aim

- The main objective of the program is to enable higher education institutions to work with the people of rural India in identifying development challenges and evolving appropriate solutions for accelerating sustainable development in rural areas.

Key facts

- This initiative will provide an opportunity to the students to learn about the basic challenges faced by rural people and to bring out practical solutions for their betterment.
- The minister advised the students to involve local village people at every stage of problem identification and solving issues relating to health, cleanliness, waste management, plantation, financial inclusion, women and child development.
- India had witnessed the migration of rural population in the past, but now the process of sustainable development through the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0 will help to reverse this migration.
- In order to cover the 45,000 villages of the country under this movement, the participation of 8,252 higher education institutions is required.
- Under the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0, the institutions have been selected on a Challenge Mode and the scheme has been extended to 750 reputed Higher Educational Institutes (both public and private) of the country.
- The scope for providing subject expert groups and regional coordinating institutes to handhold and guide the participating institutions has been strengthened.

- Institutes through their faculty and students, will carry out studies of living conditions in the adopted villages and assess the local problems and need.
- Each selected institute would adopt a cluster of villages/panchayats and gradually expand the outreach over a period of time.
- The institutes would be expected to closely coordinate with the district administration, elected public representatives of panchayat/villages and other stakeholders and will become a part of the process of development planning and implementation.

About Unnat Bharat Abhiyan

- It is a flagship programme of the Ministry of Human Resources Development, with the intention to enrich Rural India. Under the program, the knowledge base and resources of the premier institutions of the country will be leveraged to bring in a transformational change in the rural developmental process.

Aim

- The project aims to create a vibrant relationship between the society and the higher educational institutes, with the latter providing the knowledge and technology support to improve the livelihoods in rural areas and to upgrade the capabilities of both the public and private organisations in the society.

World Press Freedom Index Report

- The annual World Press Freedom Index report was recently published by the RSF (Reporters Without Borders).
- India's ranking in the Press Freedom Index has fallen two places to 138.
- Norway topped the list of having the world's freest press for the second year in a row.
- Overall, the 2018 report concludes, global press freedom is in a worse state than it was last year and a record number of countries this year have been classified as having "very bad" freedom of the press.

Background

- The World Press Freedom Index report is being published annually since 2002. The World Press Freedom Index measures the level of media freedom in 180 countries.
- It measures the level of pluralism, media independence, the environment and self-censorship, the legal framework, transparency, and the quality of the infrastructure that supports the production of news and information.

Key facts

- According to the index, journalists face more hatred than last year, not only in authoritarian countries but also increasingly in countries with democratically elected leaders.
- This year's report mentioned that more and more democratically-elected leaders no longer see the media as part of democracy's essential element.
- For instance, the United States, the country with the First Amendment (which among other things prevents US Congress from abridging the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press) fell from rank 43 last year to rank 45.
- India has dropped from rank 136 to rank 138.
- The report mentioned sharing of "hate speeches" targeting journalists by "troll armies" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a reason for this low rank.
- The report also mentioned "physical violence" against journalists is largely responsible for India's low ranking. At least three journalists were murdered in connection with their work.
- China's ranking remained unchanged at 175th position for the second year.
- North Korea is at the bottom of the list, just below Eritrea and Turkmenistan.
- The Gambia has seen the biggest improvement in press freedom, rising 21 spots to 122, followed by South Korea and Greece, which rose to 20 and 14 places respectively.
- The report also analysed press freedom in five regions, with the Middle East and North Africa region being the worst for journalists.

World Press Freedom Index Report – Top 10 countries

1. Norway
2. Sweden
3. Netherlands
4. Finland
5. Switzerland
6. Jamaica
7. Belgium
8. New Zealand
9. Denmark
10. Costa Rica



Harimau Shakti: Indo Malaysian Joint Military Exercise

- HARIMAU SHAKTI 2018 is a bilateral military exercise to be conducted between India and Malaysia from 30th April 2018 to 13th May 2018.
- It will be conducted in the dense forests of Sengai Perdik, Hulu Langat, Malaysia as part of ongoing defence cooperation between both countries.

Aim

- The exercise aims at bolstering cooperation and coordination between armed forces of both nations. It also seeks to share expertise of both contingent in conduct of counter insurgency operations in jungle terrain.

