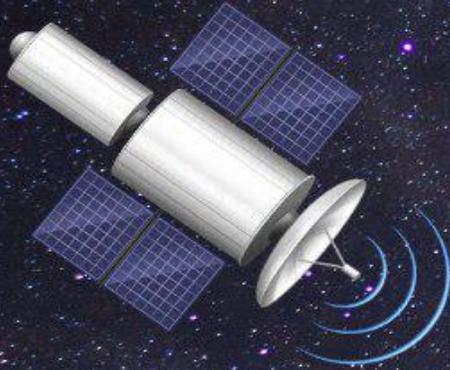


# AROUND-U

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MAY 2017



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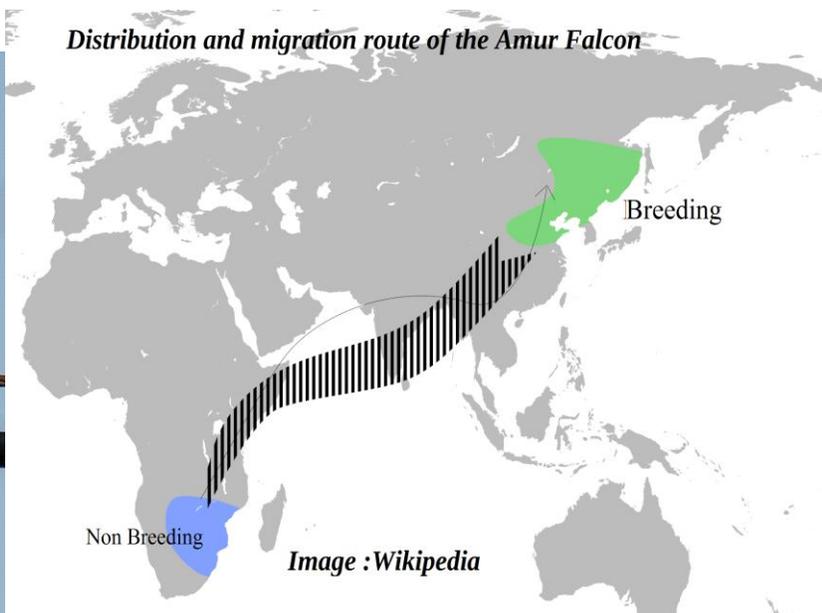


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## GS 1 History Culture Social issues and Geography

**Timely intervention helps stop child marriages - Child Welfare Committee**

**Mains: GS 1** Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.

### **The News**

The Child Welfare Committee and the Childline received information about the wedding ceremony between a 16-year-old girl in Kalaburagi with a boy of the same age from the

district. In the other case, a 16-year-old from Vijayapura district was engaged to a 20-year-old youth.

A team comprising officials from the District Child Protection Unit, the District Child Welfare Committee and the Childline visited the brides' residences and counselled parents of both the girls about the consequences of violating Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006.

### **Child Welfare Committee and its Functions**

- As per the provisions of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 (amended in 2006) State governments are required to establish a CWC or two in every district.
- Each CWC should consist of a chairperson and four members.
- The chairperson should be a person well versed in child welfare issues and at least one member of the board should be a woman.
- The CWC has the same powers as a metropolitan magistrate or a judicial magistrate of the first class.
- A child can be brought before the committee (or a member of the committee if necessary) by a police officer, any public servant, CHILDLINE personnel, any social worker or public spirited citizen, or by the child himself/herself.
- The CWC usually sends the child to a children's home while the inquiry into the case is conducted for the protection of the child.
- Children's homes are government funded institutions that provide temporary shelter, food and clothing to children in need of care and protection.
- Children in the homes are meant to receive basic education and life skills lessons.
- The CWC meets and interviews the child to learn his/her background information and also understand the problem the child is facing.
- The CWC also has powers to hold people accountable for the child such as in the case of child labour, the employers are fined or made to give bonds to the children.

### **National Programmes Targeting Children in India**

- Mid-day Meal Scheme
- Integrated Child Development Scheme
- Integrated Child Protection Scheme
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
- Operation Blackboard
- Integrated Programme for Street Children
- Kishori Shakti Yojana
- Wheat Based Nutrition Programme (WBNP)
- Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPAG)
- Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme For the Children of Working Mothers

- Balika Samridhi Yojana (BSY)
- Initiatives to combat trafficking of Women and Children
- Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA)
- Shishu Greha Scheme
- CHILDLINE services
- Reproductive and Child Health Programme
- Scheme for Working Children in need of care and protection
- National Child Labour Project

### **Prelims Perspective**

A question about Children's Welfare Committee, its functions etc can be asked.

### **Mains Perspective**

[This news item can be used as a successful case study for questions relating to child marriages in India. From GS 1 point of view, this news has much relevance]

How far Juvenile Justice Act and other child protection laws helped to reduce the menace of child marriages in India?

**Sources :** [The Hindu](#)

### **'Narasimnee' is back in T.N.**

A 1,046-year-old stone idol of Narasimnee, stolen from the Vriddhagiriswarar temple in Vriddhachalam nearly 15 years ago, has returned to Tamil Nadu.

**Mains : GS 2** Indian Heritage and Culture

### **Highlights**

- The idol was bought by the Canberra-based National Gallery of Australia (NGA) – and recorded as Pratyangira in the museum's records – from an alleged idol smuggler
- Along with the Narasimnee idol, the Australian authorities returned a third century rock carving as well as a 'seated Buddha'.
- The ancient Chola temple of Vriddhagiriswarar was commissioned by Sembiyan Mahadevi, among the most powerful queens of the Chola empire and an ardent worshipper of Lord Siva.
- The Narasimnee idol was stolen along with five other stone idols of deities from the same temple.
- The theft was not reported to the police and was detected some 11 years later, in 2013.
- Four other idols stolen from a temple in Vriddhachalam remain untraced

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

## GS 2 Indian Polity

### **The Real Estate Regulatory Act,**

The Real Estate Regulatory Act, which promises to protect the rights of homebuyers and bring in transparency to the sector, came into force. Only 13 States and Union Territories have notified the rules for its implementation so far

**Mains : GS 2** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

### **How RERA offers protection to consumer on different counts?**

- RERA requires any project that has 8 dwelling units or is at least 500 sq m in area to be registered with the regulatory authority. Only after registration the builder can sell/ even advertise about the project.
- Once registered the entire details regarding the project must be made available online for the end consumer to verify.
- **Advance Amount :** The builder is eligible to receive only 10% of the money as advance before the agreement with the consumer is inked. Further, 70% of payment has to be put into the designated account for the project (like an escrow).
- **Carpet Area :** The builder is permitted to sell units only based on carpet area.(Net usable floor area excluding the area covered by the external walls but including the internal partition walls area)
- Every six months, an audit of the structural strength of the building is to be done, certified by both the architect and the structural engineer.
- Third party audits will make developer more accountable
- **Insurance :** Earlier, it was possible that a buyer found out too late that his property belonged not to the seller but another party. To protect consumers against risk of such loss under RERA the builder is required to provide for Title Insurance for all new and ongoing projects
- **Promoters liability :** RERA requires the promoters to be liable for all structural defects in the building for a period of 5 years.
- Both developers and buyers will have to pay the same penal interest of SBI's Marginal Cost of Lending Rate plus 2% in case of delays.

### **Prelims perspective**

#### Model questions

Consider the following statements regarding Real Estate Regulatory Act.

1. Developers and buyers will have to pay penal interest in case of delays.
2. The act mandates that any project with minimum 6 dwelling units or at least 1000 sqm in area to be registered
3. It puts the liability of developers for structural defects for five years.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

---

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. All of the above
- d. 1 and 3 only

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

The passage of Real Estate regulatory authority bill will go a long way in bringing in the much needed transparency and accountability in the Real Estate Sector. Comment

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **National Steel Policy (NSP) 2017**

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for National Steel Policy (NSP) 2017.

**Mains : GS 2** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

**Objective :** It seeks to enhance domestic steel consumption and ensure high quality steel production and create a technologically advanced and globally competitive steel industry.

### **Key features of the NSP 2017**

1. Create self-sufficiency in steel production by providing policy support & guidance to private manufacturers, MSME steel producers, CPSEs
2. Encourage adequate capacity additions,
3. Development of globally competitive steel manufacturing capabilities,
4. Cost-efficient production
5. Domestic availability of iron ore, coking coal & natural gas,
6. Facilitating foreign investment
7. Asset acquisitions of raw materials &
8. Enhancing the domestic steel demand.

The policy envisages to domestically meet the entire demand of high grade automotive steel, electrical steel, special steels and alloys for strategic applications and increase domestic availability of washed coking coal so as to reduce import dependence on coking coal from about 85% to around 65% by 2030-31.

### **Some highlights of New Steel Policy**

- The New Steel Policy, 2017 aspires to achieve 300MT of steel-making capacity by 2030.
- The Policy seeks to increase consumption of steel and major segments
- Potential of MSME steel sector has been recognised.
- Steel Ministry will facilitate R&D in the sector through the establishment of Steel Research and Technology Mission of India (SRTMI).
- Ministry through policy measures will ensure availability of raw materials like Iron ore, Coking coal and non-coking coal, Natural gas etc. at competitive rates.

**Sources:** [pib](#)

### **Central Health Services (CHS)**

The Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Shri J.P. Nadda inaugurated the first-ever induction training programme for the newly appointed General Duty Medical Officers (GDMOs) of the Central Health Service Cadre at National Institute of Health and Family Welfare (NIHFW),

**Mains : GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### **Central Health Services (CHS)**

- Central Health Service (CHS) Cadre is a cadre governed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and its doctors are working all over the country providing health care services to a large number of people.
- CHS has four sub-cadres, namely, GDMOs, Teaching, Non-Teaching Specialists and Public Health, with a sanctioned strength of more than 4000 of which the GDMOs constitute the largest chunk, more than 2000.

### **Why Training programme?**

- On an average, every year around 400 to 600 doctors are recruited through UPSC.
- These doctors are not been trained in the areas of management, supervision, leadership, communication, conduction of office procedures, etc.
- The training module is designed to fill this gap so that they can look after the administration of the organization and implementation of various national health programmes for which they have very limited exposure.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Consider the following statements about Central health services.

1. The Central health services is an all India service and the doctors work under respective state governments.
2. Doctors are provided training in management by the government

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

**Sources:** [pib](#)

### **National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC)**

The Sharada Prasad Committee constituted by the Skill Development and

---

Entrepreneurship Ministry to review, rationalise and optimise the functioning of sector skill councils (SSCs) has termed these councils a 'hotbed of crony capitalism' that have tried to 'extract maximum benefit from public funds.'

**Mains : GS 2** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

### **Highlights of the Committee report**

- Several instances of conflict of interest were highlighted the report on India's recent skill development initiatives
- Public funds have been used without serving the two basic objectives - meeting the exact skill needs of the industry and providing employment to youth
- NSDC has failed to discharge its responsibilities and deviated from its original role.
- Flawed governance of the National Skill Development Fund (NSDF) set up in 2009 to raise funds from both government and non-government entities.

### **Recommendations made by the committee**

Scrap all existing skill councils, many of which have overlapping roles and introduce an oversight mechanism on the NSDC

### **Why NSDC failed to deliver?**

NSDC is 100% government-funded but accountable to a board that consists of a majority of private sector industry associations.

### **National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC).**

- The National Skill Development Corporation, (NSDC) is a one of its kind, Public Private Partnership in India, under the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship.
- It aims to promote skill development by catalyzing creation of large, quality, for-profit vocational institutions.
- It was launched in 2008.

### **National Skill Development Fund**

- It was set up in 2009 by the Government of India
- It aims to raise funds both from Government and Non Government sectors for skill development in the country.
- The Fund meets its objectives through National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)
- NSDC acts as a catalyst in skill development by providing funding to enterprises, companies and organizations that provide skill training.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Consider the following statements regarding National Skill development corporation.

1. It works under Ministry of Human resources

2. NSDC will provide funding to institutions providing skill training.
3. It was set up in 2016

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. All of the above
- d. 2 only

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

“Demographic Dividend in India will remain only theoretical unless our manpower becomes more educated, aware, skilled and creative.” What measures have been taken by the government to enhance the capacity of our population to be more productive and employable? **[UPSC Mains 2016]**

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [NSDC](#) [Ministry of Skill development](#)

### **Agenda 2030**

The High-level Political Forum comprising the political representatives (heads of states or ministers) of the members meets every July at the UN in New York to review progress on Agenda 2030.

**Mains : GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### **What is Agenda 2030?**

1. On 1 January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at an historic UN Summit – officially came into force.
2. Over the next fifteen years, with these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.
3. The SDGs, also known as Global Goals, build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty.
4. The new Goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet.
5. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.
6. While the SDGs are not legally binding, governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks for the achievement of the 17 Goals.
7. Countries have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review of the

progress made in implementing the Goals, which will require quality, accessible and timely data collection.

8. Regional follow-up and review will be based on national-level analyses and contribute to follow-up and review at the global level.

### **Why in News?**

- There is a review of Agenda 2030 every July month of an year. The Voluntary National Reviews (VNR), – voluntary and country driven – form the basis of this review.
- As per UN: The voluntary national reviews aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- The themes of review this year are Goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14 and 17 of Agenda 2030, respectively.

### **What India would highlight as its achievements?**

- The government will highlight its key achievements such as Swachh Bharat, financial inclusion, etc.
- The government has already identified existing programmes and policies which are linked to different goals under SDGs.

### **Is the VNR process an effective mechanism to review SDGs?**

- Last year, in the HLPF 2016, the governments tried to show that they already do very well.
- There was no reflection about problems, challenges or what policies should be changed to achieve the SDGs.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

“Agenda 2030” was in news. What does it refer to?

- A. Millennium Development Goals
- B. Sustainable Development Goals
- C. Review of Agenda 21 in 2030
- D. Climate Change Convention

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

SDGs are ambitious enough to address several socioeconomic concerns and make the development process inclusive. Critically analyse.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Advance Care Directives**

In India, the law is not clear as to when a person really dies.

**Mains : GS 2** Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features,

amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

### **What are the current definitions of death as per Indian Law?**

- Section 46 of the Indian Penal Code defines 'death' as the 'death of a human being'.
- Section 2(b) of the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 does not recognise brain stem deaths. So, hospital authorities continue to sustain the patient till his heart ceases to beat.
- The Transplantation of Human Organs Act, 1994 says that if a person is willing to donate his organs, his brain stem death is certified and recognised.

### **Why in news?**

Four petitioners have moved the Supreme Court for

- the right of a person to plan the course of his own treatment or Advance Care Directives, to avoid being subjected to any kind of medical treatment which violates both physical and personal dignity during the last moments of life.
- The right to choose to not seek to receive and obtain any kind of medical treatment.

### **What are the Arguments put forth?**

1. The right to life entails the right to decide one's future medical care in the advent of a terminal illness.
2. As long as a person has the capacity to decide, it is the will of the patient and that alone should decide treatment, the extent of the treatment, the form of the treatment and also the right to completely refuse any kind of treatment.
3. A patient has the right to terminate at any point of time treatment which he considers unacceptable for any reason.
4. The fundamental right to choose one's medical treatment or even to decide to deny oneself any treatment is confused with euthanasia or other forms of attempts to suicide.

### **Proposed Medical Treatment of Terminally Ill Patients (Protection of Patients and Medical Practitioners) Bill - What does it say ?**

It addresses the issue of euthanasia and not the right of a person to refuse treatment under Article 21 (right to life) of the Constitution.

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

How far Euthanasia and Advance care directives have been identified under Art 21 of the Indian Constitution?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Understanding NITI Aayog's action agenda**

NITI Aayog's Three Year Action Agenda forms part of a larger vision document which

spans a seven-year strategy and a 15-year vision till FY32

**Mains : GS 3** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment..

### **Background**

NITI Aayog released its Three Year Action Agenda document, a comprehensive framework for proposed policy changes to be implemented in the short term in India. The Action Agenda forms part of a larger Vision Document which spans a seven-year strategy and a 15-year vision till fiscal year 2031-32.

### **Highlights of NITI Aayog Three year action agenda.**

#### **Issues faced**

- All the three sectors of the economy are suffering from low productivity.
- Unevenness across the country in access to the digital network and in the ability to benefit from such services.

#### **The way ahead**

- Workers should be moved away from relatively low-productivity activity - agriculture and productivity in agriculture itself be improved to increase yields and benefit those workers who remain in the sector.
- Use of high-yield seeds, improved irrigation techniques, removal of the tariff inversion problem (where the high level of trade barriers on intermediate inputs relative to final goods disincentivizes domestic production).
- The use of a modern land-leasing law that balances and protects the rights of the tenant and landowners.
- **Manufacturing** : Development of a few Coastal Economic Zones (CEZs) operating under a liberal economic environment and with an abundance of land
- India needs a strong digital network and an ability to provide reliable end-to-end e-services.
- Productivity-enhancing reforms should be initiated in agriculture, manufacturing as well as services.

#### **Conclusion**

" Providing a base of knowledge and analysis" is perhaps the best way to summarise the elaborate three year and seven year vision documents released by the Niti Aayog that propose fundamental policy changes to bring about the radical transformation that the Indian economy sorely needs by tapping its agricultural wealth and enhancing productivity. Details of the measures suggested need to be studied to see whether the proposals are likely to see the light of day in the immediate future or whether they remain theoretical formulations.

