



MONTHLY GK DIGEST



December 2018



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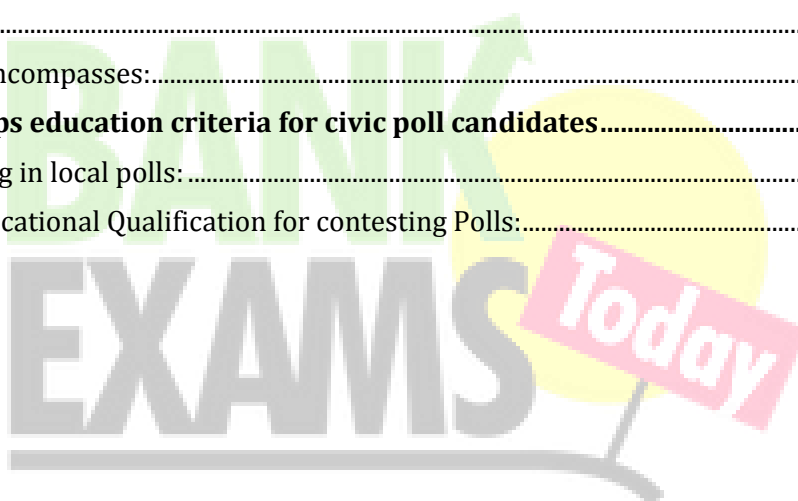
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MONTHLY GK DIGEST: DECEMBER 2018

RBI RELAXES RULES FOR NBFCs TO SELL OR SECURITISE THEIR LOAN BOOKS TO EASE PERSISTENT STRESS IN SECTOR

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) relaxed rules for Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) to sell or securitise their loan books in a bid to ease persistent stress in the sector.

DETAILS:

- **RBI has relaxed the minimum holding period (MHP) requirement for originating NBFCs**, in respect of loans of original maturity above 5 years, to receipt of repayment of six monthly installments or two quarterly installments.
- Earlier, they had to hold these assets for at least one year.
- **However, relaxation on MHP will be allowed when the NBFC retains 20% of book value of these loans.**
- **RBI has also prescribed certain Minimum Retention Requirement (MRR) for NBFCs for availing the relaxed norms.**
- **The relaxed dispensation will apply to securitisation/ assignment transactions carried out during six months.**

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **NBFCs loosely known as shadow banks, are facing stress on their balance sheets after debt crisis hit a large infrastructure funding company in September, triggering panic amongst investors and cash crunch in the sector.**
- **Following massive volatility in financial markets, RBI and government have taken steps to ringfence the crisis and support financing needs of the sector, including providing additional liquidity to banks and credit enhancement for refinancing needs.**

SOUTH ASIA YOUTH PEACE CONFERENCE HELD IN NEW DELHI

The three day South Asia Regional Youth Peace Conference was held in New Delhi as part of 150th birth anniversary celebrations of father of the nation- Mahatma Gandhi.

- It was organised by Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) and STEP (Standing Together to Enable Peace).
- It was inaugurated by Krishna G Kulkarni, great grandson of Mahatma Gandhi.

ABOUT SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL YOUTH PEACE CONFERENCE:

- **Its objective was to eliminate stereotypes, prejudices across all borders to understand micro-macro aspect of issues, identify common challenges and develop a plan of action and to build a network of youth leaders.**
- It was also aimed to equip young leaders with skills and knowledge based on peace education, critical enquiry and socio-emotional learning as tool to engage with their peers.
- It also aimed to build a network of youth leaders and change-makers across South Asia who will join hands to address common challenging issues together.
- It provided a platform for young people of South Asia to further peace agenda in the region.
- **About 100 youth leaders from South Asian countries and different parts of India had participated in to discuss different dimensions of 'peace'.**
- **The countries represented include: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.**
- The conference had conversations on Gender, Food Security, Interfaith Harmony, Digital media, Art Democracy and other Dialogues.

SALOM ZURICHISHVILI ELECTED AS FIRST FEMALE PRESIDENT OF GEORGIA

Salom Zurichishvili was elected as the first female President of Georgia.

- She will take charge on December 16, 2018.
- In the recently concluded presidential election, Salom Jurabishvili defeated her rival candidate Grigol Washadze.
- She received 59.5% of the votes, while Grigol Washadze received 40.5% of the votes.

ABOUT SALOM JURABISHVILI:

- **Salom Jurabishvili was born on March 18, 1952.**
- **Earlier she had served as Minister of Georgia from March 20, 2004 to October 19, 2005.**
- **She was a member of Iran's Prohibition Committee of UN Security Council Council (UNSC) between November 11, 2010 and October 10, 2013.**

ABOUT GEORGIA:

- **It is a country located in Eurasia and its area is 69,700 square kilometers.**
- **Its capital is Tbilissi.**
- **It had announced its independence from Soviet Union on April 9, 1991.**
- On its western boundary is the Black Sea.
- To its north lies Russia and Turkey and Armenia in the south.

KONKAN 18: INDIA, UK NAVAL EXERCISE HELD IN GOA

The naval exercise Konkan 18 between India and United Kingdom will be conducted from November 28 to December 6, 2018 off Goa with units participating from both navies.

- The harbour phase is scheduled from November 28 to November 30 2018 followed by the sea phase from 2-6 December, 2018.

DETAILS:

- For this edition of exercise, Royal Navy will be represented by HMS Dragon, a Type 45 Class Destroyer equipped with integral Wildcat helicopter.
- Indian Navy will be represented by INS Kolkata, the first ship of latest Kolkata class destroyers, equipped with integral Seaking and submarine and maritime patrol aircraft Dornier.
- The thrust of exercise this year is on Anti-Air warfare, Anti-Submarine Warfare, Anti-Surface Warfare, Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) and seamanship evolutions.
- Besides exercises at sea, it will also encompass professional interactions and sports fixtures.

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- Naval cooperation between India and United Kingdom is based on long term strategic relationship between both countries.
- Both Navies have, over years have undertaken bilateral activities such as training exchanges and technical cooperation.
- Bilateral KONKAN exercise was started in 2004 and since then has grown in scale.
- It provides a platform to periodically exercise at sea and in harbor so as to build interoperability and share best practices.
- The exercise is aimed at deriving mutual benefit from each others' experiences and is indicative of the continuing cooperation between two countries.
- The inter-operability achieved over years as result of such exercises has proved to be operationally beneficial to both navies.
- The naval cooperation is a tangible symbol of commitment of both nations in ensuring a positive climate at sea for enhancing strategic stability and promoting economic prosperity.

COPE INDIA 2019: INDIA, US AIR EXERCISE TO BE HELD IN WEST BENGAL

Indian Air Force (IAF) and US Air Force (USAF) will participate in bilateral exercise 'COPE INDIA 2019' - scheduled to be held between December 3 and 14, 2019 in West Bengal.

- The bilateral flying training programme will be held at two important airbases in West Bengal -

Air Force Station Kalaikunda and Air Force Station Arjan Singh at Panagarh.

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **IAF's Kalaikunda station is an important training air base for IAF and Air Force Station Arjan Singh at Panagarh has the second squadron of C130J Super Hercules.**
- **The first squadron of the C130J Super Hercules is based at Hindon.**

ABOUT COPE INDIA 2019:

- **It will be a long-standing bilateral US Pacific Air Forces (PACAF)-sponsored Field Training Exercise (FTX), conducted with IAF.**
- It will be focused on enhancing US-Indian mutual cooperation and building on existing capabilities, aircrew tactics and force employment.
- **It will showcase US and India's efforts and commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region.**
- **Around 200 US airmen with 15 aircraft from 18th Wing at Kadena Air Base in Japan and 182 Airlift Wing of the Illinois Air National Guard will participate in it alongside their IAF counterparts.**

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- **Cope India is a series of international Air Force exercises between Indian Air Force (IAF) and United States Air Force (USAF) conducted on and over Indian soil.**
- **The first such exercise was conducted at IAF air force station in Gwalior in February 2004.**
- The exercise included flight tests, practice and demonstrations as well as lectures on subjects related to aviation.
- The exercise has evolved to incorporate subject matter expert exchanges, air mobility training, airdrop training and large-force exercises, in addition to fighter-training exercises.
- **The exercise was repeated in 2005, 2006, 2009 and was last held in 2010.**

INDIA AND CHINA SIGN AGREEMENT TO INSPECT FISH MEAL AND FISH OIL EXPORTS FROM INDIA TO CHINA

India and China have signed a protocol on hygiene and inspection requirements for exports of fish meal and fish oil from India to China.

- It was signed as part of discussions between India's Commerce Ministry and six-member Chinese delegation led by Vice Minister, General Administration of Customs of China, Hu Wei on easing market access for exports of various farm products held in New Delhi.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MEETING:

- Both Indian and Chinese sides appreciated each other's concerns and agreed to resolve market access issues expeditiously to achieve the vision of the leaders of both the countries by promoting a more balanced trade.
- **Chinese delegation also discussed issues regarding market access for Chinese products such as milk and milk products, agricultural goods like soy meal, fruits and vegetables, tobacco and pharmaceuticals.**

WHAT IS THE PROTOCOL ON HYGIENE AND INSPECTION REQUIREMENTS?

- **This protocol for export of fish meal and fish oil from India to China is significant as India has been seeking market access for these items from China.**
- It will enable India to commence export of fish meal and fish oil to China.
- China imports fish oil to the tune of USD 143.29 million per year and fish meal worth US \$263.43 million.
- It had so far not allowed these exports from India.
- This is the second Indian product to get clearance from China in the last six months.
- **Earlier, during meeting of two countries in Wuhan, China protocol for Indian rice export to China was signed paving way for export of Indian rice to China.**

EDRISHTI SOFTWARE LAUNCHED TO HELP RAILWAYS MINISTER KEEP TRACK OF PUNCTUALITY OF TRAINS

Indian Railways unveiled 'eDrishti' software that will help Union Railway Minister to keep track of punctuality of trains as well as freight and passenger earnings and much more from anywhere in the country.

- The software has been developed by Centre for Railway Information System (CRIS) to help the Minister keep track of all information related to Indian Railways, one of the world's largest rail networks.

ABOUT THE EDRISHTI SOFTWARE:

- **Using this software, the Railway Minister can track any information with just a click of mouse - whether from his office or while on the move.**
- It will also enable the Minister to know at any given point of time day's freight and passenger earnings, freight loading and unloading, punctuality, progress of major projects, public grievances, movement of trains across the country, details of railway stations and much more.
- **It has also been connected with base kitchens of Indian Rail Catering and Tourism Corp (IRCTC) as many complaints come regarding the quality of food served on trains.**

- Through live video, Minister will be able to monitor the things going on in IRCTC kitchens.
- **It will also provide the live status of reserved and unreserved passengers travelling on trains besides providing the exact location of trains at any point of time.**

NPCC CONFERRED MINIRATNA CATEGORY-I STATUS

Union Government has conferred the status of Miniratna: Category-I to National Projects Construction Corporation Limited (NPCC).

- The empowerment of Miniratna status to NPCC will help company to take speedy decisions by enhancing delegation of powers to the Board.

ABOUT NATIONAL PROJECTS CONSTRUCTION CORPORATION LIMITED (NPCC):

- NPCC is a schedule 'B' Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under the administrative control of Ministry of Water Resources.
- It was incorporated in 1957.
- It is the premier construction company having mandate with creation of infrastructure to provide impetus for economic development of the country.
- It has also been awarded ISO 9001:2015 Certification.
- NPCC is making continuous profit since 2009-10 and is having a positive networth for last six years.
- It has an ambitious business plan with enhanced order book position of Rs. 11833 crore.

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- Department of Public Enterprises under Ministry of Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises grants status of Maharatna, Navratna, and Miniratna to Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) based upon profit made by these enterprises.
- These statuses give financial and administrative power to the companies to a certain extent.
- At present there are total 8 Maharatna, 16 Navratna, 60 Miniratna Category-I and 15 Miniratna Category-II CPSEs.

INDIA TO CHAIR KIMBERLEY PROCESS CERTIFICATION SCHEME FROM JANUARY 2018

India will Chair Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) from 1st January 2018.

- India was handed Chairmanship by the European Union during KPCS Plenary 2018, which was held in Brussels, Belgium.

COMMITMENTS OF INDIA AS KPCS CHAIR:

- Make KPCS a stronger process in terms of inclusiveness, strengthened administration and implementation.
- Make KPCS more efficient in terms of delivery of what it promises, more transparent and empathetic towards living standards of people who are dependent on production, trade and manufacturing of diamonds.
- Support Artisanal & Small-Scale Mining (ASM) with capacity building, technical assistance and education on valuation, differentiation between natural and lab-grown diamonds and importance of legal and formal mining practices.

ABOUT THE KIMBERLEY PROCESS:

- **It is a joint initiative of governments, industry and civil societies to stem the flow of 'conflict diamonds', rough diamonds used by rebel groups to finance wars against legitimate governments.**
- It is also described in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions.
- **India is one of the founding members of KPCS.**
- At present, KPCS has 54 members representing 81 countries including EU with 28 members.
- **KPCS came into effect from 1 January, 2003 through United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution.**
- **It outlines the rules that govern trade in rough diamonds.**
- **It has evolved into an effective mechanism for stopping trade in conflict diamonds.**
- It sets minimum requirements that each participant must meet.
- **In India, the scheme is administered through Department of Commerce under aegis of the Union Commerce and Industry Ministry.**

ABOUT INDIA AND KPCS:

- **India is a founding member of KPCS.**
- **It is actively involved in KPCS activities to ensure that almost 99% of diamond trade in world is conflict free.**
- It is committed to maintaining KPCS as an efficient and effective process in order to ensure conflict diamond free status.
- **It is also at the forefront in addressing issue of differentiation between Natural Diamonds and Lab Grown Diamonds and ensure responsible business in this area.**

WHAT ARE CONFLICT DIAMONDS?

- **Conflict diamonds or blood diamonds are the rough diamonds used by rebel movements in the third world countries especially in Africa to finance (civil) wars with an aim to topple legitimate governments.**
- **The KPCS completely bans import and export of rough diamonds without certification.**

ISRO SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHES ADVANCED EARTH OBSERVATION SATELLITE- HYSIS AND 30 FOREIGN SATELLITES INTO ORBIT

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully launched country's first advance earth observation satellite- "Hyper Spectral Imaging Satellite (HysIS)", along with 30 other satellites from eight countries.

- These satellites were launched on board of ISRO's workhorse PSLV-C43 from Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) at Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh.

ABOUT THE MISSION:

- **PSLV-C43 was the 45th flight of Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) with a combined payload of 641.5kg.**
- **It was the 'Core Alone' version of PSLV i.e. lightest version of the launch vehicle.**
- PSLV is a four stage launch vehicle with alternating solid and liquid stages.
- **HysIS, weighing around 380 kg was the primary payload of this PSLV-C43 mission.**
- The co-passengers of HysIS included 1 micro and 29 nano satellites from eight different countries including one each from Australia, Canada, Columbia, Finland, Malaysia, Netherlands, Spain and 23 from US.
- **All these satellites were commercially contracted for launch through ISRO's commercial arm Antrix Corporation Limited.**
- All these satellites were placed in a 504 km orbit.
- The satellites were ejected in two orbits by restarting the rocket's fourth-stage engine twice.
- PSLV had first released HysIS into orbit at 636 km, 17 minutes after launch.
- Later, the engine of rocket's fourth stage was restarted to place the remaining satellites into desired orbits.

ABOUT THE HYPER SPECTRAL IMAGING SATELLITE (HYSIS):

- **It is India's first hyperspectral imaging satellite for advanced earth observation developed indigenously by ISRO.**
- It was placed in the 636 km-polar sun synchronous orbit with an inclination of 97.957 degree.

- It has a mission life of five years.
- Its primary goal is to study earth's surface in visible near infrared and shortwave infrared regions of electromagnetic spectrum within a bandwidth of 400nm-2500nm wavelength.
- Optical imaging detector chip is the heart of this satellite which has been indigenously designed by Space Application Centre of ISRO and fabricated at its semi-conductor lab at Chandigarh.

APPLICATIONS OF HYSIS:

- The hyperspectral imaging satellite technology will be an added advantage in watching over India from space across sectors including defence, agriculture, land use and mineral exploration.
- It will be primarily used in Agriculture, Forestry, Soil Survey, Geology, Coastal Zone Studies, Inland water Studies, Environmental monitoring and Pollution Detection from Industries.

WHAT IS HYPERSPECTRAL IMAGING?

- Hyperspectral imaging or hypspx imaging (imaging spectroscopy) combines the power of digital imaging and spectroscopy.
- It collects and processes information from across electromagnetic spectrum.
- Hypspx imaging enables distinct identification of objects, materials or processes on Earth by reading spectrum for each pixel of scene from space.
- The hypspx technology is still an evolving science.
- In recent times, it has become a trend that is being experimented globally.
- It has the ability to add new dimension to plain-vanilla optical imagers.

YOU CAN FLY DRONES LEGALLY

Flying drones have become legal in India as the new policy drafted by the Director General of Civil Aviation's (DGCA) has come into effect.

- The new policy called 'Drone Regulations 1.0' classifies a remotely piloted aircraft and delineates how they can be flown and sets the restrictions under which they will operate.

DETAILS:

- The Ministry of Civil Aviation has opened the registration process for users who want to operate drones.
- Users will be required to make one-time registration of their drones, pilots and owners on the platform, which will also allow for the online filing of a drone's specific flight path and use.

- **The DGCA has defined five different categories of drones as Nano, Micro, Small, Medium and Large.**
- **Under the new policy, Nano drones which are less than or equal to 250 grams doesn't need a registration or license.**
- All the other categories will need a registration following which a unique identification number (UIN) or Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit (UAOP) will be issued by the DGCA.
- **For getting the UIN, the user will have to pay a fee of Rs 1000.**
- If someone is getting a fresh UAOP, which is valid for five years, that costs is Rs 25,000 and it will cost Rs 10,000 to renew a UAOP.

RESTRICTIONS:

- Even after completing all the required registrations, flying of drones are subjected to some restrictions.
- **Drones will only be allowed to fly during the day time and within the "visual line of sight".**
- **Strategic locations, vital military installations, areas around airports, near international border, Vijay Chowk in Delhi, State Secretariat Complex in state capitals, are no drone zones.**
- Drones can also not fly near "permanent or temporary Prohibited, Restricted and Danger Areas" and eco-sensitive zones.
- People cannot operate drones from a moving vehicle or aircraft.

SOUTH AFRICAN PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA TO BE CHIEF GUEST AT INDIA'S 70TH REPUBLIC DAY CELEBRATIONS

After United States President Donald Trump turned down India's invitation to be the Chief Guest at the 70th Republic Day celebrations due to his tight schedule, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has accepted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's invitation to grace the occasion.

- South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met on the sidelines of the G-20 summit that was being organised in Buenos Aires, capital of Argentina.

DETAILS:

- **Next year will also mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, tweeted PM Modi saying that it was an honour to welcome the South African President given Bapu's strong links to the country are well known.**
- According to Prime Minister Modi, President Ramaphosa's visit will further strengthen business ties between the two countries.
- Meanwhile, South Africa celebrated the 100th birth anniversary of their first black head of state,

Nelson Mandela, popularly called Madiba who died in 2013 at the age of 95.

- **Reportedly, the US president's "domestic commitments", including his State of the Union address, around that time seemed to have been the reason for declining the invitation.**

INDIA TO HOST G-20 SUMMIT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2022 ON 75TH YEAR OF INDEPENDENCE

India will host the G20 Summit in 2022 when the nation would be celebrating 75 years of Independence, PM Narendra Modi declared it on Saturday during the G20 Summit in Argentina.

- India will be hosting the event for the first time.

ABOUT G20:

- The G20 is the group of world's 20 major economies.
- It started out in 1999 as a meeting of the finance ministers and central bank governors, but in 2008, the head of the member states met for the first time to discuss the financial crisis.

HIGHLIGHTS OF G20 OF 2018, ARGENTINA:

- **In a final statement from the two-day gathering in Argentina's Buenos Aires, that has proved to be a major test for the G20, members called for reforms to the crisis-stricken World Trade Organization amid growing global trade tensions.**
- With a rise in nationalist sentiment in many countries, the group, which accounts for two-thirds of the global population and 85 percent of the global economy, faces doubts over its ability to deal with trade tensions and other geopolitical differences among its members.
- **India presented a nine-point agenda to the G20 countries on Friday, calling for "strong and active cooperation" among them to comprehensively deal with fugitive economic offenders.**
- **On Saturday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Chinese President Xi Jinping for the fourth time this year as the two leaders agreed that there had been a "perceptible improvement" in bilateral ties after their April summit in Wuhan and expressed hope that 2019 would be an even better year for ties between the two Asian giants.**
- PM Modi also met European Council President Donald Tusk, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and German Chancellor Angela Merkel here and discussed ways to strengthen the India-EU relations, including joint effort to counter terrorism.

INDIA'S FIRST ENGINE-LESS TRAIN CROSSES 180 KMPH SPEED LIMIT DURING TRIAL RUN

India's first locomotive-less train, known as Train 18, breached the 180 kmph speed limit during a test run on Sunday.

- According to a senior railway official, when this Rs 100-crore indigenously designed train is made operational, it will become the country's fastest train.

DETAILS:

- **Train 18 breached the 180 kmph speed limit in the Kota-Sawai Madhopur section.**
- **Integral Coach Factory (ICF) has manufactured the train.**
- The major trials are now over, with just some more remaining.
- Based on the reports, fine tuning would be done if needed.
- As of now no major technical problem has cropped up.
- **The train is expected to commence its commercial run from January 2019.**
- **If all things go well, Train 18 will replace the current Shatabdi Express - a day train.**
- **Train 18 is capable of touching 200 kmph provided the rest of Indian Railways' system such as tracks and signals permit.**
- **With 16 coaches, the train will have the same passenger carrying capacity as that of the Shatabdi Express.**
- It has aerodynamically designed driver cabins at both ends for quicker turn-around at destinations.
- The train sports an advanced regenerative braking system which saves power.
- The fully air-conditioned train offers better passenger comfort and safety, as all equipment are fixed under the carriage, so that more space is available on board.

CHINA SAYS NO TO INDIA'S PROPOSAL FOR BILATERAL TRADE IN DOMESTIC CURRENCIES

China has not accepted India's proposal to carry out bilateral trade in local currencies which was aimed at bridging the ballooning trade deficit with the neighbouring country.

DETAILS:

- **India's exports to China stood at only USD 13.4 billion, imports aggregated to USD 76.4 billion in 2017-18, leaving a trade deficit of USD 63 billion.**
- It was USD 51.11 billion in 2016-17.
- **India had suggested China for renminbi-rupee trade to boost its exports and tackle the widening trade deficit concern.**
- The issue was discussed in an inter-ministerial meeting in October.

- In the meeting, it was suggested to the Reserve Bank of India and the Department of Economic Affairs would look at the possibility of exploring renminbi-rupee trade with China.

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **The Indian industry and exporters have time and again raised the issue of increasing trade deficit with China and have asked the government to seek greater market access for domestic goods in the Chinese market.**
- **Recently, China has permitted exports of rice and sugar.**
- But India wants to increase exports of several other items, including pharmaceuticals, engineering and services.

FIRST INDIA-ASEAN INNOTECH SUMMIT HELD IN NEW DELHI

The first India-ASEAN InnoTech Summit was held in New Delhi.

- It was organized by Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) in association with Department of Science & Technology (DST) and Ministry of External Affairs.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS SUMMIT:

- Explore avenues of cross country partnerships with Indian R&D-based enterprises.
- Capture global trends in technology management and strategy.
- Advance progressive ideas for policy reforms and regulatory environment.
- Create avenues for industry-academia-government partnerships.
- Build capacities for market assessment and rapid commercialization of research.
- Promote best practices in financing, strategy, and leadership.
- Connect local and global research & development community for collaborative engagement.

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- Participating ASEAN member countries in this summit were Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
- **On sidelines of this summit, an exhibition to showcase best Indian Innovative Technologies, with potential implementation in ASEAN region was also organized.**
- **Besides, this summit also provided platform for B2G meetings i.e. one to one meeting with ASEAN delegation of ministers, advisors, and other dignitaries.**

ABOUT ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN):

- **ASEAN is a regional intergovernmental organisation comprising 10 Southeast Asian countries, which promotes intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic, political, security, military, educational, and sociocultural integration.**
- **10-member ASEAN comprise of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Brunei and Laos.**
- **India is a full dialogue partner of the ASEAN.**

GOVERNMENT PUTS IMPORTS OF GOLD DORE IN RESTRICTED CATEGORY

Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) under Ministry of Commerce and Industry has put imports of gold dore in restricted category.

This means that, now the importer needs a license to import this commodity.

WHAT IS GOLD DORE?

- **It is a semi-pure alloy of gold and silver which is refined for further purification.**
- Proportions of silver and gold can vary widely.
- It is usually created at the site of a mine and then **transported** to a refinery for further purification.
- **Refined gold bars are manufactured from gold dore bar.**
- **India imports about 900 tonnes of gold year making it world's second-biggest gold consumer after China.**
- The imports mainly take care of demand of the jewellery industry.

WASTAGE AND VALUE ADDITION NORMS FOR GOLD RELIGIOUS IDOLS:

- **DGFT also has prescribed wastage and value addition norms for gold religious idols (only gods and goddess) - both plain and studded, of eight carats and up to 24 carats.**
- Under these norms, percentage of wastage for plain gold idols will be 2.5%, while it will be 5% for studded idols.
- Similarly, percentage of value addition for plain gold religious idols will be 10% and 14% in case of idols studded with colour gems stones.
- The percentage for value addition in case of idols studded with diamonds will be 15%.

BLUE CROSS: ABHINAV BINDRA BECOMES FIRST INDIAN TO GET HIGHEST SHOOTING HONOUR

Ace Indian shooter Abhinav Bindra (36) and still India's only individual Olympic gold medallist

was awarded the coveted International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) Blue Cross.

- With this, Bindra is the first Indian to be awarded the Blue Cross.
- The award is conferred for outstanding contribution to the sport of shooting and honours distinguished members of the international shooting fraternity.
- Blue Cross is the highest recognition conferred by the parent body of international shooting- ISSF.

ABOUT ABHINAV BINDRA:

- **He has won the Olympic gold medal (2008), World Championship gold (2006), 7 Commonwealth Games medals and 3 Asian Games medals in shooting.**
- **He became the first Indian to win an individual Olympic gold medal by winning the top prize in 10m Air Rifle event at 2008 Games held in Beijing, China.**
- **He was given Arjuna award in 2000, Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna in 2001 and Padma Bhushan in 2009.**
- **He had narrowly missed out on the second Olympic medal at 2016 Games in Rio de Janeiro, post which he decided to retire from the sport at the age of 33 to make way for next generation of Indian shooters.**

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY: DECEMBER 2

The International Day for the Abolition of Slavery is observed on December 2 every year with an objective to raise awareness about slavery and its impact on the society.

- This day marks the adaptation of resolution- 'Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Prostitution of Others' by United Nations (UN) General Assembly on 2 December 1949.
- The focus of this day is on eradicating contemporary forms of slavery, such as trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, worst forms of child labour and forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.

ABOUT MODERN SLAVERY:

- **According to International Labour Organisation (ILO) more than 40 million people worldwide are victims of modern slavery.**
- There are 5.4 victims of modern slavery for every 1,000 people in the world.
- 1 in 4 victims of modern slavery are children.
- Though modern slavery is not defined in law, it is used as an umbrella term covering practices such as forced labour, forced marriage, human trafficking and debt bondage.
- Thus, it can be referred to as situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception or abuse of power.

- ILO has adopted new legally binding Protocol, designed to strengthen global efforts to eliminate forced labour, which entered into force in November 2016.

GOVERNMENT FORMS RAJIV KUMAR COMMITTEE TO LOOK AT SELLING OF OIL AND ONGC FIELDS TO PRIVATE COMPANIES

Union Government has constituted a six-member committee to look at selling as many as 149 small and marginal oil and and gas fields of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL) to private and foreign companies to boost domestic output.

- **The committee will be headed by NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar** and includes Cabinet Secretary P K Sinha, Oil Secretary M M Kuttu, Economic Affairs Secretary Subhash Chandra Garg, NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant and ONGC Chairman and Managing Director Shashi Shanker as members.