Highlights

- Indian contingent will be represented by 4 GRENADIERS, one of the oldest infantry battalions having rich operational experience in conventional as well as counter insurgency warfare.
- While, the Malaysian contingent will be represented by soldiers from 1 Royal Ranjer Regiment and the Royal Malay Regiment; both are known for their experience in Jungle Warfare.
- This is the first instance wherein a joint training exercise of this magnitude involving Indian and Malaysian soldiers is being organized in Malaysia.
- It will involve cross training phase followed by field training phase of seven days in jungles of Hulu Langat wherein both armies will jointly train, plan and execute series of training activities.
- The main focus of the exercise will be on tactical operations in jungle warfare.
- It will provide excellent opportunity to armies of both countries to hone their operational skills and also contribute to enhance strategic partnership between India and Malaysia.

National Bamboo Mission Approved by CCEA

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved restructured National Bamboo Mission (NBM) with an outlay of Rs. 1290 crore.
- The scheme will be implemented during the remaining period of 14th Finance Commission (2018–20).
- The National Bamboo Mission (NBM) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA).
- The restructured mission will address complete value chain and establish effective linkage of producers (farmers) with industry thus ensuring ensure a holistic development of the bamboo sector.

Objectives of restructured National Bamboo Mission

- The Mission would aim to bring one lakh farmers under its ambit.

- The scheme would work on plans to ensure bamboo plantation on one lakh hectare of land across the country.
- The Mission will focus on the development of bamboo in limited states where it has social, commercial and economic advantage.
- The Mission strives to increase the area under bamboo plantation in non-forest government and private lands to supplement farm income and contribute towards resilience to climate change.
- It aims to further promote product development at micro, small and medium levels, rejuvenate the under the developed bamboo industry.
- Promote skill development along with capacity building and creating awareness for the development of the bamboo sector.
- Improve post-harvest management through establishment of innovative primary processing units, treatment and seasoning plants, primary treatment and seasoning plants, preservation technologies and market infrastructure.

Key facts

- The scheme would target select states, including North-east, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Gujarat for plantation of bamboo.
- The Mission is expected to establish about 4000 treatment/ product development units and bring more than 100000 ha area under plantation.
- The restructured mission will benefit directly and indirectly farmers as well as local artisans and associated personnel engaged in the bamboo sector.
- It will directly benefit about one lakh farmers as it has proposed to bring about one lakh ha area under plantation.
- The bamboo plantation will contribute in optimizing farm productivity and income.
- It would thereby enhance livelihood opportunities of small and marginal farmers including landless and women as well as provide quality material to industry.
- It will serve as potential instrument for enhancing income of farmers and also contribute towards climate resilience and environmental benefits.
- It will also help in creating employment generation directly or indirectly in both skilled and unskilled segments

Background: NBM (National Bamboo Mission)

- NBM is a centrally sponsored scheme started in 2006-07.
- It was subsumed under Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) during 2014-15 and continued till 2015-16.

- It aims to promote growth of bamboo sector through area based regionally differentiated strategy.
- Since 2006–07, an area of 3.62 lakh hectares has been covered under bamboo plantations.
- However, there were limited efforts on processing, product development and value addition. Additionally, there was a weak linkage between the farmers and the industry.
- Considering this, the mission was restructured to give emphasis to address the complete value chain for growth of the bamboo sector and to establish a pleasant relation between farmers and industry.

BIS Grants 1st license for Liquid Chlorine on All India Basis

- The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has granted First Licence to M/s Gujarat Alkalies and Chemicals Ltd for Liquid Chlorine on All India basis.
- This is the First Licence granted on All India basis. The licence has been made operative with effect from 12th April, 2018 for a period of one year.

About liquid chlorine

- This product is in liquid form and stored in metal containers.
- It is usually used as a gas obtained by evaporating the liquid from the metal container.
- Liquid chlorine is used mainly in paper, pulp, textile bleaching, water sterilization and manufacture of chemicals.
- The move will facilitate industry to get a quality Liquid Chlorine with Standard Mark under BIS Certification Marks scheme.
- Indian Standard (IS) 646:1986 for Liquid Chlorine, Technical prescribes the requirements and the methods of sampling and test for liquid chlorine.