**Sources:** [Livemint](http://Livemint)

#### **NITI Aayog for more research, less teaching**

NITI Aayog has recommended for prioritizing research and reduce teaching

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responsibility for faculty at world class institutions.

**Mains : GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### **Why the proposal?**

The proposal by NITI Aayog is to ensure that investments in research better translate to more products and bolster innovation and development.

### **Other Suggestions made by NITI Aayog**

- World class universities should be allowed to recruit research staff from abroad and be encouraged to compete for research projects from industry.

*‘world class universities’ are part of a government-outlined plan to raise funding for 10 public and 10 private universities and mould them into institutions that rank among the world’s best.*

- Universities should be ranked according to metrics such as teaching, research output and funding won from the private sector.
- It proposed for a new ‘National Science, Technology and Innovation Foundation’ headed by a distinguished scientist to coordinate with science and technology departments, ministries, governments and private sector bodies and deliberate on national issues and recommend interventions.
- It proposed a database of all existing schemes related to science and technology across ministries and departments to avoid duplication of efforts, reduce approval times, increase accountability and collaboration between entities and measured outcomes
- It also pushed for more public private partnerships.
- S&T projects, the report notes, are “different than those” in infrastructure primarily because they are riskier and take longer to fructify.
- NITI Aayog recommends research priorities to water management, agriculture, energy, waste management, health, connectivity and security.

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Are the standardized tests good measure of academic ability or progress? **[UPSC**

**Mains Essay 2014]**

Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make a man more clever.

**[UPSC Mains Essay 2015]**

The quality of higher education in India requires major improvement to make it internationally competitive. Do you think that the entry of foreign educational institutions would help improve the quality of technical and higher education in the country. Discuss. **[UPSC Mains 2015 GS 2]**

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) pib

**Museums, beaches catch Aayog’s fancy**

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The museums around the country have caught the attention of the NITI Aayog for their cultural tourism potential, and the agency has suggested the creation of a national authority to oversee them. The travel and tourism sector is a major driver of growth and employment in India, and tax reforms will be “necessary” to reduce barriers to trade and tourism, the Aayog said. It has also pitched for development of five beach destinations. Beach destinations remain an important segment accounting for 28% of all holiday trips globally.

### **India faces stern test at United Nations meet - United Nations Human Rights Council's (UNHRC) Universal Periodic Review (UPR).**

India faced a series of tough questions at the United Nations Human Rights Council's (UNHRC) Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

**Mains : GS 2** Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure

#### **Human Rights Issues raised against India**

1. Penalisation of same-sex sexual rights under section 377
2. The decriminalisation of marital rape, asked India to amend section 375 of the IPC to criminalise marital rape.
3. Questioned India's commitment to ratifying the UN's convention on torture, to which it became a signatory in 1997.
4. Asked for a review of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010.
5. Raised the issue of the repeal of AFSPA
6. Expressed concern over the rising level of intolerance in the country
7. Transgender rights
8. Pakistan said India must control its excesses in Kashmir and ban pellet guns, and allow Kashmir to have self-determination with a plebiscite.

#### **SC cautions against delay in enacting anti-torture law**

- Supreme Court asked the government to enact an Anti-torture Act in consonance with the U.N. Convention against Torture ratified by India , in place of the lapsed Prevention of Torture Bill of 2010.
- The court said it was a matter of both Article 21 (fundamental right to life and dignity) and of international reputation that the government consider promulgating a stand-alone, comprehensive law defining and punish torture as an instrument of “human degradation” by State authorities.

#### **U.N. Convention against Torture**

- The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (commonly known as the United Nations Convention against Torture) is an international human rights treaty, under the review of the United Nations, that aims to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or

degrading treatment or punishment around the world.

- The Convention requires states to take effective measures to prevent torture in any territory under their jurisdiction, and forbids states to transport people to any country where there is reason to believe they will be tortured.

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

India should ensure consistent, transparent application of Foreign Contributions Regulations Act regulations to permit full exercise of the right to freedom of association. Critically analyse in the light of recent issues relating to NGOs.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [thewire.in](#)

### **UN-Habitat, the United Nations' Human Settlements Programme**

India has been unanimously elected to head UN-Habitat, the United Nations' Human Settlements Programme

**Mains : GS 2** Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International relations.

#### **What is UN-Habitat?**

- It is an organ of the United Nations' Organisation (UNO) that promotes socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements across the world
- UN-Habitat reports to the United Nations General Assembly.
- The UN-Habitat came into being in 1978
- Governing council : As an inter-governmental policy making and decision making body, which seeks to promote integral and comprehensive approach to human settlements, assist the countries and regions and strengthen cooperation among all countries on human settlement issue.

#### **Why in News?**

- It is the third time that India has been elected to lead this important organization after 2007 and 1988.
- Minister of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation Shri M.Venkaiah Naidu will preside over the deliberations of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat for the next two years.

The theme of the 26th Meeting of the Governing Council is "Opportunities for effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda" with focus on inclusive, sustainable and adequate housing for a better future and planning and financing sustainable urbanization and integrated human settlements.

The New Urban Agenda was adopted by the world community at Quito, Ecuador last year.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Which of the following statements about UN habitat is/are correct?

1. It promotes sustainable human settlements across the world
2. India has been chosen to be head of UN habitat recently

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

**Sources:** [pib](#)

### **Tax processed foods: FSSAI panel - The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)**

A committee of medical experts and nutritionists has recommended a tax on “highly-processed” foods and sugar-sweetened beverages.

**Mains : GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

#### **Recommendations of the committee**

- Ads promoting products high in fat, salt & sugar should be banned during children’s TV shows.
- Celebrity endorsements of junk foods need to be discouraged,
- The proportions of fats, sodium and sugar in foods, should not exceed guidelines by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
- All packaged food should carry detailed labels specifying the energy value in kcal (kilocalories); the amounts of protein, carbohydrates and fat; and the amount of any other nutrient for which a nutrition or health claim is made.

#### **The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)**

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) have been established under Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.
- FSSAI has been created for laying down science based standards for articles of food and to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.

#### **Highlights of the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006**

- The Act established an independent statutory Authority – the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India with head office at Delhi with the aim to be a single reference point for all matters relating to food safety and standards
- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and the State Food Safety Authorities shall enforce various provisions of the Act.
- Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the Administrative Ministry for the implementation of FSSAI.

### **Prelims Perspective**

Similar questions [*UPSC Prelims 2017*]

With reference to pre-packaged items in India, it is mandatory to the manufacturer to put which of the following information on the main label, as per the Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labelling) Regulations, 2011?

1. List of ingredients including additives
2. Nutrition information
3. Recommendations, if any, made by the medical profession about the possibility of any allergic reactions
4. Vegetarian/non-vegetarian

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- (a) 1, 2 and 3
- (b) 2, 3 and 4
- (c) 1, 2 and 4
- (d) 1 and 4 only

Solution: C

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

- ✓ What measures can be taken to discourage the use of junk foods that causes health issues?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#), [FSSAI](#)

### **Supreme Court plans to go paperless - The Integrated Case Management Information System (ICMIS)**

The Integrated Case Management Information System (ICMIS) was inaugurated which allows a litigant to digitally file a case and watch its progress on a real-time basis.

**Mains : GS 2** e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential;

#### **The Integrated Case Management Information System (ICMIS)**

- It allows litigants to file cases digitally and watch its progress on real-time basis.
- It will help litigants access data and retrieve information online.
- It will be a step towards a paperless Supreme Court.
- It would help usher in transparency, reduce manipulation and help the litigant track the progress of a case on a real time basis.

*The Chief Justice of India has proposed to integrate the system with all the 24 High Courts and the subordinate courts*

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

The Integrated Case Management Information System (ICMIS) recently in news pertains to

- a. initiative to reduce pendency of cases in High Courts
- b. Integrated records of all courts in the country
- c. allowing litigants to file and monitor status of cases digitally
- d. None of the above

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Technology can be the game changer in reducing pendency of cases and improving working of Judicial systems. Discuss

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Election Commission of India Launches National Contact Centre**

The Election Commission has launched National Contact Centre with a toll-free number.

**Mains : GS 2** powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

#### **What services are offered by the contact centre?**

- Any citizen can call on the toll-free in English or Hindi with any query or complaint at any time of the day.
- Callers can enquire on subjects such as elections, voting dates, EPIC, electoral roll, online registration etc. and lodge a complaint by simply dialing in to the toll free no.
- executives can also make outbound calls for educating the electors and spreading voter awareness.
- Callers may connect with the executives to register a complaint and know about its status of receipt and disposal as well as to give suggestions and feedback at every step of the way.

*The National Contact Centre is operated on a National Grievance Redressal System Software. This software is a single window platform to manage complaints and feedback received through calls, emails, sms and website access in an integrated and time-bound manner.*

### **ICT 2025 Vision Document**

- ICT 2025 is about setting up core IT infrastructure and process to consolidate multitude of election process and functions.
- The ICT 2025 Vision Document heralds the beginning of what we call as Digitalization instead of just Digitization. It is the strategy of adopting recent technologies and consolidating existing technologies in IT to make the most of the digital resources available in the Election ecosystem.

There are four major components of the ICT 2025.

1. Integrated Software application

2. GIS, Analytic and Integrated Contact Centre
3. IT infrastructure including data center, IT security, disaster recovery
4. Knowledge Management, Capacity building and social media engagement

**Sources:** [pib](#)

### **EC's challenge on EVMs**

The EC's challenge to political parties to prove EVMs can be hacked is a welcome move

**Mains : GS 2** Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability,

### **Background**

With several Opposition parties questioning the credibility of Electronic voting machines the election commission has challenged political parties to prove that EVMs can be hacked.

### **Safeguard taken by the election commission to ensure that EVMs are secure**

- Time-stamping of key presses
- Dynamic coding in second-generation machines besides tamper-proofing
- Self-diagnostics in the third-generation machines that are now being deployed.
- Strict administrative protocol involving first-level checks after manufacture, randomised deployment, sealed strong rooms for storage, and conduct of mock polls.

### **The way forward**

- From time to time several steps were taken by election commission to improve the credibility of EVMs
- The EC has decided to deploy voter verifiable paper audit trails which will add another layer of accountability,
- These is a case for constantly improving EVM design and security features to rule out sophisticated tampering attempts.

### **Conclusion**

The more transparent the EC is about demonstrating the robustness of its safeguards and its determination to improve them further, the greater will be the public's trust in the electoral process.

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Explain the steps taken by Election commission to improve the credibility of EVMs. What additional measures should be taken to improve public's trust in electoral process?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Election commission considering revision of recount rules, ban on those bribing voters**

The Election Commission is actively considering revision of its recount rules so that slips generated by the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) devices can be matched with the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) count.

The Election Commission will soon ask the government to disqualify for up to five years candidates listed in charge sheets for bribing voters, a move which comes after it found that “innovative ways” were used for luring electors in a Tamil Nadu byelection.

### **Centre may execute proposed social security law in phases - Proposed social security law**

The Labour Ministry may implement its proposed social security law in a phased manner exempting small factories, employing up to 10 workers, from its ambit initially.

**Mains : GS 2** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

#### **Highlights**

In the first phase, small factories employing up to 10 workers may be exempt

#### **What does the proposed social security code contains?**

- The labour code on social security will provide social security cover to the entire workforce in the country, including self-employed and agricultural workers.
- Factories with even a single worker will have to contribute towards social security benefits, as per the proposed law.

The proposal have been one of the key demand of the central trade union organisations.

#### **Present situation**

- The provident fund and pension contribution, administered EPFO, is mandatory only for factories employing at least 20 workers at present.
- Medical benefits under the Employees’ State Insurance Act apply to factories with at least 10 workers

#### **Implications**

- Small and medium enterprises, which are mainly kept out of social security schemes at present, has raised concerns.
- According to the Sixth Economic Census, 98.62% of the total establishments in India – both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors – employ less than 10 workers.

#### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Social security cover for all, even informal workers, is an ambitious target for the Centre and stumbling blocks pave its path. Comment

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

### **Operation Clean Portal**

The Union Minister of Finance,, launched Operation Clean Portal;

**Mains : GS 2** e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

#### **About operation clean portal**

- It will enable citizen engagement for creating a tax compliant society and transparent tax administration
- It is a portal of **Operation Clean Money** (<https://www.cleanmoney.gov.in>)

#### **Features of the Operation Clean Money Portal**

- **Providing comprehensive information at one place** related to verification process and other issues.
- **Enabling Citizen Engagement for creating a tax compliant society** where every Indian takes pride in paying taxes. Citizens would be able to support the Operation Clean Money
- **Enabling Transparent Tax Administration** by sharing status reports and thematic analysis reports.

#### **About Operation Clean Money**

- Initial phase of the operation involves e-verification of large cash deposits made during 9th November to 30th December 2016.
- Data analytics has been used for comparing the demonetisation data with information in Income tax department's databases.
- ITD has enabled online verification of these transactions to reduce compliance cost for the taxpayers while optimising its resources.
- Data analytics will be used to select cases for verification, based on approved risk criteria.
- In case explanation of source of cash is found justified, the verification will be closed without any need to visit Income Tax Office. The verification will also be closed if the cash deposit is declared under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojna (PMGKY).

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

"Operation Clean Money ", sometimes seen in the news, is related to

a. Voluntary income disclosure scheme

- b. Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojna
- c. e-verification of large cash deposits during demonetization window
- d. Black money

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Explain the major steps taken by government to curb the Black money menace. How far do you think the government has been successful in eradicating the black money menace? Evaluate

**Sources:** [pib](#) [The Hindu](#)

### **The National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) - NTRO now under Intelligence Act**

The National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO), will now have the same “norms of conduct” as the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW).

**Mains : GS 2** Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International relations.

### **The News**

- The Home Ministry listed NTRO under The Intelligence Organisations (Restriction of Rights) Act, 1985
- The Act prevents employees of a notified agency from forming unions/associations, puts restrictions on the employee’s freedom of speech, bars any communication with the press, or publishing a book or other document without the permission of the head of the intelligence organisation.

### **What is NTRO?**

- The NTRO was created after the 1999 Kargil conflict as a dedicated technical intelligence agency.
- The National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO), originally known as the National Technical Facilities Organisation (NTFO), is a highly specialised technical intelligence gathering agency.
- While the agency does not affect the working of technical wings of various intelligence agencies, including those of the Indian Armed Forces, it acts as a super-feeder agency for providing technical intelligence to other agencies on internal and external security.
- It has been fighting tooth and nail to get included in the list as it has the right to lawfully intercept and monitor communications externally.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

National Technical Research Organisation sometimes seen in news is

- a. a wing of CSIR

- b. premier technical research organisation under ISRO
- c. a technical intelligence gathering agency
- d. None of the above

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#)

**New coal linkage policy - SHAKTI, or Scheme for Harnessing and Allocating Koyala (Coal) Transparently in India,**

The Cabinet gave its nod to the new Coal Linkage Policy

**Mains : GS 2** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

**GS 3** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

**Highlights**

- Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs had approved the policy to auction Coal India's Fuel Supply Agreements to thermal power producers.
- The approved framework ensures that all projects with linkages are supplied coal as per their entitlement.
- The linkages will be first awarded to State-owned discoms, which in turn will assign them to State/Central power producers on allocation-basis.
- For independent power producers with Power Purchase Agreements, the allocation will be via the reverse auction route.
- **Significance :** If the Coal Linkage Policy can ensure the flow of fuel to power plants at competitive rates, it can be a game-changer for power companies.

**SHAKTI**

- The changes were enabled through the introduction of a New Coal Allocation Policy for Power Sector. The policy has been named SHAKTI, or Scheme for Harnessing and Allocating Koyala (Coal) Transparently in India,

**Prelims perspective**

SHAKTI scheme recently in news pertains to

- a. women empowerment
- b. Revival of unused airstrips
- c. Coal allocation
- d. skill development of minorities

**Mains Perspective**

Similar questions [UPSC Mains 2015]

To what factors can the recent dramatic fall in equipment costs and tariff of solar energy be attributed? What implications does the trend have for the thermal power producers and the related industry?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Aadhaar authority to bring new layer of authentication**

After more than 13 crore Aadhaar numbers were leaked through several government websites, UIDAI is in talks to include a new layer of authentication through voice recognition.

**Mains : GS 2** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

#### **Highlights**

Nuance Communications, the company behind Apple's Siri voice-based assistant, has held early talks with the government to offer voice-based authentication, which the company claims is so far more secure and reliable than fingerprint scan and Iris scans.

#### **Voice biometrics**

- Voice biometrics identifies each individual through their unique 'voiceprint', which eliminates the need to remember and type passwords and PINs.
- The voice gets analysed and cross checked against more than 100 unique identifiers including behavioural features such as speed, cadence and pronunciation, and physical aspects including the shape of larynx, vocal tract and nasal passages.

*In India, Nuance is currently working with three banks including ICICI Bank to offer voice authentication technology to analyse and verify callers. Nuance has been in India for the last 11 years and is working with the government on multiple projects.*

#### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions [**UPSC Prelims 2014**]

In addition to fingerprint scanning, which of the following can be used in the biometric identification of a person?

1. Iris scanning
2. Retinal scanning
3. Voice recognition

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Sources:** [The Hindu Businessline](#)

### **New Bill to deter offenders' escape - Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2017**

The government has invited comments on a Bill that seeks to deter economic offenders from fleeing the country.