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- **Constitution of this committee is the follow up of October 2018 meeting called by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to review domestic production profile of oil and gas and the roadmap for cutting import dependence by 10% by 2022.**
- In this meeting, Union Oil Ministry had made presentation showing that 149 smaller fields of ONGC, OIL and other explorers accounted for just 5% of domestic crude oil production.
- It was suggested at the meeting that these smaller fields could be given out to private and foreign firms, so that ONGC could concentrate on big ones where it could rope in technology partners through production enhancement contracts (PEC) or technical service arrangements.
- This was mainly because large ONGC fields contribute to 95% of its production.

COP24: 24TH CONFERENCE OF PARTIES TO UNFCCC BEGINS IN KATOWICE, POLAND

The 24th meeting of Conference of Parties (COP-24) to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) began in Katowice, Poland.

- COP-24 is expected to finalise guidelines for implementation of the Paris Agreement adopted in 2016.
- Delegates from nearly 200 nations are participation in COP24.
- **Indian delegation to this conference is led by Environment Minister, Dr Harsh Vardhan.**

INDIA & COP24:

- **India expects that COP-24 will be able to frame guidelines, which are pragmatic and gives due consideration to challenges and priorities of developing countries.**
- India considers that the outcome of COP-24 should be balanced, inclusive, and consistent with

principles and provisions of Convention and its Paris Agreement.

- India strongly supports the objective of Paris Agreement to strengthen global response to threat of climate change by keeping global temperature rise well below 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial revolution period.
- India considers it important, as it is linked to issue of poverty eradication.
- India will highlight its concern for climate change and reaffirm its commitments to finalisation of Paris Agreement Work Programme.
- This agreement also focuses on developing countries' need to adapt to adverse impacts of climate change, in a manner that it does not put additional burden on them.
- **India will be setting up a pavilion to create awareness about India's positive climate actions in various sectors of economy.**
- **The theme of Pavilion is 'One World One Sun One Grid' as highlighted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during first assembly of International Solar Alliance (ISA) in October 2018.**

ABOUT UNFCCC (UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE):

- **It is an international environmental treaty negotiated at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and entered into force in 1994.**
- **It has a near universal membership as it has 196 countries and European Union (EU) as its members.**
- It is the parent treaty of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol which was ratified by 192 of the UNFCCC Parties.
- The ultimate objective of both treaties is to stabilize greenhouse gas (GHGs) concentrations in atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system.

ABOUT CONFERENCE OF PARTIES (COP):

- **COP is the supreme decision-making body of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).**
- **All States that are Parties to UNFCCC are represented at COP.**
- **At COP, all parties review implementation of Convention and take decisions necessary to promote the effective implementation of Convention.**

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: DECEMBER 3

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities is observed every year on December 3 to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development.

- *The 2018 theme for this day is "Empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring inclusiveness and*

equality".

- It focuses on empowering persons with disabilities for an inclusive, equitable and sustainable development as part of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) pledges to "leave no one behind".

DETAILS:

- **The International Day of Persons with Disabilities was instituted by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) after it had passed a resolution 47/3 in 1992.**
- **Since then, it is observed annually and originally was called as the International Day of Disabled Persons.**
- UN estimates that around one billion people are living with disabilities across the world and they are facing barriers of inclusion in many key aspects of society.

OBJECTIVE OF THIS DAY:

- **It aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities.**
- **It also seeks to increase awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.**

SHINYUU MAITRI 18: FIRST INDIA, JAPAN AIR EXERCISE BEGINS IN AGRA

The first bilateral air exercise SHINYUU Maitri-18 between Japanese Air Self Defence Force (JASDF) and Indian Air Force (IAF) began at the Air Force Station in Agra.

- The theme of this exercise is joint Mobility/Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief (HADR) on Transport aircraft.

ABOUT SHINYUU MAITRI-18:

- **The focus of the exercise is set for IAF and JASDF crews- to undertake Joint Mobility/ HADR operations.**
- **IAF and JASDF will also practice display of heavy loading/off loading during this exercise.**
- In this exercise, JASDF will be participating with C2 aircraft along with aircrew and observers.
- IAF is participating with C-17 and An-32 aircraft with aircrew and observers.

GOVERNMENT INKS \$85 MILLION LOAN AGREEMENT WITH ADB FOR ODISHA SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Union Government (Ministry of Finance) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) have signed an \$85 million loan agreement for Odisha Skill Development Project.

- It aims to improve the skill development eco-system in Odisha and establish World Skill Center (WSC), an advanced skill training center in the state's capital- Bhubaneswar.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT:

- **It will improve the quality of State's TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) programs by making them relevant to industry and demand driven.**
- **It will impart advanced occupation-ready skills training aligned with international standards.**
- It will also complement efforts to target the employment needs of the emerging sectors in India and globally.
- **It will engage Institute of Technical Education Services (ITEES), Singapore to support Odisha Skill Development Authority in setting-up and operationalizing WSC.**
- This centre will offer internationally bench marked advanced training programs for the working age population of Odisha.
- **It will deliver eight training courses for 13,000 full-time students, provide training for 5,000 teachers and train 1,000 assessors.**
- The project will help over 150,000 people learn skills in priority sectors, including manufacturing, construction and services for formal employment.
- It will improve overall eco-system of skill development in Odisha by providing integrated services through entrepreneurship incubation center, career counseling and placement center, curriculum design and development center and education technology deployment center.
- These important functions of WSC will support network of Government ITIs and develop skills and capacity of polytechnics, college of engineering, and other private skilling centers.
- ADB will also administer \$2 million technical assistance grant from Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction, financed by Japanese Government that will support capacity development activities under the project.

ABOUT THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB):

- **ADB is a regional development bank based out of Asia.**
- **It aims to promote social and economic development in Asia** by achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.
- **It was established in December 1966.**
- **It is headquartered at Ortigas Centre in Manila, Philippines.**
- **It has total 67 members, of which 48 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 from outside.**

WORLD BANK UNVEILS US \$200 BILLION IN CLIMATE ACTION INVESTMENT FOR 2021-25

World Bank has unveiled US \$200 billion in climate action investment for 2021 to 2025 to fight the impact of climate change.

- The move coincides with Conference of Parties-24 (COP24) United Nations Climate Summit in Katowice, Poland.
- The breakdown of US \$200 billion will comprise approximately 100 billion in direct finance from World Bank.
- Around one-third of remaining funding will come from two World Bank Group agencies and rest will be private capital mobilised by the World Bank Group.

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- **This US \$200 billion in climate action investment, amounts to World Bank's doubling of its current five-year funding.**
- It also represents significantly ramped up ambition of World Bank to tackle climate change and sends an important signal to the wider global community to do the same.
- This amounts is also double of World Bank's earlier commitment for its current five-year funding.

ABOUT WORLD BANK:

- **It is an international financial institution that provides loans to countries of the world for capital projects.**
- **Its official goal is reduction of poverty by providing loans to developing countries for capital programmes.**
- It is one of the five institutions created at the Breton Woods Conference in 1944.
- Its headquarter is situated at Washington DC, US.
- World Bank is a part of United Nations system, but its governance structure is different.

QATAR TO LEAVE OPEC FROM JANUARY 2019

Qatar has announced its withdrawal from Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) from January 2019 and focus more on the production of natural gas.

- **It makes Qatar, the first Gulf country to leave OPEC bloc of oil-producing countries led by Saudi Arabia.**
- Qatar has been a member of OPEC since 1961 and its decision to pull out after more than five decades comes at a turbulent time in Gulf politics.
- It is under boycott from its neighbouring gulf allies including Saudi Arabia for 18 months (since August 2017).

DETAILS:

- **Qatar is the world's largest exporter of liquified natural gas (LPG) and 17th largest producer of crude oil (around 600,000 barrels per day).**
- **It also only holds around 2% of the world's global oil reserves.**
- **The withdrawal decision reflects Qatar's desire to focus its efforts on plans to develop and increase its natural gas production from 77 million tonne per year to 110 million tonnes in the coming years.**
- **Being part of OPEC its oil production was steady with limited prospects for increases.**
- **Since 2013, the amount of oil Qatar produced has steadily declined from about 728,000 barrels per day (2013) to about 607,000 barrels per day (2017), or just under 2% of OPEC's total output.**

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION OF PETROLEUM EXPORTING COUNTRIES (OPEC):

- **OPEC is an intergovernmental organization (or cartel) of 15 oil-exporting developing nations that coordinates and unifies the petroleum policies of its member countries.**
- **It was established in 1960 in Baghdad, Iraq by the first five members.**
- **Its headquarters are in Vienna, Austria.**
- **Its mission is to coordinate and unify petroleum policies of its member countries and ensure stabilization of oil markets, in order to secure an efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consumers, steady income to producers and fair return on capital for those investing in petroleum industry.**
- **OPEC member countries accounted for an estimated 43% of global oil production and 73% of the "proven" world's oil reserves.**
- **Two-thirds of OPEC's oil production and reserves are in its six Middle Eastern (west Asian) countries that surround the oil-rich Persian Gulf.**

OPEC MEMBERS:

- **Asia and Middle East:** Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia (de facto leader of OPEC), Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Qatar (to withdraw from January 2019).
- **Africa:** Algeria, Angola, Libya, Congo Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.
- **South/Latin America:** Ecuador and Venezuela.

UGC DIRECTS UNIVERSITIES TO OBSERVE DECEMBER 7 AS ARMED FORCES FLAG DAY

University Grants Commission (UGC) has directed all universities across the country to observe December 7 as the Armed Forces Flag Day to commemorate supreme sacrifices made by country's soldiers during conflicts.

- It also directed universities to organise functions or hold talks in the colleges or institutes to generate awareness on the issue among the students.

WHAT IS ITS SIGNIFICANCE?

As part of observation of the Armed Forces Flag Day, universities must acknowledge sacrifices made by valiant armed forces personnel for protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and securing lives against threats of terrorism & insurgency and against natural calamities.

ABOUT THE INDIAN ARMED FORCES FLAG DAY:

- **It is observed every year on December 7 since 1949 to honour soldiers, airmen and sailors of the country.**
- **It serves as an important occasion to remind the nation of its obligation to look after veterans, disabled soldiers, war widows and dependents of those who have sacrificed their lives for honour, safety, and integrity of the motherland.**

ABOUT UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION (UGC):

- **UGC is a statutory body set up by Union government in accordance to UGC Act 1956.**
- **It functions under Ministry of Human Resource Development.**
- **It is mandated to initiate important decisions and dialogues which have important bearing on the entire student population of the country.**
- **The three primary functions of UGC include overseeing distribution of grants to universities and colleges in India, providing scholarships and fellowships to beneficiaries and monitoring conformity to its regulations by universities and colleges.**

OVER 100 NEW EXOPLANETS DISCOVERED USING NASA'S KEPLER SPACE TELESCOPE

Scientists have discovered a cache of over 100 new exoplanets using data from NASA's Kepler Space Telescope (KST) as well as ground-based observatories.

- **Exoplanet, also called as extrasolar planet, is a planet that orbits star other than Sun.**
- **The discovery of 100 new exoplanets is expected to play a large role in developing the research field of exoplanets and life in universe.**

ABOUT THE KEPLER SPACE TELESCOPE:

- **KST is an unmanned space observatory launched in 2009 by National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).**
- **It was tasked with determining how many Earth-like planets occur throughout the Milky**

Way galaxy.

- It was designed for statistical mission and not to probe into environmental conditions of planets that exist in so-called Goldilocks zone (Habitable zone) of their stars.
- **It finds planets by using transit method.**
- It works on the detection of tiny brightness dips caused by a planet after it crosses its host star's face from the spacecraft's perspective.
- Transit method technique requires extremely precise pointing of spacecraft.
- **KST had experienced mechanical trouble in 2013, which led to a successor mission called K2.**
- **Astronomers around the world are competing to confirm exoplanets suggested by K2 data.**
- **NASA had retired KST in November 2018 after it ran out of fuel needed for further science operations.**
- In its mission lifespan of nine-and-a-half year, it had discovered over 2,600 intriguing exoplanets from outside our solar system some of which may harbour life.

PRASAD SCHEME: CENTRE INCLUDES GANGOTRI, YAMUNOTRI IN UTTARAKHAND, AMARKANTAK IN MP AND PARASNATH IN JHARKHAND

Union Government has included Gangotri and Yamunotri in Uttrakhand, Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh and Parasnath in Jharkhand under Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASAD) to develop pilgrimage and heritage destinations in the country.

- With the new additions, the number of sites under PRASAD has now reached to 41 in 25 states.

ABOUT PRASAD SCHEME:

- **It was launched in 2014-15 by Union Ministry of Tourism.**
- **It aims at the integrated development of pilgrimage destinations in planned, prioritised and sustainable manner to provide a complete religious tourism experience.**
- **It focuses on the development and beautification of the identified pilgrimage destinations.**

OBJECTIVES OF PRASAD SCHEME:

- **Harness pilgrimage tourism for its direct and multiplier effect upon employment generation and economic development.**
- **Enhance tourist attractiveness in sustainable manner by developing world class infrastructure in the religious destinations.**

- It also seeks to promote local art, culture, handicraft, cuisine, etc.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT UNDER THIS SCHEME INCLUDES:

- Development of entry points (road, rail and water transport), last mile connectivity, basic tourism facilities like Information/interpretation centers, ATM/ money exchange.
- Development of eco-friendly modes of transport, lighting and illumination with renewable energy sources, drinking water, parking, toilets, waiting rooms, first aid centers, craft bazars/haats/souvenir shops/cafeteria, rain shelters, telecom facilities, internet connectivity etc.

FUNDING:

- Under this scheme, Ministry of Tourism provides Central Financial Assistance (CFA) to State Governments for promoting tourism at identified destinations.
- For components within public funding under this scheme, Central Government will provide 100% fund.
- For improved sustainability of the project, it also seeks to involve Public Private Partnership (PPP) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as well.

ODISHA'S KANDHAMAL HALDI TO GET GI TAG

Odisha's Kandhamal Haldi (Turmeric) will soon get a Geographical Indications (GI) tag.

- It is a few steps away from receiving this tag.
- Its registration was moved by Kandhamal Apex Spices Association for Marketing and was accepted under sub-section (1) of Section 13 of Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999.
- **Kandhamal Haldi is famous for its healing properties.**
- **It is a main cash crop of the tribal people in Kandhamal.**
- Apart from domestic use, it is also used for cosmetic and medicinal purposes.

ABOUT GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION (GI):

- **GI tag is a name or sign used on certain products which correspond to a specific geographical location or origin.**
- **It is used for agricultural, natural and manufactured goods having a special quality and established reputation.**
- **The purpose of GI tag enables stakeholders to authenticate their production while earning a premium and derive an improved livelihood.**
- The goods and products having such tag are recognised for their origin, quality and reputation and gives it the required edge in the global market.
- **It also ensures that none can use their name, giving them exclusivity.**

- **The registration of GI is valid for 10 years after which it needs to be renewed.**
- Violation of GI tags is a punishable offence under law.
- **GI is covered as an element of intellectual property rights (IPRs) under the Paris Convention for Protection of Industrial Property.**
- **At the international level, GI is governed by WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).**
- In India, GI tag Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection Act), 1999 governs it.
- This Act is administered by Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks, who is also the Registrar of Geographical Indications and is based in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

SPACEX SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHES 64 SMALL SATELLITES USING REUSABLE FALCON 9 ROCKET

Elon Musk-led SpaceX has successfully launched 64 small satellites into low Earth orbit onboard of its reusable and preflown Falcon 9 rocket from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California.

- This has set a new record in United States of launching satellites in a single go.
- It was the third voyage of Falcon 9 rocket, marking another milestone in SpaceX's cost-cutting reusable rocket technology.

ABOUT THE SATELLITES:

- The 64 small satellites included 49 CubeSats and 15 micro-satellites belonging to 34 different clients including public, private and university sources from 17 different countries across the world including South Korea, France and Kazakhstan.
- The microsatellites weighed few dozen kilograms and CubeSats weighed even smaller.

ABOUT SPACE X:

- **It is a private US space agency.**
- **It was founded by Elon Musk on May 6, 2002 who is its current CEO.**
- The main purpose for its establishment was to reduce cost of space transport and establish human habitation on Mars house.
- **Space X has developed a series of Falcon Rockets.**
- **To reduce the cost of internal transport, the space company has created re-usable rockets.**
- Majority of these rockets are also used in other launches.

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) holds the record for most satellite launch in single flight.**
- **It had launched 104 satellites in one go using the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C37) rocket.**

80TH SESSION OF POLICY COMMISSION MEETING OF WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANISATION HELD IN MUMBAI

The 80th Session of Policy Commission of World Customs Organization (WCO) was held Mumbai, Maharashtra.

- It is being organized by WCO and hosted by Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), under the Union Finance Minister.

DETAILS:

- **The Secretary General- WCO, other top officials and customs heads from more than 30 countries had participated in this conference for discussion on various matters related to customs.**
- **Key discussion were on issues related trade facilitation, controlling illicit financial flow, performance measurement, challenges of small island economies.**
- **Hosting of Policy Commission session will give global presence and leadership role to India in the area of customs procedures.**
- **It will also give a boost to India's thrust in facilitating trade.**

ABOUT WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANISATION (WCO):

- **It is an independent intergovernmental body whose mission is to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations.**
- **It was established in 1952 as Customs Co-operation Council (CCC).**
- **It is headquartered in Brussels, Belgium.**
- **More than 180 countries are its members including India.**
- **It is the only international organization with competence in Customs matters and defines global standards and procedures for customs clearances at border and their implementation.**
- **It is considered as the voice of international Customs community.**
- **It aims to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of member customs administrations and assist them to contribute successfully to national development goals, particularly revenue collection, national security, trade facilitation, community protection, and collection of trade statistics.**

- **India is a member of WCO since 1971 and has been participating actively in its various activities.**
- **It is part of the Asia Pacific region having 33 countries, one of 6 regions.**
- **From 1st July 2018, India has taken over as the Vice-Chair of the Asia Pacific region for two years.**

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF WCO:

- **WCO's governing body is a Council which relies on the competence and skills of WCO Secretariat and a range of technical and advisory committees to accomplish its mission.**
- **The Secretariat comprises over 100 international officials, technical experts and support staff of multiple nationalities.**
- **WCO has divided its membership into six regions whereby each region is represented by the elected Vice-Chairperson to the WCO Council.**

WORLD SOIL DAY OBSERVED ON DECEMBER 5

World Soil Day is celebrated every year on 5th of December by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of United Nations.

- **Observance of this day aims to communicate messages on importance of soil quality for food security, healthy ecosystems and human well-being.**
- **It also advocates for sustainable management of soil resources.**
- **The Theme for year 2018 is 'Be the Solution to Soil Pollution'.**
- **It aims to raise awareness and call people to stop soil pollution.**

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF SOIL?

- **Soil is the upper layer of Earth.**
- **It is a mixture of organic and inorganic matter, in which plants grow.**
- **It is a finite natural resource.**
- **On a human time-scale it is non-renewable.**
- **According to FAO, soil holds three times as much carbon as atmosphere and can help to meet challenges of a changing climate.**
- **95% of our food comes from soil and 33% of global soils are already degraded.**

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- **International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS) had adopted the resolution proposing 5th of December as World Soil Day in 2002 to celebrate the importance of soil as a critical**

component of natural system and as a vital contributor to human wellbeing.

- Later in June 2013 FAO Conference unanimously endorsed World Soil Day and requested official adoption at 68th UN General Assembly.
- **In December 2013, 68th UNGA declared 5th of December as the World Soil Day.**

PATENTS GRANTED BY INDIA UP BY 50% IN 2017: WIPO

According to the World Intellectual Property Indicators 2018 report released by United Nation's World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), number of patents granted by India shot up by 50% in 2017.

- The patents granted by India increased from 8,248 in 2016 to 12,387 in 2017, thus keeping up a trend of steep increases.

DETAILS:

- **Patents granted in 2017 in India were more than double than 6,022 patents granted in 2015.**
- **Of the total patents granted in 2017, 1,712 went to entities and individuals based in India, and 10,675 to foreigners.**
- The steep increase in number was driven by patents granted to foreigners, which accounted for 85% of total increase.
- The number of patents given to domestic entities has also shown an increasing trend.
- In 2016, 1,115 went to domestic individuals or entities and 7,133 to foreigners and in 2015, 822 were granted to applicants in India and 5,200 to foreigners.
- Globally, 1.4 million patents were granted in 2017.
- China led world with 4,20,144 granted patents and was followed by US with 3,18,829.

ABOUT THE WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANISATION (WIPO):

- **It is the global body for promotion and protection of intellectual property rights (IPR).**
- It is one of the 15 specialized agencies of United Nations (UN).
- **It was established in 1967 and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.**
- **Its mandate is to encourage creative activity, to promote the protection of intellectual property throughout the world.**
- It encourages and provides assistance to all its 188 member countries in formulating national IPR policy, however it does not dictate or prescribe any mandatory measures.

- India is a member of WIPO and party to several treaties administered by WIPO.

REPO RATE KEPT UNCHANGED AT 6.5%

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its fifth bimonthly monetary policy review for financial year 2018-19 has decided to maintain status quo in policy rates by keeping repo rate unchanged at 6.5%.

- The reverse repo rate has also been maintained at 6.25%.
- This decision was taken by RBI's six member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) headed by RBI Governor Urjit Patel.

DETAILS:

- **The decision of MPC is consistent with its stance of calibrated tightening of monetary policy in consonance with the objective of achieving medium-term target for consumer price index (CPI) inflation of 4% within band of +/- 2 per cent, while supporting growth.**
- It has projected that retail inflation projection lowered in the range of 2.7-3.2% for the 2nd half of 2018-19; 3.8-4.2% in the first half of 2019-20.
- **It has forecasted GDP growth for 2018-19 at 7.4% and 7.5% for the first half of 2019-20.**

ABOUT POLICY RATES:

REPO RATE:

- **It was unchanged at 6.5%.**
- It is the rate at which the RBI lends to its clients generally against government securities.

REVERSE REPO RATE:

- **It was unchanged at 6.25%.**
- It is the rate at which banks lend funds to the RBI.

MARGINAL STANDING FACILITY (MSF) RATE:

- **It was unchanged at 6.75%.**
- It is the rate at which scheduled banks can borrow funds overnight from the RBI against government securities.
- It is a very short term borrowing scheme for scheduled banks.

BANK RATE:

- **It was unchanged at 6.75%.**

- It is the rate charged by the central bank for lending funds to commercial banks.
- Higher bank rate will translate to higher lending rates by banks.
- It influences lending rates of commercial banks.

CASH RESERVE RATIO (CRR):

- **It was unchanged at 4%.**
- It is the amount of funds that banks have to keep with the RBI.
- The RBI uses CRR to drain out excessive money from the system.

STATUTORY LIQUIDITY RATIO (SLR):

- **It was cut by 25 basis points to 19.25% from January 1, 2019.**
- It is the amount that banks have to maintain as a stipulated proportion of their net demand and time liabilities (NDTL) in the form of liquid assets like cash, gold and unencumbered securities, treasury bills, dated securities etc.
- It will be reduced by 25 basis points every quarter until it reaches the 18% level.

GAUTAM GAMBHIR ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT FROM CRICKET

Indian cricketer Gautam Gambhir has announced his retirement from all formats of cricket.

- In his cricketing career, Gautam Gambhir has played total 58 Test matches, 147 ODIs and 37 T20 matches for India.
- He had played his last international one-day match against England in Rajkot in 2016.
- He played his last match for Delhi in Ranji Trophy against Andhra Pradesh on 6 December, 2019.

ABOUT GAUTAM GAMBHIR:

- **He was born on October 14, 1981 in New Delhi.**
- **In domestic cricket, he played cricket for Delhi.**
- **In IPL, he played cricket for Kolkata Knight Riders and Delhi Daredevils.**
- **He started his Test Cricket career against Australia on 3 November 2004.**
- He scored 4,154 runs in 58 Tests.
- **He had started his ODI career against Bangladesh on April 11, 2003 and he scored 5,238 runs in 147 ODI.**
- **He started his International T-Twenty Career against Scotland on 13 September 2007.**

CROATIA'S LUKA MODRIC WINS MEN'S BALLON D'OR AWARD 2018

Croatia's midfielder Luca Modrich (33) has won the prestigious honor of football - Ballon d'Or.

- He was rewarded for his key role in Croatia's historic run to FIFA World Cup final (defeated by France) and his club Real Madrid's third straight Champions League trophy.
- With this, he ended the tenure of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo for almost a decade.
- Messi and Ronaldo have won this award since 2008.
- Cristiano Ronaldo remained second in run of ballon d'or race this year.
- Cristiano Ronaldo remained second in run of ballon d'or race this year.
- France's young footballer Celine Mbappe was placed fourth followed by Lionel Messi of Argentina at the fifth place, Mohamed Salah of Egypt and Liverpool at sixth place and Rafael Varan at seventh place.

ABOUT WOMEN'S BALLON D'OR:

- **Norway's Ada Hegerberg (23) wins Women's Ballon d'Or.**
- **It was the inaugural edition of Women's Ballon d'Or.**
- **She is a three-time Women's Champions League winner with French side Lyon and scored in tournament a record 15 times last season.**

ABOUT FIFA BALLON D'OR AWARD:

- **FIFA Ballon d'Or Award is an annual football association award given by FIFA to the male player who has performed the best in previous calendar year.**
- **It was instituted in 2010 after France Football's Ballon d'Or and the men's FIFA World Player of the Year award were merged.**
- **It is awarded to a male player, based upon highest votes secured by him from national team coaches and captains, as well as journalists from around the world.**

NASA'S SPACECRAFT OSIRIS-REX ARRIVES AT ITS TARGETED ASTEROID BENNU AFTER A 2-YEAR JOURNEY

NASA's first-ever OSIRIS-REx mission designed to visit an asteroid and return sample of its dust back to Earth reached its destination - Bennu, two years after its launch.

- It will use its suite of five science instruments to study the asteroid for the next year and a half.

ABOUT OSIRIS-REX:

- **OSIRIS-Rex stands for Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security-Regolith Explorer.**

- **It was launched in September 2016 for studying 101955 Bennu, a carbonaceous asteroid.**
- **It is NASA's first asteroid sampling mission i.e. it will survey the surface, collect sample and deliver it safely back to Earth.**
- **It will regularly observe area around the asteroid to search for dust plumes and natural satellites and study its light and spectral properties.**
- **It will return to Earth after collecting some of its gravels by 2023.**
- **It will capture 60 grams dirt and debris from surface of asteroid using its robotic arm without landing i.e. by hovering like a hummingbird stirred up by nitrogen gas thrusters and then to Earth for detailed analysis of the collected samples.**

ABOUT BENNU:

- **Bennu is a near-Earth carbonaceous asteroid about the size of a small mountain in the Apollo group.**
- **It was discovered in September 1999 by the LINEAR Project.**
- **It orbits close to Earth's path around the Sun.**
- **It is one of the oldest asteroids known to NASA.**
- **It is a carbon-rich asteroid and believed to be the type of asteroids that may have chemical building blocks of life, along with lots of water.**
- **So, analysis of returned sample from it could help to reveal key insights about early solar system and the origin of life on Earth.**
- **It is a potentially hazardous asteroid and there is very slight chance it could strike into Earth in the late 22nd century.**

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **NASA's OSIRIS-REx is not world's first asteroid sampling mission.**
- **This distinction is held by Japanese space agency JAXA.**
- **It had proved world's first sample collection from an asteroid after its Hayabusa spacecraft crash-landed into the surface of its target asteroid and managed to return a few micrograms of material in 2010.**

RBI TO INTRODUCE OMBUDSMAN SCHEME FOR DIGITAL TRANSACTIONS

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced to introduce 'Ombudsman Scheme for Digital Transactions' to provide cost-free mechanism to redress grievances of customers related to digital transactions.

- The scheme will be notified by end of January 2019.
- It will cover services provided by entities falling under RBI's regulatory jurisdiction.
- The scheme is being implemented taking into consideration rise in digital mode for financial transactions which is gaining traction in the country.
- There is an emerging need for a dedicated, cost-free and expeditious grievance redressal mechanism for strengthening consumer confidence in this channel.