BIS (Bureau of Indian Standards)

- The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is the National Standards Body of India working under the aegis of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Government of India.
- It is established by the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986.
- Its headquarters are in New Delhi.
- It also works as WTO–TBT (Technical Barriers to Trade) enquiry point for India.

- It is mandated for harmonious development of activities of standardization, marking and quality certification of goods and for matters connected.
- It is involved in various activities such as standards formulation, product certification scheme, compulsory registration scheme, foreign manufacturers certification scheme, hall marking scheme, laboratory services, laboratory recognition scheme, sale of Indian standards, consumer affairs activities etc.
- BIS has been providing benefits to national economy in number of ways such as by providing safe reliable quality goods, promoting exports and imports substitute, minimizing health hazards to consumers etc. through standardization, certification and testing.

Atal New India Challenge Launched by NITI Aayog

- The NITI Aayog has launched Atal New India Challenge under the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM).
- The project envisions grants of up to Rs 1 crore for selected innovations, products in 17 focus areas.
- It aims to bring-in innovations and technologies relevant to the people.
- It will focus on efforts towards solving problems in core areas, which would have direct impact on improving lives of citizens and also generate employment.
- AIM will attempt to harness the potential of India's innovators.

Key Facts

- For this initiative, AIM has partnered with Ministries of Housing and Urban Affairs, Road Transport and Highways, Agriculture and Family Welfare, Drinking Water & Sanitation and Railway Board.
- AIM will invite prospective innovators, MSMEs and start-ups to design market-ready products using cutting edge technologies or prototypes across pre-identified 17 focus areas that have been named.
- **These areas include –**
 1. Climate-smart agriculture
 2. Fog vision system for road and rail
 3. Prevention of Rail failure using emerging technologies
 4. Predictive maintenance of Rolling Stock
 5. Alternate fuel based transportation
 6. Smart Mobility
 7. Electric Mobility

8. Safe transport
9. Instant Portable Water Quality Testing
10. Affordable Desalination / Recycling Technology
11. Waste management recycling/reuse
12. Garbage composition devices
13. Quality of compost
14. Decentralized composting
15. Mixing blades for composting
16. Waste in public spaces
17. Dissuading public littering

- Applicants showing capability, intent and potential to productise technologies will be awarded grants up to Rs 1 crore.
- This grant will be further supplemented by mentoring, handholding, incubating and other support as needed at various stages of commercialisation, while generating wider deployment for the product.
- These grants will be awarded in up to 3 tranches within 12 – 18 months and will not be mutually exclusive and will be given based on Selection Committee's perception of potential.
- The winning grantees will be supported with mentoring, go-to-market strategies by leading incubators, accelerators and experts, technical support and other means.
- The programme will be open to Indian companies registered under Companies Act 1956 and 2013, MSMEs, Start-Ups or private R&D organizations (other than Railway R&D organization), academic institutions, academicians, or even individual innovators.

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)

- It is a flagship initiative set up by the NITI Aayog to promote innovation and entrepreneurship across India. Its mandate is to create umbrella structure to oversee innovation ecosystem of country and revolutionize innovation eco-system. It aims to develop new programmes and policies for fostering innovation in different sectors of economy.

BARC Offers 1st Indigenous Bullet Proof Vest : Bhabha Kavach

- The Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) has developed Bhabha Kavach, a next-generation bulletproof jacket for the Indian armed forces.
- Bhabha Kavach has been named after nuclear physicist Dr Homi J. Bhabha.

- It was developed at BARC's Trombay centre in response to a request from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Features of the jacket

- The bulletproof jacket is not only cheaper but also much lighter.
- It weighs just 6.6 kg in comparison to the 17-kg jackets in use, and has passed over 30 tests carried out by certified agencies.
- The materials used in it reduce weight by nearly 50% as compared to presently used heavy steel-armoured jackets that weigh between 10kg to 17kg.
- Bhabha Kavach is available in three variants as per the requirement of the armed forces.
- The jacket is made using extremely hard boron carbide ceramics that is hot-pressed with carbon nano-tubes and composite polymer. Boron carbide is being used by BARC in the control rods of its nuclear reactors.
- It is very cost effective. While the cost of a Bhabha Kavach is ₹70,000, jackets of similar strength are available in the range of ₹1.5 lakh and have to be imported.
- Bhabha Kavach is able to withstand eight 7.62mm bullets fired from AK-47 rifle from distance of 5-10 metres.
- It can even withstand 5.56mm bullet of Indian Small Arms System (INSAS).
- The jacket was developed by a team of 5 members who worked for a year. It is being now tested by a joint team of the CRPF, Indo-Tibetan Border Police, and the Central Industrial Security Force.
- The northern command of Indian Army is also testing variant of jacket in Jammu & Kashmir. If jackets pass various tests, it will be manufactured by Mishra Dhatu Nigam Limited, a defence public sector unit.