**Mains : GS 2** Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International relations.

#### **Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2017**

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- It seeks to deter economic offenders from fleeing the country by attaching and confiscating properties owned by them in India.
- The Bill makes provisions for a special court under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act to declare a person a 'Fugitive Economic Offender'.
- A Fugitive Economic Offender is a person who has an arrest warrant issued in respect of a scheduled offence and who leaves or has left India so as to avoid criminal prosecution, or refuses to return to India to face criminal prosecution.

#### **Why the bill?**

- The proposed 'Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2017' comes against the background of India seeking the extradition of Vijay Mallya from the U.K. for defaulted loans to banks.
- There have been several instances of economic offenders fleeing the jurisdiction of Indian courts, anticipating the commencement, or during the pendency, of criminal proceedings,

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

#### **Chance of newborn survival: Somalia better off than India**

India falls 11 places, holds 154th position in Global Burden of Disease rankings. As per the study newborns in India have a lesser chance of survival than babies born in Afghanistan and Somalia.

**Mains : GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources. Issues relating to poverty and hunger.

#### **Highlights of the latest Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study**

- In the GBD rankings for **healthcare access and quality (HAQ)**, India ranks 154 out of 195 countries.
- Further, India's healthcare index of 44.8 is the lowest among the sub-continental countries, as Sri Lanka (72.8), Bangladesh (51.7), Bhutan (52.7), and Nepal (50.8) all fared better. The top-ranked nation was Andorra with an overall score of 95 and the lowest-ranked nation was Central African Republic at 29.

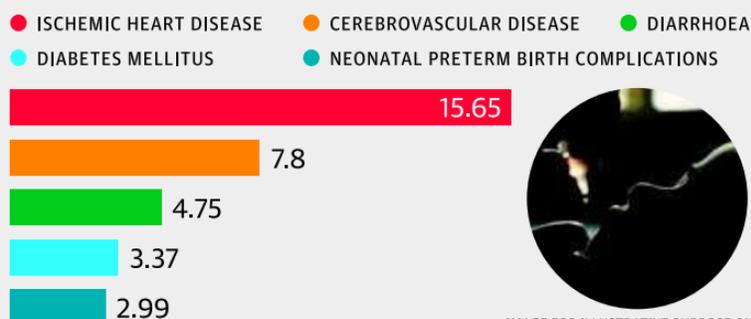
#### **About health care access and quality (HAQ)**

- The Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors study is put together by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), an independent population health research centre associated with the University of Washington, along with a consortium of 2,300 researchers in more than 130 countries.
- The HAQ Index is based on death rates from 32 ailments that could be avoided by timely medical intervention.

## The healthcare quagmire

India's rank in neonatal diseases and chronic kidney ailments is among the worst in the world

### Top five causes of death or injury (% value)



### India's rank out of 195 countries

Healthcare Access Quality	154
Neonatal disorders	185
Chronic kidney diseases	176
Tuberculosis	166
Diabetes mellitus	151
Diphtheria	133

IMAGE FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSE ONLY

SOURCE: INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH METRICS AND EVALUATION

## Prelims perspective

Model questions

The global burden of diseases is study is conducted by

- The Lancet
- Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME),
- Doctors without borders
- World health organisation

## Mains Perspective

Model questions

Having a strong economy or having a great medical technology does not guarantee good health care. Discuss

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

## 'SEVA' App

Shri Piyush Goyal launches SEVA app.

**Prelims** : Indian Polity and Governance - Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

**Mains** : **GS 2** e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential;

### About SEVA app - Saral Eindhyan Vitaran Application (SEVA)

- SEVA would increase Consumer Connect as well as Transparency and Accountability in Coal dispatch
- The app is developed in-house by Coal India Limited (CIL) for power sector consumers.

- SEVA is a part of 'Digital India' initiative, which is aimed at increasing the Consumer Connect as well as the Transparency and Accountability in Coal dispatch.
- The mobile app and the online dashboard monitor the movement of coal from mines allocated to the power sector.
- Non-power sector mines would also be added in this app.
- It will provide a summary of quantity of coal dispatched along with grades for the given day, month, and the latest yearly updates.
- The app also provides information on rake movement including latest status of indents of rake, allotment and loading. This would help consumers making advance logistics planning.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

SEVA app recently in news is related to

- a. Coal linkage policy
- b. monitor movement of coal
- c. to provide information on government services
- d. None of the above

**Sources:** [The Hindu BusinessLine](#) [pib](#)

### **'Rich get bail, poor remain in jails'**

The latest report by law commission points out that while the rich and powerful get bail easily, the poor continue to languish in jail.

**Mains : GS 2** Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary Ministries

### **Highlights of the report**

- In most jurisdictions including India the powerful, rich and influential obtain bail promptly and with ease, whereas the masses/the common/the poor languish in jails.
- Prolonged periods in prison where undertrials and convicts were not segregated would only make hardened criminals of the former
- A majority of the undertrials (70.6 per cent) are illiterate or semiliterate and belong to socio-economically marginalised groups.
- Sixty-seven per cent of the prison population is awaiting trial.
- A majority of the arrests are for "very minor prosecutions.
- Over 60 per cent of arrests were unnecessary and such arrests accounted for 42.3 per cent of jail expenditure.
- Inconsistency in bail system may be one of the reasons for the overcrowding of prisons.
- The prison occupancy is 114 percentage.

### **The way forward - recommendations made by Law commission**

- Law Commission advocated relaxation of bail provisions for undertrial prisoners
- Undertrials who have completed one-third of the maximum sentence for offences up to seven years be released on bail.
- Undertrials awaiting trial for offences punishable with imprisonment of more than seven years, should be bailed out if they have completed one-half of their sentence.
- New legal provisions for remission should be included to cover those undertrials who have already endured the full length of the maximum sentence.

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Examine the constraints faced by the poor and vulnerable in accessing the judicial system. What reform measures should be adopted to address these constraints?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Cabinet approves policy for providing preference to 'Make in India' in Government procurements**

The Union Cabinet approved a policy for providing preference to 'Make in India' in government procurements.

**Mains : GS 2** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

### **Highlights of the new policy**

- Under the policy, preference in Government procurement will be given to local suppliers.

*Local suppliers are those whose goods or services meet prescribed minimum thresholds (ordinarily 50%) for local content. Local content is essentially domestic value addition.*

- In procurement of goods for Rs. 50 lakhs and less, and where the Nodal Ministry determines that there is sufficient local capacity and local competition, only local suppliers will be eligible.
- Small purchases of less than Rs.5 lakhs are exempted.
- The order also covers autonomous bodies, government companies/ entities under the government's control.
- The policy requires that specifications in tenders must not be restrictive and should not result in unreasonable exclusion of local suppliers who would otherwise be eligible,
- The policy lays down a procedure for verification of local content

### **Significance**

- It will give a substantial boost to domestic manufacturing and service provision, thereby creating employment.

- It will stimulate the flow of capital and technology into domestic manufacturing and services.
- It will provide a further thrust towards manufacture of parts, components, sub-components etc. of these items, in line with the vision of 'Make in India'.
- Procurement by the Government is substantial in amount and can contribute towards achieving policy objectives under Make in India initiative.

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Can Make in India alter India's commodities landscape? Evaluate

**Sources:** [pib](#)

### **Prices of 31 more drugs capped - National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA)**

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) capped the prices of 31 more drugs.

**Mains : GS 2** Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International relations.

### **Highlights**

- List of essential medicines based on disease prevalence
- With these 31 drugs, the NPPA has brought 791 medicines under price control.
- There are 829 drugs on the National List of Essential Medicines, 2015, all of which will be brought under price control.

### **The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA),**

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), is an independent body of experts under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, constituted inter alia, to fix/revise the prices of controlled bulk drugs and formulations and to enforce prices and availability of the medicines in the country, under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 1995

### **Drug Prices Control order**

- The prices of drugs that figure in national list of essential medicines are controlled by the government. These price limits are given effect by passing the order referred to as DPCO.
- Under the provisions of DPCO 2013, the prices of drugs that figure in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) are monitored and controlled by the regulator, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority.
- In December 2015, the government had updated the NLEM list.

### **Functions of NPPA**

- Fixation and revision of prices of scheduled bulk drugs and formulations

- Monitoring of prices of decontrolled drugs and formulations and recovering amounts overcharged by manufacturers for the controlled drugs from the consumers.
- Implementation and enforcement of the provisions of Drug Price Control Order
- To monitor the availability of drugs, identify shortages, if any, and to take remedial steps;
- Other matter related to drug pricing and policy

### **Prelims Perspective**

Model questions

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority comes under which ministry?

- a) Ministry of Health
- b) Ministry of Social justice
- c) Ministry of Chemicals and fertilizers
- d) Ministry of Commerce

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Recently government has capped the stent prices bringing respite to heart patients, but whether the government will be able to effectively monitor the practices of the hospitals exploiting patients is another matter . The government needs to find new ways if it has to make ceiling price fixation on medicines meaningful. Comment

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [NPPA](#) [The Hindu Businessline](#)

### **Strategic ties with foreign OEMs - Strategic partnership in defence manufacturing**

The Union government will sound out five or six private sector majors to execute mega defence deals in four key areas – submarines, single-engine fighter aircraft, helicopters and armoured vehicles.

**Mains : GS 2** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

### **Highlights**

- Indian firms will be partners in new model for defence manufacturing
- Private sector majors will be selected as the strategic partner for each segment and they will tie up with the foreign OEMs under the new strategic partnership policy for the private sector under defence procurement policy.
- While the SP policy is for the private sector, the government has stated that it look at the feasibility of how defence public sector undertakings (DPSU) can be involved in the process and what their contribution would be.
- There are broadly six or seven companies viewing to become strategic partners which will be selected by a two-stage evaluation process.

### **What is Strategic partnership model?**

- It will allow local private sector companies to form manufacturing joint ventures with foreign defence equipment makers
- Under the “strategic partnership” model, the government will shortlist and then pick Indian companies to join forces with foreign firms to make fighter jets, helicopters, armoured vehicles and submarines.
- The policy is in line with government’s ‘Make in India’ programme as well as efforts by the Indian private sector to make inroads into the lucrative defence equipment business.

*The Indian defence industry is currently dominated by state-owned manufacturers, including HAL.*

### **Mains perspective**

What are the reasons behind India not having a robust defence industry. Examine the constraints and give your suggestions.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [Livemint](#)

### **Centre confirms 3 Zika cases in Gujarat - Zika Virus**

The Union Health Ministry has confirmed that three cases of Zika were reported from Ahmedabad in January. The information was made public five months after the cases were reported, as the World Health Organization (WHO) has now published a ‘member state report’ on its website.

**Mains : GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### **The News**

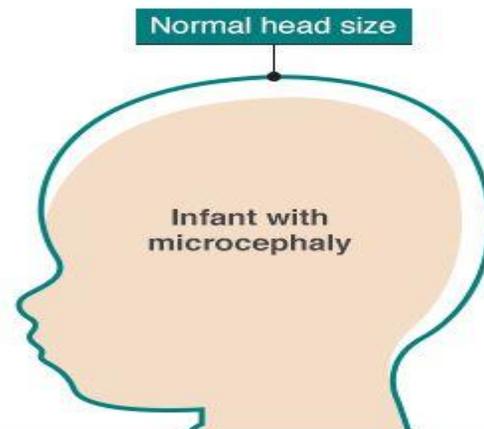
- WHO report says infections were reported five months ago
- Three laboratory-confirmed cases of Zika virus were reported from Bapunagar area in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, the Ministry said.
- The Zika virus is transmitted through the bite of an infected *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which also transmits dengue and chikungunya.

### **Zika Virus**

- Zika virus disease is caused by a virus transmitted primarily by *Aedes* mosquitoes.
- People with Zika virus disease can have symptoms including mild fever, skin rash, conjunctivitis, muscle and joint pain, malaise or headache. These symptoms normally last for 2-7 days.

## Microcephaly

- Symptoms include below-average head size
- Often caused by failure of brain to grow at normal rate
- Head circumference measuring **less than 31.5-32cm** at birth
- Affects **25,000 children** in US each year



Source: ADAM, WHO

BBC

- There is scientific consensus that Zika virus is a cause of microcephaly and Guillain-Barré syndrome. Links to other neurological complications are also being investigated.

## Guillain-Barré syndrome

Guillain-Barré syndrome is a condition in which the immune system attacks the nerves. A rare nervous system disorder, Guillain-Barré syndrome, can cause temporary paralysis has been linked to the infection.

## Prelims Perspective

Similar Question from **[UPSC Prelims 2015]**

Among the following, which were frequently mentioned in the news for the outbreak of Ebola virus recently?

- (a) Syria and Jordan
- (b) Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia
- (c) Philippines and Papua New Guinea
- (d) Jamaica, Haiti and Surinam

## Mains Perspective

Questions related to health sector **[UPSC Mains 2015]**

- Public Health system has limitation in providing universal health coverage. Do you think that private sector can help in bridging the gap? What other viable alternatives do you suggest?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [BBC](#) [WHO](#)

## Cattle slaughter

The Centre has banned the sale of cattle for slaughter at animal markets across the country.

**Mains :Mains : GS 2 GS3** Issues related to rights, food processing industry agriculture

**GS 3** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact

assessment.

## Stringent rules

The Environment Ministry has notified the stringent Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules, 2017, derived from Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960



A file photo of cattle being transported in a vehicle. ■ VIPIN CHANDRAN

■ Applies to the whole of India, except Jammu and Kashmir

■ Cattle cannot be brought to an animal market for sale or slaughter

### ■ Animal market committee

It provides for the constitution of a District Animal Market Monitoring Committee (DAMMC), headed by a Magistrate, to regulate cattle markets

■ Every new cattle market shall, within three months, register itself with the DAMMC

■ Under the new rules, cruel practices have been prohibited including slaughter, painting of horns and cutting the ears of buffaloes

■ Provision for hiring veterinary inspectors, who shall screen the animals before they enter a market for trade

■ **Caging of animals:** The Member Secretary of the DAMMC is duty-bound to ensure that no animal is kept in a pen or cage that is unsuitable for its size

*Image : The Hindu*

## Highlights

- Centre has notified rules to prevent sale of cows and other bovines for slaughter at markets
- Under a notification, titled the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules, 2017, those who wish to sell cattle — bulls, cows, buffaloes, steers, heifers and camels — may do so only after they formally state that the animals have not been “brought to the market for sale for slaughter”.
- At the same time, buyers of cattle at animal markets will have to verify they are agriculturalists and declare that they will not sell the animal/s for a period of six months from the date of purchase.

## Implications

- The notification drew the strongest response from Kerala, where Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan declared it was part of a plan to further the RSS agenda.
- While individuals have not been prevented from selling cattle for slaughter, representatives from the meat and livestock industry have expressed serious concern about the impact of the notification.
- While the Centre is empowered to frame rules, implementation of the regulation of livestock falls under the State government’s ambit.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Madras HC stays new curbs on cattle trade**

The Madras High Court stayed the operation of Rules 22(b)(iii) and 22(e) of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Market) Rules 2017 notified by the Centre.

## **Legality of rules under challenge**



### **BENCH OBSERVATIONS**

**RULE 22(b) (III)** requires that a written declaration should be given saying the cattle has not been brought to the market for sale for slaughter

**RULE 22(e)** requires that the purchaser shall not sell the animal for slaughter, nor sacrifice the animal for religious purpose

- This court is not in full agreement as to whether the presumption is in favour of the Central government when a particular rule is introduced not by Parliament, but by the executive

- The subject of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act is in the Concurrent List. At the same time, slaughtering of animals is exclusively in the State List

- In the above background, it should be tested if the impugned rule is within the constitutional or legal framework

*Image : The Hindu*

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Examine the impact of ban on cattle slaughter at animal markets on food processing industry. Give your suggestions

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Tissue-matched transplants offer hope to thalasseemics - Thalassemic**

Transplantation of a special kind of stem cells found in the bone marrow has been the only curative option for patients with thalassemia major A recent study conducted

found 95% success rate in stem cell transplants from unrelated donors

**Mains : GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### **What is thalassemia ?**

- It is a genetic disorder characterised by inability to produce normal, adult haemoglobin leading to severe anaemia
- The genetic disorder involves the absence of or errors in genes responsible for production of haemoglobin, Each red blood cell can contain between 240 and 300 million molecules of haemoglobin.
- The severity of the disease depends on the mutations involved in the genes, and their interplay.
- It has wide-ranging effects on the human body like iron overload, bone deformities and in severe cases can cause heart diseases.
- The disease has no cure and people living with thalassaemia require regular blood transfusions as an effective measure to prolong life.

### **Cure**

- Transplantation of a special kind of stem cells found in the bone marrow has been the only curative option for patients with thalassemia major
- Only 30-35% of such patients have a suitable tissue-matched donor in the family, a majority of them rely on regular blood transfusions .
- A study at found out that of 25 thalassemia major patients, who underwent stem cell transplantation from tissue-matched unrelated donors, none rejected the donated cells.

### **The issues**

- India is the thalassaemia capital of the world with 40 million carriers and over 1,00,000 thalassaemia majors under blood transfusion every month.
- Despite this, there has been no move to put in place a prevention and control programme at the national level.
- With preventive health checks not being the norm in India, people suffering from thalassaemia are unknowingly passing on this genetic disorder to their children.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

thalassaemia sometimes seen in news is a

- a. heart disease
- b. genetic disorder characterised by abnormal production of haemoglobin
- c. genetic disorder affecting children under 5 year
- d. None of the above

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [WHO](#)

### **Tabs to watch over truant teachers**

Four states will start to use tablet PC's and smartphones to keep track on teachers and penalise them for not absenteeism.