FRAMEWORK FOR LIMITING CUSTOMER LIABILITY:

- **RBI has also decided to come out with a framework for limiting customer liability in respect of unauthorised electronic payment transactions involving prepaid payment instruments (PPI).**
- It has already issued instructions on limiting customer liability in respect of unauthorised electronic transactions involving banks and credit card issuing non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).
- **This framework will bring all customers up to same level with regard to electronic transactions made by them and extend benefit of limiting customer liability for unauthorised electronic transactions involving PPIs issued by other entities not covered by extant guidelines.**
- **The guidelines will be issued by the end of December 2018.**

GSAT-11: INDIA'S HEAVIEST SATELLITE LAUNCHED FROM FRENCH GUYANA

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully launched India's heaviest and most-advanced communication satellite GSAT-11 into space.

- It was launched on board of Ariane 5 VA-246 rocket from Kourou Launch Base, French Guiana.

ABOUT GSAT-11:

- **GSAT-11, also called Big Bird, has been indigenously developed by ISRO.**
- **It weighs 5854 kgs, making it the heaviest Indian-made equipment that has been put into the orbit.**
- **It will provide high data rate connectivity to Indian mainland and islands users through 32 user beams in Ku-band and 8 hub beams in Ka-band.**
- It is three to six times more powerful than any other ISRO's satellite.
- **It will help provide satellite-based internet to remote places where cable-based internet cannot reach.**
- **It will boost the broadband connectivity to rural and inaccessible gram panchayats in the country under Bharat Net Project, which is a part of Digital India Programme.**

SC APPROVES CENTRE'S WITNESS PROTECTION SCHEME

The Supreme Court has approved Witness Protection Scheme 2018 and directed Union and State Governments to enforce the same.

- This scheme was framed by Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in response to a PIL seeking protection for witnesses.

DETAILS:

- **The apex court held that the scheme will become law under Article 141/142 of Constitution till enactment of parliamentary and state legislations on the subject.**
- **It also directed states/UTs to set up the vulnerable witness deposition complexes (VWDCs) within a period of 1 year (by the end of 2019).**
- It also observed that there is paramount need to have witness protection regime in statutory form.
- **The main reason for establishing these VWDC is large percentage of acquittal in criminal cases is due to witnesses turning hostile and giving false testimonies, mostly due to lack of protection for them and their families.**

ABOUT WITNESS PROTECTION SCHEME 2018:

- **It has been formulated by Home Ministry on the inputs received from 18 States/UTs, five state legal services authorities and open sources including civil society, three high courts as well as from police personnel.**
- **It was finalised in consultation with National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).**
- It aims to ensure that investigation, prosecution and trial of criminal offences does not turn out to be biased as witnesses are intimidated or frightened to give evidence without protection from violent or other criminal recrimination.

ESSENTIAL FEATURES:

- Identifying categories of threat perceptions.
- Preparation of Threat Analysis Report by the head of police.
- Confidentiality and preservation of records, recovery of expenses, etc.
- Types of protection measures like ensuring that witness and accused do not come face to face during investigation etc. protection of identity, change of identity and relocation of witness.

THREE TYPES OF WITNESSES CATEGORISES:

1. Threat extends to life of witness or his family members during investigation, trial or thereafter.
2. Threat extends to safety, reputation or property of witness or his family members, during

investigation, trial.

3. Threat is moderate and extends to harassment of witness or his family member's, reputation or property during investigation, trial or thereafter.

MORE DETAILS:

- **Categorised witnesses under the scheme can file application for seeking protection order before competent authority of concerned district where offence is committed.**
- **This competent authority will be chaired by District and Sessions Judge.**
- **Head of police in the district will be its member and head of prosecution in the district as its member secretary.**
- **When this authority receives application, it has to call for Threat Analysis Report (TAR) from ACP/DSP in charge of the concerned Police Sub-Division.**
- **The authority is also empowered to order protection measures based on TAR such as identity protection, change of identity and relocation of witnesses.**

24 POETS AND AUTHORS 2018 SAHITYA AKADEMI AWARD

Sahitya Academy has announced names of 24 poets and authors who will be conferred the prestigious 2018 Sahitya Akademi Award in 24 different Indian languages.

- The award has recognised premier works in 24 Indian languages that includes seven books of poetry, six novels, six short stories, three of literary criticism and two of essays.
- The awards will be presented at a roadshow function to be held on 29th January next year at New Delhi during Festival of Letters to be organised by Sahitya Akademi.
- The awardees were recommended by distinguished jury members representing 24 languages and were approved by Executive Board under chairmanship of Dr. Chandrashekhar Kambar who is the President of Sahitya Akademi.

AND THE AWARDEES ARE:

POETRY:

- Sananta Tanti (Assamese), Paresh Narendra Kamat (Konkani), S Ramesan Nair (Malayalam) and Dr Rama Kant Shukla (Sanskrit), Dr. Mohanjit (Punjabi), Dr. Rajesh Kumar Vyas (Rajasthani) and Khiman U Mulani (Sindhi).

SHORT STORIES:

- Sanjib Chattopadhyay (Bengali), Mushtaq Ahmed Mushtaq (Kashmiri), Prof Bina Thakur (Maithili), Rituraj Basumatary (Bodo), Prof. Budhichandra Heisnamba (Manipuri) and Nath Upadhyay Chapagain (Nepali).

NOVEL:

- Inderjeet Kesar (Dogri), Anees Salim (English), Chitra Mudgal (Hindi), Shyam Besra (Santali), Ramkrishnan (Tamil) and Rahman Abbas (Urdu).
-

LITERARY CRITICISM:

- KG Nagarajappa (Kannada), Ma. Su. Patil (Marathi) and Prof. Dasarathi Das (Odia).
-

ESSAYS:

- Prof. Sharifa Vijliwala (Gujarati) and Dr. Kolakaluri Enoch (Telugu).
-

BHASHA SALMAN 2017 AND 2018:

- Sahitya Akademi also announced its Bhasha Samman for the years 2017 and 2018.
 - Yogendra Nath Sharma was awarded for North zone; Gagendra Nath Das for Eastern zone; G Venkatasubbiah for South zone; and Shailaja Bapat for Western zone.
-

ABOUT SAHITYA AKADEMI AWARDS:

- It is a literary honour that is conferred annually on Indian writers for their outstanding works of literary merit.
 - It was established in 1954.
 - The award is conferred annually on writers of outstanding works in one of the twenty-four major Indian languages (22 Scheduled Languages+ English and Rajasthani).
 - The award consists of a casket containing an engraved copper-plaque (designed by filmmaker Satyajit Ray), a shawl and cheque of Rs.1 Lakh.
-

WORLD BANK ASSISTED PROJECT SMART LAUNCHED IN MAHARASHTRA

Maharashtra Government has launched World Bank assisted- State of Maharashtra's Agribusiness and Rural Transformation (SMART) Project to transform rural Maharashtra.

- This project aims to revamp agricultural value chains, with special focus on marginal farmers across 1,0000 villages.
 - **This initiative is in line with Union Government's step towards doubling farmers' income by 2022.**
 - The launch of the project was followed by signing of 50 memorandum of understandings (MoUs) between big corporates and farmers producer groups.
-

ABOUT THE STATE OF MAHARASHTRA'S AGRIBUSINESS AND RURAL TRANSFORMATION (SMART) PROJECT:

- **The objective of this project is to create and support value chains in post-harvest segments of agriculture, facilitate agribusiness investment, stimulate SMEs within the value chain.**
- It will also support resilient agriculture production systems, expand access to new and organised markets for producers and enhance private sector participation in the agribusiness.
- The project will be implemented in 10,000 villages of total 40,913 villages in states with objective to achieve sustainable farming within the next three years.
- **It will cover almost one-fourth of Maharashtra.**
- Its focus is on villages which are reeling under worst agriculture crisis compounded by lack of infrastructure and assures value chains to channelise farm produce.
- **The project will be implemented in 10,000 villages comprising 10,000 gram panchayats which were shortlisted by state government based on multiple parameters of socio-economic backwardness in terms of development and growth.**

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROJECT?

- **The project is a giant step towards transformation of rural economy and empowerment of farmers and also sustainable agriculture through public-private partnership (PPP) model.**
- **It seeks to sure higher production of crops and create robust market mechanism to enable farmers to reap higher remunerations for the yield.**
- It unites agriculture-oriented corporates and farmers by providing them a common platform.

INDIA WATER IMPACT SUMMIT 2018 HELD IN NEW DELHI

The India Water Impact Summit-2018 was held in New Delhi.

- It was jointly organized by National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) and Centre for Ganga River Basin Management and Studies (cGanga).

DETAILS:

- **India Water Impact Summit is an annual event where stakeholders get together to discuss, debate and develop model solutions for some of the biggest water related problems in the country.**
- **The discussions this year were on rejuvenation of the Ganga River Basin.**
- There was also a multi-country dialogue on subjects showcasing of technological innovations, research, policy frameworks and funding models from India and abroad.
- Large number of Indian Central Government Ministries as well as all key decision makers responsible for delivering rejuvenation of Ganga were also present at the Summit.
- Nearly 200 domestic and international participants from nearly 15 countries and more than 50

Central, State and Municipal Government representatives participated in the summit.

- There were also sessions on afforestation and biodiversity, urban river/water management plans, creating a global ecosystem for financing Ganga Rejuvenation Programme and tapping into global capital markets for long term project finance.

THE SUMMIT FOCUSED ON THREE KEY ASPECTS:

SPOTLIGHT ON 5 STATES:

- Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Delhi and Bihar.
- Its objective was to showcase efforts and works going on within the respective states.

GANGA FINANCING FORUM:

- It was the inaugural forum that brought a number of institutions to common knowledge, information and partnership platform.
- It brought together financial institutions and investors interested in Namami Gange programmes.

TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION:

- It was a pilot/demonstration programme aimed at providing opportunity to technology and innovation companies from around the world to showcase their solutions for addressing problems prevalent in the river basin.

CCEA APPROVES STRATEGIC SALE OF RURAL ELECTRIFICATION CORPORATION

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has given its in principle approval for strategic sale of Central Government's existing 52.63% of total paid up equity shareholding in Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) to Power Finance Corporation (PFC) along with transfer of management control.

- Both REC and PFC are Central Public Sector Enterprises under the Ministry of Power.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS ACQUISITION:

- The acquisition intends to achieve integration across Power Chain, create economies of scale, obtain better synergies and have enhanced capability to support energy access and energy efficiency by improved capability to finance power sector.
- It may also allow for cheaper fund raising with increase in bargaining power for combined entity.

ABOUT RURAL ELECTRIFICATION CORPORATION (REC):

- It is a public Infrastructure finance company in India's power sector.

- It finances and promotes rural electrification projects across India.
- It provides loans to Central/ State Sector Power Utilities, State Electricity Boards, Rural Electric Cooperatives, NGOs and Private Power Developers.
- It was founded in July 1969 and is headquartered in New Delhi.

WORLD'S FASTEST GROWING CITIES: ALL TOP 10 ARE FROM INDIA

When it comes to the top 10 cities for economic growth, India is set to dominate over the next two decades, according to Oxford Economics.

DETAILS:

- Surat, a diamond processing and trading center in the western state of Gujarat, will see the fastest expansion through 2035, averaging more than 9 percent, Richard Holt, Oxford's head of global cities research, wrote in a report.
- All of the 10 fastest over that period will be in India.

India's Dominance

Fastest-growing cities in the world 2019-2035 are all in India

Rank	City	Nation	Average annual growth
1	Surat	India	9.17%
2	Agra	India	8.58
3	Bengaluru	India	8.5
4	Hyderabad	India	8.47
5	Nagpur	India	8.41
6	Tiruppur	India	8.36
7	Rajkot	India	8.33
8	Tiruchirappalli	India	8.29
9	Chennai	India	8.17
10	Vijayawada	India	8.16

Source: Oxford Economics

Bloomberg

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- While economic output in many of those Indian cities will remain rather small in comparison to the world's biggest metropolises, aggregated gross domestic product of all Asian cities will exceed that of all North American and European urban centers combined in 2027.
- By 2035, it will be 17 percent higher, with the largest contribution coming from Chinese cities.
- Little will change at the top of the list of the world's biggest cities between now and 2035.
- New York, Tokyo, Los Angeles and London will defend their spots as Shanghai and Beijing - each boasting more than 20 million people - surpass Paris and Chicago.

- Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Southern China will also make the top 10, crowding out Hong Kong.
- The fastest-growing African city is the Tanzanian port of Dar es Salaam, while the top spot in Europe is held by the Armenian capital of Yerevan, according to the report.
- San Jose - a proxy for Silicon Valley - will be best performer in North America.

SAUDI ARABIA HOSTS GCC SUMMIT AMID QATAR TENSIONS, KHASHOGGI CRISIS

The Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) annual summit opened in Riyadh on Sunday, 9th December 2018.

- The regional unity was imperilled by a bitter row between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which is mired in a diplomatic crisis over the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

DETAILS:

- **The one-day annual gathering of leaders from the six member states is expected to focus on security issues, including the Yemen war and Iran's regional activities, and may touch on oil politics and a protracted boycott of Qatar by some neighbours.**
- Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and non-GCC member Egypt cut diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar in June 2017 over allegations of supporting terrorism.
- Qatar, which last week abruptly announced it was withdrawing from the oil exporters' group OPEC, denies the charges and says the boycott aims to curtail its sovereignty.
- The Saudi king has invited Qatar's emir to the summit, but Doha has not said what level of representation it would send.
- The emir attended last year's gathering in Kuwait, while Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain sent more junior officials.
- The UAE delegation to the Riyadh summit will be headed by Prime Minister and Vice-President Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, who is also ruler of Dubai.

THE GCC:

- The GCC that was set up in 1980 as a bulwark against larger neighbours Iran and Iraq - groups Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and Qatar.
- Kuwait's ties with Riyadh have also been strained over control of shared oilfields.

KANNUR AIRPORT INAUGURATED, KERALA BECOMES ONLY STATE WITH FOUR INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS

Fulfilling a long-standing public demand for a second airport in Malabar region of Kerala, Chief

Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Union Minister for Civil Aviation Suresh Prabhu on Sunday jointly inaugurated the Kannur International Airport.

- **With this, Kerala became the only state in the country to have four international airports.**
- Kochi, Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram are the other three cities with an international airport.

ABOUT THE AIRPORT:

- **The greenfield airport, built on a public-private-partnership model, stretches across over 2,000 acres of land at Mattanur, a town 25 kilometres from Kannur town.**
- **Constructed at a cost of Rs 1,892 crores, the airport has an integrated terminal for domestic and international passengers, six aerobridges, a 3,050 metre long runway and can handle up to 2,000 passengers during peak hours.**
- The airport will cater primarily to the people of Kannur and Kasaragod districts of Kerala and Kodagu region in Karnataka.
- **It becomes an important and easy gateway for the thousands of NRI Malayalis working in the Gulf countries.**
- At present, Air India and GoAir have released their schedule of flights from the airport, with more domestic airlines likely to commence operations shortly.

ABOUT THE INAUGURATION CEREMONY:

- At the grand inauguration ceremony within the airport premises, attended by close to a lakh people, Vijayan and Prabhu jointly flagged off the first aircraft from the airport – an Air India Express flight to Abu Dhabi at 10 am.
- Passengers of the flight received a ceremonial welcome at the airport with ministers of the ruling Left government personally handing over boarding passes to them.
- **The Union Minister also expressed confidence that with commercial operations beginning at the airport, it will boost the state's export of spices and marine products.**

INDIA, CHINA JOINT MILITARY DRILL TO RESUME AFTER A YEAR'S GAP: OFFICIALS

India and China will resume their joint military drills after a one-year gap on Tuesday in the southwest Chinese city of Chengdu to improve capabilities in fighting terrorism and promote mutual understanding.

- The opening ceremony of the drills will be held on December 11.

DETAILS:

- **Each side will send 100 troops to take part in the 7th India and China joint military**

exercises - 'Hand in Hand' - which will focus on counter-terrorism operations, Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Col Ren Guoqiang said last month.

- **The relations between India and China strained after both the sides were locked in a 73-day standoff in Doklam in the Sikkim sector of the border in 2017.**
- The relations later improved resulting in an informal summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in the Chinese city of Wuhan in April this year.
- The drill will promote understanding between the two militaries and improving their capabilities in fighting terrorism.
- **The exercises, which will conclude on December 23, will include live shooting and adoptive and basic training.**
- Top leaders from both the countries met on November 24 at the 21st India-China border talks held at Dujiangyan near Chengdu in southwestern Sichuan province. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and China's State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who are the designated Special Representatives, took part in the talks.
- They called for intensifying efforts to find a solution to the vexed border dispute.

CLEAN SEA-2018: INDIAN COAST GUARD CONDUCTS EXERCISE AT SEA OFF PORT BLAIR

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has conducted Regional Level Marine Oil Pollution Response Exercise titled 'Clean Sea- 2018' at the sea off Port Blair, Andaman & Nicobar (A&B) Islands.

- The objective of the exercise was to ascertain preparedness of IGC, resource agencies and other stakeholders in responding to a major oil spill in line with the provisions of National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOS-DCP).
- ICG ships Viswasth, Vijith, Rajveer, Rajshri, 4 interceptor boats and its air assets Dornier and Chetak helicopters participated in the exercise.

WHAT WAS THE NEED FOR THE EXERCISE?

- **Great Channel between Nicobar Islands and Northern Sumatra that leads into Malacca Straits is a marine drive of high seas.**
- **Almost 200 ships cross 160-km wide Straits daily making it among busiest sea routes of world.**
- **Considering, the high intensity of oil tanker traffic through this route, the area is highly vulnerable to oil spills.**
- **So, the need for a robust national system for oil spill response is critical.**

HIGHLIGHTS OF CLEAN SEA-2018:

- The exercise was planned to evaluate preparedness for Response Operations for any such oil pollution incident in the highly sensitive area of A&B islands.
- The exercise was conducted in two phases for synchronizing support and cooperation provided by all stakeholders for combating oil spills in such ecologically sensitive areas.
- The exercise saw participation of ICG Pollution Control Vessel and integration of ICG Dornier/Chetak aircraft into Oil Spill Disaster Management System for aerial assessment and delivery of Oil Spill Dispersant for mitigation of spilled oil.

ONE MUST KNOW:

- Indian Coast Guard (ICG) under Ministry of Defence is responsible for marine environment protection in maritime zones of India and is the coordinating authority for response to oil spills in Indian waters.
- It has drawn up the National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOS-DCP) and has established three pollution response centres at Mumbai, Chennai and Port Blair.

UNION CABINET APPROVES IMPLEMENTATION OF SHAHPURKANDI DAM ON RIVER RAVI IN PUNJAB

Union Cabinet has approved implementation of Shahpurkandi Dam Project on river Ravi in Punjab.

- It has also approved central assistance of Rs. 485.38 crore (for irrigation component) over a five years period from 2019 to 2023.
- The project will be implemented by Punjab Government with central assistance.
- It will be completed by June 2022.

FUNDING OF THE PROJECT:

- The total cost of this project is Rs. 1973.53 crore (Irrigation component: 564.63 cr, Power component: 1408.90 cr).
- Out of this, Rs 485.38 cr would be provided as Central Assistance.
- Funding for central assistance will be made through National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) under the existing system for funding of 99 Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana- Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (PMKSY-AIBP) projects under Long Term Irrigation Fund (LTIF).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROJECT:

- This project will help minimizing some of water of River Ravi which at present is going waste through Madhopur Headworks downstream to Pakistan.
- It will create an irrigation potential of 5,000 hectares in Punjab and 32,173 hectares in

Jammu & Kashmir on completion.

- Besides, Punjab will be able to generate 206 MW of hydropower.

OTHER DETAILS:

- Indus Waters Treaty was signed between India and Pakistan in 1960 for sharing of Indus waters.
- According to this treaty, India got the full rights for utilization of waters of three eastern rivers namely Ravi, Beas and Satluj.
- Bilateral agreement was signed between Punjab and J&K in January 1979 for construction of RanjitSagar Dam (Thein Dam) and Shahpurkandi Dam by Punjab Government.
- RanjitSagar Dam was commissioned in August 2000.
- ShahpurKandi Dam project was proposed on River Ravi.
- The Project was initially approved by erstwhile Planning Commission in November 2001 and was included under AIBP for funding its irrigation component.
- However, works could not progress much due to non-availability of funds on part of Punjab Government for power component and later interstate issues with J & K.
- Series of meetings were held bilaterally between both states as well as at Central Government level.
- Finally, an agreement was reached between both states under aegis of Ministry of Water Resources in September, 2018.

UNION CABINET APPROVES AGRICULTURE EXPORT POLICY, 2018

Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved Agriculture Export Policy, 2018 with an aim to double farmer's income by 2022.

- Cabinet has also approved a proposal for establishment of Monitoring Framework at the Centre with Ministry of Commerce as nodal Department to oversee the implementation of Agriculture Export Policy.
- It will also have representation from various ministries and departments and agencies and representatives of concerned State Governments.

ABOUT THE AGRICULTURE EXPORT POLICY:

- It is aimed at doubling agricultural exports and integrating Indian farmers and agricultural products with the global value chains.
- Its vision is to harness the export potential of Indian agriculture, through suitable policy instruments and to make India a global power in agriculture and raise farmers' income.

OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY:

- **Double agricultural exports from present US\$ 30+ Billion to US\$ 60+ Billion by 2022 and reach US\$ 100 Billion in the next few years thereafter with a stable trade policy regime.**
- **Diversify India's export basket, destinations and also boost high value and value added agricultural exports including perishables.**
- **Provide an institutional mechanism for pursuing market access, tackling barriers and deal with sanitary and phyto-sanitary issues.**
- **Strive to double India's share in the world agri-exports by integrating with global value chain at the earliest.**
- **Promote indigenous, organic, ethnic, traditional and non-traditional agri products exports.**
- **Enable farmers to benefit from export opportunities in overseas markets.**

ELEMENTS OF AGRICULTURE EXPORT POLICY:

STRATEGIC:

- Policy measures.
- Holistic approach to boost exports.
- Infrastructure and logistics support.
- Focus on Clusters.
- Promoting value-added exports.
- Marketing and promotion of Brand India.
- Greater involvement of State Governments in agri exports.

OPERATIONAL:

- Attract private investments into production and processing.
- Research & Development.
- Establishment of a strong quality regimen.
- Miscellaneous.

CABINET APPROVES LAUNCH OF NATIONAL MISSION ON INTERDISCIPLINARY CYBER-PHYSICAL SYSTEMS

Union Cabinet has approved launching of National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS).

- It will be implemented by Department of Science & Technology under Ministry of Science and Technology for a period of five years.
- The objective of the Mission is to address the ever increasing technological requirements of the society.
- It also takes into account the international trends and road maps of leading countries for next generation technologies.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS MISSION WILL DEVELOP AND BRING:

- Cyber Physical Systems (CPS) and associated technologies within reach in the country.
- Adoption of CPS technologies to address India specific National / Regional issues.
- Catalyze Translational Research.
- Produce Next Generation skilled manpower in CPS.
- Accelerate entrepreneurship and start-up ecosystem development in CPS.
- Place India at par with other advanced countries and derive several direct and indirect benefits.
- Give impetus to advanced research in CPS, Technology development and higher education in Science, Technology and Engineering disciplines.

ABOUT NM-ICPS:

- **It is a comprehensive mission to address technology development, application development, human resource development & skill enhancement, entrepreneurship and start-up development in CPS and associated technologies.**
- **It aims at an establishment of 15 numbers of Technology Innovation Hubs (TIH), six numbers of Application Innovation Hubs (AIH) and four numbers of Technology Translation Research Parks (TTRP).**
- These Hubs & TTRPs will connect to Academics, Industry, Central Ministries and State Government in developing solutions at a reputed academic, R&D and other organizations across the country in a hub and spoke model.
- They have four focused areas along which mission implementation will proceed viz.
 - (i) Technology Development
 - (ii) HRD & Skill Development
 - (iii) Innovation, Entrepreneurship & Start-ups Ecosystem Development
 - (iv) International Collaborations.
- **Strategic approach involving a suitable mix of Academic, Industry and Government is proposed to be adopted.**

- Strong Steering and Monitoring Mechanisms in the form of Mission Governing Board (MGB), Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee (IMCC), Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) and other Sub-Committees will guide and monitor the Mission implementation.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MISSION:

- **It will act as an engine of growth, benefiting national initiatives in health, education, energy, environment, agriculture, strategic cum security, and industrial sectors, Industry 4.0, SMART Cities and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**
- It will help bring a paradigm shift in the entire skill sets requirement.
- **It will boost job opportunities by imparting advanced skills and generating skilled manpower as per the requirement of the industry and society.**
- It will support and encourage Central ministries and departments, state governments and also industry to effectively use CPS technologies in their projects and schemes for the benefit of the society.

INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION DAY OBSERVED ON DECEMBER 9

International Anti-Corruption Day (IACD) is observed every year across the world on December 9 to raise public awareness of corruption and what people can do to fight it.

- Observance of this day aims to promote and strengthen measures to prevent and combat corruption more efficiently and effectively.
- It also highlights the role of United Nations Convention against Corruption in combating and preventing it.

WHAT IS CORRUPTION?

- **Corruption is a serious societal crime that undermines social and economic development in all societies.**
- No country, region or community is immune from corruption.
- **According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), every year \$1 trillion is paid in bribes while an estimated \$2.6 trillion are stolen annually through corruption - a sum equivalent to more than 5% of global GDP.**
- **In developing countries, funds lost to corruption are estimated at 10 times amount of official development assistance.**

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- **International Anti-Corruption Day was instituted by UN General Assembly (UNGA) by passing resolution 58/4 on October 31, 2003.**
- It was adopted to raise people's awareness of corruption and the role of United Nations

Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in combating and preventing it.

- **The UNCAC is the first legally binding, international anti-corruption instrument that provides a chance to mount a global response to corruption.**

2ND KHELO INDIA SCHOOL GAMES TO BE HELD IN PUNE FROM JANUARY 9 TO 20, 2019

The second edition of Khelo India School Games rechristened as Khelo India Youth Games will be held from January 9-20, 2019 in Pune, Maharashtra.

- It will take place at Shree Shiv Chhatrapati Sports Complex in Pune.
- **The first edition of these games under Khelo India Programme was held in New Delhi in February 2018.**

ABOUT KHELO INDIA YOUTH GAMES:

- **Union Ministry of Sports has expanded in its scope as compared to Khelo India School Games.**
- **It will allow participants to compete in two categories, (Under 17) and (Under 21).**
- **It also allows students from colleges and Universities to compete.**
- **It will see over 10,000 participants from 29 states and 7 Union Territories.**

ABOUT THE KHELO INDIA PROGRAMME:

- **It was introduced by Ministry of Sports and Youth affairs to revive sports culture in India at grass-root level.**
- **Its objective is to build a strong framework for all sports played in our country and establish India as a great sporting nation.**
- **It is expected to help scout young talent from schools in various disciplines and groom them as future sports champions.**
- **Talented players will be identified in priority sports disciplines at various levels by a High-Powered Committee and each will be provided an annual financial assistance of Rs. 5 lakh for 8 years.**

SHI YOMI BECOMES 23RD DISTRICT OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Shi Yomi formally became the 23rd district of Arunachal Pradesh after it was inaugurated by Chief Minister Pema Khandu in presence of Union Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijiju.

- It was created by bifurcating West Siang district with its headquarters at Tato.
- It will have four administrative units namely Mechuka, Tato, Pidi and Manigong.
- Two more districts Pakke-Kesang and Lepa Rada will be formally inaugurated in the state within

taking the total to 25.