BARC

- The BARC (Bhabha Atomic Research Centre) is India's premier nuclear research facility based in Mumbai, Maharashtra. Dr Bhabha established the Atomic Energy Establishment, Trombay (AEET) in January 1954 for multidisciplinary research program essential for the ambitious nuclear program of India. After the sad demise of Bhabha in 1966, AEET was renamed Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC).
- BARC is a multi-disciplinary research centre with extensive infrastructure for advanced research and development covering the entire spectrum of nuclear science, engineering and related areas. At present, K N Vyas is the Director of BARC.

28th April – World Day for Safety and Health at Work

- World Day for Safety and Health at Work is celebrated annually on 28th April to promote the prevention of occupational accidents and diseases globally.
- It is an awareness-raising campaign intended to focus international attention on emerging trends in the field of occupational safety and health and on the magnitude of work-related injuries, diseases and fatalities worldwide.

Background

- The International Labour Organization (ILO) started observing the World Day for Safety and Health at Work on April 28, 2003. The ILO is devoted to advancing opportunities for people to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

Aim

- It aims to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, boost social protection, and strengthen dialogue in work-related issues.

World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2018

- This year's celebrations will be held under the global theme – "Generation safe and healthy."
- The ILO acknowledges the shared responsibility of key stakeholders and encourages them to promote a preventive safety and health culture to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities for preventing deaths, injuries and diseases in the workplace, allowing workers to return safely to their homes at the end of the working day.
- The ILO Youth Employment Programme has developed the training package "Youth Rights @Work: Decent work for young people" in response to the employment challenges for young workers.
- Young workers suffer the highest rate of work-related injuries. One of the key factors cited for the high injury toll is the lack of awareness of workplace safety and worker rights on the part of young workers.
- This training package consists of a guide for facilitators and a toolkit that provide hands-on examples of rights and entitlements of young workers as well as recruitment practices and workplace situations.

- Youth4OSH or OSH project was also launched for Young Workers and Young Employers in Global Supply Chains.
- It seeks to reduce workplace injuries, fatalities, and occupational diseases through increased preventative safety actions by young workers and young employers engaged in global supply chains.
- Youth4OSH is being implemented in conjunction with the ILO's SafeYouth@Work project.

CSIR Wins National Intellectual Property (IP) Award 2018

- The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) was awarded National Intellectual Property (IP) Award 2018.
- It received the award in the category "Top R&D Institution/Organization for Patents and Commercialization".
- This award is awarded annually by Indian Intellectual Property Office (under Ministry of Commerce and Industry) in various categories.
- The award was conferred by Union Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu, at a function organised by the Indian Intellectual Property Office and Confederation of Indian Chambers of Commerce (CII).
- The Indian Intellectual Property Office confers National Intellectual Property (IP) Award on outstanding innovators, organisations and companies in the fields of patents, designs, trademarks and geographical indications on the occasion of World IP Day every year.

About CSIR

- The Council of Scientific & Industrial Research is a contemporary research and development organisation established in 1942.
- It runs 38 laboratories and 39 field stations throughout the nation, with a collective staff of over 12,000 scientists and scientific and technical personnel.
- It has been ranked 9th in the world amongst 1207 government institutions, with an overall global ranking of 75 amongst 5250 institutions.
- Although it is mainly funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology, it operates as an autonomous body through the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- It is contributing to Missions such as Swachh Bharat, Swasth Bharat, Samarth Bharat, Make in India, Innovate for India, Startup India and Skill India.
- It is known as the pioneer of India's intellectual property movement.