**Mains** : **GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### **Highlights**

- The Centre set to launch a new programme under which attendance of government school teachers would be tracked by a GPS-enabled tablet device.
- The plan will also help create a national real-time education database.
- It will cover school-level infrastructure and quality of teaching and learning.
- The tablet devices will monitor parameters such as dropout rates and aspects like availability of drinking water, toilets and laboratories. Eventually, they could deliver training content.
- Tablet devices will be geotagged so that teachers cannot mark their attendance from external locations, and a biometric check linked to a State-level teacher database can be done

### **Significance**

- Teacher absenteeism is 25% on an average in government schools and a key reason for poor learning outcomes
- States believe the investment will pay for itself as teachers will not be paid during unauthorised absence.

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Examine the role of technology in providing quality education in the country.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Govt launches microsite that links websites of various depts - 'threeyears.mygov.in'**

To make the government websites more user-friendly and make it easier for visitors to understand government programmes and updates, a new site (microsite) was launched.

**Mains** : **GS 2** e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential;

### **Highlights**

- An animated character called 'Prerna' would take the user through each section in the new site (microsite) — 'threeyears.mygov.in' —
- Weblinks or websites of the government departments will also be linked to this portal
- The portal will be available in 12 regional languages
- The websites linked to the portal include [agricoop.in](#), [data.gov.in](#), [ecourts.gov.in](#), [farmer.gov.in](#), [passportindia.gov.in](#), [uidai.gov.in](#) among others.

- This microsite is a one-stop platform serving as a repository of information pertaining to the initiatives and achievements of the government in the last three years.
- The information is categorised in 11 narratives such as ‘Decisive and Bold Government’, ‘Government Empowering Gaav and Garib’, ‘Honest and Incorruptible Government’, ‘A Government That Cares’, ‘Government for the people, of the people, by the people’, ‘Brand India on the rise’, and ‘Harnessing Yuva Shakti for a New India’.
- Under each narrative, a user will find different sub-themes that will lead to interactive videos and infographics through Prerna.
- A ‘Media Zone’ would provide infographics, flyers and other downloadable materials that can be downloaded and read.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **“One IP- Two Dispensaries” and “Aadhaar Based Online Claim Submission” Schemes**

Two schemes “One IP- Two Dispensaries” and “Aadhaar based Online Claim Submission” was launched by the government on the occasion of International Labour Day.

**Under One IP- Two Dispensaries scheme** ESIC has given an option to an Insured Person (IP) to choose two dispensaries, one for self and another for family through an employer. This will benefit all IPs, especially migrant workers who are working in other than home State, while their families are living in their native States.

**Under Aadhaar based Online Claim Submission scheme** all EPF Members who have activated their UAN and seeded their KYC (Aadhaar) with EPFO will be able to apply for PF final settlement, Pension withdrawal benefit and PF part withdrawal from the their UAN Interface directly. The three forms collectively form more than 80% of EPFO’s claim workload.

### **Department of Telecom (DoT) Launches Tarang Sanchar.**

Tarang Sanchar, a web portal for Information sharing on Mobile Towers and EMF Emission Compliances was launched by department of telecom. The web portal will go a long way in clearing the myths and misconceptions of public on mobile towers and emissions from them. The portal will empower common man to know about towers working in a particular locality and whether they are compliant to the EMF emission norms defined by the Government. The portal will allow users to get a tower or base station checked for radiation emission, for a fee of Rs 4,000.

### **Prakash Javadekar Launches VIDYA VEERTA ABHIYAN**

Union Minister of Human Resource Development launched the VIDYA VEERTA ABHIYAN. Under the campaign a wall of valour will be built in colleges and universities across the country and this will be built on contributory funding by students and teachers on voluntary basis. He said this wall will be 15X20 feet in size and will depict the portraits of all the 21 Paramveer Chakra recipients the highest wartime gallantry award.

### **M/O Culture Develops “E-Guide (Audio-Visual)” App to Create Awareness for Tourists**

To create awareness on “Swachhata”, Ministry of Culture has developed “e-guide (Audio-Visual) App e3.guide.net.in” to create awareness for the tourists visiting National Museum.

### **Haryana House passes motion for separate HC**

Haryana Assembly on Thursday unanimously passed a resolution, urging the Parliament to effect an appropriate amendment in the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966 to provide for the creation of a separate High Court for the State in Chandigarh.

### **“Bharat ke Veer”**

A modest Rs. 2.1 crore has been donated by the people to a fund set up a month ago by the Home Ministry to help families of paramilitary personnel who laid down their lives fighting extremists. About Rs. 60 lakh of the said amount has been received for 25 personnel massacred by Naxals at Sukma in Chhattisgarh on April 24. Web Portal and mobile application named “Bharat ke Veer” was inaugurated on the occasion of Valour Day of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). The portal is an IT based platform, with an objective to enable willing donors to contribute towards the family of a braveheart who sacrificed his/her life in line of duty. The amount so donated will be credited to the account of ‘Next of Kin’ of those Central Armed Police Force/Central Para Military Force soldiers.

### **SAMADHAN’ for use in security operations**

The Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh carried out a review of the Left Wing Extremism (LWE) situation in the ten LWE affected States. The Home Minister enunciated an operational strategy ‘SAMADHAN’ to fight Left Wing Extremism. The elements of this strategy are S for Smart Leadership, A for Aggressive Strategy, M for Motivation and Training, A for Actionable Intelligence, D for Dashboard-based Key Result Areas and Key Performance Indicators, H for Harnessing Technology, A for Action Plan for Each Theatre and N for No access to Financing.

### **Entire Assam declared ‘disturbed’**

The Centre has declared the entire State of Assam a “disturbed” area under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act for three more months, citing various violent activities by insurgent groups ULFA, NDFB and others.

### **e-Krishi Samvad launched**

e-Krishi Samvad is internet-based interface and is a unique platform that will provide direct and effective solutions to the problems faced by farmers and stakeholders in the agriculture sector. People can directly connect to the ICAR website and get the appropriate solutions from the subject matter specialists and institutes through web or SMS. Stakeholders can upload photographs related to diseases of the crops, animals or fishes for diagnostics and remedial measures instantly from the specialists. e-Krishi Samvad is useful to get information pertaining to welfare and development of agricultural stakeholders.

### **Minority status only if trusts enrol on NITI site**

Educational trusts and societies seeking minority status will now be required to register as non-governmental organisation with the NITI Aayog, whether they are seeking government aid or not. The registration with the NITI Aayog portal Darpan is likely to put all the financial transactions of the trust and its office-bearers under government scanner as details such as PAN and Aadhaar of all trustees and office-bearers will be required for the enrolment. The rule will not be applicable to institutions run by individuals. Minority status permits schools and colleges to have a say in the reservation quantum and limits interference from the government.

### **EPFO’s Citizens’ Charter 2017 & e-court management system**

The Minister of State for Labour & Employment launched EPFO’s Citizens’ Charter 2017 and e-court management system. Citizens’ Charter 2017 is an attempt to bring transparency and accountability on the part of EPFO and make service delivery system and grievance redressal mechanism more efficient

EPFO e-court Management System’s objective is a transparent and electronic case management system which will cater to aspirations of all stakeholders – the employers, the employees, litigants and CBT.

### **Swachh Bharat App Launched in National Museum**

“Swachh Bharat App” has been launched in National Museum under Ministry of Culture by the Minister of State (I/C) for Culture & Tourism Dr. Mahesh Sharma. The main focus of this “Swachh Bharat App” is to basically involve people actively to become part of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Movement). When you are in the monument or Museum it will deliver you the message about Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and ask you to

report the garbage around you. Once you start the App it will ask to take photograph of the garbage and write the comment and just submit. It will be reported to the authority on the backend.

### **Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports to Initiate “Adopt A Slum” Campaign in Delhi**

Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports, Shri Vijay Goel today announced “Adopt a Slum” - a new campaign to mark completion of three years of the Government. The idea is to initiate developmental work in the slums and help the slum-dwellers in resolving various issues. Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, along with Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, under the aegis of the Ministry, will initiate “Adopt a Slum” campaign and groups like NSS, public schools, rotary clubs, will pool in with efforts and manpower.

### **Darwaza Band for open defecation**

The centre launched an aggressive new campaign titled 'Darwaza Band' to promote toilet use and freedom from open defecation across the country's villages. The campaign is produced by the MDWS under Swachh Bharat Mission The 'Darwaza Band' campaign has been supported by the World Bank and is being rolled out countrywide immediately after the launch. It is designed to encourage behaviour change in men who have toilets but are not using them. A part of the campaign also features actor, Ms Anushka Sharma, who will be seen encouraging women to stand up for this issue in their villages and assume a leadership role.

### **Prakash Javadekar launches UGC App to fight Ragging**

Union Human Resource Development launched an Anti-Ragging Mobile App introduced by the University Grants Commission (UGC). The mobile app will help students register complaints to counter the menace of ragging.

## GS 2 International Relations

### **ADB eyes Delhi as regional hub - Asian Development Bank (ADB)**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has operationally started working to create several regional hubs including New Delhi as one for South Asia

**Mains : GS 2** Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

#### **Details**

- The ADB has started outposting people and staff and started working on the idea of hub.
- Setting up of regional centres might help in reducing time lag for disbursement of loans.

- ADB will continue to strengthen its resident missions by providing them greater authority, and out-posting more staff

### **Asian Development Bank (ADB)**

- The Asian Development Bank was set up on 1966 with its headquarters in Manila Philippines.
- The Asian Development Bank aims for an Asia and Pacific free from poverty.
- Its mission is to help developing member countries reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of their people.
- During the 1960s, ADB focused much of its assistance on food production and rural development.
- ADB is composed of 67 members, 48 of which are from the Asia and Pacific region.
- India, is a founding member of the ADB and its fourth-largest shareholder.
- At the end of 2014, Japan holds the largest proportion of shares at 15.7%. The United States holds 15.6%, China holds 6.5%, India holds 6.4%, and Australia holds 5.8

### **Prelims perspective**

#### Model questions

Consider the following statements about Asian Development bank.

1. China is the largest shareholder of ADB
2. It has membership only from Asian countries
3. The Asian Development Bank aims for an Asia and Pacific free from poverty.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 3 only
- b. 3 only
- c. 1 and 2 only
- d. All of the above

### **Mains Perspective**

#### Model questions

How far multilateral institutions have been successful in achieving its stated objective of eliminating poverty? Explain

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [ADB](#) [Wikipedia](#)

### **Recourse to ICJ 'carefully considered' - International Court of Justice**

India got a stay on Pakistan's death sentence to arrested former Navy official Kulbhushan Jadhav at International Court of Justice.

**Mains : GS 2** Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate. India and its neighborhood- relations.

### **Details**

- The decision to resort to arbitration at the International Court of Justice, after a

gap of 46 years, was aimed to save Mr. Jadhav's life.

- Despite requesting the government of Pakistan, India did not get the documents on the case.
- India approached ICJ after Kulbhushan Jadav was sentenced to death by a Pakistan military court. India had repeatedly sought consular access to Mr. Jadhav and had been repeatedly denied it.
- India has in the past refused to accept the jurisdiction of the ICJ on issues such as the Atlantique aircraft incident of 1999 and in the Saurav Kalia case. However, the MEA spokesperson sought to differentiate between the consular and human rights issues.

### **The International Court of Justice**

- The international court of Justice is the principal judicial organ of United Nations. It was established in June 1945 by charter of United Nations.
- The seat of the Court is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands). Of the six principal organs of the United Nations, it is the only one not located in New York.
- The Court's role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.
- The Court is composed of 15 judges, who are elected for terms of office of nine years by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council. It is assisted by a Registry, its administrative organ. Its official languages are English and French

### **Prelims Perspective**

Which among the following statements are correct about International Court of Justice?

1. The International court of Justice is the principal judicial organ of United Nations.
2. The seat of the Court is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands).

Select the correct answer from the codes given below:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both
- D. None

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

India and its neighborhood- relations is a very important topic for civil services examination. Questions are sure to figure from this part of the syllabus. To see the question related to India and neighbourhood relations please visit our [IAS preparation page](#)

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [ICJ](#)

### **Xi Jinping evokes Panchsheel as India skips Belt and Road meet**

Chinese President proposed five principles of peaceful co-existence or Panchsheel – the brainchild of China, India and Myanmar in the 1950s – as the mantra for advancing the Belt and Road Initiative (B&RI)

**Mains : GS 2** India and its neighborhood- relations. Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

#### **Highlights of the Belt and road initiative**

- India skipped participating in the initiative citing as a mark of protest against the infringement of its sovereignty by the China- Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- The meeting was attended by several countries including Japan and US
- China and Pakistan reportedly signed a MoU entailing a mega-investment of up to 50 billion dollars in power projects which is set to come up in the disputed Gilgit-Baltistan area.
- Pakistan Prime Minister underscored the need to resolve conflict through talks.

#### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

With reference to India's growing concerns over Chinese hegemonic intentions in South Asia and the 'Indo-Pacific' region, discuss the merits and demerits in joining the OBOR initiative?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **G7 financial leaders reiterate FX pledges, vow more cyber cooperation - G7 nations**

Financial leaders of G7 pledged stronger cooperation against cyber crime and not to use foreign exchange to gain competitive advantage, but stuck to their cautious wording on trade.

**Mains : GS 2** Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

#### **Highlights**

- The final communique of the meeting said the seven countries would use all policy tools - fiscal, structural and monetary - to boost economic growth.
- G7 financial leaders would strengthen cooperation to counter cyber threats such as a global online attack
- Fiscal policy should be used to help job creation while keeping public debt on a sustainable path and monetary policy should help economic activity without fuelling strong inflation.

- The meeting did not endorse free trade and has not rejected protectionism,

### **Group of Seven - G7**

- The Group of 7 (G7) is a group consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- The European Union is also represented within the G7.
- These countries are the seven major advanced economies as reported by the International Monetary Fund: the G7 countries represent more than 64% of the net global wealth (\$263 trillion).
- A very high net national wealth and a very high Human Development Index are the main requirements to be a member of this group.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Which of the following country or organisation is not a member of G7?

- a. Russia
- b. Canada
- c. USA
- d. Italy

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

How far do you think international organisations have been successful improving economic ties between various nations?

**Sources:** The Hindu [Wikipedia](#) [Reuters](#)

### **Iran sets new conditions for gas block**

In fresh conditions, Iran wants India to pay more than triple the gas price for award of the coveted Farzad-B natural gas block to ONGC Videsh (OVL).

**Mains : GS 2** International relations.Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

### **What are conditions put forward by Iran?**

- Iran wants India to buy all of the natural gas to be produced from the Persian Gulf block at a price equivalent to the rate Qatar charges for selling liquefied natural gas (LNG) to India under a long-term deal.
- The rate being sought by Iran is triple of what OVL is willing to pay for the gas during [times of] low global oil prices.
- After the lifting of western sanctions, Iran is playing hardball over award of the field which was discovered by OVL

### **Farzad-B**

Farzad-B was discovered by OVL in the Farsi block about 10 years ago. The project has so far cost the OVL-led consortium, which includes Oil India Ltd. and Indian Oil Corp., over \$80 million.

### **Prelims Perspective**

Farzad-B some times seen in news is located in which of the following country

- a. Iraq
- b. Saudi Arabia
- c. Iran
- d. Pakistan

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

In respect of India-Iran relations, discuss how international factors influence foreign policy

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **RCEP- Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**

India is under pressure to agree to eliminate import duty on at least 90 per cent of its traded goods as part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

**Mains :** GS 2 India and its neighborhood- relations.

Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

#### **Highlights**

- It is difficult for India to agree to eliminate duties on 90 per cent of items for all members the
- India might consider eliminating duties for ASEAN countries but it will be impossible to agree to such deep cuts for China.
- An alternative suggested in The 'opt out and reciprocity' principle which proposes that if a country cannot agree to what the majority of members were ready for, it can opt out from that provision and wait for a time till it is ready to sign up.
- India seeks to protect its markets from China, New Zealand and Australia by seeking 'deviations', under which it would offer certain members smaller concessions than those offered to all countries.

#### **RCEP – Regional Comprehensive economic partnership**

- RCEP is the proposed mega-regional Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between 16 Asia-Pacific countries including India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the 10-member ASEAN bloc.
- **Volume of market :** The agreement will cover a market of over three billion people in these countries -- whose total GDP is more than \$17 trillion and account for 40 per cent of world trade.
- Objectives of the trade agreement : Open up trade in goods and services as well as liberalise investment policies in member countries

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#)

### **RCEP: India upset over slow progress on services talks**

India is disappointed over the inadequate progress in talks on services trade liberalisation in RCEP.

#### **Highlights**

- The Negotiations for services trade liberalisation is not keeping pace with goods.
- Following economic slowdown and the consequent job losses, most countries in the grouping have turned protectionist with regard to temporary movement of skilled workers.
- India fears that the issue is getting mixed up with immigration.
- The talks are likely to stretch into the first half of 2018 as several aspects of goods, services and investment have not yet been negotiated.
- In return for eliminating or reducing tariffs on goods, India wants RCEP member countries to work toward liberalisation across all modes of services, including movement of professionals.