ONE MUST KNOW:

- In August 2018, Arunachal Pradesh Legislative assembly has passed Arunachal Pradesh Re-Organisation of Districts (Amendment) Bill, 2018 for creation of three new districts, Pakke-Kesang, Lepa Rada and Shi Yomi in the state.
- These new districts were created keeping in view of large geographical area, inaccessible terrains, growing demands of people, bring administration to their door-steps and for all-round equal development in all parts of the state.
- **With addition of these three new districts, the state will have total 25 districts from earlier 22 districts.**
- **Pakke-Kesang district will be carved out of East Kameng district** with five administrative units namely Pakke-Kesangan, Seijosa, Pijiriang, Passa Valley and Dissingn Passo with district headquarters at Lemmi.
- Lepa Rada district will be created by bifurcating Lower Siang district with headquarters at Basar.
- **It will have four administrative units Tirbin, Basar, Daring and Sago.**

INDIA TO RECEIVE TOTAL REMITTANCE OF \$80 BILLION IN 2018: WORLD BANK

According to World Bank's Migration and Development Brief, India will retain its position as world's top recipient of remittances in 2018, receiving a total remittance of \$80 billion from its diaspora.

- India is followed by China (\$67 billion), Mexico and Philippines (\$34 billion each) and Egypt (\$26 billion).

WHAT IS REMITTANCE?

- **It is the transfer of money by a foreign worker to an individual or family in their home country.**
- It competes with international aid as one of the largest financial inflows to developing countries.
- **It has a direct impact on alleviating poverty for many households especially in developing and low and middle-income countries.**

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT BRIEF:

GLOBAL REMITTANCES:

- Flows to high-income countries, are projected to grow by 10.3% to \$689 billion.

- They are expected to grow 3.7% to \$715 billion in 2019.

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES:

- Remittances to developing countries will increase by 10.8% to reach \$528 billion in 2018, against a 7.8% growth in 2017.

LOW AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES:

- Future remittances to these countries are expected to grow moderately by 4% to \$549 billion in 2019.

INDIA:

- Over the last three years, India registered a significant flow of remittances, from \$62.7 billion in 2016 to \$65.3 billion 2017.
- **In 2017, remittances constituted 2.7% of India's GDP.**

SOUTH ASIA:

- **Remittances are projected to increase by 13.5% to \$132 billion in 2018, a stronger pace than 5.7% growth seen in 2017.**

MORE DETAILS:

- **The upsurge is driven by stronger economic conditions in advanced economies**, particularly US and increase in oil prices having positive impact on outflows from some Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries such as UAE, which reported a 13% growth in outflows for first half of 2018.
- Bangladesh and Pakistan have experienced strong upticks of 17.9% and 6.2% in 2018, respectively.
- **For 2019, it is projected that remittances growth for region will slow to 4.3% due to moderation of growth in advanced economies, lower migration to GCC and the benefits from the oil price spurt dissipating.**
- GCC is a regional inter-governmental political and economic bloc of six oil rich middle-east countries viz. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE.

UN GLOBAL COUNTER TERRORISM COORDINATION COMPACT

To deal with the rising problem of terrorism, United Nation Chief along with 39 organizational entities, Interpol and World custom organization signed a framework to deal with terrorism and promote peace and sustainable growth.

- The agreement is non-binding in nature.
- **The UN Global counter terrorism coordination compact is also termed as Global Compact.**

- The Global Compact Coordination Committee will be chaired by Under-Secretary-General for counter terrorism.
- The first meeting took place on 6th December 2018 in New York.
- **United Nations office of counter terrorism will serve as the Secretariat of Global Compact.**

WHAT IS THE NEED OF THE FRAMEWORK?

- The Global terrorism index released by Institute for Economic and Peace showed that there is a decrease in deaths due to terrorism, but the impacts of terrorism are still spreading all over the world.
- United Nation is actively working to bring peace and cooperation among member states.
- **To combat counter terrorism UN created UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force in 2005.**
- **The task force consists of 38 international entities.**
- The goal of Counter Terrorism Implementation task force was to organize working groups and the project related to counter terrorism.
- Finally, on 23rd February 2018, a new agreement was signed to create a more integrated working approach between the agencies and coordinate them for counter terrorism and prevention of violent extremism.
- **UN Global Counter Terrorism Coordination Compact replaced Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force.**

OBJECTIVES OF THE AGREEMENT:

- **To bring the UN agencies together to combat terrorism with a common approach and find the ways to improve the strategies to support member states.**
- **To protect the people from violent extremist groups and hate speeches.**
- **To adopt the strategies that do not compromise the international human rights standards and the rule of law.**
- To monitor use of technology which is the main source of reaching people globally and manipulate them.
- To devise the policies that will protect communities and their religious belief.

NOTE:

- Despite the previous approaches and initiatives by UN there are still some loopholes in the strategies.
- There is still a threat of terrorism that persists.

- Many countries are high on risk.
- By this new framework, UN is now taking a step ahead to remove terrorism from the roots.

EXERCISE AVIAINDRA BETWEEN INDIAN AND RUSSIAN AIR FORCES HELD AT JODHPUR

The second edition of service specific exercise AVIAINDRA between Indian Air Force and Russian Federation Aerospace Force (RFSAF) was held at the Air Force Station Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

- The inaugural IAF-RFSAF Ex AVIAINDRA was conducted in 2014 and since then it is conducted bi-annually (twice a year) in both countries.

ABOUT AVIAINDRA 2018:

- **The aim of this exercise was focused towards anti-terrorist operations in a bi-lateral scenario.**
- It also seeks to further enhance co-operation and understanding between Air forces of both countries in each other's Concept of Operations.
- This edition of exercise was planned in two phases.
- **The exercise is unique wherein the foreign participant does not bring its air assets.**
- In Russia, IAF pilots flew alongside their Russian counterparts in RFSAF aircraft at Lipetsk in September 2018.
- Similarly in India, RFSAF pilots flew alongside their Indian counterparts in the IAF aircraft, which are common to both Air Forces.

SHAKTIKANTA DAS: 25TH GOVERNOR OF RBI

India's former economic affairs secretary and current member of the Finance Commission Shaktikanta Das is to be appointed as next RBI Governor.

- He will be the 25th Governor of the apex bank of the country.

ABOUT SHAKTIKANTA DAS:

- **Shaktikanta Das is a 1980 batch IAS officer of Tamil Nadu Cadre and a very prominent bureaucrat who served under both NDA and UPA governments.**
- He served as economic affairs secretary from 2015 to 2017; and was a key official in both big economic moves of the government viz. demonetisation and implementation of GST.
- **Appointment committee of cabinet approved Shaktikanta Das's appointment as RBI governor.**

- He will serve as governor for a term of three years.

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **Shaktikanta Das has been appointed as the 25th governor of RBI after the resignation of Urijit Patel.**
- **Urijit Patel resigned due to personal reasons.**
- His tenure as RBI governor was about to complete in September 2019.
- **Patel has become the fourth RBI to step down before end of term.**
- **Before him, Sir Osborne Smith, Benegal Rama Rau and S Jagannathan had resigned before completion of their respective tenures.**

HAND-IN-HAND MILITARY EXERCISE BETWEEN INDIA AND CHINA BEGINS AT CHENGDU, CHINA

The seventh edition of Hand-in-Hand Military exercise between India and China began in Chengdu, China.

- It is being held to improve capabilities of the two armies in fighting terrorism and promote mutual understanding.
- **The exercise was held after a gap of one year as both the sides were locked in a 73-day standoff in Doklam in Sikkim sector of the border in 2017.**
- The strained relations between two sides later improved resulting in an informal summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in the Chinese city of Wuhan in April 2018.

ABOUT HAND-IN-HAND 2019:

- **In this edition of exercise, 100 troops from each side are taking part.**
- The main focus is on counter-terrorism operations.
- **It will involve tactical level operations in an International Counter Insurgency/ Counter Terrorist environment under UN mandate.**
- The drill will promote understanding between two militaries and improving their capabilities in fighting terrorism.
- **The exercise will include live shooting and adoptive and basic training.**

GOVERNMENT RAISES ITS CONTRIBUTION IN NATIONAL PENSION SYSTEM TO 14% FROM 10%

Union Cabinet has decided to raise contribution of Central Government to National Pension

System (NPS) corpus of its employees from 10% to 14%.

- This will increase in eventual accumulated corpus of all central government employees covered by NPS.
- There are 18 lakh central government employees at present.
- The revenue impact from higher government contribution to employees' corpus is expected to be around Rs.2,840 crore for 2019-20 and will be in the nature of a recurring expenditure.
- Government also has decided to make NPS fully tax free, making it on par with the provident fund scheme.
- It has decided to exempt income tax that is applicable on part of NPS corpus that is withdrawn on retirement.
- At present, while exiting scheme, 60% of corpus could be withdrawn and 20% of withdrawn amount is taxable.
- This portion now has been made tax free.
- The remaining part that could be used to buy annuities is anyways tax free.
- **With this decision, NPS has acquired parity with provident fund savings, which are not taxed at any of three stages of saving, profit accrual or exit.**

ABOUT THE NATIONAL PENSION SYSTEM (NPS):

- **It is an easily accessible, low cost, tax-efficient, flexible and portable retirement savings account.**
- It was launched in 2004 and was initially introduced for new Government recruits (except armed forces).
- It aims to institute pension reforms in the country and to inculcate a habit of saving for retirement amongst the citizens.
- **Its objective is to provide retirement income to all the citizens.**
- **Under NPS, an individual contributes to his/her retirement account.**
- Employer can also co-contribute for social security/welfare of the individual.
- It was extended for all citizens of country from May 2009 including the unorganised sector workers on voluntary basis.
- **NPS is governed and administered by Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA).**
- **Currently, any Indian between age of 18 to 65 years may voluntarily join the NPS.**
- **NRI can open an NPS account, however contributions made by the NRI are subject to regulatory requirements as prescribed by RBI and FEMA from time to time.**

HAL DEVELOPED LIGHT UTILITY HELICOPTER ACHIEVES IMPORTANT MILESTONE OF FLYING AT 6 KM ALTITUDE

Indigenously developed Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has achieved an important milestone of flying at 6 km altitude in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

- The test was a critical requirement towards the certification of LUH.
- Its first flight was carried in September 2016 and second Prototype was flown in May 2017.
- The recent flight test was carried out under envelope expansion tests and helicopter exhibited satisfactory performance and handling qualities.
- With the completion of this milestone, LUH can now undertake high altitude cold weather trials planned in January 2019.

ABOUT LIGHT UTILITY HELICOPTER (LUH):

- **It is a 3-ton class new generation helicopter designed and developed indigenously Rotary Wing Research and Design Center (RWR&DC) of HAL.**
- It will replace the ageing fleet of Cheetah and Chetak helicopters used by Indian Armed Forces.
- **It is capable of flying at 220 kmph, with a service ceiling of 6.5 km and a range of 350 km with 400 kg payload.**
- It is fitted with a glass cockpit and powered by TM/HAL Ardiden 1U/Shakti 1U single turbo shaft engine with sufficient power margins to cater to demanding high altitude missions.
- It will meet requirements of both military and civil operators.
- **It can be deployed for reconnaissance, surveillance roles and as a light transport helicopter.**
- HAL has in principal order for 187 LUH that includes 126 for Indian Army and 61 for IAF.

ABOUT HINDUSTAN AERONAUTICAL LIMITED (HAL):

- **HAL is a state-owned aerospace and defence company based in Bengaluru, Karnataka.**
- It is governed under the management of the Union Defence Ministry.
- **It pursues high-end research and development to create the country's future aircraft and aeroengine technologies.**
- HAL has already developed four highly popular models of helicopters under its belt.
- Its product range includes, Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH), multi-role seven seater Chetak Helicopter, Light combat helicopter (LCH) Cheetah and Lancer, anti-insurgency, close air support chopper.

AGNI-5 MISSILE SUCCESSFULLY TEST-FIRED

Nuclear capable surface to surface Agni-5 ballistic missile was successfully test-fired from Dr Abdul Kalam Island off the Odisha coast.

- It was a user associated trial of the missile undertaken by strategic force command along with DRDO scientists.

ABOUT THE TEST:

- **The missile was launched with the help of a mobile launcher from launch pad-4 of the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Dr Abdul Kalam Island in the Bay of Bengal.**
- During this trial, the flight performance of the missile was tracked and monitored by radars, tracking instruments and observation stations.
- **It was the seventh trial of the indigenously-developed surface-to-surface missile.**
- The first test was conducted in April 2012, second in September 2013, third in January 2015 and fourth in December 2016.
- The fifth test was held in January 2018 and seventh was held in June 2018.
- All the trials were successful.

ABOUT AGNI-5 BALLISTIC MISSILE:

- **It is a three-stage solid propellant nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), indigenously developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).**
- It is about 17 metres long, 2 metres wide and has a launch weight of around 50 tonnes.
- Agni-5 is the latest and most advanced variant in terms of navigation and guidance, warhead and engine in the Agni series of missiles.
- **It has a strike range of over 5,000 kilometres and can carry a nuclear warhead of 1.5 tonne.**
- Thus, it can hit most northern parts of China and other parts of Asia, Europe and Africa.
- **Unlike other missiles of Agni series, Agni-5 is the most advanced missile having new technologies incorporated with it in terms of navigation and guidance, warhead and engine.**
- **It is also a fire and forget missile, which once fired cannot be stopped, except by an interceptor missile which only US, Russia and Israel have.**
- It carries Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicles (MIRV) payloads.
- It is a single MIRV equipped missile that can deliver multiple warheads at different targets.
- It is also incorporates advanced technologies involving ring laser gyroscope and accelerometer for navigation and guidance.
- It has not yet been inducted into the Services.

GLOBAL COMPACT FOR SAFE, ORDERLY AND REGULAR MIGRATION ADOPTED AT UN CONFERENCE IN MARRAKESH, MOROCCO

Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration was adopted by 164 nations including India at Intergovernmental Conference held under the auspices of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) at Marrakesh, Morocco.

- It is the first intergovernmental agreement to cover wide-ranging dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner and agreed upon by all the UN member states minus United States.

ABOUT GLOBAL COMPACT FOR SAFE, ORDERLY AND REGULAR MIGRATION:

It seeks to better manage migration at local, national, regional and global levels, in order to reduce the risks and vulnerabilities of migrants.

- It creates a non-legally binding and co-operative framework that builds on commitments agreed upon by member states in New York Declaration for refugees and migrants of December 2016.

It lists four objectives:

- Ease pressures on host countries.
- Enhance refugee self-reliance.
- Expand access to third country solutions.
- Support conditions in countries of origin for return with safety and dignity.
- **It sets out a framework on how international cooperation on migration issues should work but does not oblige states to take concrete action.**
- It sets out 23 objectives to deal with issues ranging from factors that compel people to move, legal channels for migration, combating trafficking and smuggling, harness economic benefits of migration and return of the migrants.
- **Its intent to protect human rights of migrants, address root causes of migration, and combat negative myths surrounding migration.**
- It acknowledges that migration is an international issue that affects all member states and there is a need for more effective migration governance.

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **According to UN, there were 258 million international migrants in the world in 2017, increasing almost 50% since 2000.**
- The number of migrants, representing 3.4% of world's population, is increasing faster than global population, driven by economic prosperity, inequality, violence, conflict and climate change.
- **Migrants worldwide account for 3% of the world's entire population, but contribute 10% of the global gross domestic production (GDP).**

- **Migrants remittance is a huge contributor to their home countries' development.**
- **Around 80% of world's migrants move between countries in a safe and orderly fashion.**
- But more than 60,000 people have died on the move since the year 2000.
- Besides in transit countries or the country of destination, racism, discrimination and human-rights violations are continuously reported.
- The process of developing the compact was started in early 2017 as implementation of decision by UN member states as adopted New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in September 2016.
- **UN member states' another decision pledged in the declaration is to develop a Global Compact on Refugees.**

EU OPENS INDIA'S FIRST JEAN MONNET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN NEW DELHI

European Union (EU) has established India's first Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence (CoE) at Department of European Studies (DES) at Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) in New Delhi.

- It comes with a grant of €1,00,000 to pursue India-EU interdisciplinary studies in culture, literature, education and society.

DETAILS:

- **This is for the fifth time MAHE has been awarded grants under Erasmus+ Jean Monnet initiative.**
- Previous grants have been used for chair, modules and project.
- **Under the present award, Jean Monnet CoE in India-EU Interdisciplinary Studies aims to strengthen and enhance the educational connect between India and EU.**
- **It will host open-to-public workshops on European literature, winter schools for students around the world and India-EU Higher Education Meet.**

ABOUT JEAN MONNET:

- **He was a French political economist and diplomat.**
- **He was an influential supporter of European unity and is considered as one of the founding fathers of European Union.**
- **He has also been called "The Father of Europe"** by those who have seen his innovative and pioneering efforts in the 1950s as the key to establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, the predecessor of today's European Union.

- He was never elected to public office.

GOVERNMENT INKS \$31 MILLION LOAN AGREEMENT WITH ADB TO DEVELOP TOURISM AND BOOST JOBS IN TAMIL NADU

Union Government has inked \$31 million loan agreement with Asian Development Bank (ADB) for Tamil Nadu Government's Infrastructure Development Investment Program for Tourism (IDIPT).

- It is the fourth loan tranche for this program aimed at building-up tourism industry and boosting visitor arrivals in Tamil Nadu.

ABOUT INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT INVESTMENT PROGRAM FOR TOURISM (IDIPT):

- It is a \$250 million project approved in September 2010.
- It aims to build opportunities for local communities and boost local economy by enhancing tourism in three other states - Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand- besides Tamil Nadu.
- This will be achieved through developing and preserving sites of natural and cultural heritage, and building connectivity, capacity, and infrastructure around state tourist sites.
- It will support conservation and restoration of eight heritage monuments, one museum, three temples and a pond.
- It will build various facilities at the sites, including information centers, rest centers and toilet blocks with facilities served by solar-powered lighting and energy efficient lighting.
- The estimated completion date is June 2020.
- The project is expected to improve tourism infrastructure in Tamil Nadu and also help the state in preserving natural and cultural heritage.
- The activities under the project will also boost economic opportunities for the local people.
- It will also generate extra jobs in Tamil Nadu, especially through skills training and community-based activities that target poor and women.

CAG RAJIV MEHRISHI APPOINTED AS VICE-CHAIR OF UN PANEL OF AUDITORS

Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) Rajiv Mehrishi was elected as Vice-Chair of United Nations (UN) Panel of Auditors at its annual meeting held in New York.

- In this meeting CAG of UK was also appointed as Chair of Panel for another term (2019).
- The meeting discussed various issues concerning audit of United Nations and the agencies under the United Nations System.
- The next meeting will be held in Bonn, Germany in November-December 2019.

ABOUT UNITED NATIONS PANEL OF AUDITORS:

- It was established by UN General Assembly Resolution 1438 (XIV) in 1959.
- Its main objectives are to further co-ordination of audits for which its members are responsible and to exchange information on audit methods and findings.
- It is made up of members of United Nations Board of Auditors and external auditors of Specialized Agencies of UN and of International Atomic Energy Agency.
- Currently, it is chaired by CAG of UK and consists of 11 countries - India, Germany, Chile, Canada, France, Italy, Philippines, Ghana, Indonesia, Switzerland and United Kingdom.
- It may submit to executive heads of organisations audited any observations or recommendations in relation to accounts and financial procedures of the organisation concerned.
- The executive heads of participating organisations may also, through their auditors submit requests to it for their opinion or recommendation on any matter within its competence.

ECONOMIST SURJIT BHALLA RESIGNS FROM PRIME MINISTER'S ECONOMIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

Eminent economist and columnist Surjit Bhalla has resigned as part-time member of Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister(EAC-PM).

- His resignation comes a day after Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Urjit Patel, quit abruptly after months-long tussle over policy with the government.

ABOUT PRIME MINISTER'S ECONOMIC ADVISORY COUNCIL (PMEAC):

- PMEAC is a non-constitutional and non-statutory, non-permanent and independent body, constituted with the prime and sole aim to analyse all critical issues, economic or otherwise, referred to it by the Prime Minister and advising him thereon.
- It is mandated to give advice to the Prime Minister on economic matters such as inflation, GDP changes, export-import changes, creating supporting environment for increased trade and commerce.

FUNCTIONS:

- Submit periodic reports to the PM related to macroeconomic developments and issues which will have implications on the economic policy.
- Analyse any topics, issues assigned by the PM and provide advice on them.
- Analyse macroeconomic issues having high importance and present the views to PM and any other task which is assigned by the Prime Minister.

CURRENT COMPOSITION OF PMEAC:

- It is headed by Niti Aayog member Bibek Debroy.
- Economists Rathin Roy, Ashima Goyal and Shamika Ravi are other part-time members.

NASA'S OSIRIS-REX SPACECRAFT FINDS EVIDENCE OF WATER ON ASTEROID BENNU

NASA's Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security-Regolith Explorer (OSIRIS-REx) spacecraft has found water locked inside asteroid Bennu.

- Bennu is too small to have ever hosted liquid water, but this finding does indicate that liquid water was present at some time on Bennu's parent body, a much larger asteroid.

DETAILS:

- Data obtained from spacecraft's two spectrometers OSIRIS-REx Thermal Emission Spectrometer (OTES) and OSIRIS-REx Visible and Infrared Spectrometer (OVIRS) has revealed presence of hydroxyl molecules that contain oxygen and hydrogen atoms bonded together.
- These hydroxyl groups exist all across asteroid in water-bearing clay minerals, indicating that at some point Bennu's rocky material interacted with water.

ABOUT OSIRIS-REX:

- It was launched in September 2016 and is NASA's first asteroid sampling mission i.e. it will survey the surface, collect sample and deliver it safely back to Earth.
- It had reached its destination- Bennu asteroid in December 2018 after travelling through space for more than two years and travelling over two billion kilometres.
- Samples returned by the mission to Earth in 2023 will enable scientists to find new information about the history and evolution of our solar system.

ABOUT BENNU:

- It is a near-Earth carbonaceous asteroid about the size of a small mountain in the Apollo group.
- It was discovered in September 1999 by the LINEAR Project.
- It is one of the oldest known asteroids which is considered as a remnant from early formation of solar system and orbits close to Earth's path around Sun.
- It is a carbon-rich asteroid and believed to be the type of asteroids that may have chemical building blocks of life, along with lots of water.
- So, analysis of returned sample from it could help to reveal key insights about early solar system and the origin of life on Earth.

- It is a potentially hazardous asteroid and there is very slight chance that it could strike into Earth in the late 22nd century.

@CYBERDOST: HOME MINISTRY LAUNCHES TWITTER ACCOUNT TO SPREAD AWARENESS ABOUT CYBERCRIMES

Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has launched a Twitter account @CyberDost to spread awareness about cybercrimes and normal precautions to be taken.

- It is aimed at enhancing people's basic knowledge about cybercrimes and precautions to be taken for prevention.

ABOUT @CYBERDOST:

- This twitter handle will educate people about various channels through which complaints about cyber-crimes can be filed and make people aware of their duties regarding misuse of cyber space by some people in the country.
- It will also help to mitigate possibilities of disruption in normal business activities or losses due to cyber-crimes by creating an ecosystem to prevent and control cyber-crimes.
- The information shared on this handle will enhance basic knowledge of followers about cyber-crimes and precautionary measures to be taken to prevent such crimes.

ONE MUST KNOW:

- Information and communication technology is being used in all walks of public life including banking, transport, airlines, railways, power and other sectors.
- With the enhanced use of technology for day to day activities, possibility of cyber-crimes is also increasing.
- Capacity building and public awareness are critical components for obviating the impact of cybercrimes and creating a suitable climate for trust-based transactions.
- Government is committed to create an ecosystem to prevent and control cybercrimes to mitigate the possibility of disruption in normal business activities or losses due to cybercrimes.

ADB RETAINS INDIA'S GROWTH FORECAST AT 7.3% FOR FY19

Asian Development Bank (ADB) in its Outlook Supplement has retained India's growth forecast at 7.3% for current fiscal (2018-19) and 7.6% in the following financial year (2019-20).

- It held that India is maintaining growth momentum on rebounding exports and higher industrial and agricultural output.
- India saw GDP growth moderate to 7.1% in Q2 of FY2018 (ending March 31, 2019) from 8.2% in

Q1.

- The slowdown came mainly from food prices, rising oil prices delivering negative shock in terms of trade, lower rural consumption, and rising costs for raw materials.
- But growth forecasts of 7.3% for 2018-19 and 7.6% for 2019-20 are retained from update despite some downside risks.

ABOUT ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB):

- **ADB is a regional development bank based out of Asia.**
- It aims to promote social and economic development in Asia by achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.
- **It was established in December 1966.**
- **It is headquartered at Ortigas Centre in Manila, Philippines.**
- It has total 67 members, of which 48 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.

PARTNERS FORUM 2018

Fourth edition of Partners' Forum was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 12th December in New Delhi.

- The two day international conference was hosted by Government of India in association with Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH).
- Total 1500 participants from across 8 countries participated to talk about the improvement in the health and well being of women, children and adolescents.

DETAIL:

- **The programme was framed on the objective of Survive - Thrive - Transform.**
- The forum was aimed to explore the findings of 12 success factors, case studies which show how the countries are working towards the improvement of women's and children's health.

The forum showcased learnings from six regions on six thematic areas:

1. Early childhood Development - Germany and Chile
2. Adolescent Health and Wellbeing - USA and Indonesia
3. Quality, Equity and Dignity in services - India and Cambodia
4. Sexual and Reproductive Health - Malawi and Malaysia
5. Empowerment of Women, Girls and communities - South Africa and Guatemala
6. Humanitarian and fragile settings - Sierra Leone and Afghanistan

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **The global health partnership, Partners' Forum was launched in September 2005 to reduce the child and maternal mortality, and improve adolescent, child, newborn and maternal health.**
- Many countries around the globe joined the forum to achieve the objective.
- **Earlier editions of forum were held in - Tanzania (2007), India (2010), South Africa (2014).**

ABOUT PMNCH'S MISSION:

- The mission supports the global health community to work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Goal 3 of SDG is to achieve good health and well-being for people.

DAM SAFETY BILL 2018 INTRODUCED IN LOK SABHA

Minister of State for Parliamentary affairs Arjun Ram Meghwal introduced Dam Safety Bill 2018 in Lok Sabha.

- The bill provides a uniform procedure for the safety of dams in the country.
- The bill ensures surveillance, inspection, operation and maintenance of dams; and prevention of dam failure from disaster.
- **According to the bill, the dam owner is responsible for dam safety and contain penal provisions for not adhering the certain acts of the bill.**

SALIENT FEATURES OF BILL:

- **The bill provides legal and institutional safeguard to ensure the safe functioning of dams.**
- The bill addresses all the issues related to dam safety, comprehensive dam safety review, Emergency Action plan, repair and maintenance of funds for the dam.
- The bill provides institutional framework which includes - National Dam Safety Authority, State committee on Dam safety, State Dam safety organization.
- Owner of the dam have to prepare Emergency action plan within 5 years and for new dams, it has to prepared before filling.
- **Owner of the dam is required to establish hydro-meteorological network and emergency Flood warning system.**
- There is a provision for comprehensive safety evaluation by independent panel of expert.
- **Every state will establish a State Dam Safety Organization for safety of the dam.**

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- India holds third rank after USA and China in terms of larger number of dams.
- **Over 5254 larger dams are operating in India and about 447 dams are under construction.**
- These dams are not maintained properly which causes concern for human life, Flora and Fauna and to the environment.
- **In past, India faced 36 dam failures due to low maintenance and lack of legal mechanism.**

UTTAR PRADESH'S STARTUP 'HELPUSGREEN' HONoured BY UN

Uttar Pradesh based startup HelpUsGreen has been honored by UN for its works to clean River Ganga by recycling tonnes of floral waste.

- UN presented the award to 14 other countries along with India at the United Nations Climate Action award ceremony during the UN Climate Change Conference in Katowice.

HOW DOES THE START UP WORKS?

- **The startup collects the floral waste daily from the temples.**
- **These flowers are then recycled to produce charcoal free incense, organic vermicompost and biodegradable packaging material through 'Flowercycling' technology.**
- **According to UN the startup flower cycled 11060 metric tonnes of temple waste by the women working with the startup.**
- **According to data, more than 800 million metric tonnes of flowers are used in temple and these flowers are thrown into the Ganga river.**
- **The river filled with lots of waste, toxins and pesticides dumped into it, eventually lead to pollution and water borne diseases.**

ABOUT HELPUSGREEN:

- **HelpUsGreen started as world's first profitable solution to the waste problem created by flowers in monumental temple.**
- **Total of 8.4 tons of floral waste is collected by the startup everyday from the temples in Uttar Pradesh.**
- **The startup helped 1260 women who have been supporting the startup and 19 children whose mother works as manual scavengers started going to school.**

DELHI HIGH COURT ORDERS BAN ON SALE OF ONLINE MEDICINES

The Delhi High Court has ordered a ban on the sale of online medicines by E-pharmacies across the country.