Govt. Declares All Protected Areas as 'Plastic Free Zones'

- In order to achieve a plastic-free India, the Environment Ministry has declared the protected areas to be 'Plastic Free Zones'.
- This announcement has been made ahead of the World Environment Day to be observed on 5th June.
- States and Union Territories have been directed to organize awareness campaigns to sensitize people about the issue.

Key Facts

- All protected areas and forest reserves will be plastic free zones and it will be mandatorily enforced.
- Non-recyclable plastics have been banned and various steps will be taken so that plastic is not allowed inside the protected areas.
- Other alternatives to plastics would be provided gradually.
- India will host the World Environment Day this year.
- The theme for UN World Environment Day this year is 'Beat Plastic Pollution'.
- Protected areas in Bengal and Odisha are already plastic free zones.
- Recently on March 18, Maharashtra Government also declared as plastic free making its land to get rid of this danger to environment material.

World Environment Day 2018

- India is the global host of the World Environment Day 2018 which will be observed on 5th June 2018.
- Every World Environment Day has a different global host country, where the official celebrations take place.
- The focus on the host country helps highlight the environmental challenges it faces and supports the effort to address those challenges.
- Theme for World Environment Day 2018 = "Beat Plastic Pollution".
- It urges governments, industry, communities, and individuals to come together and explore sustainable alternatives and urgently reduce the production and excessive use of single-use plastic polluting our oceans, damaging marine life and threatening human health.
- World Environment Day is a UN Environment-led global event, the single largest celebration of our environment each year.
- Since it began in 1972, it has grown to become a global platform for public outreach that is widely celebrated across the globe.

Plastic Pollution

- Every year the world uses 500 billion plastic bags.
- Each year, at least 8 million tonnes of plastic end up in the oceans which is equivalent to a full garbage truck every minute.
- In the last decade, the amount of plastic produced was more than that in the whole last century.
- 50% of the plastic used in single-use or disposable.
- 1 million plastic bottles are bought every minute.
- Plastic makes up 10% of all the waste generated.

Pawan Chamling Becomes India's Longest Serving CM

- The Chief Minister of Sikkim, Pawan Chamling has surpassed Jyoti Basu to become the longest serving Chief Minister of India.
- Pawan Chamling became the chief minister of Sikkim on December 12, 1994, and has ruled the state ever since.
- His other two counterparts are Dr Raman Singh of Chhattisgarh (the longest-serving CM from the BJP) and Naveen Patnaik (Odisha's longest-serving CM).
- Pawan Chamling is known as 'Kiran' and 'Green Crusader' who brought the primacy of Nature back to a land once ravaged by corruption.

About Pawan Chamling

- Pawan Chamling was born on 22nd September 1950.
- He is the fifth and incumbent Chief Minister of the northeastern state– Sikkim.
- He is the second chief minister in India after Jyoti Basu, of West Bengal to govern a state five terms in a row.
- Chamling's party Sikkim Democratic Front won the 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014 Sikkim Legislative Assembly elections.
- He started his political journey in 1973 as the founder president of the Sikkim Democratic Front, which has governed the state for five successive terms since 1994.
- Under Chamling's leadership, Sikkim is one of the fastest growing states as its GDP has shown great improvement.

Growth of Sikkim under Pawan Chamling

- Sikkim is steadily moving towards being a 100 percent literate state. Its current literacy rate is 82 percent.
- Seventy percent of Sikkim's budget goes to the rural sector.
- Today the state has 44 clean industries—all green—such as distilleries, pharma, hotels and more.
- Sikkim's teacher-student ratio is the best in India—1:10 in primary and 1:21 in secondary schools.

Acquisition of NAG Missile System : Approved by DAC

- Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman cleared capital acquisition proposals of DRDO's NAG missile system (NAMIS) for Indian Army and 127 mm calibre guns for Indian Navy.
- The capital acquisition proposals were cleared at a meeting of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.
- DAC is Defence Ministry's highest decision-making body on procurement.