*India is keen that the FTA ensures easier temporary movement of such professionals as well as an 'RCEP Travel Card' for business people.*

#### **Prelims Perspective**

The term 'Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership' often appears in the news in the context of the affairs of a group of countries known as **[UPSC Prelims 2016]**

- a) G20
- b) ASEAN
- c) SCO
- d) SAARC

Solution: B

#### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

For India, RCEP presents a decisive platform to influence its strategic and economic status in Asia- Pacific region. Discuss

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#)

### **No room yet for India in NSG, says China Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)**

China said it would oppose India's unilateral entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), pending a consensus on the membership of the nuclear weapon states that have not signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).

**Mains : GS 2** Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

#### **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)**

- The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is a group of nuclear supplier countries that seeks to contribute to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons through the implementation of two sets of Guidelines for nuclear exports and nuclear-related exports.
- **Origin:** The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) was created following the explosion in 1974 of a nuclear device by a non-nuclear-weapon State- India.
- **Non Proliferation principle :** Under this principle adopted in 1994, a nuclear supplier, authorises a transfer (of fuel or related technology) only when satisfied that the transfer would not contribute to the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

### Organisation

- The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) works on the basis of consensus.
- Overall responsibility for activities lies within NSG Plenary meetings that are held once a year.
- A rotating Chair has the overall responsibility for coordination of work and outreach activities.
- **NSG Troika :** The current NSG Chair, together with the previous and the future Chair, form the NSG Troika.
- **NSG Point of Contact :** The Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organisations in Vienna, acting as a Point of Contact, carries out a practical support function.
- **Members :** Presently it has 48 members

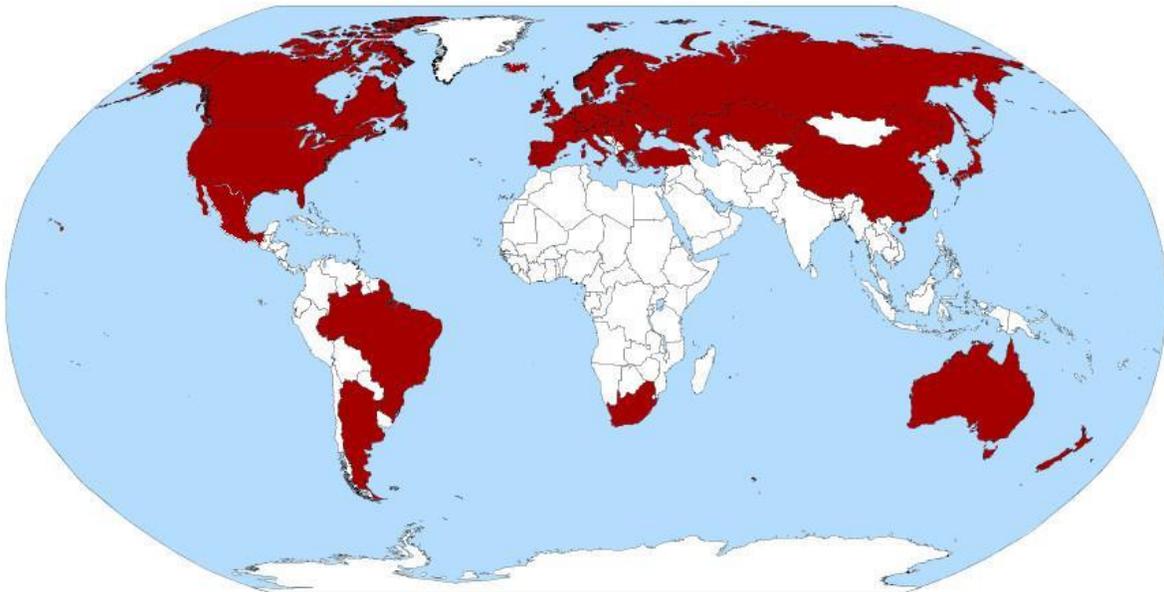


Image : <http://www.nuclearsuppliersgroup.org/en/>

### China's stand on India's NSG membership

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- China maintains that nuclear Non Proliferation treaty that India has not signed is essential to prevent the spread of atomic weapons.
- China also wants two step intergovernmental process to address the issue of non-NPT states participation in NSG groups
- China further wants common criteria while considering new membership so that no special concession for India is made.
- In talks with China India insisted that the NSG was not a non-proliferation, but an “export control,” mechanism. Therefore, India’s NSG bid should be de-linked from the criterion of NPT membership.

### **Prelims Perspective**

A question can be expected from any of the following areas

- Any facts about NSG regarding its membership, criteria for getting membership...

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

- Considering the efforts India is making to gain entry to NSG evaluate the merits of NSG membership against the efforts taken to gain entry to NSG

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [NSG](#)

### **India to fund river dredging in Bangladesh to ease cargo movement to North-East**

As part of the India-Bangladesh cooperation for inland water transport, India will finance 80 per cent of the estimated ₹220 crore required for dredging to maintain navigability in the Sirajganj-Daikhawa on the Jamuna Ashugunj-Karimgunj stretch of the Kushiara river in Bangladesh.

**Mains : GS 2** India and its neighborhood- relations.

- The Jamuna is the local name of the Brahmaputra in Bangladesh.
- The Kushiara is known as the Barak river in India.
- Both the stretches are part of the India-Bangladesh protocol routes.
- Dredging will help improve cargo movement from Kolkata to North-East through Bangladesh.
- India signed an MoU for fairway development across the stretches with Bangladesh during the visit of Bangladeshi Prime Minister
- Dhaka allowed transshipment of goods through Ashugunj port, close to Tripura border, last year.
- The Sirajganj-Daikhawa stretch would help create a nearly 4,000-km-long fairway from Varanasi in UP to Sadiya in upper Assam (bordering Arunachal Pradesh) through Bangladesh.

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

India and its neighborhood- relations is a topic which is of great importance in Mains

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examination. Every year questions were asked based on this topic. Visit our IAS preparation page to know more

**Sources:** [The Hindu Businessline](#)

### **Cabinet approves MoU on Third Line of Credit of US \$ 4.5 billion to Bangladesh for implementation of developmental projects**

The Union Cabinet has given ex-post facto approval to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Third Line of Credit (LoC) of US \$ 4.5 billion to Bangladesh for implementation of developmental projects. The MoU provides for deepening the strategic partnership, development of infrastructure in Bangladesh, improving connectivity between India and Bangladesh, thus enhancing accessibility to our North Eastern Region, as well as creating new business opportunities for Indian companies in Bangladesh. The MoU specifies a list of projects which will be undertaken under the concessional financing system. This provides an opportunity to ensure that projects of India's interest are undertaken under this LoC.

### **India in talks with Latam nations to boost trade, investment**

India has intensified dialogue with Latin American countries to boost trade and investment. India and Ecuador has considered initiating the process of negotiations for a preferential trade agreement. Separately, India and Colombia agreed to strengthen cooperation in various sectors.

### **World Bank to lend \$240 m for AP's 24x7 'Power for All' programme**

The World Bank has announced \$240-million credit line to support the Andhra Pradesh government's effort to provide 24x7 power supply to its citizens. The loan has a 5-year grace period and a maturity of 19 years. The project is the first in India being co-financed by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The World Bank and AIIB will provide loans in 60:40 ratio. The project is part of the Central Government's Power for All programme launched in 2014. Andhra Pradesh is one of the first states selected for the rollout of the programme.

### **Implementation of the expanded India-Chile PTA**

The agreement on expansion of India-Chile Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) signed earlier is finally being implemented on 16th May, 2017. The Union Cabinet had approved the expansion of PTA. The expanded PTA would immensely benefit both sides as a wide array of concessions has been offered by both sides on a number of tariff lines which will facilitate more two way trade.

Chile is the fourth largest trading partner of India in LAC region after Brazil, Venezuela and Argentina.

### **Indo-Thailand Siam Bharat 17: HADR**

Indo-Thailand Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Table Top Exercise 2017 is in progress at Chiang Mai, Thailand between the Indian Air Force and Royal Thailand Air Force (RTAF). This is second such exercise to be conducted between the two Air Forces. The aim of the bilateral exercise is to evolve SOPs for planning and executing relief missions during unforeseen natural calamities like Tsunami, earthquakes, cyclones, floods etc.

### **India gives \$500 mn aid to Mauritius**

India announced a \$500 million line of credit to Mauritius as the two countries decided to firm up cooperation in the field of maritime security in the Indian Ocean region. Both countries agreed that effective management of conventional and non-conventional threats in the Indian Ocean is essential to pursue economic opportunities and provide security to the people of both the countries.

### **UAE ready for air traffic pact**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is in favour of India's proposal for a unified bilateral air traffic pact provided the Gulf nation gets access to more Indian airports. India has signed separate agreements with emirates of the UAE which is a unique arrangement as bilateral air traffic rights are generally signed between two countries. It has an agreement each with Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah. India is contemplating a single air traffic pact with UAE to align with global practice. As per the global practice, countries sign air service agreement bilaterally which decides the equal number of flights or seats per week that can fly into each other's country depending upon their own requirements. Then, the government distributes the allocated seats to the respective airlines.

## **GS 3 Indian Economy**

### **Infrastructure Investment Trusts**

The initial public offering (IPO) for IRB InvIT, - sponsored by road developer IRB Infrastructure Developers Ltd - India's first infrastructure investment trust fund will open for subscription soon.

**Mains : GS 3 Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.**

### **What are InvITs?**

InvITs are similar to mutual funds. An InvIT allows one to invest in infrastructure projects such as road and power in the same way as mutual funds allows one to invest in equity.

### **How do InvITs work?**

InvITs raise funds from a large number of investors and directly invest in infrastructure projects or through a special purpose vehicle. Two types of InvITs have been allowed: one, which invests in completed and revenue generation infrastructure projects; the other, which has the flexibility to invest in completed or under-construction projects.

### **Significance**

InvITs allow developers of infrastructure assets to monetise their assets by pooling multiple projects under a single entity (trust structure).

### **Why InvIT?**

- Infrastructure projects suffer from lack of availability of long-term capital and have depended on bank finance which typically has a short tenure.
- InvITs are designed to attract low-cost, long term capital and the underlying focus is to reduce the funding pressure on the banking system as well as generating fresh equity capital for infrastructure projects.

### **What is the structure of InvITs?**

InvITs are registered as trusts with SEBI and there are four parties

1. Trustee - Oversees the role of InvIT, investment managers and project manager and ensures that all rules are complied with.
2. Sponsors - firms which set up the InvITs.,
3. Investment manager - manage assets and investments of InvITs and undertake activities of the InvIT.
4. Project manager - responsible for executing the projects.

### **Investors**

- As per present regulations, InvIT investments are not open for small and retail investors. The minimum application size for InvIT units is ₹10 lakh.
- The main investors could be foreign institutional investors, insurance and pension funds and domestic institutional investors (like mutual funds, banks) and also super-rich individuals.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Consider the following statements regarding Infrastructure Investment Trusts.

1. It is open to retail investors
2. It is aimed at attracting investment towards under construction infrastructural projects only

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

What are the bottlenecks faced by infrastructure projects in India? Give your

suggestions

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### Farmer suicides

A study conducted across 13 States by the Union Agriculture Ministry throws up the all-too-familiar reasons that drive farmers to suicide. An affidavit filed by an organization has brought Supreme Court's attention to farmer suicide.

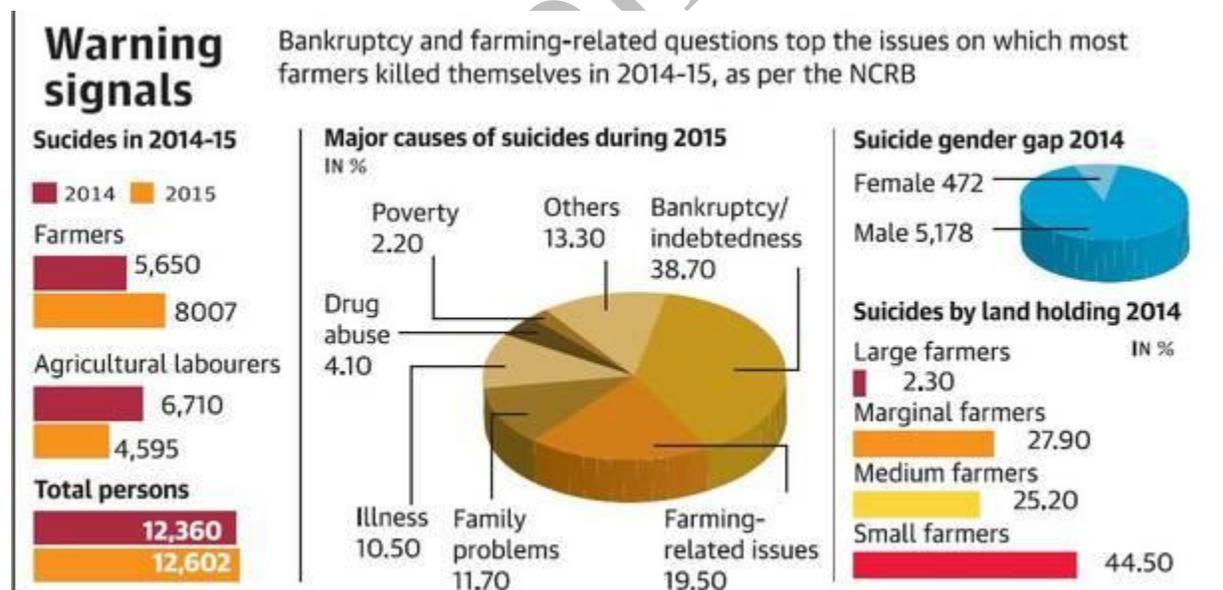
**Mains : GS 2** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

The report said the government has increased target of agricultural credit from Rs. 9 lakh crore to Rs. 10 lakh crore in Budget 2017-18.

### Reasons behind farmer suicide

- Frequent crop failure
- Vagaries of the monsoon
- Absence of assured water resources
- Attacks of pests and diseases,
- Debts,
- Social causes.

**NCRB data :** NCRB reports up to 2015 reveal identical causes of suicides among farmers – bankruptcy, farming-related issues, family problems, illness, drug abuse or alcoholism.



SOURCE: NCRB ACCIDENTAL DEATHS & SUICIDES IN INDIA 2015, ECONOMIC SURVEY, 2015

### The issues

The disconnect between the Centre and States affects farmers badly. The Centre controls most important policies pertaining to farm livelihoods whether it is MSP, credit, crop

insurance, disaster compensation, trade policies and so on and the States are not consulted on these matters.

### **Government measures to help farmers**

- Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, which provides farmers' full insurance
- increased target of agricultural credit from ₹9 lakh crore to ₹10 lakh crore in Budget 2017-18.
- The Reserve Bank of India has allowed State and district level banks to take a lenient view on rescheduling of loans if crop loss is 33% or more.
- Kisan Credit Card scheme and the e-National Agricultural Market Scheme to "create a single unified market for the State and ultimately for the nation for agricultural commodities."

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

What are the different types of agriculture subsidies given to farmers at the national and at state levels? Critically analyse the agricultural subsidy regime with reference to the distortions created by it. **[UPSC Mains 2013]**

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **SAMPADA - Scheme For Agro-Marine Processing And Development Of Agro-Processing Clusters**

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, has given its approval for re-structuring the schemes under new Central Sector Scheme – SAMPADA (Scheme for Agro-Marine Processing and Development of Agro-Processing Clusters) .

**Mains : GS 3** Food processing and related industries in India- scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management.

### **Objective**

The objective of SAMPADA is to supplement agriculture, modernize processing and decrease agri-waste.

### **Highlights**

- SAMPADA is an umbrella scheme incorporating ongoing schemes of the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI)
- The SAMPADA is a comprehensive package to give a renewed thrust to the food processing sector in the country.
- It includes new schemes of Infrastructure, aims at development of modern infrastructure to encourage entrepreneurs to set up food processing units based on cluster approach, provide effective and seamless backward and forward integration for processed food industry
- The implementation of SAMPADA will result in creation of modern infrastructure with efficient supply chain management from farm gate to retail outlet.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

SAMPADA a scheme of government is related to

- a. renewable energy
- b. e governance
- c. food processing
- d. irrigation

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

What are the impediments in marketing and supply chain management in developing the food processing industry in India? Can e-commerce help in overcoming these bottlenecks? **[UPSC Mains 2015]**

**Sources:** [pib](#)

### **‘Prime Minister’s Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)**

Job opportunities under the Prime Minister’s Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) fell over 9.5% year-on-year to 3.2 lakh in FY16 from more than 3.5 lakh in FY15, according to industry body Assocham.

**Mains : GS 2** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

### **Highlights of Assocham report**

- Job opportunities under the Prime Minister’s Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) fell over 9.5%
- The number of projects set up under the PMEGP reduced.
- Uttar Pradesh topped with over 43,000 jobs generated under the PMEGP

**The scheme :** The PMEGP is an effective scheme aimed at reducing unemployment and generating sustainable employment opportunities in rural and urban India

### **Other highlights**

- The number of credit proposals approved under the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) increased significantly while the approved amount under this scheme fell 6%.
- The number of MSMEs which benefited from the Marketing Assistance and Technology Upgradation programme also fell
- The number of trainees under the Entrepreneur Development Programmes Scheme fell significantly
- The number of new ideas approved as part of Entrepreneurial Development of SMEs through Incubators rose marginally.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Centre to release new series of IIP, WPI data**

A new series of Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and Wholesale Price Index (WPI) will be released in a bid to bring greater accuracy and improved synchronisation among such data sets.