- A bench of Chief Justice Rajendra Menon and Justice V K Rao has also ordered Central and Delhi Governments to implement the order.
- The court was acting on a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by Zaheer Ahmed, a Delhi based dermatologist.

The main complaints in the PIL were as follows:

- Medicines worth Lakhs was being sold online everyday without much regulation and posing a huge risk to patients as well as doctors.
- Online sale of medicines is not permitted under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Pharmacy Act, 1948.
- The Drug Controller General of India in 2015 had clearly directed all state drug controllers to protect the interest of public health by restraining such sale online.
- By allowing unchecked online sales, the government has failed in its responsibility to protect public health and fulfill its obligation under Article 21 of the constitution (right to life).
- Drugs are different from common items; and their misuse and abuse can have serious consequences for public health.
- Internet is used by a large number of children, minors and also uneducated people in rural areas. They can become victims of wrong medication.
- Online pharmacies are working without drug licenses and are also indulged in selling psychotropic substances.

ABOUT THE LEGAL STATUS OF ONLINE PHARMACIES:

- **The Union Health Ministry had come out with draft rules on sale of drugs by E-pharmacies in September 2018.**
- **The objective of these rules was to regulate the sale of medicines across India.**
- **The government did not ban the sale of drugs online because such sale also provides the patients in remote areas access to genuine drugs from authentic portals.**
- **The draft rules had mandated that no person will distribute or sell, stock, exhibit or offer for sale of drugs through e-pharmacy portal unless registered.**

BP SINGH APPOINTED AS FTII NEW CHAIRMAN

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has appointed Brijendra Pal Singh as the new Chairman and President of Film and Television Institute of India.

- He succeeded Anupam Kher, who had resigned from the post in October because of some international commitments.

ABOUT BRIJENDRA PAL SINGH:

- **He is an alumnus of FTII of 1970-73 batch and done specialization in film cinematography.**
- **He is the producer of the famous crime drama CID and completed a record of 21 years of continuous telecast on Sony TV.**
- **He also made his name in the Limca Book of World Record for taking a continuous shot of 111 minutes marking the completion of six years of crime drama CID.**
- **He served as Chairman of FTII Academic Council and Vice Chairman of Governing Council.**

ABOUT FTII:

- **Film and television Institute of India is an autonomous body established in 1960.**
- **It comes under Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.**
- **It is one of the members of International Liason Centre of Schools of Cinema and Television which is world's leading organization of schools of films and television.**
- **The institute is registered under Societies' Registration Act 1960.**
- **It consists of a President who also serves as Chairman of Governing Council and Standing Finance Committee.**
- **Governing council of FTII is responsible for all the important policy decisions of the institute.**
- **Director of Institute is responsible for implementation.**

FOUR INDIAN PSUS FEATURE IN WORLDS TOP 100 ARMS PRODUCERS: SIPRI REPORT

The recently released rankings by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) have placed four Indian Public Sector Undertakings among world's top 100 arms producers.

These companies are as follows:

- **Indian Ordnance Factories (37th Rank)**
- **Hindustan Aeronautics (38th Rank)**
- **Bharat Electronics (64th Rank)**
- **Bharat Dynamics (94th rank)**

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **This was for the first time that four Indian companies have ranked in top 100 arms producers companies of world.**
- **These four companies have sold arms worth USD 7.52 Billion in 2017.**

ABOUT SIPRI:

- **Established in 1966, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) is a Swedish think tank dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.**
- **SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.**

INDIA'S SHARE IN GLOBAL ARMS SALE:

- **India's current share in total global arms sales stands at less than 2%.**
- This indicates that India has been a weak player in international markets.
- Successive Government have tried to turn India into a global defence manufacturing hub and take multiple policy steps to involve private sector in defense production.
- However, most of such measures have been on papers only till now.

WORLD'S TOP ARMS PRODUCERS:

- **The global arms market is dominated by US companies which have a whopping 57% of the market share, followed by Russia (9.5%), United Kingdom (9%) and France (5.3%).**
- **As of 2017, Lockheed Martin is world's largest arms producing company with an arms sales of \$44.9 billion.**
- **Boeing is the second largest arms producer company in the world.**

4TH EDITION OF KOCHI-MUZIRIS BIENNALE INAUGURATED

Fourth edition of Kochi-Muziris Biennale was inaugurated by Kerala Chief Minister at Parade Ground in Fort Kochi, Kerala.

- The Biennale was curated by Anita Dube and became the first Biennale in world in which participation of women accounts for half of the participating artists.
- The 108-day long event will showcase 94 artists in 10 venues of the city.
- The Theme of the Biennale is - "Possibilities for a Non- Alienated Life".

ABOUT KOCHI MUZIRIS BIENNALE:

- **It is the largest contemporary art exhibition of India held in Kochi, Kerala.**
- The event is the combined effort of Kochi Biennale Foundation and Government of India.
- The aim of the initiative is to bring artists from around the globe and promote contemporary art.
- **Contemporary artists Bose Krisnamachari and Riyaz Komu proposed the State Government**

the idea of Biennale on the lines of Venice Biennale.

- **First Kochi-Muziris Biennale began in December 2012.**

ABOUT KOCHI BIENNALE FOUNDATION:

- **It is a non-profit charitable trust founded in 2010 for promoting art and culture educational activities in India.**
- **It is the primary organization to host Kochi-Muziris Biennale.**
- **It also works towards the conservation of heritage properties and upliftment of tradition art.**

GOVERNMENT TO SET UP NATIONAL MEDICAL DEVICES PROMOTION COUNCIL

The Government will set up a National Medical Devices Promotion Council (NMDPC) under the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) in the medical devices sector.

- **This announcement has been made by Union Minister of Commerce and Industry and Civil Aviation, Suresh Prabhu on December 14, 2018.**

DETAILS:

- **National Medical Devices Promotion Council will have representations from concerned departments of the Government of India and also healthcare industry and quality control institutions of the country.**
- **It will be headed by the Secretary of Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion.**
- **It will get technical support from Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone, Visakhapatnam.**

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES:

The key objectives and activities of the National Medical Devices Promotion Council will be as follows:

- **To work as a facilitating and developmental body for Indian Medical Devices Industry.**
- **To conduct seminars, workshop and other promotional and networking activities to promote the sector.**
- **To identify redundant processes and provide technical assistance to simplify the approval processes involved in medical devices industry.**
- **To work towards making a export driven market in the field.**
- **To support dissemination and documentation of international norms and standards for medical devices' and promote global best practices.**

- To drive a robust and dynamic Preferential Market Access (PMA) policy, by identifying the strengths of the Indian manufacturers and discouraging unfair trade practices in imports; while ensuring pro-active monitoring of public procurement notices across India to ensure compliance with PMA guidelines of DIPP and DoP.
- **Help validation of Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs) and other such entities within MDI sector.**
- To recommend Government, various measures to promote the MDI sector.

ABOUT MEDICAL DEVICES INDUSTRY (MDI) IN INDIA:

- **The current value of the Indian MDI industry is more than USD 5 Billion and India is one of the top 20 global medical devices markets.**
- However, the medical devices market in India is currently dominated by imports.
- Currently, Indian companies are engaged in production of only low end products.
- **There are huge possibilities in this market and the Government has provided for a regulatory framework for the industry in 2017.**

INDIA AND ADB SIGN LOAN AGREEMENT OF \$60 MILLION FOR ASSAM

Government of India and Asian Development Bank (ADB) have signed a loan agreement of \$60 million for financing the project for renovation, protection and community-based flood risk management activities along the Brahmaputra river in Assam.

- The objective of the program is to enhance the reliability and effectiveness of flood and river bank erosion risk management systems in Assam.
- Duration of the loan is 20 years with the grace period of five years.
- Interest rates are determined by ADB based on London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR) and commitment charge of 0.15% per year.

DETAILS:

- In 2010, ADB had approved the Tranch 2 Loan of \$120 million for Assam Integrated Flood and River Bank Erosion Risk Management Investment Program.
- The Project 2 of the program will help to fund the structural and non-structural measures in three sub Project areas - Palasbari Gumi, Kaziranga and Dibrugarh along the Brahmaputra river which covers 20 km of riverbank protection work and flood embankments upto 13 km.
- The executing and implementing agencies for this project are Flood and River Erosion Management Agency of Assam and Assam State Disaster Management Authority.
- The project will create and strengthen disaster management system and knowledge base for flood forecasting.

ABOUT THE BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER:

- The river originates from Mansarovar Lake in Himalayas in Tibet with the name Yarlung Tsangpo.
- **It is one of the major rivers of Asia flowing in China, India and Bangladesh.**
- The river has different names along its path.
- **It is known as Yarlung Tsangpo in China, and Brahmaputra in India.**
- **When it enters Bangladesh, it is called Jamuna river before merging with Ganga and finally Meghna when it drains into Bay of Bengal.**

ABOUT THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK:

- **It is a multilateral development bank established on 19th December 1966 with an objective to promote social and economic development in Asia.**
- **It is headquartered at Manila, Philippines.**
- **The President of the bank is Takehiko Nakao.**
- Presently 67 countries are the member of ADB and Japan and United States are the largest shareholders of the bank.
- **Other shareholders include China, India and Australia.**

BHARAT BHUSHAN VYAS APPOINTED AS NEW MEMBER OF UPSC

On 13 December 2018, Bharat Bhushan Vyas has joined as a member of the Union Public Service Commission.

- UPSC Chairman Arvind Saxena administered him the oath of office and secrecy.
- Bharat Bhushan Vyas has become the first IAS officer from J&K cadre to join any constitutional body.
- His tenure will be of three years.

ABOUT BHARAT BHUSHAN VYAS:

- **He is an IAS officer of the 1986 batch, and served Jammu and Kashmir for 32 years.**
- **He retired as Chief Secretary of Jammu and Kashmir.**
- **He served on prominent posts including Principal Secretary Finance, Srinagar Deputy Commissioner and Divisional commissioner.**

ABOUT UNION PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION:

- UPSC is a central recruiting agency in India which derived its mandate from Article 315 to 323 in Part XIV of the Indian Constitution.
- UPSC consists of a Chairman and four other members appointed by the President of India.
- The term of the Chairman and members of UPSC is of six years or until they attain the age of 65 years.
- According to Constitution, UPSC is the 'watch - dog' of merit system in India.

3RD EDITION OF WOMEN TRANSFORMING INDIA AWARDS TO BE ORGANIZED BY NITI AAYOG

Third edition of Women Transforming India Awards will be organized by Government think- tank NITI Aayog on 16th December 2018.

- On this occasion NITI Aayog will also launch the upgraded portal of Women Entrepreneurship Platform.
- Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu will present the awards to the women.
- The theme for this year awards is - 'Women and Entrepreneurship' and 15 winners have been selected.

ABOUT WOMEN TRANSFORMING INDIA AWARDS:

- **The awards were launched in 2016 to recognize the exceptional women who are working hard and making difference in lives of others.**
- It invites the stories of women entrepreneurs from the country, who are doing innovative work to address the key development challenges and impacting the communities.
- The nominations of the awards were opened on the launch of Women Entrepreneurship Platform in March this year.
- The event will include panel discussions consisting of entrepreneurs, investors, and experts.

ABOUT NITI AAYOG:

- **National Institution for Transforming India was launched on 1st January 2015 to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and enhance cooperative federalism by increasing involvement of states in the policy making process.**
- The initiative consists of a 5 years road map plan and a 7 years vision, strategy and action plan.
- **NITI Aayog replaced the 65 years old Planning Commission of India.**

FUNCTIONS OF NITI AAYOG:

- To enhance the involvement of States in decision making process by fostering cooperative federalism.

- To promote innovation, knowledge and entrepreneurial support system through a collaborative community of national and international experts.
- Incorporating National security in economic strategy and policy.
- To maintain state-of-the-art resource center for best practices in sustainable and equitable development and promote good governance.
- Formulate the strategies at village level and integrate these at higher levels of government.
- To work towards the technology up-gradation for implementation of policies.
- The design framework for strategic and long-term policies and monitor their progress.

BOARD OF NITI AAYOG:

The board consists of a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Ex-Officio members, Chief Executive Officer, Special Invitees, Full time members and Governing Council.

- Chairperson - The Prime Minister of India
- Vice Chairperson - Rajiv Kumar
- Chief Executive Officer - Amitabh Kant
- Governing Council - All Chief Ministers of States and LG of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Special Invitees.

RENOWNED ENGLISH WRITER AMITAV GHOSH SELECTED FOR JNANPITH AWARD, 2018

Renowned English fiction writer Amitav Ghosh has been selected for Jnanpith award, 2018.

- This has been announced by Jnanpith Selection Board on 14 December 2018.

ABOUT AMITAV GHOSH:

- Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta in 1956.
- He is an alumnus of Doon School, Dehradun, St. Stephen's College, Delhi University and Delhi School of Economics.
- **He was awarded Padma Shri in 2007 and was elected as Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2009.**
- **He was also named Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellow in 2015.**

ABOUT HIS WORKS:

- The Circle of Reason (1986) was his first novel. Other fiction works include The Shadow Lines

(1988), The Calcutta Chromosome (1995), The Glass Palace (2000), The Hungry Tide (2004).

- He has also written three works as a part of The Ibis Trilogy of which the first volume is Sea of Poppies (2008); second volume is River of Smoke (2011); and third volume is Flood of Fire (2015).
- His notable non-fiction works include Antique Land (1992), Dancing in Cambodia and at Large in Burma (1998), Countdown (1999), and The Imam and the Indian (2002), The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable (2016) etc.

ABOUT JNANPITH AWARD:

- **Jnanpith award was instituted in 1961.**
- **Via this award, the Bhartiya Jnanpith recognises Indian litterateurs who write in one of the 22 Indian languages listed in the Schedule Eight of the Indian Constitution.**
- **The winners receive a cash prize, a citation and a bronze replica of Goddess Saraswati.**
- **Famous Malyalam writer G.S. Kurup was the first winner of Jnanpith.**

INTERNET FACILITY FOR POST OFFICE SAVINGS BANK CUSTOMERS LAUNCHED

India Post has started internet facility for the customers of Post office savings bank account.

- The facility was launched by Union Minister for Communication (independent charge) Manoj Sinha at National Media Centre, New Delhi.
- Revamped version of Indian Post website and e-commerce portal for rural artisans were also launched at the event.

FACILITIES AVAILABLE TO CUSTOMERS:

- Customers can transfer funds online from one Post office Saving Bank Account to other.
- E-Commerce portal will provide an online market to rural artisans and Public Sector Units where they can sell their products.
- Indian Post Service will provide a vast network for delivery of products over 1.5 lakh places.
- Speed post service will deliver the products to the destination.
- The online market provides return policy to the customers.
- The Department of Post provides registration of sellers free of cost for the first six months.

ABOUT INDIA POST:

- **India Post is a Central Postal System of Government of India that was founded on 1st April**

1854.

- **It works under the Ministry of Communications of the Government of India.**
- The postal system of India is one of the widely distributed networks in the world.
- **India is divided into 23 postal circles headed by Chief Postmaster.**
- Indian Post is providing its services in Philately, Army Postal Service, Electronic Indian Postal Order, Postal Life Insurance, Postal Savings, Banking, Data collection, e-commerce and Railways.

POSTAL STAMPS:

- **Postage stamps are PIN codes that are used to identify the location for post.**
- **Stamps are used for postage and for certain services.**
- There are a variety of stamps produced in India with different themes.
- **The first stamp in Asia was issued in India in July 1852 by Bartle Frere.**

PIN CODES:

- **Postal Index Number is a 6-digit code of post office introduced on 15th August 1972.**
- **Out of the total 9 PIN regions, eight PIN denotes geographical regions and one is reserved for Army Postal Service.**

AKADEMIK LOMONOSOV: WORLD'S FIRST FLOATING NUCLEAR POWER PLANT BECOMES OPERATIONAL

On December 11, 2018, Russia's Akademik Lomonosov, the world's first floating nuclear power plant (FNPP) has become operational.

- The Russian atomic energy corporation Rosatom announced that the plant has been brought to 10% of its capacity.

ABOUT AKADEMIK LOMONOSOV FNPP:

- **Akademik Lomonosov was constructed by Russian state nuclear power firm Rosatom.**
- It has length of 144 metres and width of 30 metres.
- It has a displacement of 21,500 tonnes and crew of 69 people.
- For power generation, it has been fitted with two modified KLT-40 naval propulsion nuclear reactors (each of 35 MW capacity) together providing up to 70 MW of electricity and 300 MW of heat.
- **It is named after Russian Academician Mikhail Lomonosov.**

- It has the latest security systems and is considered as one of safest nuclear installations in the world.
- **However, environmentalists have dubbed it as 'Nuclear Titanic' or 'Chernobyl on ice'.**
- It will be primarily used to power oil rigs in remote areas of Arctic region where Russia is pushing to drill for oil and gas.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS NUCLEAR POWER PLANT:

- **The low-capacity, mobile (floating) nuclear power plant can produce enough electricity to power town of 200,000 residents living in Russia's far-flung northernmost Arctic region where large amounts of electricity is not needed and construction of conventional power station based on coal, gas and diesel is complicated and costly.**
- **It can save upto 50,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per year.**
- The project is part of Russia's greater aims to secure rich deposits of oil and gas in North Pole region in Arctic.
- Due to climate change, new shipping routes are opening up in Russia's north and as result, it is strengthening its military position in the region.

AUSTRALIA RECOGNIZES WEST JERUSALEM AS CAPITAL OF ISRAEL

On 15th December 2018, Australia recognized West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

- With this, Australia has become one of the few countries that officially recognize West Jerusalem as Israel's capital and as the seat of the Knesset (Israel's parliament).
- **However, Australia has made it clear that it will not move its embassy from Tel Aviv until a peace settlement is reached between Israel and Palestine.**
- Yet, Australia will establish a defence and trade office in Jerusalem and start looking for an embassy site.

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **West Jerusalem is that part of Jerusalem which remained under Israeli control after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.**
- A number of western countries such as the UK acknowledge de facto Israeli authority, but withhold de jure recognition.
- Israel's claim of sovereignty over West Jerusalem is more widely accepted than its claim over city of East Jerusalem.

SOME IMPORTANT DETAILS:

- Both Israel and Palestine claim Jerusalem as their capital.

- Before this, United States President Donald Trump's administration had also announced recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital on December 6, 2017.
- The UN General Assembly passed a resolution in opposition to declare the US President Donald Trump's declaration of Jerusalem as Israel's capital "null and void".
- India also supported the resolution, which was approved with a majority of 127-9 at the UN General Assembly calling for the US to withdraw its decision.

- **The Israeli - Palestinian tussle is the ongoing struggle between Israelis and Palestinians that began in the mid-20th century.**
- **The origins of this conflict can be traced back to Jewish immigration, and sectarian conflict in Mandatory Palestine between Jews and Arabs.**
- **This conflict has been referred to as the world's "most intractable conflict", with the ongoing Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for last 51 years.**

JAMMU AND KASHMIR PASSES THE LAW ON SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The state assembly of Jammu and Kashmir has passed a law to ban sexual extortion of woman in offices and became the first state in the country to amend law on Sextortion.

- The State Administrative Council headed by Governor Satya Pal Malik has given approval for Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Bill, 2018 and Jammu and Kashmir Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2018.

DETAILS:

- **The new law amended section 154, 161 and schedule of Criminal Procedure Code and Section 53 of Evidence Act to bring the Sextortion as a similar offence prescribed under RPC.**
- **New Section E has been added to Section 354 of Ranbir Penal Code that makes sexual harassment a criminal offence with three years of imprisonment.**
- The amended section 354 E has the provision related to sexual harassment and practice of extorting money at workplace by those who are in position of authority, having a fiduciary relationship or a public servant.
- The new amendment prescribed the definition of misconduct and the demand for sexual favours also comes under the misconduct in Section 5.

ABOUT RANBIR PENAL CODE:

- **Indian Penal code is not applicable to Jammu and Kashmir and in place of IPC, a similar criminal law Ranbir Penal Code applies in the state.**

- The code was introduced by Ranbir Singh during the Dogra Dynasty and it came in effect from 1932.
- The provision of code was prepared by Thomas Babington Macaulay.

PUNJAB ASSEMBLY PASSED RESOLUTION TO SEEK 33% RESERVATION FOR WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

Punjab Legislative Assembly unanimously passed a resolution for seeking 30% reservation for women in Parliament and State legislative assembly.

- The resolution was moved by Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh, urging the Centre to enact it.
- The bill would ensure the representation of men and women equally in national electoral process.

DETAILS:

- The women Reservation Bill will ensure the balanced representation of women in electoral and decision-making process.
- The bill would reserve 180 seats out of 543 seats in Lok Sabha and 1370 seats out of 4109 seats in State Assembly.
- Apart from that, State will give more parole holidays for prisoners extending from 12 weeks to 16 weeks during 550th birth anniversary celebration of Guru Nanak Dev.

OTHER RESOLUTIONS PASSED:

- The state assembly passed other amendments in Punjab Goods and Service Tax Bill, The Punjab Panchayat Raj Bill, The Punjab Good Conduct Prisoners Bill, The Punjab Regulation of Cattle Feed, Concentration and Mineral Mixtures Bill.
- The Punjab Goods and Service tax Bill will enable small taxpayer to quarterly file returns and tax payment.
- The Cattle feed Bill will provide framework for proper regulation of animal husbandry sector.
- The State Assemble unanimously passed another resolution for swapping of land with Pakistan to make it Kartarpur.

PU ZORAMTHANGA HAS BEEN APPOINTED AS NEW CHIEF MINISTER OF MIZORAM

Pu Zoramthanga has been sworn in as the new Chief minister of Mizoram.

- Zoramthanga belongs to the Mizo National Front (MNF).
- He will be heading a 12-member council.
- Governor of Mizoram K Rajasekharan administered the oath of office and secrecy during a

ceremony at Raj Bhavan in Aizawl, which was taken by Zoramthanga in the Mizo language.

ABOUT PU ZORAMTHANGA:

- **This is Zoramthanga's third stint as the Chief CM of Mizoram.**
- **Previously, he has led the MNF Government in Mizoram in 1998 and 2003.**
- The five cabinet ministers of the new Mizoram Government are - Tawnluia, R Lalthangliana, Lalchamlia, Lalzirliana and Lalrinsanga. Mr Tawnluia will also be the deputy chief minister of Mizoram.
- The six ministers of state in the new Mizoram Government are - K Lalrinliana, Lalchhandama Ralte, Lalruatkima, Dr K Beichhua, TJ Lalnuntluanga and Robert Romawia Ralte.

ABOUT MNF:

- **The Mizo National Front, also known as MNF, is a regional political party in the state of Mizoram.**
- **MNF originated from the Mizo National Famine Front formed by Pu Laldenga.**
- **The Mizo National Famine Front was formed to protest against the inaction of the Indian Government towards the famine of 1959 in the Mizo areas of Assam.**
- **After years of violence and underground activities, it signed the Mizoram Accord in 1986 with the Government of India, giving up secession and violence.**

RECENT ELECTIONS IN THE STATE OF MIZORAM:

- The elections to the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram were held on 28th November 2018.
- There are total 40 constituencies in Mizoram.
- Mizo National Front (MNF) won 26 seats out of 40 seats in the 2018 elections.
- Indian National Congress won 5 seats and BJP won 1 seat.

NRTI: INDIA'S FIRST RAILWAY UNIVERSITY IN VADODARA DEDICATED TO NATION

Union Railways Minister Piyush Goyal has dedicated India's first railway university to the Nation in Vadodara.

- The Railway University will be first of its kind institution in the nation and the third in the world after Russia and China.

DETAILS:

- It is named as the National Rail and Transportation Institution (NRTI).
- It will be a deemed university which will offer professional courses in technology and management of transportation networks.
- The Chairman of Railways Board Sh. Ashok Lohani has been named the Vice Chancellor of the University.
- It will host visiting faculty from renowned institutions like XLRI School of Management and Indian Business School, Hyderabad and others.

ABOUT NATIONAL RAIL AND TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTION (NRTI):

- The National Rail and Transportation Institution (NRTI) started its operation on September 5 earlier this year.
- The first batch of the university has already been shortlisted and consists of 103 students - 62 for BSc in Transportation Technology and 41 in BBA in Transportation Management.
- Both the courses are the flagship three-year programmes offered by the university.
- The first batch of students has been awarded 50 per cent scholarship in the yearly course fee of Rs 75,000.
- The actual annual fee of NRTI for one year is Rs 91,000, including all other charges.
- There are plans to start Master Degree programmes from the academic session 2019-20 in Transportation and Systems Design, Transport Systems Engineering, Transport Policy and Economics, and others.
- The Railways Ministry has sanctioned Rs 421 crore for the NRTI and its curriculum development for the next five years.
- A greenfield campus is also under development for the university.
- Indian Railways has identified a 110-acre plot of land for the NRTI campus at Pipaliya village in Waghodiya Taluka, District Vadodara.

FOUNDATION STONE OF INSTITUTE OF HIGH-ALTITUDE MEDICINAL PLANTS (IHAMP) LAID IN J&K

- The foundation stone of Institute of High-Altitude Medicinal Plants (IHAMP) was laid by Union Ministers Jitendra Singh and Shripad Yesso Naik (Ayush Ministry).
- The Institute of High-Altitude Medicinal Plants will be located in Bhaderwah in Doda district of Jammu & Kashmir.

DETAILS:

- It will provide research in medicinal plants and promote cultivation of medicinal plants.

- The institute will also provide employment and promote medicinal plant in foreign market.
- The estimated cost of the construction of Institute of High-Altitude Medicinal Plants is Rs 100 crore.

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- Institute of High-Altitude Medicinal Plants will be a pioneer in research on medicinal plants.
- It will help the farmers in cultivation of medicinal plants in a scientific manner.
- Training and capacity-building in the field of medicinal plants will also generate employment opportunity for youth in the region.

SHREE SAINI WINS MISS INDIA WORLDWIDE, 2018

Indian-American Shree Saini has won the Miss India Worldwide 2018 title at a pageant held in the Fords City of New Jersey.

- Sakshi Sinha from Australia and Anusha Sareen from the United Kingdom were respectively declared first and second runner-ups in the competition.

ABOUT MISS INDIA WORLDWIDE 2018:

- The Miss India Worldwide pageant is organised by the New York-based India Festival Committee (IFC) which is headed by Dharmatma Saran in New York.
- It is said to be the oldest and largest event for the Indian Diaspora community.
- It draws contestants from India and from among members of the Indian Diaspora residing in different countries.

DETAILS ABOUT THE CURRENT EDITION OF THE PAGEANT:

- It was the 27th edition of this annual global pageant for people of Indian origin.
- Girls of Indian-origin from as many as 17 countries participated in this annual beauty pageant.
- India's Mandeep Kaur Sandhu, who hails from Haryana, was crowned as Mrs India Worldwide 2018.
- Jeya Priya Pandian from Malaysia and Kavita Malhotra Pattani from the USA were declared as the first and second runner-ups of the Mrs India Worldwide 2018 respectively.
- The next edition of the Miss India Worldwide competition will be held in Mumbai in 2019.

18TH MEETING OF IRIGC-MTC HELD IN NEW DELHI

The Indian Defense Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently met the Russian Defence Minister General Sergei Shoigu at the 18th meeting of India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC) that was held in New Delhi.

IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 18TH MEETING OF IRIGC-MTC:

- In the meeting, a wide range of issues were discussed regarding defence equipment, industry and technological cooperation between India and Russia.
- **Issues related to after sales support and upgradation of military equipment of Russian origin were also discussed.**
- Both the Ministers have expressed their satisfaction at the progress in bilateral defence cooperation between India and Russia.
- **Discussions took place on joint manufacturing projects in the meeting, including the Kamov-226T helicopters, naval frigates and other projects related to land systems.**
- **There was also an agreement from both the sides to take forward inter-governmental arrangements to facilitate joint manufacturing of spares for equipments of Russian origin in India, under the 'Make in India' scheme.**
- The existing IRIGC-MTC will be restructured to the IRIGC on Military and Military Technical Cooperation.
- An agreement regarding this was signed by the two Defence Ministers.