Keys facts

- The DAC approved procurement of thirteen 127 mm calibre guns for the Navy from BAE Systems of the United States at a cost of over Rs 3,000 crore.
- The NAG missile system, indigenously developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), will be procured for the Army at a cost of Rs 524 crore.
- The system includes a third generation anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) along with the missile carrier vehicle (NAMICA).
- The NAG missile has top attack capabilities that can effectively engage and destroy enemy tanks during day and night.
- It will give a quantum boost to the Army's capability against enemy armour.
- The Indian army is currently using second generation Milan 2T and Konkur ATGMs and has been looking for about 8000 third generation ATGMs, which are important for stopping advancing enemy tanks.
- The thirteen 127 mm calibre guns for the Navy will be fitted on board the newly constructed ships and will enable naval vessels to provide fire support.
- These guns have engagement range of 24 kilometres, which could be extended further by using Extended Range Gun Munitions (ERGM).

- The DAC also reviewed the progress of the DRDO programme to develop indigenous Airborne Warning and Control System.

UNCCD – Asia Pacific Regional Workshop Held

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and the UN hosted four-day Asia Pacific Regional Workshop in New Delhi to monitor and report on land degradation.
- The four day workshop is aimed at enabling countries to efficiently report land degradation to the UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification).
- It was attended by delegates from about 40 Asia Pacific countries, as well as representatives from 12 Indian states affected by land degradation, researchers and scientists from scientific institutions of national importance.

Key Facts

- The Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Dr. Harsh Vardhan highlighted the critical need to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) by 2030.
- He urged the delegates to transform the Workshop into a milestone in combating land degradation, desertification, and drought.
- In India, the total land area under land degradation is 96.40 million hectares, which is 29.32 percent of the country's total geographical area.
- India has around 70 percent of its total geographical area under drylands and about 30 percent of its land affected by land degradation and about 25 percent of the land affected by desertification.
- Conditions of droughts and desertification result in a loss of 20 million tonnes of potential foodgrain production.
- The workshop provided UNCCD member countries platform to submit their national report in time and in particular for Target 15.3 on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN).
- It provided diverse and multi-disciplinary knowledge sharing platform addressing desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) issues.
- It also provided opportunity to bring all key stakeholders from Asia to India and discuss key aspects of Reporting, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN).
- The participants were trained in use of state-of-the-art tool called 'Trends.Earth' developed by Conservation International, an NGO for combating land degradation.
- It will collect data that in turn will help policy-makers to prioritize areas for interventions for combating land degradation.

UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification)

- **Signed:** 14 October 1994
- **Effective:** 26 December 1996
- **Parties:** 197 (196 states + the European Union)
- **Location:** Paris, France
- Desertification was addressed for the first time in 1977 in the United Nations Conference on Desertification.
- This was followed by the adoption of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Paris on 17th June 1994.
- The Convention entered into force in December 1996.
- It is one of the three Rio Conventions, along with United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).
- India became a signatory to the Convention on October 14, 1994, and ratified it on December 17, 1996.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is the nodal Ministry to coordinate all issues pertaining to the Convention.
- The Convention holds a biennial Conference of Parties (CoP) to the Convention.
- The last CoP was held in Ordos, Inner Mongolia, in China, in September 2016.

Gujarati Poet Sitanshu Yashaschandras 'Vakhar' Chosen for Saraswati Samman

- Eminent Gujarati poet Sitanshu Yashaschandras poetry collection "Vakhar" has been chosen for the Saraswati Samman for 2017.
- The selection for the award is made by a high level Chayan Parishad (selection committee), presided over by former secretary general of Lok Sabha, Subhash C Kashyap.

About Sitanshu Yashaschandras

- Sitanshu was born in 1941 in Bhuj, Gujarat.
- Yashaschandra has three poetry collections — Odysseusnu Halesu, Jatayu, and Vakhar — to his credit.
- He has penned 10 plays and three books on critical analysis.
- He is also a recipient of the Padma Shri and the Sahitya Akademi Award.

- Vakhar, chosen for the Saraswati Samman was published in 2009.

Saraswati Samman

- Saraswati Samman is an annual award bestowed upon Indian citizen for his outstanding literary work written in any 22 Indian language mentioned in Schedule VIII of Constitution and published during last 10 years.
- The award has been named after Indian goddess of learning Saraswati.
- It is considered one of the highest literary awards in India. It was established in 1991 by the KK Birla Foundation.
- Harivansh Rai Bachchan was first recipient of this award for his autobiography published in four volumes.