**Mains : GS 3** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

#### **Details**

- The base year for the IIP and the WPI will be 2011-12 and not the current 2004-05.
- The Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and gross value addition also have 2011-12 as the base year.
- The common base year is expected to reduce discrepancies and making it easier to draw comparisons.
- The new series of IIP will include technology items such as smart phones, tablets, LED television and tablets.
- The new WPI series will include toys and games as a separate group.

#### **What is IIP?**

The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is an index for India which details out the growth of various sectors in an economy such as mining, electricity and manufacturing. The all India IIP is a composite indicator that measures the short-term changes in the volume of production of a basket of industrial products during a given period with respect to that in a chosen base period.

#### **Who publishes it?**

- It is compiled and published monthly by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) six weeks after the reference month ends.
- The level of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is an abstract number, the magnitude of which represents the status of production in the industrial sector for a given period of time as compared to a reference period of time.

#### **Core industries and weightage**

The Eight Core Industries comprise nearly 38 % of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). These are Electricity (10.32), steel(6.68), refinery products(5.94), crude oil(5.22), coal(4.38), cement(2.41), natural gas(1.71) and fertilisers(1.25).

#### **Wholesale price index (WPI)**

- WPI measures the change in price level at wholesale market
- WPI consists of 676 commodities (services are not included in WPI in India). It is measured on year-on-year basis i.e., rate of change in price level in a given month vis a vis corresponding month of last year. This is also known as point to point inflation.

- In India, there are three main components in WPI – Primary Articles (weight: 20.12%), Fuel & Power (weight: 14.91%) and Manufactured Products (weight: 64.97).
- Within WPI, Food commodities (from which Food Inflation) have a combined weight of 24.31%. This includes “Food Articles” in the Primary Articles (14.34%) and “Food Products” in the Manufactured Products category (9.97%). Food Inflation is also calculated on year-on-year basis.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

In the ‘Index of Eight Core Industries’, which one of the following is given the highest weight? **[UPSC Prelims 2015]**

- (a) Coal production
- (b) Electricity generation
- (c) Fertilizer production
- (d) Steel production

Questions related to inflation were asked several times in the previous examination. To know more visit our [IAS preparation page](#).

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#)

### **Foreign Portfolio Investment - FPI mix drives Indian equities**

Several institutional investors are entering into Indian equity market aiming to reap large returns.

**Mains : GS 3** Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

#### **Highlights**

- There are nearly 8,000 registered FPIs in India coming from almost 60 different countries.
- U.S. has maximum number of registered FPIs in India, followed by Luxembourg (946), Canada (622) and Mauritius (572).
- The number of FPIs domiciled in Mauritius was much higher and began to fall only after the benefits of double tax avoidance started to wean away.

#### **What attracts foreign investors?**

- Indian market yields higher returns when compared with some of the other leading markets, including the emerging markets.
- Indian markets have generated good returns consistently and that attracts the large number of foreign investors.
- In the last 17 years since 2000, the Sensex has ended with losses only on five occasions.

### **What is 'Foreign Portfolio Investment - FPI'**

- Foreign portfolio investment (FPI) consists of securities and other financial assets passively held by foreign investors.
- It does not provide the investor with direct ownership of financial assets and is relatively liquid depending on the volatility of the market.

### **Difference between FDI and FPI**

- FPI lets an investor purchase stocks, bonds or other financial assets in a foreign country. Because the investor does not actively manage the investments or the companies that issue the investments, he does not have control over the securities or the business. However, since the investor's goal is to create a quick return on his money, FPI is more liquid and less risky than FDI.
- In contrast, FDI lets an investor purchase a direct business interest in a foreign country. For example, an investor living in New York purchases a warehouse in Berlin so a German company can expand its operations. The investor's goal is to create a long-term income stream while helping the company increase its profits.

### **Prelims perspective**

Both FDI and FII are related to investment in a country. Which one of the following statements best represents an important difference between the two? **[UPSC Prelims 2011]**

- a. FII helps bring better management skills and technology, while FDI brings only capital.
- b. FII helps in increasing capital availability in general, while FDI only targets specific sectors.
- c. FDI flows only into the secondary market, while FII targets primary market.
- d. FII is considered to be more stable than FDI

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Foreign investment related questions were asked multiple times in the past examinations. To see the questions visit our [IAS preparation page](#).

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [Investopedia](#)

### **Banking Regulations Amendment Ordinance**

Government notified the Banking Regulations Amendment Ordinance to give RBI more powers to tackle NPAs clogging Indian banks

**Mains** : Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

### **Why an Ordinance?**

The move comes after clarion calls from lenders who have been jostling with stressed assets amounting to about Rs 10 lakh crore, or close to 7% of India's GDP.

The promulgation of the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2017 inserting

two new Sections (viz. 35AA and 35AB) after Section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

**Key Amendments in the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2017**

1. The government authorised the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to issue directions to banks to initiate insolvency proceedings against defaulters under the bankruptcy code.
2. RBI on its own accord can issue directions to banks for resolution of stressed assets.
3. RBI may form committees with members it can choose to appoint to advise banks on resolution of stressed assets.

These measures, in effect, give the RBI and the central government powers to act directly against any company which has defaulted on its loans.

This action of the Union Government will have a direct impact on effective resolution of stressed assets, particularly in consortium or multiple banking arrangements, as the RBI will be empowered to intervene in specific cases of resolution of non-performing assets, to bring them to a definite conclusion.

**Current Mechanisms for expeditious resolution of stressed assets are**

1. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016
2. The SARFAESI Act
3. Debt Recovery Tribunal

**RBI's loan restructuring schemes**

1. Corporate debt restructuring (CDR)
2. Formation of joint lenders' forum (JLF)
3. Flexible structuring for long-term project loans to infrastructure (or 5/25 Scheme)
4. Strategic debt restructuring (SDR) scheme
5. Sustainable structuring of stressed assets (S4A)

**Other Options Proposed are**

1. The finance ministry and RBI are also considering setting up of a "bad bank" to deal with the problem of non-performing loans, as suggested by chief economic adviser Arvind Subramanian in the Economic Survey.
2. Reserve Bank deputy governor Viral Acharya has also floated the twin concept of Private Asset Management Company (PAMC) and National Asset Management Company (NAMC) for resolution of stressed assets.

**Prelims perspective**

A question about any of the RBI loan restructuring schemes OR Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 can be asked. So read up on related topics thoroughly.

**Mains Perspective**

Model questions

The recent enactment of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016 has opened up new possibilities for time bound resolution of stressed assets. Compare the Insolvency Code with existing mechanism.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [Livemint](#) [pib](#)

### **UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik/Let The Common Man Fly)**

All about government's UDAN scheme

**Mains : GS 3** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

**GS 2** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

#### **What is UDAN?**

- A regional connectivity scheme, UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik/Let The Common Man Fly) is aimed at reviving dormant airstrips in the country and helping passengers in Tier-II and Tier-III cities fly by air.
- The government has capped airfares at affordable levels – ₹2,500 for an hour's flight – aimed at attracting people from the hinterland.

#### **Significance**

- From the current figure of 10 crore, UDAN aims to increase air passenger strength to 30 crore by 2022
- Under the first phase of the scheme, 12 underserved airports and 50 unserved airports will be covered.

#### **How does the scheme work?**

- Airfare for a one-hour journey (covering approximately 500 km) is to be capped at ₹2,500 per seat.
- The airlines will be provided subsidy for three years in the range of depending on the type of aircraft and distance covered.
- Airlines will get exclusive rights to fly on a regional route for the first three years.
- Routes are awarded through a reverse bidding auction, so the airline that asks for the least subsidy support gets the exclusive right to fly.

#### **Who is funding the subsidy?**

Airlines' losses will be funded by passengers flying on national routes, and State governments. The Centre has set up a regional connectivity fund, to be financed by levying a cess on each departing domestic flight on major national routes.

#### **Airfares**

Airlines will provide lower airfare on 50% of the seats – for a maximum of 40 seats on a fixed-wing aircraft – and will be free to charge market price for the rest of them.

**Also Read :** [Regional Connectivity Scheme](#)

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

## **All you need to know about FATCA - Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA)**

Details about The Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA)

**Mains : GS 3** Money-laundering and its prevention

### **What is FATCA?**

- The Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) is a United States federal law that requires United States persons, including U.S. citizens who live outside the United States, to report their financial accounts held outside of the U.S., and requires foreign financial institutions to report to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) about their U.S. clients.

### **Why is FATCA compliance necessary in India?**

- India had signed an agreement with the U.S. which enables automatic exchange of financial information between India and the U.S.

### **What does the agreement provide for?**

- The agreement provides that Indian Financial Institutions will provide the necessary information to the Indian tax authority i.e. Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), which information will then be transmitted to the U.S. automatically in the case of FATCA.

### **Which financial transactions need FATCA compliance?**

- The compliance is needed for bank accounts, mutual fund, national pension scheme and other such transactions.

### **What do you need to submit to be FATCA compliant and how can it be done?**

- Individuals and entities need to provide details of their country of birth, country of citizenship, country of residence for tax purposes, among others, to the respective financial institutions.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Consider the following statements

1. FATCA is a law enacted by Indian Parliament to prevent money laundering.
2. RBI is the agency that implements FACTA.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **DMIC Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor**

Infrastructure development contracts worth ₹1,400 crore will be awarded in the

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upcoming Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor industrial township project in Maharashtra.

**Mains : GS 3** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

### **Details**

- Aurangabad Industrial Township Ltd (AITL) AITL, a special purpose vehicle set up by Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation and Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation is developing two industrial zones at Shendra and Bidkin near Aurangabad to attract investments worth \$11 billion.
- The two locations are being developed as one industrial smart city called 'AURIC'. Infrastructure development at Shendra has picked up and infrastructure work is scheduled to end by 2018.
- The contracts to build infrastructure such as roads, bridges and telecommunications will be awarded soon

### **What is an industrial corridor?**

- An industrial corridor is a package of infrastructure spending allocated to a specific geographical area, with the intent to stimulate industrial development.
- An industrial corridor aims to create an area with a cluster of manufacturing or other industry. Such corridors are often created in areas that have preexisting infrastructure, such as ports, highways and railroads. These modalities are arranged such that an "arterial" modality, such as a highway or railroad, receives "feeder" roads or railways. Concerns when creating corridors including correctly assessing demand and viability, transport options for goods and workers, land values, and economic incentives for companies.

### **Background**

To accelerate the growth in manufacturing and for ensuring scientifically planned urbanization, Government of India (GoI) has adopted the strategy of developing integrated Industrial Corridors in partnership with State Governments with focus on manufacturing.

Five Corridors namely, Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC), Amritsar Kolkata Industrial Corridor (AKIG), Bengaluru-Mumbai Economic Corridor (BMEC) and Vizag-Chennai Industrial Corridor (VCIC) have been planned for development by Government of India.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Which among the following are the Industrial corridors planned for development by government of India?

1. Delhi- Kolkata Industrial Corridor
2. Bengaluru- Mumbai Economic Corridor
3. Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC)

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) All the above
- d) 1 and 3 only

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

What do you mean by an industrial corridor. Write a note on India's industrial corridor projects. Explain how it can help in boosting India's manufacturing sector.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#) [pib](#)

### **Cobweb phenomenon: how an abundant crop ruins farmers**

An abundance of the produce has led to a crash in prices of tomatoes in Karnataka, red chillies in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, tur and grapes in Maharashtra

**Mains : GS 3** Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints.

### **Why prices crashed for these products?**

Farmers complain about the poor remuneration for their produce in comparison with the previous season while agricultural economists have traced the reasons for the glut and the resultant price crash to the "cobweb phenomenon."

### **What is cobweb phenomenon?**

- After the prices of a particular agricultural commodity shoot through the roof during a season of scarcity, farmers resort to boosting the production on the premise of the pre-existing demand and prices, leading to a problem of plenty.
- Most of the agricultural products that have now suffered a price crash due to their abundance had yielded a rich dividend in the previous season.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Economists attribute the fall in prices of certain in agricultural commodities to cobweb phenomenon. What is cobweb phenomenon?

- a. A fall in prices of agricultural commodities due to environmental factors
- b. A rise in price of commodities due to shortages in supply
- c. Increased demand of agricultural produce due to rising income
- d. Producers' expectations about prices of produce depends on observations of previous prices

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **NHAI Masala Bond Launched at London Stock Exchange**

The National Highways Authority of India issued masala bonds at the London Stock Exchange.

**Mains : GS 3** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

**Details**

- The NHAI issue witnessed an overwhelming response from a wide range of investors,. The transaction marks the largest ever 5 year issuance and the largest inaugural transaction in Masala Bond market.
- NHAI Masala Bond issue has attracted investors from across the spectrum with Asia contributing 60% of the subscription and the balance 40% coming from Europe.

**Masala Bond**

The term is used to refer to rupee-denominated borrowings by Indian entities in overseas markets.

**Why is it important?**

- Masala bonds, if they take off, can be quite a significant plus for the Indian economy.
- They are issued to foreign investors and settled in US dollars. Hence the currency risk lies with the investor and not the issuer, unlike external commercial borrowings (ECBs), where Indian companies raise money in foreign currency loans.

**Prelims Perspective**

A question can be expected from any of the following areas

With reference to `IFC Masala Bonds`, sometimes seen in the news, which of the statements given below is/are correct?

1. The International Finance Corporation, which offers these bonds, is an arm of the World Bank.
2. They are the rupee-denominated bonds and are a source of debt financing for the public and private sector.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2**
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Sources:** [pib](#) [The Hindu](#) The Hindu Business Line- [All you wanted to know about Masala Bonds](#)

**Rail regulator to define performance standards**

India's first rail regulator, Rail Development Authority (RDA), would also set standards of performance and efficiency that would be enforceable under the Railways Act.

**Mains : GS 3** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

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### **Details**

- RDA can define standards of performance and efficiency
- Standards prescribed would be enforced under Railway Act.
- It will also be authorised to check for deviations and suggest remedial measures.
- It will provide guidance on quantity and quality of service provided to passengers.

*The Union Cabinet had last month approved setting up the rail regulator responsible for recommending passenger fares, setting performance standards for rail operations and creating a level playing policy for private sector participation.*

### **Regulator's structure**

- RDA will consist of a Chairman along with three members each for tariff, public private partnership and efficiency, standards and benchmarking.
- The regulator will not involve itself in policy making of the Indian Railways, operations and maintenance of the rail system, financial management, setting technical standards and compliance of safety standards

It clarified that the

### **Mandate of the rail regulator - Rail Development Authority (RDA)**

- Recommend passenger fares commensurate with costs. regulator would only make recommendations on tariff and not impose a tariff on the Indian Railways.

*It will only make recommendations to the Ministry which will take a final call on passenger and freight fares.*

- Setting performance standards for rail operations
- Create level playing policy for private sector participation.
- Frame principles for social service obligation
- Fix efficiency standards and resolve disputes related to future concession agreements
- Collect, analyse and disseminate information and statistics concerning the rail sector.

### **Significance**

It will improve the services offered to passengers, provide comfort to investors in the rail sector and will enhance transparency and accountability.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Which of the following is/are the function of the proposed Rail Development Authority

1. Fixing passenger fares
2. Suggest policies for improving private sector participation

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only

- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer C

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

The establishment of Rail development authority can pave the way for professional management of Railways .Discuss

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

### **Anti-dumping duty**

The Finance Ministry imposed anti-dumping duties on some steel products from Brazil, Russia, China, Korea, Japan and Indonesia.

**Mains : GS 2** Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International relations. Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

- The duty will be effective for five years from August 8 last year.

### **Why duty was imposed?**

- Several foreign firms have been dumping their steel products into India.

### **What is an 'Anti-Dumping Duty'**

- An anti-dumping duty is a protectionist tariff that a domestic government imposes on foreign imports that it believes are priced below fair market value.
- Dumping is a process where a company exports a product at a price lower than the price it normally charges on its own home market.
- To protect local businesses and markets, many countries impose stiff duties on products they believe are being dumped in their national market.
- The anti-dumping measures are in line with the process and norms laid down by the WTO

### **Prelims perspective**

A definition of anti dumping duty minimum import price etc can be asked

### **Mains Perspective**

Similar Question

“The broader aims and objectives of WTO are to manage and promote international trade in the era of globalization. But the Doha round of negotiations seem doomed due to differences between the developed and the developing countries” Discuss in the Indian perspective. **[UPSC Mains 2016]**

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [BusinessLine](#) [Investopedia](#)

### **Domestic funds set pace as FIIs ease up, 'Foreign Portfolio Investment - FPI**

Domestic institutional investors (DIIs), which include insurance companies, banks and mutual funds, are playing an active role in the equity markets especially at a time when

**Mains : GS 3** Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

### Highlights

- Mutual funds (MFs) were seeing a lot of inflows through systematic investment plans (SIPs) that were getting deployed in the market.
- Demonetisation played a key role in the inflows..
- Domestic institutional investors (DIIs) and Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have been almost on par with each other in terms of investments in the stock market.
- While FII outflows from Indian equities had been marginal, flows from DIIs had picked up due to money pouring into MFs through SIPs.

### What is 'Foreign Portfolio Investment - FPI'

- Foreign portfolio investment (FPI) consists of securities and other financial assets passively held by foreign investors.
- It does not provide the investor with direct ownership of financial assets and is relatively liquid depending on the volatility of the market.