ABOUT IRIGC-MTC:

- **Russia has been the most important arms supplier for India's Defence forces.**
- Both the countries have an institutionalized structure to oversee all the issues of military-technical cooperation.
- The IRIGC is at the top of this institutionalized structure.
- **The India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC) was set up in 2000.**
- **The First meeting of the IRIGC-MTC was held in Moscow in 2001.**
- **The 19th IRIGC meeting is proposed to be held in Russia next year.**

GOVERNMENT NOTIFIES FLIGHT AND MARITIME CONNECTIVITY RULES, 2018

The Union Government has notified Flight and Maritime Connectivity Rules, 2018, thereby allowing phone calls and internet on flights and ship voyage within India's territory.

- The Indian and foreign airlines and shipping companies that are operating in India can provide in-flight and maritime voice and data services by partnering with an Indian telecom company having a valid licence.
- The rules regarding this will be called as the Flight and Maritime Connectivity Rules, 2018.

ABOUT FLIGHT AND MARITIME CONNECTIVITY RULES, 2018:

- **The IFMC i.e in-flight and maritime connectivity can be provided by the airlines and ships using telecom networks on the ground as well as using satellites.**
- **Both domestic and foreign satellites can be used for providing the IFMC services by a telecom licence holder after taking permission from the Department of Space.**
- The rules make it clear that when the satellite system is used for providing IFMC, the telegraph message need to pass through the satellite gateway earth station located within India.
- Such satellite gateway earth stations shall be interconnected with the National Long Distance (NLD) or access service or ISP licensee's network for further delivery of the message.
- **The in-flight and maritime connectivity services will only be activated once the aircraft reaches a minimum height of 3,000m in the Indian airspace.**
- **The objective of this is to avoid any interference with terrestrial mobile networks.**
- **The licences for IFMC will be granted for an annual fee of Rs. 1 for a period of 10 years.**
- The permit holder will have to pay licence fees and spectrum charges depending upon the revenue earned from providing services.
- **It is to be noted that even with all the rules notified, it would take time for the airlines to upgrade their systems to provide IFMC services.**

RANIL WICKREMESINGHE SWORN-IN AS PRIME MINISTER OF SRI LANKA

Ranil Wickremesinghe has once again become the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka after the end of weeks-long political crisis in the island nation.

- On 26th October 2018, Mr. Ranil Wickremesing was ousted as Prime Minister of Sri Lanka.
- He was replaced by Mahinda Rajapaksa as the Prime Minister.
- Mr. Rajapaksa resigned on 15th October 2018 after he failed to prove majority in the Sri Lankan Parliament.
- **Ranil Wickremesinghe has been sworn in as the Prime minister for the fifth time which is a record in Sri Lanka.**

ABOUT RANIL WICKREMESINGHE:

- **Ranil Wickremesinghe is a Sri Lankan politician and the incumbent Prime Minister of Sri Lanka.**

- **He belongs to United National Party and has served as its leader since 1994.**
- He got elected as Member of Parliament (MP) for the first time in 1977 from Colombo District.
- Ranil Wickremesinghe was appointed as the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in the J. R. Jayewardene government.
- He also became the youngest cabinet minister of Sri Lanka after he was promoted to the post of Minister of Youth Affairs and Employment.
-
- **Ranil Wickremesinghe has also been the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka from 1993 to 1994 and 2001 to 2004.**
- **After the assassination of Gamini Dissanayake, during the 1994 presidential election campaign, Wickremesinghe was appointed the party leader of the United National Party in November 1994.**
- **Maithripala Sirisena defeated Mahinda Rajapaksa in the 2015 presidential elections of Sri Lanka. Following which, on 8th January 2015, Wickremesinghe was appointed as the Prime Minister by Sirisena.**

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- **In the 2015 parliamentary elections of Sri Lanka, Wickremesinghe's coalition alliance, called as the United National Front for Good Governance, won 106 seats.**
- **Although it did not attain an outright majority, Wickremesinghe got re-elected as Sri Lankan Prime Minister as over 35 MPs from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party joined his cabinet.**

PV SINDHU WINS MAIDEN BWF WORLD TOUR TITLE

PV Sindhu, the 2016 Rio Olympic silver medallist, created history on 16th December 2018 as she became the first Indian to win the BWF World Tour Finals.

- She defeated Japan's Nozomi Okuhara, the 2017 world champion, by 21-19 21-17 in the final match that lasted for an hour and two minutes.
- Earlier, Sindhu defeated Ratchanok by 21-16, 25-23 in the semi-finals to enter the finals of the season-ending BWF World Tour tournament.

ABOUT 2018 BWF WORLD TOUR:

- **The BWF World Tour Finals is an annual badminton competition that takes place at the end of every year.**
- The badminton players having most points from all the events of the BWF World Tour in that calendar year compete with each other in this tournament.

- **It was held from 12th to 16th December 2018 in Tianhe, Guangzhou, China.**
- **The total prize of the tournament was \$1,500,000.**
- Shi Yuqi of China won the Men's Singles title defeating Kento Momota of Japan by 21-12, 21-11.
- Li Junhui & Liu Yuchen (China) beat Hiroyuki Endo & Yuta Watanabe by 21-15, 21-11 to win the Men's Doubles title final match.
- In the Women's Doubles final match, Misaki Matsutomo & Ayaka Takahashi (Japan) defeated Lee So-hee & Shin Seung-chan (South Korea) by 21-12, 22-20.
- Wang Yilü & Huang Dongping (China) defeated Zheng Siwei & Huang Yaqiong (China) by 23-21, 16-21, 21-18 to win Mixed Doubles final match.

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **This win was Sindhu's 14th title in her career but it was the first title for her in 2018.**
- P V Sindhu won the silver medal at the World Championships 2018, Thailand Open 2018, Asian Games 2018, Commonwealth Games 2018 and India Open held this year.

BELGIUM WINS HOCKEY WORLD CUP 2018 TITLE

Belgium Hockey team has won their first ever Word Cup title on 16th December 2018 after they defeated The Netherlands in sudden death.

- Belgium, which also won a silver medal in Rio Olympics 2016, made history by beating the opponents by 3-2 in the penalty shoot-out after the finals ended without any goal.
- Belgium hockey team registered its second biggest international title after winning a silver medal in Rio Olympics in 2016 and ending up second in the 2017 Euro Hockey Championships.

ABOUT HOCKEY WORLD CUP 2018:

- **The Hockey World Cup 2018 was held at Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneshwar, Odisha from 28 November to 16 December 2018.**
- **It was the 14th edition of the Cup.**
- Belgium finished first, while the Netherlands and Australia finished second and third respectively.
- Australia defeated England by 8-1 to secure third place.
- Belgium came fifth in the last edition of the Hockey World Cup which was played at The Hague in the Netherlands.
- **India came at sixth place in the Hockey World Cup 2018.**
- **Arthur Van Doren, the Belgian Hockey player, was awarded as the Best Player of the Hockey World Cup 2018 tournament.**

- Australia's Blake Govers and Belgium's Alexander Hendrickx scored most number of goals (7) in the tournament.
- Primin Blaak was the Goalkeeper of the Tournament and the team of Spain was given Fair Play Award.

THE MASCOT FOR HOCKEY WORLD CUP 2018:

- Turtle 'Olly' was the official mascot for the Hockey World Cup 2018 Cup.
- 'Olly' mascot of the Hockey World Cup 2018 represented the Olive Ridley turtles which are an endangered species.
- Olive Ridley turtles swim thousands of miles in the ocean to arrive for their annual nesting on Odisha's Rushikulya and Gahirmatha beaches every year.
- Olly was also the mascot for Asian Athletics Championships that took place in India in 2017.

JOSHNA CHINAPPA WINS NATIONAL SQUASH WOMEN'S SINGLES TITLE

Joshna Chinappa won the National Squash Women's Singles title after she defeated Urwashi Joshi in the final match of the competition by 9-11, 11-1, 11-6, 11-5.

- It was her 16th National title and with this win, she has equalled the record of Bhuvaneshwari Kumari of winning 16 titles.

ABOUT JOSHNA CHINAPPA:

- Joshna Chinappa is the first Indian squash player to win the British Squash Championship in 2003.
- She won this title in the under 19 category.
- Joshna Chinappa and Dipika Pallikal Karthik won the squash women's doubles gold medal in 2014 at the Commonwealth Games.
- It was India's first ever medal in squash at the Commonwealth Games.

ONE MUST ALSO KNOW:

- Mahesh Mangaonkar defeated Vikram Malhotra in the final match by 11-4, 13-15, 11-2, 5-11, 15-13 to win Men's Singles title.
- It was the 75th edition of the championship.
- This is the maiden title for Mahesh Mangaonkar.
- The entire tournament was held in Noida.

SQUASH IN INDIA:

- **Squash is a ball sport played by two or four players in a four-walled court with a hollow rubber ball.**
- In India, the game is not very popular but is picking up gradually.
- **The Squash Rackets Federation of India is India's squash governing body.**
- **Currently, most popular squash players in India are Joshna Chinappa and Dipika Pallikal.**
- **Dipika was the first Indian woman to break into the top 10 in the Women's Squash Association rankings.**

CATRIONA GRAY FROM PHILIPPINES WINS MISS UNIVERSE 2018 TITLE

Catriona Elisa Gray from the Philippines was crowned as the Miss Universe 2018, beating 93 contestants from other countries.

- She was crowned by Demi Leigh Nel-Peters from South Africa, the Miss Universe 2017 title winner.
- **India was represented by Nehal Chudasama in the beauty pageant.**
- Nehal Chudasama failed to enter the final 20 of the Miss Universe 2018 competition.
- After Lara Dutta had won the crown in 2000, no Indian contestant has been able to win the Miss Universe title in all these 18 years.

ABOUT MISS UNIVERSE 2018:

- **Tamaryn Green from South Africa and Sthefany Guterrez from Venezuela were the first runner-up and second runner-up at Miss Universe 2018 competition.**
- **Spain's Angela Ponce created history as the first transgender woman to participate in the Miss Universe beauty pageant.**
- **The event was hosted by Emmy Award-winning comedian Steve Harvey.**
- Miss universe 2018 Catriona Elisa Gray has a Master Certificate in Music Theory.
- She also works as an HIV/AIDS advocate and volunteers at an NGO as a teacher's assistant.
- **The countries of Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia participated for the first time in the Miss Universe competition.**

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **This was the 67th edition of the Miss Universe pageant.**
- **Miss Universe 2018 was held at in Nonthaburi Province, Thailand on 17th December 2018.**
- **For the first time, the competition was judged by an all-women jury.**

- Total 94 countries participated in the competition.

MERRIAM-WEBSTER SELECTS 'JUSTICE' AS ITS 2018 WORD OF THE YEAR

Merriam-Webster has declared 'Justice' as the 2018 Word Of The Year.

- As per Merriam-Webster, the word 'Justice' is used in many phrases like racial justice, social justice and obstruction of justice.

ABOUT MERRIAM-WEBSTER:

- **Merriam-Webster is a US company famous for its dictionaries and also known for reference books that it publishes.**
- **It was founded by George and Charles Merriam in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1828.**
- Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. acquired Merriam-Webster in 1964 as its subsidiary company.

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- **Every year Merriam-Webster, the American dictionary-publishing company, publishes the List of Words of the Year.**
- The 'List of Words of the Year' contains ten English language words of the year.
- The company started publishing the list in 2003 and have been publishing at the end of every year since then.
- Initially, the company chose the words based on popular searches on its website.
- **Since 2006, the words in the list are selected by an online poll and by suggestions from readers.**
- **The words selected by Merriam Webster are usually a reflection of the events that take place during that year.**

SOME PREVIOUS EXAMPLES OF 'WORD OF THE YEAR':

- The Word of the Year for 2005 was '**Integrity**'.
- The Word of the Year for 2016 was '**Surreal**'.
- The Word of the Year for 2017 was '**Feminism**'.

LOK SABHA PASSES TRANSGENDER PERSONS (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS) BILL, 2016

The Lok Sabha has passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016, which seeks to empower the transgender community in the country by providing them a separate identity.

- The bill which was introduced in the parliament two years ago has been passed with 27 amendments.
- The primary objective of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016, is to define transgenders and prohibit discrimination against the transgender community.

MAIN HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BILL:

- **The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016 defines a transgender person as one who is partly female or male; or a combination of female and male; or neither female nor male.**
- Additionally, the bill states that the person's gender must not match the assigned gender at birth.
- **Every transgender person in the country must obtain an identity certificate which will be used as the proof of recognition of identity as a transgender person and to avail all the rights under the Bill.**
- **The identity certificate would be granted by the District Magistrate on the recommendation of a Screening Committee.**
- The screening committee for recommending the certificate would comprise a medical officer, a psychologist or psychiatrist, a district welfare officer, a government official, and a transgender person.
- **The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016 prohibits discriminating with transgender people in education, employment, healthcare and other areas.**
- The Bill directs the Central and State Governments for providing welfare schemes to the Transgender community in these areas.
- **The Bill also provides for the punishment of up to two years' imprisonment and a fine for offences like compelling a transgender person to beg, denial of access to a public place, physical and sexual abuse, etc.**

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **The Supreme Court in its recent judgement has held that the right to self-identification of gender is part of the right to dignity and autonomy and comes under Article 21 of the Constitution.**
- However, it is important to adopt an objective criteria to determine one's gender in order to become eligible for entitlements.

MADHAVI DIVAN APPOINTED AS THE NEW ADDITIONAL SOLICITOR GENERAL

The Union government has appointed advocate Madhavi Goradia Divan as the Additional Solicitor General (ASG) in the Government of India.

- She will hold office of ASG till 30 June, 2020 and will appear in the Supreme Court on behalf of the

Government of India.

- She is the third woman to hold the post of ASG.
- Senior advocate Indira Jaising was the first woman in India to become ASG.
- Pinky Anand was the second woman and she still holds the post.

ABOUT MADHAVI DIVAN:

- Madhavi Divan began her legal career from the Bombay High Court.
- **She has represented the states of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat in judicial proceedings.**
- She is married to Senior Advocate Shyam Divan, who recently appeared in the right to privacy case as a lawyer for the petitioners.
- **She played a great role in getting Triple Talaq getting criminalised by the Supreme Court of India.**
- Also, she advocated against giving the death penalty by the courts for the rape of minor victims.

ABOUT THE ADDITIONAL SOLICITOR GENERAL OF INDIA:

- **The Additional Solicitor General of India, also known as the ASG, is the third-ranked law-officer in the Indian Government.**
- The post of ASG is not constitutional as the constitution does not have any provisions regarding this.
- **The seat of the Additional Solicitor-General of India may be at New Delhi or Mumbai or Chennai or Allahabad as the Government of India specifies.**

TAMIL NADU FISHERMEN GET NAVIC-POWERED ISRO GADGETS

The Tamil Nadu Government has distributed 200 NavIC- powered satellite-enabled communication devices developed by ISRO to 80 fishing boat groups in Tamil Nadu.

- These gadgets will help the Tamil Nadu fishermen to get cyclone and weather updates on a real-time basis.
- Tamil Nadu Government rolled out these devices after Chief Minister K Palaniswami distributed the gadgets to seven fishermen engaged in deep sea fishing in Chennai.

ABOUT THE GADGETS:

- **These gadgets, which are of the size of a soapbox, are basically 'receivers' which will produce a beep when alerts are received by the device.**
- **These are Bluetooth enabled and the alerts received can be read on the NavIC App which can be downloaded on an android phone.**
- **The alerts will be in the Tamil language so that the fisherman find it easy to understand.**

- These gadgets have been given free of cost and there is no recurring cost associated with these devices.

WHAT IS NAVIC?

- NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation) can be understood as the Indian version of the American GPS (Global Positioning System).
- The Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System constellation consists of eight satellites.
- NavIC provides accurate real-time position, navigation and timing services over India and a region extending 1,500 km around Indian borders.

FACTS:

- Last year several fishermen went missing in the cyclone Ockhi and Tamil Nadu Government had to face severe criticism for not providing timely weather alerts to fishermen.
- For this reason, the Tamil Nadu Government had declared giving these gadgets free of cost to fishermen in this year's state budget.

KAIGA ATOMIC POWER STATION CREATES WORLD RECORD FOR CONTINUOUS OPERATION FOR 941 DAYS

The Kaiga Atomic Power Station of Karnataka has created a new world record, with one of its units functioning continuously without any interruption for 941 days.

- The previous world record was held by Unit 2 of Heysham of the United Kingdom.
- It operated without any interruption for 940 days.

ABOUT KAIGA ATOMIC POWER STATION:

- Kaiga Atomic Power Station is a nuclear power generating station located at Kaiga in Karnataka, India.
- It is operated by the Nuclear Power Corporation of India.
- The power plant has been functioning since March 2000.
- The Kaiga power plant has four units of 220 MW each.
- The total power generating capacity of Kaiga power plant is 880 MW.
- It is the third largest nuclear power plant in India.
- Tarapur (1400 MW) of Maharashtra is the largest and Rawatbhata (1180 MW) of Rajasthan is the second largest power plant in India.
- It supplies electricity to Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- **The same unit of Kiaga Power plant had set a world record in October 2018 when it functioned non-stop for 894 days.**
- **The record set by Kaiga power plant is a record for all kinds of units in the world which generate nuclear power, including advanced gas-based reactor.**

NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE (NCI) OPENED IN JHAJJAR, HARYANA

India's largest Cancer Institute, National Cancer Institute (NCI), has opened on 18th December 2018 in Jhajjar, Haryana for public services.

- The National Cancer Institute will be formally inaugurated in January 2019.
- The National Cancer Institute has been established under a project of Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).
- **Dr G.K. Rath, head of Institute Rotary Cancer hospital at All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi, will head the NCI.**

ABOUT THE NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE:

- The NCI is built at a cost of Rs 2,035 crore.
- Presently, NCI has a total of 710 beds out of which 200 beds have been dedicated for the treatment of cancer patients based on research protocols.
- The National Cancer Institute (NCI) will act as the nodal institution for all cancer-related activities in India.
- It will be linked to regional cancer centres and other cancer institutes of India.
- The NCI will be the premier institute for cancer treatment and research.
- It is tasked to conduct basic and applied research in areas like molecular biology, genomics, proteomics, cancer epidemiology, radiation biology, cancer vaccines and more.
- It will work towards evolving new cancer control strategies, which include new models of prevention, early diagnosis and therapy, for the developing nations.
- Development of human resource in various branches of cancer management is another area where NCI will work.
- NCI will also have the facilities for training and capacity building in cancer treatment.
- The NCI will have equipment with advanced and latest technology to learn more about cancer.
- NCI will assist other regional cancer centres in research activities.

MORE DETAILS:

- **The National Cancer Institute (NCI) will help to take off some patient load from AIIMS which presently receives about 1000 patients every day.**
- **Although the doctors have started OPDs in the NCI, the full functioning of all the departments of the National Cancer Institute will commence in January 2019.**

CAPITAL FIRST MERGES WITH IDFC BANK TO CREATE IDFC FIRST BANK

The IDFC Bank has merged completely with the non-banking financial company Capital First on 18th December 2018 into a new entity to be called as IDFC First Bank.

- The merger between IDFC Bank and Capital First was announced on 13th December 2018.
- The new bank i.e. IDFC First bank will have a loan asset book of Rs 1.03 lakh crore.
- **V Vaidyanathan, who is the Founder and Chairman of Capital First Ltd, has been appointed as the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of the newly formed IDFC First bank.**

ABOUT NON-BANKING FINANCIAL COMPANY (NBFC):

- **An NBFC is a financial institution that does not have a banking license but provides banking services.**
- Operations of NBFCs are regulated under the country's banking regulations but it is established under the Companies Act, 1956.
- **The Reserve Bank of India regulates the NBFCs under Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.**
- NBFCs can provide loans and credit facilities, offer savings and investments products and can offer money transfer services to the customers.
- **However NBFCs, unlike Banks, cannot accept demand deposits from customers.**
- NBFCs also are not a part of the country's payment and settlement system.
- Therefore, they cannot offer cheque facility to their customers.

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

IDFC Bank had made a deal with Shriram Group for a merger but the deal was called off as both the entities could not agree on the share swap ratio.

'SHIKSHA SETU' MOBILE APP LAUNCHED BY HARYANA GOVERNMENT

Haryana Government has launched a mobile app named as 'Shiksha Setu' with an aim to help the students of the state.

- The 'Shiksha Setu' App will help in bringing transparency in the Education Department and in the administration of colleges in the state.

Also, the connectivity between students, parents, teachers and administration will be improved through this mobile application.

ABOUT SHIKHA SETU MOBILE APP:

- **This mobile app will contain all the information related to attendance, fee, online admission and scholarships in all the Haryana Government colleges.**
- The details of lecturers of government colleges and officers of the Directorate can be accessed through the mobile app.
- **The app will provide the students with instant information about assignments and updates of important notices, circulars and other programmes.**
- **There will be a facility of online fee-payment through the mobile app.**
- The college administration will be able to check details about total fee collected and pending fee payments.
- **The students can check the status of seats or course in every college in the state.**
- The details of scholarship, eligibility conditions and details of applying can be checked.

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- **As per the 2011 Census, Haryana has 76.64% literacy rate, having Male literacy rate of 85.4% and the literacy rate of females stands at 66.8%.**

POSTAGE STAMP ON RAJKUMAR SHUKLA, ASSOCIATED WITH THE CHAMPARAN SATYAGRAHA, RELEASED

The Department of Post has issued a Commemorative Postage Stamp on Rajkumar Shukla in New Delhi.

- The stamp was released as a tribute to the contribution made by Rajkumar Shukla in the launch of Champaran Satyagraha in the year 1917.

ABOUT RAJKUMAR SHUKLA:

- **Raj Kumar Shukla was born on 23rd August 1875 in Satwaria village of Champaran in Bihar.**
- He a famous Indigo cultivator of Champaran and he was a money lender as well.
- He rose to fame for his close association with Gandhiji during the Champaran Satyagraha.
- **Raj Kumar Shukla convinced Mahatma Gandhi to visit Champaran, which was was a turning point in India's struggle for independence.**

- Earlier also, the Department of Post had released a postage stamp in the year 2000 to commemorate the 125th birth anniversary of Pandit Raj Kumar Shukla.

ONE MUST KNOW:

- The Department of Post has been issuing postage stamps to honour and to pay a tribute to the important personalities who made a great contribution to public life especially the freedom fighters of India.
- The total number of such stamps released this year has reached 43 with the issuance of this postage stamp.

CCEA APPROVES SETTING UP OF EKLAVYA MODEL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) have given its approval for the revamped Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs) Scheme.

- Under this scheme, Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs) will be set up in every block where Scheduled Tribes population is more than 50% and has at least 20,000 tribal persons.

DETAILS:

- A budget of Rs. 2,242 crore during 2018-19 and 2019-20 has been approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) for rolling out this scheme.
- The EMRSs will be run by an Autonomous Society, on the lines of Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti.
- This society will be under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
- 462 new Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs) will be set up as 102 EMRSs are already running in the country.
- The new scheme aims to improve the construction quality and provide better facilities for the students.
- For this, the support of construction cost of EMRS has been enhanced from the current Rs. 12 crore to Rs. 20 crore.

ABOUT EKLAVYA MODEL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS:

- Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) is set up under a Central Government scheme for setting up of model residential schools for Scheduled Tribes all over India.
- The Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs runs the EMRS Scheme in the country.

OBJECTIVE OF THE EMRS SCHEME:

The EMRS Scheme has an objective to increase the literacy level among the Tribals of India by

imparting quality education to children of Scheduled Tribes.

HARSH VARDHAN SHRINGLA APPOINTED AS INDIA'S AMBASSADOR TO US

Harsh Vardhan Shringla has been appointed as the Ambassador of India to the USA.

- Presently, Shringla is serving as the High Commissioner to the People's Republic of Bangladesh and will take up the assignment soon.
- **He will be succeeding Navtej Sarna as the Indian Ambassador to the United States of America.**

ABOUT HARSH VARDHAN SHRINGLA:

- **Harsh Vardhan Shringla is a 1984-batch Indian Foreign Service diplomat.**
- His diplomatic career spans over 30 years in which he has held various positions in New Delhi and in Indian missions in Paris, Hanoi and Tel Aviv.
- **Before being appointed as the Ambassador to the US, he has served as the High Commissioner in Bangladesh, Ambassador of India to the Kingdom of Thailand and Permanent Representative of India to UNESCAP.**
- In the Ministry of External Affairs, he has headed the United Nations Political and SAARC Divisions.

ONE MUST KNOW:

- **Riva Ganguly Das, who is presently the Director General of Indian Council for Cultural Relations will take the position of High Commissioner to Bangladesh.**

'ASIATIC LION CONSERVATION PROJECT' LAUNCHED BY GOVERNMENT

The "Asiatic Lion Conservation Project" has been launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change(MoEFCC).

- The main objective of this project is to work for the conservation of the world's last ranging free Asiatic Lion population and the ecosystem associated with it.

BUDGET AND FUNDING OF THE PROJECT:

- The total budget of the "Asiatic Lion Conservation Project" for 3 years, stands at about Rs. 9784 lakh.
- **The project will be funded under the 'Development of Wildlife Habitat (CSS-DWH) Scheme' which is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.**
- The cost will be borne in the 60:40 ratio by the Central and State Government.

ABOUT THE ASIATIC LION:

- Asiatic Lions are listed as 'Endangered' under the IUCN Red List.
- Its population is restricted to the state of Gujarat in India.
- With serious conservation efforts of the State and the Union Government, the population of Asiatic lions have increased to over 500 which used to be around 50 by late 1890s.

THE GIR PROTECTED AREA NETWORK OF GUJARAT:

- As per the 2015 census, there were a total of 523 Asiatic Lions in the Gir Protected Area Network.
- The Gir Protected Area Network of Gujarat includes Gir National Park, Gir Sanctuary, Pania Sanctuary, Mitiyala Sanctuary and adjoining forests.
- It has an area of 1648.79 sq. km.

MORE DETAILS:

- The main activities under the 'Asiatic Lion Conservation Project' will include habitat improvement of the Lions, controlling of diseases among the population, scientific interventions and adequate veterinary care.
- It will be supplemented with sufficient eco-development works ensuring a stable and viable Lion population in India.

LOK SABHA PASSED THE CONSUMER PROTECTION BILL, 2018

The Lok Sabha has passed the Consumer Protection Bill, 2018, which will replace the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

- The Bill seeks to enforce consumer rights and to offer a mechanism for complaint redressal related to the deficiencies in goods and services.

KEY POINTS ABOUT THE CONSUMER PROTECTION BILL, 2018:

- The Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions will be set up at District, State and National levels as per the bill passed.
- The District Commissions will have the mandate to hear complaints having claim worth one crore rupees.
- In the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 this limit was 20 lakh rupees.
- The limit of the Commissions' at the State level enhanced from 1 crore rupees to 15 crore rupees.
- Complaints above 15 crore rupees worth of claim will be settled by the National Commission.
- The Consumer Protection Bill, 2018 has provisions for stringent punishments in the matters of

food adulterations.

- **The Bill has the provisions to protect those consumers who use new digital technologies like e-commerce and online shopping.**
- **The Bill seeks to establish a Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) which will be tasked with promoting, protecting and enforcing consumer rights.**

FURTHERMORE:

- **The main objective of the said bill is to protect of the interests of consumers and to provide effective administration and timely settle consumer disputes.**
- **Now, the bill will move to Rajya Sabha for passage.**

WV RAMAN APPOINTED AS THE NEW COACH OF WOMEN'S CRICKET TEAM OF INDIA

BCCI has appointed W V Raman as the Indian Women's Cricket Team coach.

- South African cricketer Gary Kirsten was initially contacted for this position.
- Gary Kirsten, who is associated with IPL franchise Royal Challengers Bangalore, did not agree to give up his job with RCB which made the selectors chose WV Raman as the coach of the Indian women cricket team.