HDFC Unveils Advance Version of IRA 2.0 – Virtual Assistant EVA

- HDFC Bank has launched IRA 2.0, its interactive humanoid at the Koramangala Branch in Bangalore.
- The advanced version is aimed to enhance user experience for customers visiting in this branch.

Background

- HDFC Bank has developed IRA (Interactive Robotic Assistant) 2.0 in collaboration with its technology partners Invento Makerspaces and Senseforth Technologies.
- It became the first bank in India to introduce a humanoid IRA 1.0 for customer service at the Kamala Mills Branch in Mumbai last January.
- Currently, IRA 1.0 is stationed at the Palarivattom Branch in Kochi.

Features of IRA 2.0

- IRA 2.0 is more advance than the first one (IRA 1.0) and it's a blend of IRA 1.0 and EVA with some added features.

- It will interact with the customers visiting the bank, answer bank-related queries, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and also guide them inside the branch with voice-based navigation.
- It has an in-built GPS as well as a speech recognition module that can be trained to understand what customers speak.
- It uses ultrasonic sensor to move in inside the branch as well as a face detection algorithm for recognition the customers.

Launch of EVA

- The bank has also launched its virtual assistant 'EVA' on Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant.
- HDFC has become the first bank to offer voice banking experience on Alexa.
- EVA on Alexa will support banking transactions and deliver hyper-personalized services using voice.
- HDFC Bank customers can now chat with EVA using voice from the comfort of their homes, without having to pick up a phone, tablet or laptop.
- Customers can also inquire about how to block/unblock card, what to do if one forgets pin, and updating personal information.

Dr. Manmohan Singh Launches Economist C H Hanumantha Rao's Book

- Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh released a book by former Planning Commission and Finance Commission member C H Hanumantha Rao.
- The title of the book is "My Journey from Marxism-Leninism to Nehruvian Socialism".
- While releasing the book, Mr Singh addressed the Indian economist as a most creative thinker, social activist, and distinguished economist.
- In his book, Professor has not commented much on the period of Emergency imposed by late PM Indira Gandhi.
- But it is quite clear from his book that he was not very happy with Emergency and the suspension of human rights and civil rights in India.

About C H Hanumantha Rao

- Chennamaneni Hanumantha Rao is an Indian economist and writer.
- He was a member of the National Advisory Council from 2004 to 2008.

- He chaired the Technical Committee on Drought prone Areas Programme and Desert Development Programme of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices.
- He was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the president of India in 2004, for contributions in the field of Literature and Education.
- He is the Chairman of the Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad.
- He remained a member of the Seventh and Eighth Planning Commission and also the Finance Commission of India.

India–China Informal Summit in Wuhan

- The first Informal Summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and China's President Xi Jinping was held in Wuhan.
- The main objective of the meeting was to exchange views on overarching issues of bilateral and global importance, and to elaborate their respective visions and priorities for national development in the context of the current and future international situation.

Key Facts

- The two sides aim to enhance policy coordination in their neighbourhood to discuss cooperation in the form of China India plus one or China India plus X.
- Both leaders agreed that simultaneous emergence of India and China as two large economies and major powers with strategic and decisional autonomy has implications of regional and global significance.
- They shared the view that peaceful, stable and balanced relations between India and China will be a positive factor for stability amidst current global uncertainties.
- Therefore a bilateral relationship will be conducive for the development and prosperity of the region.
- They decided to strengthen the Closer Development Partnership in a mutually beneficial and sustainable manner to bring greater prosperity for their peoples.
- They also agreed to issue strategic guidance to their forces and strengthen existing mechanisms to maintain peace and tranquillity along the border areas.
- They highlighted importance of maintaining peace and tranquillity in all areas of India–China border region in larger interest of the overall development of bilateral relations.
- Prime Minister Modi and President Xi agreed that both sides have the maturity and wisdom to handle the differences through peaceful discussion, respecting each other's sensitivities, concerns and aspirations.