### Who are Domestic institutional investors?

Domestic institutional investors are those institutional investors which undertake investment in securities and other financial assets of the country they are based in.

### Institutional investment

- Institutional investment is defined to be the investment done by institutions or organizations such as banks, insurance companies, mutual fund houses, etc in the financial or real assets of a country. Simply stated, domestic institutional investors use pooled funds to trade in securities and assets of their country.
- These investment decisions are influenced by various domestic economic as well as political trends. In addition to the foreign institutional investors, the domestic institutional investors also affect the net investment flows into the economy.

### Prelims perspective

Similar questions

Both FDI and FII are related to investment in a country. Which one of the following statements best represents an important difference between the two? **[UPSC Prelims 2011]**

- a. FII helps bring better management skills and technology, while FDI brings only capital.
- b. FII helps in increasing capital availability in general, while FDI only targets specific sectors.
- c. FDI flows only into the secondary market, while FII targets primary market.
- d. FII is considered to be more stable than FDI

### Mains Perspective

### Model questions

Foreign investment related questions were asked multiple times in the past examinations. To see the questions visit our [IAS preparation page](#).

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [Investopedia](#) [Economic Times](#)

### **Indian scientists unveil home-grown gold standard - Bharatiya Nirdeshak Dravya**

India now has its own standard bar of gold that is 99.99% pure and can be used to verify the purity of gold sold in shops.

**Mains : GS 3** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

#### **Highlights**

- Bharatiya Nirdeshak Dravya weighs 20gm and has the dimensions of a 'Parle-G' biscuit
- The standard bar of gold that is 99.99% pure can be used to verify the purity of gold sold in shops.
- The gold bar would be 25% cheaper than the imported version

#### **Why standard gold bar was developed?**

Though India is one of the largest markets for gold, goldsmiths in India so far depended on imported reference gold bars to check the purity of their gold.

#### **Who developed the standard?**

- The India Government Mint (IGM), a unit of Security Printing and Minting Corp of India Ltd, signed an agreement with the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) and CSIR-National Physical Laboratory (NPL) to develop the first gold standard.
- *The NPL is the repository of standard units — such as the kilogram, the second, the centimetre — in India*
- The bars will be made by the IGM, technical aspects such as measurement would be done by the BARC and certifying the purity of the bars would be the responsibility of the NPL.
- IGM produces Standard Gold Bars of standard fineness and purity of 10g, 50g, 100g, 500g & 1000g denominations.

#### **Prelims perspective**

##### Model questions

Bharatiya Nirdeshak Dravya sometimes seen in news is related to

- gold standards
- export of precious metals
- promotion of jewellery
- None of the above

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Cash is back as digital payments dip on cost**

Cash transactions are beginning to trump almost every form of digital payment alternative with April clocking a decline in volumes as well as value of transactions conducted through cards, mobile banking and the Unified Payment Interface (UPI).

**Mains : GS 3** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

#### **Highlights**

- During demonetisation period the demand of PoS devices, shot up.
- The near-completion of the remonetisation process and merchants unwillingness to pay user charges also known as the Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) to banks has resulted in a slump in demand for new point of sale (PoS) devices
- Small merchants are not willing to pay charge of 1% or 2%
- Payment systems like Aadhaar-enabled payments, UPI and Bharat QR are all relatively unpopular in smaller towns.
- The volume of digital transactions have come down.

#### **The way forward**

- The government should take more steps to encourage the shift to digital payments
- Reducing the number of cash transactions is difficult as it offers anonymity, convenience and comes with no charges such as MDR

#### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Explain the challenges faced by India while moving towards a cashless society. Give your suggestions

**Sources :** The Hindu

### **‘National Employment Policy this year’**

The Centre will frame a new sector-wise National Employment Policy in this financial year

**Mains : GS 3** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

#### **What will the policy contain?**

- The policy’s thrust would be to ensure a transition from informal to formal jobs takes place in the country.
- The policy aims to provide a long term vision about the job market in the country.

#### **Present stats related to employment in India**

- The pace of job creation fell to a six-year low in 2015
- Presently in India, around 92% of the workers are engaged in informal employment — those who are not covered by any social security law.

- Recent policy announcements by the American government are leading to job cuts in IT sector.
- Companies are going ahead with automation and job shifts are happening.

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

“While we flaunt India’s demographic dividend, we ignore the dropping rates of employability”. What are we missing while doing so? Where will the jobs that India desperately needs come from? Explain. [UPSC Mains 2013]

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

### **Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting by India**

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting.

**Mains : GS 2** Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

### **What is Base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS)?**

- Base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS) refers to tax avoidance strategies that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules to artificially shift profits to low or no-tax locations.
- Under the inclusive framework, over 100 countries and jurisdictions are collaborating to implement the BEPS measures and tackle BEPS.
- The Base erosion and profit shifting project is a project headed by the OECD's Centre for Tax Policy and Administration

### **What does the recent multilateral convention contains?**

- The Convention is an outcome of the OECD / G20 BEPS Project.
- It aims to tackle base erosion and profit shifting through tax planning strategies that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules.
- The Final BEPS Project identified 15 actions to address BEPS in a comprehensive manner.
- The implementation of the Final BEPS Package requires changes to more than 3000 bilateral tax treaties which will be burdensome and time consuming.
- In view of the same, the Convention was conceived as a Multilateral instrument which would swiftly modify all covered bilateral tax treaties (Covered Tax Agreements / CTA) to implement BEPS measures.

**Significance :** The Convention will enable curbing of revenue loss through treaty abuse and base erosion and profit shifting strategies by ensuring that profits are taxed where substantive economic activities generating the profits are carried out and where value is created.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions **[UPSC Prelims 2016]**

The term 'Base Erosion and Profit Shifting' is sometimes seen in the news in the context of

- a) mining operation by multinational companies in resource-rich but backward areas
- b) curbing of the tax evasion by multinational companies
- c) exploitation of genetic resources of a country by multinational companies
- d) lack of consideration of environmental costs in the planning and implementation of developmental projects

Solution: B

**Mains Perspective**

Model questions

What is Base Erosion and profit Shifting? What are the various initiatives undertaken by the government to limit Base Erosion and profit Shifting and how effective has these initiatives been?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [OECD](#) [Wikipedia](#) [pib](#)

**GST Council sets rates for most commodities**

The Goods and Services (GST) Council agreed on the fitment of almost all commodities in the various tax slabs under GST.

**Mains :** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

**GST rates determined by the council**

- **Zero Rate :** Essential items including food, which presently constitute roughly half of the consumer inflation basket, will be taxed at zero rate.
- **5% slab :** The lowest slab of 5 per cent will be for items of common consumption
- **12% and 18 % :** These would be the two standard rates in which would fall on the bulk of the goods and services. This includes fast-moving consumer goods. Most services are expected to become costlier as the ones being taxed currently at the rate of 15 per cent are likely to be put in the 18-per cent slab. Some services would be taxed at 12%
- **28% rate :** This rate will include white goods and all those items on which the current rate of incidence varies from 30-31 per cent. Ultra luxuries, demerit and sin goods, will attract a cess for a period of five years on top of the 28 per cent GST.

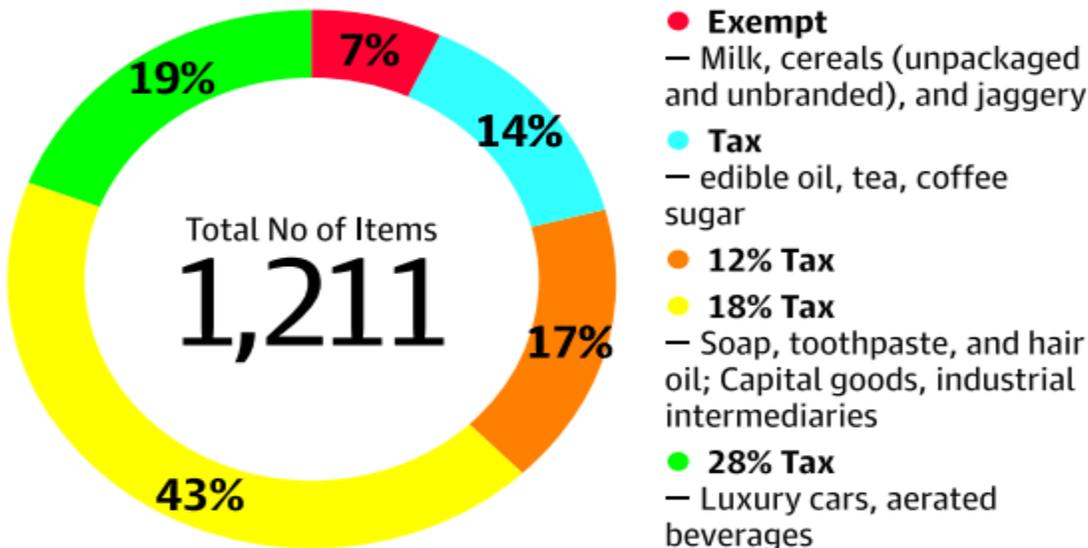
**How tax rates are determined**

The principle for determining the rate on each item will be to levy and collect the GST at the rate slab closest to the current tax incidence on it.

Current tax incidence refers to present rate of tax on a particular good

## Fitting to GST tax slabs

Fitment for more than 1,200 items within GST tax slabs were decided on Thursday but for six categories including cigarettes, footwear and gold



### Image : The Hindu

- Milk, cereals (unpackaged and unbranded), and jaggery will be exempt from any GST, while sugar, tea, coffee (except instant), and edible oil will be taxed at 5%.
- Common use items such as soap, toothpaste, and hair oil, which currently attract a tax rate of 22-24%, will be taxed at 18%.
- Coal, which is currently taxed at 11.7%, will attract a GST rate of 5%.
- Consumer durables will come under the 28% tax bracket
- Capital goods and industrial intermediaries will be taxed at 18%.
- Luxury cars will attract a 15% cess in addition to 28% GST.

Also Read : [All you want to know about- Goods and Services Tax or GST](#)

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

### GST Council finalises rates for services

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council finalised tax rates for all services, except lottery, under the new indirect tax regime to be rolled out from July 1.

#### Tax rates on services

- Those services already exempted from tax, such as healthcare and education, will
- continue to enjoy the concession.

- Even in the services sector, depending on the nature of service, services have been categorised
- Transport services have largely been kept under the 5% bracket.
- Five star hotels, gambling, race club betting, and cinemas will attract a 28% tax rate.
- If companies do not pass on the benefit of a lower rate of tax to the consumer, then the government will initiate the anti-profiteering clause against them

### **The issues**

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council's treatment of goods such as commercial LPG, hybrid cars, and renewable energy components has missed an opportunity to back environmentally friendly goods
- The GST rates has not been set taking into account the need to promote clean energy.
- Vehicles which use renewable, environmentally friendly fuel have been taxed at a higher higher rate compared to vehicles that use non renewable fuels.
- Cess rate for Sport-utility vehicles (SUVs) and hybrid vehicles have been set at 15% while the cess on ultra-luxury products, like private planes and yachts, has been set at a relatively low 3%.
- Telecom and beverages bodies are disappointed over 18% tax rate set under the GST as it would make their services expensive.
- Higher tax on telecoms will likely slowdown the planned rollout of infrastructure across the country and will have an impact on flagship government initiatives like Digital India and Cashless India
- The effective tax rate of 40% on sweetened aerated water and flavoured water. will have a negative ripple effect and hurt the entire ecosystem of farmers, retailers, distributors and bottlers.

### **Prelims Perspective**

A question relating to GST such as its objective, purpose, taxation... can be asked in UPSC prelims

### **Mains Perspective**

- Discuss the rationale for introducing Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India. Bring out critically the reasons for the delay in rollout for its regime [UPSC

**Mains 2013]**

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

### **Prompt corrective action for banks**

All you want to know about Prompt corrective action

**Mains : GS 3** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has revised the norms for prompt corrective action and has imposed those norms on a couple of public sector lenders.

### **What is PCA?**

- PCA norms allow the regulator to place certain restrictions such as halting branch expansion and stopping dividend payment.
- It can even cap a bank's lending limit to one entity or sector.
- Corrective actions such as special audit, restructuring operations and activation of recovery plan, bringing in new management, can be taken under PCA. The RBI can also supersede the bank's board, under PCA.

### **When is PCA invoked?**

- The PCA is invoked when certain risk thresholds are breached. The revised norms have set out three thresholds.
- The thresholds are based on capital, net non-performing assets, profitability and leverage ratio.
- The breach of the first threshold will invite restriction on dividend distribution or require parents of foreign banks to bring in more capital.
- The breach of the second threshold will occur when the capital adequacy ratio falls below will result in restrictions on expansion of branches and higher provisions.
- The third such threshold, which is maximum tolerance limit, sets net NPA at over 12% and negative return on assets for four consecutive years.
- Restrictions, in addition to that of threshold one and two, will be put on management compensation and directors' fees if the the third level is breached.

### **What are the types of sanctions?**

There are two type of restrictions, mandatory and discretionary.

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

### **What next?**

- Some more lenders are expected to come under the corrective action framework.
- Though some Public sector banks have breached the net NPA parameter as well as profitability parameter government's infusion of capital have ensured that they are comfortable on Capital parameter. How far government will be able to infuse capital in these banks remains to be seen given government's commitment to maintain fiscal discipline.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Which of the following factors are taken into account under Prompt corrective action for banks?

1. Profitability

2. Capital
3. NPA's

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Explain the steps taken by government to resolve the mounting bad loan problem faced by the country. Also examine how far these steps are successful

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

### **Coal comeuppance: on coal block allocation case**

The coal block allocation case may become a benchmark for other ongoing prosecutions

**Mains : GS 2** Role of civil services in a democracy.

### **Background**

- The conviction of three Coal Ministry officials, marks the first case in which individual criminal liability has been fixed on public servants in the coal block scam.
- It is arguably the logical consequence of the 2014 Supreme Court order declaring all coal block allocations made since 1993 illegal and arbitrary.

### **The issues**

- The screening committee that allocated coal blocks functioned for years without regard for guidelines, norms or transparency, until the apex court halted its irregular run.
- Three civil servants have been found guilty of abusing their positions to procure a coal block for Kamal Sponge Steel and Power Limited.
- It was not certain if it could be proved beyond reasonable doubt that public servants had manipulated the system to their advantage.

### **Significance of the judgement**

- The verdict is a studied indictment of government processes, or the lack of processes, during the period.
- The case may become a benchmark for other ongoing prosecutions on similar lines.
- The case raises questions about the role and responsibility of a Secretary to the government, who is not only the administrative head of a department but also an adviser to the Minister on matters of policy.

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Has the Cadre based Civil Services Organization been the cause of slow in India? Critically examine. **[UPSC Mains 2014]**

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Paytm Payments Bank to pay 4% on savings account - Payments Bank**

Paytm Payments Bank,, said it will offer 4% per annum as interest on saving accounts deposits. The bank is targeting a customer base of 500 million customers by 2020.

**Mains :** GS 3 Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment. Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

### **Payment Banks**

#### **Objectives**

The objectives of setting up of payments banks will be to further financial inclusion by providing (i) small savings accounts and (ii) payments/remittance services to migrant labour workforce, low income households, small businesses, other unorganised sector entities and other users.

#### **Scope of activities:**

- Acceptance of demand deposits. Payments bank will initially be restricted to holding a maximum balance of Rs. 100,000 per individual customer.
- Issuance of ATM/debit cards. Payments banks, however, cannot issue credit cards.
- Payments and remittance services through various channels.
- BC of another bank, subject to the Reserve Bank guidelines on BCs.
- Distribution of non-risk sharing simple financial products like mutual fund units and insurance products, etc.

#### **Deployment of funds :**

- The payments bank cannot undertake lending activities.
- Apart from amounts maintained as Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) with the Reserve Bank on its outside demand and time liabilities, it will be required to invest minimum 75 per cent of its "demand deposit balances" in Statutory Liquidity Ratio(SLR) eligible Government securities/treasury bills /fixed deposits.
- **Capital :** The minimum paid-up equity capital for payments banks shall be Rs. 100 crore.

### **Prelims Perspective**

Similar question from **[UPSC Prelims 2016]**

The establishment of 'Payment Banks' is being allowed in India to promote financial inclusion. Which of the following statements is/are correct in this context?

1. Mobile telephone companies and supermarket chains that are owned and controlled by residents are eligible to be promoters of Payment Banks.
2. Payment Banks can issue both credit cards and debit cards.

3. Payment Banks cannot undertake lending activities.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

- ✓ How far India's financial institutions have been able to cater to the needs of the poor and vulnerable. Explain how institutional credit can play a major role in achieving inclusive growth.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [RBI](#)

### **RBI to revamp oversight panel to tackle bad loans**

The Reserve Bank of India said it will reconstitute and expand the oversight committee to deal with rising bad loans.