ABOUT W V RAMAN:

- **W V Raman Raman has played 11 Tests and 27 ODIs for India and is one of the most qualified coaches in the nation.**
- He has coached Ranji Trophy sides like Tamil Nadu and Bengal and the Indian Under -19 cricket team as well.
- **He was the first Indian to hit a century in South Africa during the 1992-93 tour.**
- Presently, Raman is serving as a batting consultant at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru.

ABOUT THE SELECTION:

- **Kapil Dev, Anshuman Gaekwad and Shantha Rangaswamy were the members of the selection committee of the coach for Indian Women Cricket Team.**
- Total 28 candidates had applied for the position.
- **Former coach Ramesh Powar, whose tenure ended last month amid many controversies, had also appeared for the interview for this position.**

NITI AAYOG RELEASES SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS INDEX

The NITI Aayog has released a first-of-its-kind Sustainable Development Goals index.

- According to the SDG Index, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu have been ranked on top 3 positions and are on track to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

AIM OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS INDEX:

The recently released Sustainable Development Goals Index aims to promote healthy competition among States by evaluating their progress in social, economic and environmental terms that will help India in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030.

Scoring:

- Based on the performance of the States and UTs across 13 of the 17 identified SDGs, a score ranging between 0 and 100 has been assigned to each of them in the index.
- The index considered only 13 out of 17 goals because of non-availability of data at the state level.
- The average Indian score in the SDG index is 57 and varies between 42 and 69 for the States and between 57 and 68 for UTs.

KEY POINTS OF THE SDG INDEX:

- **Kerala and Himachal Pradesh have been called as the front-runners in the Index with a score of 69.**
- **Chandigarh has been declared as the front runner in the Index with a score of 68 among the UTs.**
- **The state of Tamil Nadu (score 66) is at the top to meet the goals of eradicating poverty and providing clean and affordable energy.**
- **Assam, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are at the bottom of the rankings in the NITI Aayog's Sustainable Development Goals Index.**
- **Goa, Kerala, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland were the front runners on the 'Zero' hunger sub-index.**
- **The states performed badly in the SDG Index in regards to the goals of gender equality (36), in enabling industry, innovation, and infrastructure (44), and in eradicating hunger (48) and in creating sustainable cities and communities (39).**

INSIGHT LANDER PLACES ITS FIRST INSTRUMENT (SEIS) ON MARS

InSight, NASA's new Mars lander, has set up its first instrument on planet Mars.

- The instrument placed by InSight, which landed on Mars on 26th November, is a quake monitor (seismometer) that will listen for quakes and wobbles.
- It is the first time that a scientific instrument has ever been placed on another planet's surface.
- InSight will also put a wind cover over the seismometer next month and initiate a new experiment.

ABOUT INSIGHT MISSION:

- **InSight or the Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport mission of NASA is a robotic lander that seeks to gather information about the deep interior of Mars.**
- **InSight mission was launched by NASA on 5 May 2018 and landed on Mars on 26 November 2018 making a journey of about 483 million km.**
- The successful execution of Insight mission will enable humans to have a better understanding of the evolution of the Solar System's terrestrial planets- Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars and Earth's Moon.
- **InSight's primary tasks include placing a seismometer, known as SEIS, on planet Mars' dusky red surface to measure the seismic activity.**
- SEIS will also provide accurate 3D models of the interior of Mars.
- **To study Mars' early geological evolution, InSight also plans to set up a heat probe called HP3 on Mars that will measure the internal heat flow.**

NATIONAL MATHEMATICS DAY CELEBRATED ON 22ND DECEMBER

India celebrated 22nd December 2018 as the National Mathematics Day honouring the 131st birth anniversary of famous Indian Mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan.

- Since 2011, 22nd December is celebrated as National Mathematics Day every year.
- The National Mathematics Day is celebrated to honour his contribution to the field of Mathematics and also to keep his legacy alive to inspire the future mathematicians.

ABOUT SRINIVASA RAMANUJAN:

- **Ramanujan was born in the year 1887 and lived during the British rule in India.**
- His life was totally devoted to Mathematics.
- At a young age of 11, Ramanujan started showing signs of a genius.
- **He had attained expertise in trigonometry and developed many theorems by himself.**
- **He got his papers published in the Journal of the Indian Mathematical Society in the year 1911.**
- **Ramanujan compiled nearly 3,900 results, mostly identities and equations, on his own without any assistance.**
- **Many of the results were completely original and novel such as the Ramanujan prime, the Ramanujan theta function, partition formulae and mock theta functions.**
- These results and identities have opened entirely new fields of work and inspired further research.

- **He came out with his own theory of divergent series.**
- Also, he worked out the Riemann series, the elliptic integrals, hypergeometric series and the functional equations of the zeta function.
- **The number 1729 is famously known as the Hardy-Ramanujan number.**

US DEFENCE SECRETARY JAMES MATTIS RESIGNS FROM HIS POST

The United States Defence Secretary James Mattis has resigned from his post.

- His resignation came after his disagreement with the US President Donald Trump over the withdrawal of US troops from Syria.
- James Mattis, however, will be occupying the position till February 28 so as to allow sufficient time for his successor to be nominated.

MORE DETAILS:

- James Mattis' experience and stability were widely seen as a balance to Donald Trumps' unpredictable policies.
- As per the political pundits, his resignation would add to the instability and chaos in the administration of Donald Trump.
- **The US President Donald Trump had a few days ago announced that he will be withdrawing all 2,000 U.S. troops out of Syria, after making a declaration that the Islamic State group has been destroyed.**
- **This decision is being by opposed by the Pentagon and other people in the US administration.**
- **The U.S. announcement for withdrawal has come at a critical moment in northern Syria, where Turkey has been threatening to launch a new offensive against the Kurds.**
- As per the Kurdish forces, ISIS militants have not been fully defeated and a premature US pullout would cause a resurgence of the Islamic State group, destabilizing the entire region.

GITEGA NAMED AS THE NEW CAPITAL OF BURUNDI

The Government of Burundi has declared Gitega as the country's new political capital.

- **Bujumbura, the previous capital of Burundi, will serve as the economic capital of the country.**
- President Nkurunziza had made this promise of shifting the capital in 2007 which has been implemented now.
- The Government has decided to hold future Cabinet meetings in Gitega and to establish five ministries in Gitega from the start of 2019.

- Gitega's population is around 30 000 as compared to Bujumbura's 1.2 million.

ABOUT BURUNDI:

- **Burundi is a resource-poor, underdeveloped landlocked African country which shares its borders with Rwanda in the north, Tanzania in the east and south, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the west.**
- **Burundi gained freedom from colonial rule in 1962.**
- The political system of Burundi is that of a Presidential representative Democratic Republic.
- About 85% of the population of Burundi is of Hutu ethnicity, 15% are of Tutsi origin and less than 1% are Twa.
- **Burundi has extreme levels of poverty and rampant corruption.**
- **Burundi was ranked as the world's least happy nation in the World Happiness Report 2018.**

CHINA LAUNCHED ITS FIRST SATELLITE FOR SPACE-BASED BROADBAND SERVICES

China has launched its first communication satellite to offer broadband internet services to users worldwide.

- The communication satellite was launched using a Long March 11 carrier rocket which took off from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in north-western China.
- It is CASIC's (China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation) first satellite launch under China's Hongyun project.
- The satellite aims to rival Google and other companies which have similar plans for providing Internet services worldwide.

ABOUT THE HONGYUN PROJECT:

- **China started the Hongyun project in September 2016.**
- **Under this project, China plans to give broadband internet connectivity to users all over the world by building a space-based communications network.**
- The project also seeks to take the Internet connectivity to the underserved regions of the world.
- CASIC will be placing than 150 Hongyun satellites on orbits about 1,000 km above the ground around 2023 and can be expanded as per the demand.
- **It is to be noted that CASIC is the main contractor for Chinese space programs and a state-owned company.**

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- A number of tech companies have already launched space-based broadband plans to provide free internet access that includes Google, SpaceX, OneWeb and Telesat.
- United States' SpaceX launched Starlink project aims to put around 12,000 satellites in the space by the mid-2020s.
- A U.S. firm, OneWeb, will be launching a constellation of 648 low-Earth orbit microsatellites by the end of 2019 to provide broadband services.
- A Chinese company plans to launch a constellation of 272 satellites to provide free WiFi service worldwide.

VEDANGI KULKARNI: INDIAN WOMAN BECOMES FASTEST ASIAN TO CYCLE THE GLOBE

20-year-old Pune woman Vedangi Kulkarni has become the fastest Asian to cycle the globe.

- She has completed the 29,000 km distance required to qualify as bicycling across the globe.
- She has spent 159 days peddling up to 300 km a day in 14 countries.
- The world record is in the name of British adventurer Jenny Graham (38) who had cycled the globe in 124 days in 2018.

ABOUT VEDANGI KULKARNI:

- Vedangi Kulkarni hails from Pune.
- Her father's name is Vivek Kulkarni.
- She is currently pursuing a degree in sports management from the University of Bournemouth in the UK.

ABOUT HER JOURNEY:

- **She started off from Perth.**
- She cycled across Australia to reach Brisbane.
- **From Brisbane, she flew to Wellington, New Zealand, for cycling the entire country north to south.**
- Then she took a flight across the International Date Line to Western Canada's Vancouver.
- **From Vancouver, she travelled eastward till Halifax.**
- **Then she flew to Europe and started from Iceland and later cycled through Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Finland to enter Russia.**
- **From Russia, she flew to India for doing the last 4,000 km.**
- From India, she will now fly to Australia and cycle 15 Km to reach the place from where she had started, to complete her journey.
- **Vedangi lugged the cycle with the heavy luggage that includes cycle tools, camping equipment and clothing in desolate stretches all alone and did not have anyone**

accompanying her for over 80 per cent of the route.

NUCLEAR CAPABLE AGNI-IV SUCCESSFULLY TEST-FIRED

India has successfully test-fired nuclear-capable long-range ballistic missile Agni-IV from the Dr Abdul Kalam Island in Odhisa.

- It was the 7th trial of Agni-IV missile.
- DRDO had positioned Radars and electro-optical systems along the coast of Odisha for tracking and monitoring all parameters of the missile and two ships were anchored near the target area to witness the final event.

ABOUT AGNI IV:

- **The strategic surface-to-surface missile has a strike range of 4,000 km.**
- The indigenously developed Agni IV is a two-stage missile and is 20 meters long with a weight of 17 tonnes.
- Agni IV is equipped with advanced Avionics, 5th generation On Board Computer and distributed architecture to provide a high level of reliability and precision.
- Agni IV is also equipped with accurate Ring Laser Gyro based Inertial Navigation System (RINS) which is supported by highly reliable redundant Micro Navigation System (MINGS) to ensure the vehicle reaches the target with accuracy.
- The re-entry heat shield of Agni IV can withstand temperatures in the range of 4000 degrees centigrade and also makes sure avionics function normally with the inside temperature remaining less than 50 degrees centigrade.

ABOUT DR ABDUL KALAM ISLAND:

- **Dr Abdul Kalam Island, formerly known as Wheeler Island, is an island off the coast of Odisha.**
- **The Island was originally named after English commandant Lieutenant Wheeler and it was renamed after the late Indian President, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam who is also referred as Missile Man of India, on 4 September 2015.**
- **The Indian Integrated Test Range missile testing facility is located on the Dr Abdul Kalam Island.**
- **Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary is also located close to Dr Abdul Kalam Island.**

INDIA'S FIRST MUSIC MUSEUM TO BE SET UP IN THIRUVAIYARU

Tamil Nadu has announced the setting up of country's first music museum with assistance from the Central Government in Thiruvaiyaru which is the birthplace of Saint Tyagaraja, one of the

Trinities of Carnatic music.

- The other two of the Trinity are Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri.

ABOUT SAINT TYAGARAJA:

- Saint Tyagaraja was a renowned composer of Carnatic music.
- He has composed thousands of devotional compositions, mostly in Telugu in the praise of Lord Rama, many of which remain popular today.
- He saw the reigns of four kings of Maratha dynasty - Tulaja II (1763-1787), Amarasimha (1787-1798), Serfoji II (1798-1832) and Sivaji II (1832-1855), but he served none of them.

ABOUT SAINT MUTHUSWAMI DIKSHITAR:

- Saint Muthuswami Dikshitar was a South Indian poet and composer.
- His compositions are noted for their elaborate and poetic descriptions of Hindu Gods and temples and for capturing the essence of the raga forms through the Vainika (veena) style that emphasises Gamakas.
- His compositions are predominantly in Sanskrit and he has also composed some of his Kritis in Manipravalam (a mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil).

ABOUT SAINT SYAMA SASTRI:

- Saint Syama Sastri was a musician and composer of Carnatic music and was the oldest among the Trinity of Carnatic music.
- Even though he did not compose so many Kritis, his compositions are still well known due to the literary, melodic and rhythmic proficiency observed in them.
- He composed in a more formal form of Telugu which borrows heavily from Sanskrit and there are also a number of Kritis in Tamil attributed to him.
- Most of his works propitiate the Goddess Kamakshi.

SARDAR PATEL AWARD FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION

PM Narendra Modi has announced the setting up of Sardar Patel Award for National Integration while addressing the conference of DGPs/IGPs in Gujarat's Kevadia.

ABOUT SARDAR PATEL AWARD FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION:

- The award would be given for outstanding efforts to further national integration.
- Our country's first Home Minister Sardar Patel had devoted his life to unifying India.

- The award for national integration in his name would be a tribute to him and will inspire more people to work towards furthering the cause of India's unity and national integration.

MORE TO KNOW:

DGPs/IGPs Conference at Kevadia:

- A three day All India DGPs/IGPs Conference was held at Kevadia.
- On the occasion, PM Modi also released a commemorative stamp on the National Police Memorial and Presented Police medals for distinguished services to IB officers.

National Police Memorial:

- National Police Memorial located in New Delhi's Chanakyapuri area commemorates the police personnel from all of the central and state police forces in India who have died in the line of duty since the nation's Independence in 1947.

PM RELEASES COMMEMORATIVE COIN IN HONOUR OF ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE

PM Modi on 24th December 2018, a day before Vajpayee's 94th birth anniversary released a commemorative coin worth Rs 100 in honour of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

FEATURES OF THE COIN:

- The front side of the coin features the Emblem of India and words Satyamev Jayate are inscribed below the Lion Capital of Ashoka Pillar in Devanagari script.
- The coin's value Rs 100 is inscribed below the national emblem.
- The words 'Bharat' in Devanagari and 'India' in Roman script are also inscribed on the front side.
- The reverse side of the coin features a portrait of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and his name is inscribed in both Devanagari and Roman scripts.
- The years 1924 and 2018 are inscribed below Vajpayee's portrait to mark the year of his birth and death respectively.

ABOUT ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE:

- **Atal Bihari Vajpayee served as the Prime Minister of India for a term of 13 days in 1996, then for a period of 13 months from 1998 to 1999, and finally ,for a full term from 1999 to 2004.**
- **Atal Bihari Vajpayee was born to Krishna Devi and Krishna Bihari Vajpayee on 25 December 1924 in Gwalior.**
- **He passed away on 16 August 2018 due to age-related illness.**

- **His birth anniversary is celebrated as Good Governance Day.**

PM MODI LAUNCHES PAIKA REBELLION CHAIR IN UTKAL UNIVERSITY

PM Modi announced setting up of a Chair on the Paika Rebellion, in Utkal University, Bhubaneswar.

- He also released a commemorative stamp and coin on the Paika Rebellion.

ABOUT PAIKA REBELLION:

- **The Paika Rebellion of 1817 in Odisha briefly shook the foundations of British rule in the eastern part of India.**
- **Paikas were the peasant militias of the Gajapati rulers of Odisha and rendered military service to the king during times of war while taking up cultivation during times of peace.**
- The British had established their sway over Bengal Province and Madras Province to the north and south of Odisha and occupied Odisha in 1803.
- The Gajapati Ruler of Odisha Mukunda Deva-II was a minor then and the resistance by Jai Rajguru, the custodian of Mukunda Deva-II, was put down brutally.
- As British began consolidating their rule and started tinkering with the revenue system, they faced the anger of the people of Odisha.
- **A few years later Paikas under Baxi Jagabandhu, the hereditary chief of the militia army of the Gajapati King rose in rebellion by taking the support tribals and other sections of society in March 1817.**
- **Paikas attacked British symbols of power, setting ablaze police stations, administrative offices and the treasury during their march towards Khurda, from where the British fled.**
- The Paikas were supported by the Rajas of Kanika, Kujang, Nayagarh and Ghumusar and zamindars, village heads and ordinary peasants.
- The Rebellion spread quickly.
- British were initially taken aback and then tried to regain lost ground but faced stiff resistance from the Paikas.
- There was a widespread suppression.
- Rebels fought a guerilla war till 1819 but were captured and killed.
- **Baxi Jagabandhu was finally arrested in 1825 and died in captivity in 1829.**
- The Paika Rebellion enjoys a cult status in Odisha.
- **Children in Odisha grow up with hearing stories of the brave fight against the British.**

P. V. BHARATHI APPOINTED AS MD AND CEO OF CORPORATION BANK

According to an order issued by the Personnel Ministry, P.V Bharathi has been appointed as Managing Director and Chief Executive officer of the Corporation Bank.

- P.V. Bharathi is currently working as the Executive Director in the Canara Bank.
- She will take charge on or after 1st February 2019, and remain in the post till March 31, 2020.

ONE MUST ALSO KNOW:

- **The ministry has also released another order as per which, Birupaksha Mishra and Balakrishna Alse S have been appointed as Executive Director in the Corporation Bank and the Oriental Bank of Commerce, respectively.**
- **Also, K Ramachandran has been appointed as Executive Director of the Allahabad Bank.**
- Currently, Mishra is the General Manager in the Central Bank of India.
- Balakrishna is the General Manager in the Corporation Bank and K Ramachandran is the General Manager at the Corporation Bank.

INDIAN NAVY COMMISSIONS NAVAL HOSPITAL INHS SANDHANI

The Indian Navy has commissioned a naval hospital ship, the INHS Sandhani at Naval station Karanja in the Raigad district of Maharashtra.

- INHS Sandhani was flagged by Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief (FOC-in-C) of the Western Naval Command Vice Admiral Girish Luthra and the commissioning plaque of the hospital was unveiled by Preeti Luthra, President of NWWA (Navy Wives Welfare Association), Western Region.

ABOUT THE HOSPITAL:

- **The hospital has its origins as a small primary health care unit established in 1955.**
- As Naval station Karanja expanded rapidly over the last couple of decades, there was a need to develop the station's healthcare services.
- Hence the upgrade was sanctioned by the Ministry of Defence in September 2016.
- **The hospital has been expanded from a 16-bed facility to a 30-bed hospital.**
- The hospital is capable of providing treatment in the fields of General Medicine, Surgery, Gynaecology, Anaesthesia, Paediatrics and dental services to naval personnel at the station.
- INHS Sandhani is the tenth commissioned hospital by the Indian Navy.
- **The Navy had earlier commissioned its ninth hospital 'INHS Navjivani' at the Indian Naval Academy in Kerala's Ezhimala.**

24TH DECEMBER: NATIONAL CONSUMERS DAY

The Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Consumer Affairs Food and Public Distribution celebrated the National Consumer Day 2018 on 24th December at the Kothari Auditorium, DRDO Bhawan, New Delhi.

- *The theme of the 2018 National Consumers Day was "Timely Disposal of Consumer Complaints".*

WHY 24TH DECEMBER?

- **The National Consumers Day is celebrated on the 24th December because it was on the 24th December 1986, the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 had received the assent of the President.**

INITIATIVES FOR TIMELY REDRESSAL OF CONSUMER GRIEVANCES:

- Strengthening of the National Consumer Helpline with new software, additional counsellors and Zonal Helplines in 6 zones for regional language services.
- 480 major Companies including several e-commerce platforms have been roped in as convergence partners for speedy resolution of cases.
- **Strengthening of Consumer Fora with infrastructure and CONFONET (It is the computer networking of consumer fora).**
- **On directions of Supreme Court, National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission has issued new Regulations making admission or rejection of cases in 21 days and pronouncing judgment in 45 days after the final hearing.**
- Model Rules have also been framed to assist States in recruiting qualified persons for District fora and State Commissions.
- The new Consumer Protection Bill, 2018 through Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) and alternate dispute resolution mechanism through mediation and simplification of adjudication procedures will result in quick disposal of consumer cases.

FUTURE COURSE OF ACTION:

- **The National Consumers Day 2018 is significant for the fact that the Government is preparing to repeal the Consumer Protection Act 1986 and bring in a new Act with substantial changes to holistically cover all aspects of consumer grievance redressal and to streamline the functioning of consumer forums to meet future challenges for more effective consumer protection.**
- The new bill has been passed in the Loksabha and is pending before Rajyasabha.

SANGEETA VERMA JOINS COMPETITION COMMISSION OF INDIA (CCI)

Sangeeta Verma, a former Indian Economic Services (IES) officer has joined the Competition Commission of India (CCI) as a member.

- The order of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs states that the Central Government has appointed Sangeeta Verma as the member of CCI for a period of 5 years from the date of assumption of charge of the post, or until further orders, whichever is earlier.
- **The CCI is now at its full strength** with Ashok Kumar Gupta as Chairperson, Sangeeta Verma, Augustine Peter and UC Nahta as its members.
- **In April the Union Cabinet had reduced the number of members of the Competition Commission of India from six to three.**

ABOUT THE COMPETITION COMMISSION OF INDIA (CCI):

- **Competition Commission of India (CCI) aims to create and sustain fair competition in the economy that will provide a 'level playing field' to the producers and make the markets work for the welfare of the consumers.**
- **The Competition Commission of India (CCI) was established by the Central Government in 2003 under the provisions of the Competition Act 2002.**

CCI AIMS TO ESTABLISH A ROBUST COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH:

- Proactive engagement with all stakeholders, including consumers, industry, government and international jurisdictions.
- Being a knowledge-intensive organization with high competence level.
- Professionalism, transparency, resolve and wisdom in enforcement.

THE VISION OF THE CCI:

- *"To promote and sustain an enabling competition culture through engagement and enforcement that would inspire businesses to be fair, competitive and innovative; enhance consumer welfare, and support economic growth".*

INDIAN FIRM TAKES OVER OPERATIONS OF STRATEGIC IRANIAN PORT CHABAHAH

India Ports Global Private Limited has opened its office and took over operations at the Shaheed Behesti port at Chabahar, Iran.

- It happened during the occasion of the first meeting of the follow-up committee for implementation of the trilateral Chabahar agreement between India, Afghanistan and Iran.

OUTCOMES OF THE TRILATERAL MEET:

- There was consensus on the routes for the trade and transit corridors between the three countries.
- It was agreed to finalise the protocol to harmonise transit, roads, customs, and consular matters at the earliest.
- It was agreed to allow cargo movement at Chabahar using Transports Internationaux Routiers Convention provisions.
- Holding an event to promote and popularise the potential of Chabahar on February 26, 2019.
- Constituting a study to determine measures to make the route attractive, decrease logistic costs and pave the way for smooth operationalisation of the Chabahar Agreement.

WHAT IS INTERNATIONAUX ROUTIERS CONVENTION?

- **It is a multilateral treaty which aims to simplify and harmonise the administrative formalities of international road transport.**
- It was concluded in Geneva on 14 November 1975. India is a party to the treaty.

IMPORTANCE OF CHABAHAR PORT:

- **Chabahar port in the Sistan-Balochistan province of Iran's southern coast and is easily accessible from India's western coast and is increasingly seen as a counter to Pakistan's Gwadar Port, which is being developed with Chinese investment and is located at a distance of around 80 km from Chabahar.**
- **Chabahar Port has the potential to be a gateway for golden opportunities for trade by India, Iran and Afghanistan with Central Asian countries besides ramping up trade among the three countries since Pakistan denies transit access to India.**

ABOUT INDIA PORTS GLOBAL PRIVATE LIMITED:

- India Ports Global Private Limited is a private registered company and classified as a Union Government Company.
- It is involved in Sea and Coastal Water.

U.S. PRESIDENT TRUMP NAMES PATRICK SHANAHAN AS ACTING DEFENCE SECRETARY

U.S. President Donald Trump has announced that Defence Secretary James Mattis will depart the Pentagon by January 1.

- **James Mattis's Deputy, Patrick Shanahan is appointed as the Acting Defence Secretary.**

ABOUT JAMES MATTIS'S RESIGNATION:

- **James Mattis had resigned from the post of Defence Secretary citing policy differences with President Trump.**
- **The major reason for the fallout between President Trump and Mattis was, President Trump's sudden announcement about the troop drawdowns in Syria.**
- **Mattis was said to be against the move.**
- The resignation letter of Mattis delivered a harsh assessment of President Trump's policy objectives.
- This triggered series of negative headlines in the US media and it was said to be the reason to remove Mattis earlier than expected.

ABOUT PATRICK SHANAHAN:

- **Shanahan is a former Boeing executive.**
- **He became the Deputy Secretary of Defence in 2017.**
- Shanahan is a native of Washington State like Mattis and he will be responsible for managing the Pentagon's colossal \$700 billion defence budget.
- As Deputy Secretary of Defence, Shanahan focused on reforming the internal processes of the Pentagon.

GOVT EXTENDS BAN ON IMPORT OF MILK PRODUCTS FROM CHINA FOR 4 MONTHS

India which is the largest producer and consumer of milk has extended the ban on import of milk products from China for 4 months.

- The ban would continue till 23rd April 2019 as per the notification issued by the Ministry of Commerce.

DETAILS:

- The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), an arm of the commerce ministry which deals with the norms related to exports and imports of the country in a statement has said that:
- **"Prohibition on import of milk, milk products (including chocolates, chocolate products, candies, confectionary food preparations with milk or milk solids as an ingredient) from China is extended for a further period of four months, i.e. till April 23, 2019, or until further orders".**

WHY THE BAN?

- The ban was primarily imposed due to the concerns about the presence of melamine in some of the milk consignments from China.
- Melamine is a toxic non-edible chemical used for making plastics and fertilisers.
- Even though India does not import milk products from China, the ban is imposed as a preventive measure.

PM MODI INAUGURATES BOGIBEEL BRIDGE

PM Modi inaugurated the Bogibeel Bridge on the birth anniversary of the late Atal Bihari Vajpayee i.e. December 25 which is observed as "Good Governance Day".

- This 4.9 km-long bridge is the nation's only fully welded bridge and for the first time European codes and welding standards were adhered to and it has a life of about 120 years.

ABOUT THE BOGIBEEL BRIDGE:

- The bridge is referred to as "Lifeline of Assam".
- It is an asset for the entire north-eastern region.
- The Bogibeel Bridge connects the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River in Assam's Dibrugarh district with Silapathar in Dhemaji district, bordering Arunachal Pradesh.
- This Double-Track and three-lane Road Bridge will be the lifeline of the north-eastern part of India.
- The railroad bridge is constructed at a cost of Rs 5,900 crore and it is Asia's second-longest railroad bridge.
- The bridge is part of the infrastructure projects planned to improve logistics along the border in Arunachal Pradesh which includes the construction of a trans-Arunachal highway on the Brahmaputra's north bank, and new road and rail links over the river and its major tributaries.

BENEFITS OF THE BRIDGE:

- It reduces travel time from Assam to Arunachal Pradesh to four hours and will eliminate a detour of over 170 km via Tinsukia.
- It also reduces the train travel time between Delhi and Dibrugarh by about three hours.
- The bridge will also play an important role in the defence of the country by facilitating ease of mobility to the India-China border in Arunachal Pradesh and also the three road lanes of the bridge can act as three landing strips for the Air Force.

INTERESTING TO KNOW:

- **The foundation stone for the Bogibeel Bridge was laid by former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda on January 22, 1997.**
- The work had begun on 21st April 2002, under the Atal Bihari Vajpayee led government.
- It is now inaugurated on the birth anniversary of the former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

SADAIV ATAL DEDICATED TO THE NATION

Sadaiv Atal, the Samadhi of Atal Bihari Vajpayee was dedicated to the Nation on the birth Anniversary of the former Prime Minister.