- They agreed on their need to strengthen strategic communication through greater consultation on all matters of common interest. This would have a positive influence on enhancing mutual understanding and will contribute to regional and global stability.
- They recognized the common threat posed by terrorism and committed themselves to cooperate on counter-terrorism.
- They laid emphasis on the fact that a good Sino-India relationship is important for maintaining peace and stability in world.
- PM Modi laid emphasis on importance of people-to-people (P2P) contact through STRENGTH.
- **STRENGTH** was used as an acronym which meant –
 - **S** – Spirituality
 - **T** – Tradition, Trade and Technology
 - **R** – Relationship
 - **E** – Entertainment
 - **N** – Nature Conservation
 - **G** – Games
 - **T** – Tourism
 - **H** – Health and Healing

LCA Tejas Successfully Fired an Air-to-Air BVR Missile

- The indigenously developed LCA (Light Combat Aircraft) Tejas has successfully fired Derby an air-to-air BVR (Beyond Visual Range) missile off the Goa coast.
- It demonstrated its overall capability as an effective combat jet, and inched closer to receive final operational clearance.
- Tejas was earlier given clearance for deployment of armaments and other missiles.

Key Facts

- Tejas has now successfully completed a series of captive flight trials to clear the Derby for full operational capability in the entire final operational clearance (FOC) envelope.
- The aircraft was tracked by two other Tejas aircraft in close formation to capture the firing event in the specially instrumented high-speed cameras for detailed analysis.
- The entire planning, practice and final firing was carried out by DRDO's autonomous society – Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) and its National Flight Test Centre (NFTC).
- Tejas has qualified for the armaments and missile release related trials.

- The Indian Air Force (IAF) had ordered 40 Tejas Mark-1 version and a request for proposal (RFP) was issued to HAL by the IAF in December for procurement of another batch of 83 Tejas at a cost of around Rs 50,000 crore.
- IAF tested its war-waging capabilities in a possible two-front scenario involving Pakistan and China during Gagan Shakti 2018.
- During the Gagan Shakti 2018 exercise, eight Tejas jets were deployed.
- The IAF has already committed to buying at least 123 Tejas fighters for Rs 75,000 crore from the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).

Features of Derby BVR missile

- It is a short to medium range BVR Air-to-Air missile.
- It is developed jointly by Israeli armament development agency Rafael and Israel Aircraft Industries MBT has a maximum effective range of about 50 km.
- Launch weight - 118 kg
- Length - 3.8 metres
- Wingspan - 64 cm
- Diameter - 16 cm
- It is an active radar air-to-air missile for the fighter aircraft and has the capability to be launched at a target day or night and in all weather conditions.
- It has look-down/shoot-down capability, fire and forget mode and an advanced ECCM tailored to the customer's operational requirements.
- It is a dual-use missile (air-to-air and surface-to-air).
- The missile's light weight allows it to be adapted to various modern fighter aircraft.

Maharashtra Govt. Signs MoU With British Council

- The government of Maharashtra has signed a MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the British Council to strengthen educational and cultural cooperation between the two nations.
- The announcement has been made at comes when the UK's international culture and educational arm completes seventy years of its existence in India.
- The agreement was signed by Sumit Mullick, Chief Secretary, state government, and Alan Gemmell OBE, Director British Council India.

Key Facts

- The MOU's areas of work highlight the work of the British Council over the last 70 years, which were referenced by Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi during his visit to London last week.

- It is the 70th anniversary of the British council in India which has been working to train teachers, deliver skills programmes for youth, and support cultural exchanges.
- Under this new agreement, British Council would be training 30,000 teachers in the English language in the state.
- The training will be funded by Tata Trusts.
- With this MoU, the British Council hopes to expand its existing work in the state.
- In the recent times, it has trained more than 100,000 teachers benefitting around five million learners.
- Over the last year, there have been 12 partnerships between higher education institutions in Maharashtra with the UK under the bilateral UK India Education and Research Initiative.
- The focus of the MoU would be in developing further initiatives to improve English teaching and enhance employability skills in schools and training institutes, building capacity in higher education and research and further co-operation on inspiring hundreds of thousands of people in the state through arts and culture.
- The British Council is aimed to support CM Devendra Fadnavis' vision for the youth of the state.
- With this MoU the youth of the state are expected to be more employable nationally and internationally, have better learning outcomes for school students, seek greater cooperation in the higher education sector, and enhance cultural collaboration between Maharashtra and the UK.
- Young researchers and students from the State have been travelling regularly to UK for higher education and professional development through Scholarships from the UK.