ABOUT THE SAMADHI:

- **To emphasise on the unity in diversity, stones from various parts of the country have been used in the construction of the Samadhi near Rajghat in New Delhi.**
- The Samadhi has a central platform comprising of nine square blocks, capped with a Diya in the centre.
- **The number nine represents the Navarasas, Navaratras and Navagrahas.**
- The placement of the nine square blocks is in a circular lotus shaped pattern.

ABOUT ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE:

- **Atal Bihari Vajpayee served as the Prime Minister of India for a term of 13 days in 1996, then for a period of 13 months from 1998 to 1999, and finally, for a full term from 1999 to 2004.**
- Atal Bihari Vajpayee was born to Krishna Devi and Krishna Bihari Vajpayee on 25 December 1924 in Gwalior.
- **He passed away on 16 August 2018 due to age-related illness.**
- **His birth anniversary is celebrated as "Good Governance Day".**

ISLANDS OF ANDAMAN TO BE RENAMED AFTER NETAJI BOSE

The Union Government has decided to rename Ross, Neil and Havelock islands of Andaman.

- **The Ross, Neil and Havelock Islands are to be named as Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Island, Shaheed Dweep, and Swaraj Dweep, respectively.**
- The announcement about renaming is expected to be made by PM Narendra Modi on 30th December during his visit to the Islands.
- **30th December marks the 75th anniversary of the Netaji's visit to the Andaman Islands.**

NETAJI'S CONNECTION WITH THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS:

- **Netaji, accompanied by Sarvashri Anand Mohan Sahay, Captain Rawat-ADC and Colonel DS Raju, the personal physician of Netaji, landed at the Port Blair aerodrome in Andaman on 29th December 1943.**
- Netaji was accorded a warm welcome.
- Netaji had appointed Indian National Army General AD Loganathan as the governor of the islands.
- **After the Japanese captured the Andaman Island during the time of the Second World War, Netaji had hoisted the flag at Port Blair on December 30, 1943.**
- This was because he believed that Port Blair was the first territory to be freed from British rule.
- **Netaji had even suggested way back that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands be renamed as Shahid and Swaraj Dweep.**

INDIA'S LARGEST CANCER INSTITUTE TO COME UP IN HARYANA'S JHAJJAR

Union Health Minister JP Nadda has announced that India's largest cancer hospital, the National Cancer Institute will be inaugurated in Haryana's Jhajjar district in January.

- The Institute aims to bridge the deficit of tertiary cancer care in the northern region.
- The Institute would play a pivotal role in cancer research in the country.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE:

- The National Cancer Institute will be set up with 710 beds, out of which 200 beds will be dedicated for translational research on India-specific cancers.
- **The Out-patient Department has been started already.**
- Different facilities like surgical oncology, radiation oncology, medical oncology, anesthesia and palliative care and nuclear medicine would be available at the institute.
- **The Institute will also house first-of-its-kind tissue repository in India.**
- **The National Cancer Institute would operate under AIIMS.**
- The Institute will also house 372 units of flats and 1,080 hostel rooms for staff members.
- A night shelter with a capacity of 800 units meant for patient attendants is also been planned.
- The Institute will operate on the lines of National Cancer Institute in the US and German Cancer Research Centre (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum) DKFZ as a nodal centre for indigenous research, promotive, preventive and curative aspects of care and human resource development.
- The Institute would concentrate on conducting and coordinating research on cancers which are more specific to India like tobacco-related cancers, cancer of the uterine cervix, gallbladder cancer and liver cancers and would focus on understanding and analyzing the cause and genesis of these type of cancers.

ONE MUST KNOW:

- Out of 80 lakh cancer patients in the world, nearly 29 lakh of them are in India and about 11 lakh cancer cases are detected every year.

EMINENT SITAR PLAYER MANJU MEHTA CONFERRED TANSEN SAMMAN, 2018

The Madhya Pradesh Government has conferred the annual Tansen Samman upon eminent Sitar Player Manju Mehta for her contribution in the field of Hindustani Classical Music.

- The award was presented by Union Minister Narendra Singh Tomar in the inaugural function of Tansen Music Festival in Gwalior.

ABOUT TANSEN:

- **Tansen was the legendary court musician of Akbar.**
- His early music training was held in the music school of Gwalior's Raja Mansingh Tomar.
- **He was a disciple of Swami Haridas.**

ABOUT TANSEN SAMAROH (TANSEN MUSIC FESTIVAL):

- **The Department of Culture, Madhya Pradesh Government organizes an annual four day Tansen Samaroh near the tomb of Tansen in Gwalior every year in December.**
- The vocal and instrumental artists from all over India come and deliver their performances.

ABOUT TANSEN AWARD:

- **Tansen Award was instituted by Madhya Pradesh Government to honour the individual artists with significant contribution to Hindustani Classical Music.**
- **This award carries a cash prize of Rs. 2 Lakh along with a memento.**
- The first Tansen Samman was conferred upon Sitar maestro Ustad Abdul Haleem Jafar Khan in 2000.

ABOUT MANJU MEHTA:

- **Veteran Sitar maestro Manju Mehta belongs to Bhatt family of Jaipur, which other eminent musicians Shashimohan Bhatt and Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt come from.**
- **She has been a top artist at All Indian Radio and has co-founded the Saptak School of Music in Gujarat.**

'MADE IN INDIA' E-DUMPER PUT INTO TRIAL BY COAL INDIA

Coal India for the first time, has started using an indigenously-made, 205-tonne electric dumper, a critical piece of equipment in mining.

- This indigenously-made dumper has been developed by state-owned BEML.
- Coal India has put this electric dumper on a trial in Northern Coalfields' Amlohri coal mine.
- This indigenously-made dumper is the biggest one deployed by Northern Coalfields limited.
- This indigenously-made dumper is expected to increase competition among suppliers, bring down costs and improve the availability of spares.

HOW THE SUCCESSFUL TRAIL CAN GIVE A BOOST TO MAKE IN INDIA?

- The successful trial will enable BEML to participate in tenders for higher capacity dumpers floated by Coal India.
- Northern Coalfields limited has already floated one such tender and the Eastern Coalfield limited is in the process of floating tender for 10 dumpers.
- The dumper market in India is captured by Russia's Belaz, Tata Hitachi and Caterpillar.
- But these dumpers come at prices upwards of Rs 15 crore.

ABOUT MAKE IN INDIA:

- **'Make in India' campaign aims to facilitate investment, foster innovation, enhance skill development, protect intellectual property & build best in class manufacturing infrastructure in India.**
- **The initiative aims to transform India into a global manufacturing hub.**
- The initiative focuses on creating jobs in 25 sectors.

CHINA'S NAVIGATION SATELLITE SYSTEM BEIDOU STARTS PROVIDING GLOBAL SERVICE

China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS) has started offering global service.

- It is touted as a rival to America's Global Positioning System (GPS).
- Pakistan has become the first foreign nation to use the BeiDou system ending its reliance on GPS.
- China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System was the fourth global navigation system after US's GPS, Russia's GLONASS and the European Union's Galileo.

ABOUT THE BEIDOU NAVIGATION SATELLITE SYSTEM:

- China has named its navigation satellite system after the Chinese term which means 'Big Dipper'.
- BeiDou-1 consisted of three satellites and was offering navigation services mainly in China and neighbouring regions.
- It was decommissioned in 2012.

- The second generation of the navigation system, BeiDou-2 became operational in China in December 2011 with a partial constellation of 10 satellites in orbit and started providing services in the Asia-Pacific region from December 2012.
- The third generation of the navigation system, BeiDou-3 began to provide global services from 27th December 2018.
- China plans to have a total of 33 satellites operating in orbit for BeiDou by the end of 2018 which includes 15 BeiDou-2 satellites and 18 BeiDou-3 satellites.
- China further plans to launch another 11 BeiDou-3 satellites and one BeiDou-2 satellite in the coming two years to form a complete global network for enhancing the global service performance.

INDIA'S NAVIGATION SYSTEM:

- **The Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) named NAVIC is a regional satellite navigation system that provides accurate real-time positioning and timing services covering India and a region extending 1,500 km around it.**
- NAVIC provides two levels of service, the standard positioning service, which will be open for civilian use, and restricted service for authorized users (including military).
- **There are plans to expand the NavIC system by increasing the number of satellites from 7 to 11.**

SUBHASH CHANDRA BOSE AAPDA PRABANDHAN PURASKAAR

The Central Government has launched Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskaar annual awards to recognise the excellent work done by individuals and institutions in the country in the field of disaster management.

- The award has been instituted with an aim to recognise the efforts of individuals and organisations who have been working to alleviate the the human suffering caused by disasters.

ABOUT THE AWARD:

- As per the statement issued by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) three eligible institutions and individuals will be given the 'Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskaar' every year with cash rewards ranging from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 51 lakh.
- **Only Indian nationals and Indian institutions are eligible for this award.**
- **If the awardee is an individual, the person shall receive a certificate and a cash prize of Rs 5 lakh and in case the awardee is an institution, it will be given a certificate and a cash prize of Rs 51 lakh and the prize money will be utilised for disaster management-related activities only.**
- **For the year 2019, the award would be announced on January 23, 2019, the birth**

anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

INDIA TO BUILD NEW VERTICAL BRIDGE TO REPLACE PAMBAN BRIDGE

Indian Railways is building the country's first vertical-lift bridge to connect Rameswaram to mainland India.

- The bridge will allow ships and steamers to pass through without any hindrance.
- **The new bridge would replace the existing 104-year-old Pamban bridge.**
- It would be ready in the next four years.

ABOUT THE NEW VERTICAL BRIDGE:

- **The New Bridge will have a 63-metre stretch which will lift up while remaining parallel to the deck to allow access to the ships.**
- The lifting would be done using sensors at each end.
- The new bridge will have electro-mechanical controlled systems which will be interlocked with train control systems in place of existing manual operation and control.

PAMBAN BRIDGE:

- **Pamban Bridge connects the town of Rameswaram on Pamban Island to mainland India.**
- Pamban Bridge was the first sea bridge of India and was the longest sea bridge in India until the Bandra-Worli Sea Link was opened in 2010.
- **Pamban Bridge is located in a very challenging location.**
- **It is located in the world's second most corrosive environment after Florida and is prone to high-velocity cyclones.**
- This makes maintenance very challenging.

POSTAL STAMP DEDICATED TO NABIN CHANDRA DAS, INVENTOR OF ROSOGOLLA LAUNCHED IN WEST BENGAL

A postal stamp dedicated to Nabin Chandra Das, inventor of Rosogolla was launched on the inaugural day of the three-day festival, Bagbazar-O-Rosogolla Utsob marking the 150th year of its invention.

BAGBAZAR-O-RASOGOLLA UTSOB:

- **Bagbazar O Rosogolla Utsob, a three-day Rosogolla Utsav is being held at Bagbazar, Kolkata as a tribute to Nabin Chandra Das, inventor of Rosogolla.**
- The statue of Nabin Chandra Das was also unveiled during the inaugural programme.

TUSSLE BETWEEN BENGAL AND ODISHA OVER ROSOGOLLA:

- **The battle over the ownership of Rosogolla started in 2015 when the government of West Bengal applied for the GI tag for the sweet.**
- **Odisha contested the West Bengal claim by narrating Rosogolla has a 600-year-old history in Odisha.**
- **Odisha even cited mythological stories to claim that Lord Jagannath had offered 'Kheer Mohana' to an angry Goddess Lakshmi in order to appease her and this 'Kheer Mohana' later became Pahala Rosogolla.**
- **The GI authorities ruled in the favour of West Bengal.**
- **The Odisha has now applied to get GI tag for a variant of Rosogolla, the Odishara Rosogolla.**

UNION CABINET APPROVES BUDGET FOR GAGANYAAN PROJECT

The Union Cabinet has approved a budget of Rs 10,000 crore for India's Gaganyaan project.

- **The allocation of the budget comes after the announcement of Prime Minister that, an Indian would travel to space in an Indian spacecraft by 2022 in his 2018 Independence Day speech.**

ABOUT THE MISSION:

- **The Mission aims to carry three human beings for a maximum period of seven days in space with the support of academia, the scientific community, industry, IAF and ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation).**
- **India will launch two unmanned missions before the final mission.**
- **The first unmanned test-flight will be launched in December 2020.**
- **The second unmanned test will be conducted in July 2021 and the human space flight will be launched in December 2021.**
- **The module carrying three Indians will be attached to a service module.**
- **These two modules will comprise the orbital module that will be integrated with an advanced GSLV Mk III rocket.**
- **The rocket will take the modules to the low-earth orbit (300-400 km) where they will perform micro-gravity and other scientific experiments for a week.**
- **The orbital module will reorient itself.**
- **The crew and service module will get separated at 120km altitude.**
- **The crew module will reduce the speed by applying aerobrake and parachutes will open just before the splashdown in the Arabian Sea.**

- The return journey will take approximately 36 minutes.
- **The module can also land in the Bay of Bengal as a backup.**
- The crew members will be jointly selected by the IAF and ISRO.
- The crew members would be trained for two-three years.
- ISRO had started preparations for the project way back in 2004.
- **Gaganyaan will also provide employment to around 15,000 people.**

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR HOMEOPATHY BILL, 2018 GETS CABINET APPROVAL

The Union Cabinet has approved the National Commission for Homeopathy Bill, 2018.

- The National Commission for Homeopathy seeks to replace the existing regulator Central Council of Homoeopathy.

FEATURES OF THE BILL:

- **Constitution of a National Commission with three autonomous boards.**
- The Homoeopathy Education Board to be vested with the responsibility of overseeing the Homeopathy education in the country.
- The board of assessment and rating to assess and grant recognition to educational institutions of Homoeopathy.
- Board of ethics and registration of practitioners of Homoeopathy to maintain a National Register and deal with ethical issues relating to practice.
- **The bill also proposes a common entrance exam and an exit exam which all graduates will have to clear to get practicing licenses.**
- **The bill proposes a teacher's eligibility test to assess the standard of teachers before appointment and promotions.**

AIM:

- **The bill aims at bringing reforms in the medical education of homoeopathy in line with the National Medical Commission proposed for setting up for allopathy system of medicine.**
- The National Commission for Homeopathy aims to promote transparency and accountability.

BAHUDA ROOKERY: ANOTHER OLIVE RIDLEY NESTING SITE IN ODISHA

Odisha Forest Department has added another Olive Ridley mass nesting site 'Bahuda Rookery' at

the beach on the Bahuda river mouth in Ganjam district.

- It is located around 20 km to south of Rushikulya rookery coast.

ABOUT OLIVE RIDLEY:

- **Olive Ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) is the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.**
- It gets its name from its olive coloured carapace, which is heart-shaped and rounded.
- **It is best known for their unique mass nesting called Arribada, where thousands of females come together on the same beach each year to lay eggs.**
- **It is found in warm waters of Pacific and Indian oceans.**
- **They are found along both-eastern and western coasts of India.**
- It spends entire lives in ocean and migrates thousands of kilometers between feeding and mating grounds in the course of a year.

BREEDING SEASON:

- **Olive Ridley turtles commence their journey from Indian Ocean towards Bay of Bengal during their mating season in October and November every year.**
- **A single female can lay upto 100 to 150 eggs in a pit dug on beaches.**
- Six weeks later these eggs hatch and newly hatched turtles start their journey to their Indian Ocean habitat.

THREATS:

- Accidental killing of adult turtles through entanglement in trawl nets and gill nets due to uncontrolled fishing during their mating season around nesting beaches.
- **Poaching for meat, shell and leather, and their eggs.**
- Development and exploitation of nesting beaches for ports and tourist centres.

PROTECTION STATUS:

- Though found in abundance, their numbers have been declining over the past few years.
- **It is included in Vulnerable category by the IUCN Red list.**
- **In India, it is protected under Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.**
- Moreover, trading in its products are banned under CITES.

DWIJING FESTIVAL BEGINS AT CHIRANG DISTRICT OF ASSAM

An annual river festival, Dwijing Festival has begun on 27th December on the bank of River Aie at Chirang district of Assam.

- It is the third edition of the festival.
- The festival was inaugurated by the Public Health Engineering Minister of Assam, Rihon Daimary.
- About 15 lakh tourists are expected to participate in the festival.

ABOUT DWIJING FESTIVAL:

- Dwijing Festival is an annual river festival celebrated in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) region of Assam with various colorful events viz. ethnic trade and food festival, exhibition, games & sports, river campaign & adventure and various culture programs to make it a centre of attraction for the visitors as a New Year Festival.
- The festival provides a platform of earning for the people in the region by putting in to focus the business activities for better economy generation through rural tourism.
- The festival also aims to provide help to the flood victim families through charity generation and distribution.

ABOUT RIVER AIE (MOTHER):

- River Aie "Mother" originates from the Himalayan Mountains of Bhutan and flows through the Chirang and Bongaigaon districts of Assam before joining the river Brahmaputra.
- The River Aie is the lifeline of the region as about 30000 families in the region are dependent on the river for their daily livelihoods through Crops, Fishing, Stone & Sand Collection and many other activities.
- The River creates a massive attraction for many tourists (locals/visiting) for picnic and weekend activities during the winter season and in summer the river creates massive damages to both the sideways due to heavy rainfall resulting in loss of properties and lives of many families.
- Hagrama Bridge which is located on this river is a centre of attraction.

BHUTANESE PM ON A 3 DAY VISIT TO INDIA

Prime Minister of Bhutan Lotay Tshering arrived in India on 27th December for a three-day visit.

- The Visit is significant because it is taking place during the Golden Jubilee year of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries.
- The Bhutanese PM was accorded ceremonial reception at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan.
- He would pay homage to Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi and hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

ABOUT INDIA-BHUTAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS:

- **The diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan were established in 1968.**
- **India established a special office of India in Thimphu in 1968.**
- Prior to this, Indian diplomatic relations with Bhutan were looked after by Indian Political Officer in Sikkim.
- **The India-Bhutan bilateral relations are governed by the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1949 between the two countries.**
- **The treaty was revised in February 2007.**
- The Golden Jubilee of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan is being celebrated in the year 2018.

ABOUT LOTAY TSHERING:

- **Doctor by profession Lotay Tshering is a Bhutanese politician who is the current Prime Minister of Bhutan.**
- He is also the president of the political party, Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa since 14 May 2018.
- **Lotay Tshering is the 3rd democratically elected Prime Minister of Bhutan.**

INDIA TO SUBMIT 2ND BIENNIAL REPORT ON GREENHOUSE GAS INVENTORY TO UNFCCC

India is mandated to submit a biennial update report containing updates of national greenhouse gas inventories and information on mitigation actions, needs and support received as a party to UNFCCC.

- **The Union Cabinet chaired by PM Modi has approved the submission of second Biennial Update Report (BUR) to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), giving India's national greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory of 2014.**

INDIA'S GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IN 2014:

The BUR reports following figures about India's greenhouse gas emissions:

- In India, a total of 26,07,488 gigagram (Gg) CC-2 equivalent or around 2.607 billion tonnes of CC-2 equivalent of GHGs were emitted from all activities, excluding 'land use, land use change and forestry' (LULUCF) in 2014.
- Net national GHG emissions after including LULUCF were 23,06,295 Gg CO₂ equivalent or around 2.306 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent.
- Energy sector accounted for 73 per cent, industrial processes and product use (IPPU) 8 per cent, agriculture 16 per cent and waste sector 3 per cent of emissions.

- India is on course for achieving the target for emission intensity of the economy and share of non-fossil fuel-based power capacity.

INDIA'S COMMITMENTS UNDER THE PARIS AGREEMENT:

- **Reducing greenhouse gas emission intensity of India's GDP by 33-35 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.**
- **40 per cent of India's power capacity would be based on non-fossil fuel sources.**
- Creating an additional 'carbon sink' of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.

UNION CABINET APPROVES THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR INDIAN SYSTEMS OF MEDICINE (NCIM) BILL, 2018

The Union Cabinet has approved the National Commission for Indian Systems of Medicine (NCIM) Bill, 2018.

- The bill seeks to replace the existing regulator, the Central Council for Indian Medicine (CCIM).

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE BILL:

- The Bill provides for the constitution of a National Commission with four autonomous boards.
- The Board of Ayurveda would be responsible for overseeing the overall education of Ayurveda.
- The Board of Unani, Siddha and Sowaigpa will be responsible for overseeing the overall education of Unani, Siddha and Sowaigpa.
- The Bill provides for two common boards, Board of Assessment and Rating and Board of Ethics and Registration.
- The Board of Assessment and Rating would be responsible to assess and grant permission to educational institutions of Indian systems of Medicine.
- The Board of Ethics and Registration of practitioners of Indian systems of medicine would maintain National Register and deal with ethical issues relating to practice under the National Commission for Indian Medicine.
- The Bill also proposes a common entrance exam and an exit exam which all graduates will have to clear to get practicing licenses.
- The Bill proposes a teacher's eligibility test to assess the standard of teachers before appointment and promotions.

AIM:

- **The Bill aims at bringing reforms in the medical education of Indian systems in line with the National Medical Commission proposed for setting up for allopathy system of medicine.**
- The National Commission for Indian Systems of Medicine aims to promote transparency and accountability.

BIMAL JALAN PANEL ON ECONOMIC CAPITAL FRAMEWORK

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has set up an expert committee, headed by its Former Governor Bimal Jalan, to suggest how the Central Bank should handle its reserves and whether it can transfer its surplus to the Government.

- The committee will submit its report within 90 days of its first meeting.
- The expert committee headed by Bimal Jalan will have former RBI deputy governor Rakesh Mohan as its Vice Chairman.
- The members of the committee are RBI Central Board Directors Bharat Doshi and Sudhir Mankad, Deputy Governor N.S. Vishwanathan, and economic affairs Subhash Chandra Garg.

RBI RESERVES:

- **RBI's contingency fund core reserve is only around 7% of its total assets and the rest of it is largely in revaluation reserves.**
- **Revaluation reserves fluctuate with corresponding changes in currency and gold valuations.**
- In 2017-18, the central bank's contingency funds and revaluation reserves stood at ₹2.32 trillion and ₹6.92 trillion respectively.
- The data shows that the growth in revaluation reserves has far exceeded the growth in the contingency fund.
- While revaluation reserves have more than tripled from ₹1.99 trillion in 2008-09 to ₹6.92 trillion in 2017-18, the contingency fund has grown 50% during the same period from ₹1.53 trillion to ₹2.32 trillion.

CORE RESERVE AND REVALUATION RESERVE:

- Core Reserves are considered to be of highest quality and consists mainly of share capital and disclosed reserve.
- They are fully available to cover losses.
- Revaluation reserves arise from revaluation of assets that are undervalued in the bank's books, e.g. Marketable Securities.
- The Revaluation Reserves can be used as a cushion for unexpected losses and depends mainly

upon the level of certainty that can be placed on estimates.

WHY THE COMMITTEE IS FORMED?

Since the RBI and the Government were at loggerhead over the transfer of surplus, the committee has been formed to look into this issue.

THE COMMITTEE WILL:

- Decide whether RBI is holding provisions, reserves and buffers in the surplus of the required levels.
- Propose a suitable profits distribution policy taking into account all the likely situations of the RBI, including the situations of holding more provisions than required and the RBI holding lesser provisions than required.
- Suggest an adequate level of risk provisioning that the RBI needs to maintain.

PM INAUGURATES INTERNATIONAL RICE RESEARCH INSTITUTE'S SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL CENTRE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the International Rice Research Institute South Asia Regional Centre (IRRI SARC) in Varanasi.

- It is the sixth campus of IRRI SARC.
- The institute will complement the government's effort to double farmer's income by 2022.

WHAT WILL IRRI SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL CENTRE (IRRI SARC) DO?

- The education and training arm of IRRI SARC will educate scientists and agriculture leaders about the latest technologies and innovations for sustainable farming.
- The IRRI SARC will house laboratories for digital crop monitoring and assessment.
- IRRI SARC will house demonstration fields for testing various varieties of rice.
- IRRI SARC will also house Centre of Excellence in Rice Value Addition (CERVA), which would be a suite of modern laboratories where rice grains are assessed for quality and nutritional value and sensory evaluations for grain taste, texture and aroma are conducted on-site facilities.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE IRRI SARC:

- It will serve as a hub for rice research and training in South Asia and SAARC region.
- The IRRI SARC will aid in improving crop production, seed quality and the nutritional value of rice.
- The Centre will work with national partners to enhance farmers' knowledge and income and deliver advanced research, teaching and services in the connection.

- IRRI SARC aims to improve livelihood and nutrition, abolishing poverty, hunger, and malnutrition among those countries which depend on rice-based agri-food systems.
- The Centre will help in utilizing the rich biodiversity of India to develop special rice varieties which will help India to achieve higher per hectare yields and improved nutritional contents.
- The Centre will support in adopting a value chain based production system in the country by reducing wastage, adding value and generating higher income for the farmers.

PM RELEASES COMMEMORATIVE STAMP ON MAHARAJA SUHELDEV

PM Narendra Modi released a commemorative stamp on Maharaja Suheldev.

- He described Maharaja Suheldev as a brave warrior and a hero who inspires the people and said that the Union Government is determined to preserve the legacy of all those who contributed to the cause of India's defence and security, and to its social life.

LEGACY OF MAHARAJA SUHELDEV:

- **Maharaja Suheldev is a semi-legendary king whose references are found somewhere between the boundary of fiction and history.**
- There is no consensus about his name and is alternating between Sakardev, Suhirdadhvaj, Suhridil, Suhridal-dhaj, Rai Suhrid Dev, Susaj, Suhardal etc.
- There is also not much clarity on his caste and religious identity.
- Of late various Hindu nationalist groups have characterized him as a Hindu king who defeated a Muslim invader.
- The only surviving historical account of him can be traced to Mirat-i-Masudi, a 17th-century Persian-language historical romance.
- **Maharaja Suheldev is said to have defeated and killed the Ghaznavid general Ghazi Saiyyad Salar Masud at Bahraich, in the early 11th century.**

"ONE DISTRICT, ONE PRODUCT" SCHEME OF UTTAR PRADESH

The Government of Uttar Pradesh has initiated "One District, One Product" Scheme to encourage indigenous and specialized products and crafts of the state.

AIM OF THE SCHEME:

- The scheme aims to capitalize the rich heritage of the Uttar Pradesh by reviving them through modernization and publicisation to enhance the reach of these products.

DETAILS:

- Uttar Pradesh is a vast state with vast diversity in all facets of life.
- The diversity of products and crafts in UP is breathtaking.

THE VAST DIVERSITY ENCOMPASSES:

- The ancient and nutritious Kala Namak Rice
- The rare and intriguing Wheat-Stalk Craft
- World-famous Chikankari and Zari-Zardozi work on clothes
- The intricate and stunning Horn and Bone work that uses the remains of dead animals rather than live ones
- A nature-friendly replacement for ivory
- *Many of these rich traditions are facing the existential threat.*
- *The One District, One Product aims to revive these traditional heritages by reviving them through modernization and publicisation.*

RAJASTHAN CABINET SCRAPS EDUCATION CRITERIA FOR CIVIC POLL CANDIDATES

The new Government of Rajasthan has abolished the condition of a minimum educational qualification to contest local body elections.

- The cabinet also decided on holding the election of mayors and chairmen in corporations through the direct system instead of the indirect method introduced by the previous government.

CRITERIA'S FOR CONTESTING IN LOCAL POLLS:

As per the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Amendment Bill 2015, Candidates were:

- Required to have passed Class X for contesting municipal elections, Class VIII for contesting panchayat polls for the post of a sarpanch, and Class X for contesting Zila Parishad or Panchayat Samiti elections.
- Construction of toilets in their homes as mandatory for contesting polls to the panchayati raj institutions in the state.

SUPREME COURT ON EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION FOR CONTESTING POLLS:

- Even Haryana had passed a similar law mandating minimum education qualification for those contesting in Panchayat Raj Institutions.
- The constitutional validity of this law of Haryana was questioned in the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court had upheld the constitutional validity of the law enacted by Haryana government to bar the illiterate from contesting panchayat polls in the state.

- The Supreme Court had ruled that "it is only education which gives a human being the power to discriminate between right and wrong, good and bad".
- The Supreme Court had even made it clear that it would be valid for the legislature to disqualify a candidate from seeking election to a civic body if he or she lacks "basic norms of hygiene" by not having a functional toilet at home.