**Mains : GS 3** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

### **Highlights**

- The central bank is planning to expand the scope of cases to be referred to the committee beyond those under the Scheme for Sustainable Structuring of Stressed Assets (S4A).
- This is part of the central bank's action plan to implement the recently passed ordinance that amended the Banking Regulation Act.
- RBI has also decided to reconstitute the oversight committee to include more members in it. It has been decided to reconstitute the OC under the aegis of the Reserve Bank.
- The RBI recently changed the norms for decision-making in the Joint Lending Forum (JLF) whereby consent required for approval of a proposal was changed to 60 per cent by value from 75 per cent earlier.
- Participating banks have been mandated to implement the JLF's decision without any additional conditionality.
- The Boards of banks were advised to empower their executives to implement JLF decisions

**Also read :** [Non Performing Assets – The Indian Banking Syndrome](#)

**Sources:** [The Hindu BusinessLine](#)

### **Foreign Investment Promotion Board**

The Union Cabinet approved phasing out of the 25-year-old Foreign Investment

Promotion Board (FIPB).

**Mains : GS 3** Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

**Highlights**

- The Centre had, in the Budget 2017-18, proposed that the FIPB will be abolished in FY'18.
- The applications — on foreign direct investment (FDI) in India in sectors under the approval route — considered by the inter-ministerial Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) will soon be taken up by the concerned ministries and sectoral regulators.
- In cases of applications where there are security concerns, the home ministry's approval will be required.
- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs will continue to clear FDI proposals above Rs 5,000 crore.

**Why government want to abolish FIPB?**

- More than 92% of the FDI inflows were through the automatic route. For the rest of the FDI (about 8% of the total FDI inflows), every department concerned has a framework or a regulator for it.

**Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB)**

- The Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) is housed in the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, is an inter-ministerial body, responsible for processing of FDI proposals and making recommendations for Government approval.
- The Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) offers a single window clearance for applications on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India that are under the approval route.
- The sectors under automatic route do not require any prior approval from FIPB and are subject to only sectoral laws.
- The Minister of Finance who is in-charge of FIPB would consider the recommendations of FIPB on proposals with total foreign equity inflow of and below Rs. 3000 crore.
- The recommendations of FIPB on proposals with total foreign equity inflow of more than Rs. 3000 crore would be placed for consideration of Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA).
- FIPB comprises of the secretaries to the Government of India from various departments.

**Prelims perspective**

Model questions

The Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) is housed under which ministry?

- a) Ministry of commerce
- b) Ministry of Finance
- c) Ministry of Home
- d) Ministry of External affairs

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

Foreign direct investment related questions were asked in the previous examinations.

To know more visit our [IAS preparation page](#)

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [FIPB pib](#)

### **DIPP gets back power to grant industrial licences for defence manufacturing**

The power to grant licence for defence manufacturing is back with the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion a few months after the Home Ministry was given the responsibility.

**Mains : GS 3** Technology, Economic Development, Bio diversity, Environment, Security and Disaster Management.

#### **The news**

- The powers and functions of the Ministry of Home Affairs under the Arms Act have been delegated to DIPP Secretary in respect of certain defence items
- The power to grant manufacturing licence in respect of certain category of arms and ammunition and defence items has been delegated to Secretary, DIPP.
- Now defence products manufacturing companies will give their applications for industrial licences to the DIPP

**Significance :** The decision will be big relief to defence products manufacturing companies as the process of granting industrial licences had virtually come to a stop since last year when a turf battle on the matter had started between the DIPP and the Home Ministry.

#### **Mains perspective**

What are the reasons behind India not having a robust defence industry. Examine the constraints and give your suggestions.

**Sources:** [The Hindu BusinessLine](#)

### **International publication 'Condé Nast Traveller' lists Ganga cruise as one of the 'six river cruises to take in 2017'**

A reputed US based international media house in the latest issue of its publication 'Condé Nast Traveller' has listed the river cruise on Ganga as one of the 'six river cruises to take in 2017'. The Inland Waterways Authority of India facilitates cruise operations on NW-1 (river Ganga) from Kolkata to Varanasi in collaboration with private cruise operators. The facilities provided by IWAI include navigation aids including night

navigation facility, embarking and disembarking at designated locations, facilitating expeditious crossing of Farakka Navigation Lock, pilotage, and assistance in distress

### **Task Force on employment data created**

India suffers from a lack of reliable, timely data on employment which has made it difficult for policy makers and independent observers to assess the extent of employment generation at different points of time. In view of the importance of timely and reliable data on employment, a task force has been created under the chairmanship of the Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog to look into the problem of poor employment data in the country. The Task Force will recommend solutions which can be implemented in a time bound manner.

### **Centre mulls financial assistance to fisherfolk**

The Centre plans to provide them financial assistance and introduce norms to improve labour conditions in the sector. It will ensure that the Indian fishing fleet does not engage in 'Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated' (IUU) fishing, according to the National Policy on Marine Fisheries, 2017. The Indian marine fisheries account for an economic wealth of about Rs. 65,000 crore, according to the policy – meant to guide the coordination and management of India's marine fisheries during the next 10 years.

### **Measurement of Liveability Index of cities**

Ministry of Urban Development will launch measuring of Liveability Index of cities next month based on indigenously evolved Index. To start with, Liveability Standards of 140 cities including 53 cities with population of one million and above and Smart Cities will be assessed. The Ministry has already invited bids for selecting the agency for carrying out the assessment based on the parameters evolved by the Ministry. Cities will be assessed on 15 core parameters relating to Governance, social infrastructure pertaining to education, health and safety and security, economic aspects and physical infrastructure like housing, open spaces, land use, energy and water availability, solid waste management, pollution etc. Cities will be ranked based on Liveability Index that would cover a total of 79 aspects.

### **Introduction of The India's First Tejas Express Between Mumbai and Karmali**

Indian Railways will introduce the high speed, air-conditioned Tejas Express between Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus Mumbai and Karmali for the first time. Tejas Express is a state of the art train capable of running at the speed of 200 kmph with ultra modern amenities run between Mumbai and Karmali

## GS 3 Environment and Ecology

### Curious case of dip, rise in Indian seas

The rise and fall of sea level in Indian ocean was unique and was found nowhere else

**Mains : GS 3** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Scientists say such a 'decadal swing' in North Indian Ocean is unique and never observed in others

### Highlights

- From 1993 to 2003 the North Indian Ocean (NIO) sea levels fell.
- After 2004, sea levels began an unprecedented, accelerated spike till 2014.

*The NIO consists of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and part of the Indian Ocean up till the 5°S latitude.*

- This rise and fall was even as global temperatures steadily climbed and registered their largest two-decadal jump in more than a century.
- Scientists associated with the study said that such a “decadal swing” in the North Indian Ocean was unique and never observed in either the Pacific or Atlantic oceans.
- The North Indian Ocean was warming twice as fast as the other oceans after 2004

### How do sea levels rise?

Sea levels primarily rise due to water expanding from atmospheric heat and, more water being added from, melting ice sheets and glaciers.

- The NIO's warming could be explained by expansion.
- Wind flows could have influenced sea level patterns in Northern Indian ocean

### Prelims perspective

Which of the following factors might contribute to sea level rise?

1. Expansion of water due to atmospheric heat
2. Melting of glaciers

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

### Mains Perspective

Model questions

What are threats posed by the rising sea level to the communities across the world?

What are the precautions to be taken to address these issues?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](http://www.thehindu.com)

### **Swachh Survekshan-2017**

Indore and Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh have emerged as the cleanest cities in the country as per a massive cleanliness survey commissioned by the Union Urban Development Ministry.

**Mains : GS3** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

#### **Highlights**

- The survey, Swachh Survekshan-2017, was carried out by the Quality Council of India across 434 cities and includes the feedback of 18 lakh respondents.
- The top 10 cleanest cities are Indore, Bhopal, Visakhapatnam, Surat, Mysuru, Tiruchi, Delhi's New Delhi Municipal Council area, Navi Mumbai, Tirupati and Vadodara, respectively.
- Gujarat has the maximum of 12 cities among the top 50, closely followed by Madhya Pradesh with 11 and Andhra Pradesh with eight.
- Tamil Nadu and Telangana account for four each.
- Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Sikkim and Uttar Pradesh account for one each in this group.
- The heritage city of Mysuru was dethroned from its pedestal of being the cleanest city in the country – a crown it held for two consecutive years -- and has been ranked the fifth cleanest city in the Swachh Survekshan 2017

#### **Criteria used for Ranking**

Solid waste management, citizen feedback, independent observation by the Quality Council of India were the three criteria and weightage considered for ranking.

The contest was more intense this year as cities and towns with a population of one lakh and above were in the race.

#### **About Swachh Survekshan**

- In order to foster a healthy competition between cities for improving cleanliness standards, the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) started the “Swachh Survekshan” survey, ranking of cities on cleanliness and other aspects of urban sanitation, in 2016 which ranked 73 cities across the country.
- On the same lines, MoUD had initiated “Swachh Survekshan” 2017 which conducted a survey to rank 500 cities of India.
- The performance evaluation of the Swachh survekshan is conducted by Quality Council of India (QCI), an autonomous body established by Government of India in 1997 for Quality assurance in all spheres of activities including Governance.

#### **Area of Evaluation**

1. Waste collection, Sweeping and Transportation- 40%
2. MSW-Processing and Disposal- 20%
3. ODF / Toilets- 30%

4. Information, Education and Behaviour Change- 5%
5. Capacity Building-SBM eLearning portal- 5%

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Which among the following city has topped the Swachh Survekshan Ranking in 2017?

- A. Mysore
- B. Bhopal
- C. Indore
- D. Surat

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

How far Swachh Bharat Mission proved successful in improving the cleanliness and public health issues faced by the country? Discuss.

**Sources:** [The Hindu pib](http://www.thehindu.com) <http://swachh-survekshan.in/>

### **Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary hitches wagon to star tortoises - Star tortoises**

A project of the Kerala Forest Department at the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS) to rehabilitate Indian star tortoises (*Geochelone elegans*) seized from smugglers turned into a major success.

**Mains : GS 3** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

#### **Highlights**

- The programme made Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS) the only rehabilitation centre for star tortoises in the country.
- The CWS is the only place in Kerala where star tortoises are known to occur in the wild. The sanctuary has now at least 450 tortoises seized from poachers in less than two years.

#### **Smuggling of star tortoises.**

- In east Asian destinations, live Indian star tortoises are considered auspicious for gaining wealth. Thus Indian star tortoises, which are protected under the Wildlife Act, are poached and smuggled.
- Seized consignments of star tortoises were handed over to the Forest Department which created a special project under the Wildlife Warden of the Eravikulam National Park

#### **Indian Star tortoise**

- The Indian star tortoise (*Geochelone elegans*) is a threatened species of tortoise found in dry areas and scrub forest in India and Sri Lanka.
- This species is quite popular in the exotic pet trade, which is the main reason it is endangered.

- It is classified as vulnerable according to IUCN Red List.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Indian star tortoises are categorised as endangered species according to IUCN Red List
2. Star tortoises is quite popular in the exotic pet trade.

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Local Treatment of Urban Sewage Streams for Healthy Reuse - LOTUS**

Indian and netherlands dignitaries jointly laid the foundation stone to mark the beginning of work on cleaning the Barapullah drain in New Delhi.

**Mains : GS 3** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

### **Highlights**

The function was started with unveiling of an art work that represents Indo – Dutch collaboration for the LOTUS<sup>HR</sup> project in form of two flowers - 'lotus' and 'tulip', depicting the union of Indian and Dutch strengths.

### **Project LOTUS**

- The project Local Treatment of Urban Sewage Streams for Healthy Reuse (LOTUS<sup>HR</sup>) is an Indo-Netherlands joint project funded by Department of Biotechnology(DBT), Govt of india and NWO/STW, The Govt of Netherlands.
- The project has stakeholders from both Academia and Industry from India and Netherlands.

### **What is the project about?**

- The project aims to demonstrate a novel holistic (waste-) water management approach, that will produce clean water that can be reused for various proposes (e.g. industry, agriculture, construction etc.), while simultaneously recovering nutrients and energy from the urban waste water, thus converting drain into profitable mines.
- Special attention will be paid to pathogen removal and removing conventional and emerging pollutants.
- The participation of end-users in the project will ensure that the demonstration site becomes a self-sustaining initiative that will not finish at the end of the project and will be taken up by the end-users.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

LOTUS project sometimes seen in news is

- a. India Israel project to improve agriculture
- b. project to revive water structures in temples
- c. India - Dutch project for wastewater management
- d. watershed development programme

**Sources:** [pib](#)

### **Amur falcon**

Amur Falcons have been spotted in Kolar gold fields. Satellite-tracked bird's route from Somalia throws new light migration patterns of Amur Falcon

**Mains :** GS 3 Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

### **Why in News**

- Between October and November, Amur falcons go from Nagaland towards Central Peninsular India and then to Somalia before wintering in Southern Africa. On their return, they fly over 5,500 km from Somalia into Northern India and then Southeast Asia.
- This is the first time that satellite tagged birds has gone south during this season, rather than fly across the Gangetic plains towards Nagaland,

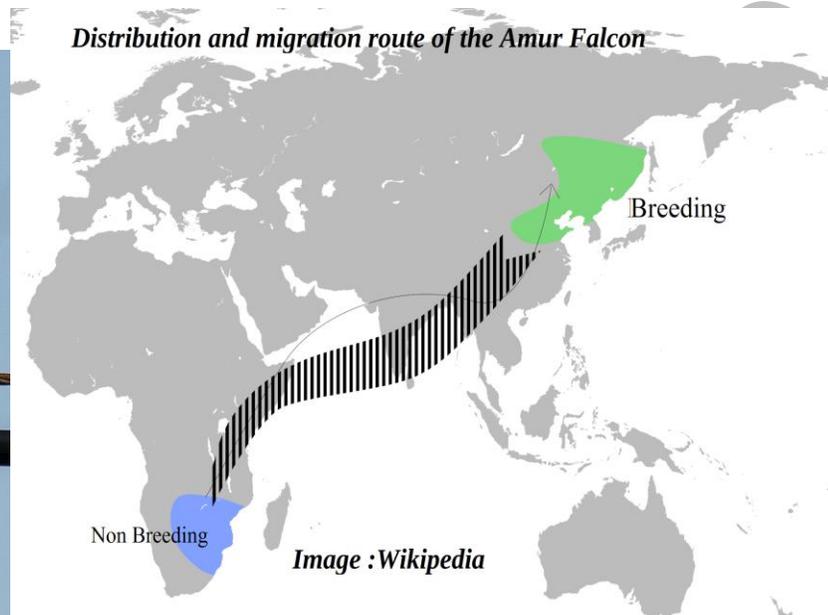
### **Amur Falcon**

- Weighing hardly 150 g, the Amur falcon (*Falco amurensis*) is a small raptor of the falcon family.
- The male is mostly grey in colour, and the females having dark-streaked cream or orange underparts.
- Their diet consists mainly of insects, such as termites; during migration over the sea, they are thought to feed on migrating dragonflies. The birds eat winged termites and other insects that destroy crops.
- IUCN Red list category : Least concern

### **Long migration**

- It migrates from the northern reaches of the northern hemisphere to the southern reaches of the southern hemisphere, and in its migration the Amur falcon spreads across the Indian sub-continent.
- Nagaland was their home in India.
- Every year, they travel 22,000 km from Nagaland to South Africa then onto Mongolia and back to Nagaland.
- Amur falcons typically begin their annual journey from north- eastern Siberia and Northern China, heading to north-east India and roosting in Nagaland, before leaving for Africa, where they spend winters.

- **Breeding grounds :** The falcons normally breed in south-eastern Siberia and North-eastern China where the Amur river divides the Russian Far East and China, hence the name Amur.
- The route that they take from Africa back to their breeding grounds is as yet unclear.



### Preying on the birds

- Earlier tribals in Tamenglong district (Manipur) tribals used to trap the bird during their migratory journey for selling. Officials and activists have now brought a turnaround in this practice and now the tribals have turned conservationists.
- In Nagaland, hunters used to mass-slaughter them for their tender meat. It was hardly three years ago that nearly 1,20,000 of the birds were trapped and killed at just one location in Nagaland.
- Though the species is protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, enforcement was weak as only skeleton staff is present in hilly Tamenglong.
- The bird roosts in the four forest ranges in the district.

### Prelims Perspective

Which of the following statements regarding Amur falcons is correct?

1. It is classified as endangered under IUCN red list
2. It migrates from northern hemisphere to the southern reaches of the southern hemisphere
3. The male is mostly grey in colour

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1 and 3 only
- c) All the above
- d) 2 and 3 only

Answer D

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#)

### **Ahmedabad launches air quality index linked to health advisories**

The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation's (AMC) is launching a comprehensive Air Quality Index (AQI) and Air Information and Response (AIR) plan that would include an air pollution alert system and health risk communication based on real-time data.

**Mains : GS 3** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

#### **How will the system work?**

- Eight air quality monitors in Ahmedabad and two in Gandhinagar will collect data on smog and toxic pollutants and feed it into the system which would generate the AQI.
- The data generated would be used to inform residents on when to take precautions.
- Various communication channels, including social media platforms and traditional media, and colour-coded messages on large LED screens installed across the city will be used to disseminate information.

*The AQI is supported by technical expertise from the Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology and the Indian Meteorological Department's System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), which operate the AQI in Delhi, Pune and Mumbai.*

#### **Factors**

1. health risk communication,
2. inter-agency coordination,
3. capacity-building of the medical staff,
4. targeted activities for vulnerable groups such as school children, senior citizens, and people with asthma or lung disease, and
5. research on mitigation pathways," said Anjali Jaiswal, a senior official in the Natural Resources Defense Council (NDRC), which has partnered with AMC to launch the new program.

#### **Prelims Perspective**

Similar questions **[UPSC Prelims 2016]**

In the cities of our country, which among the following atmospheric gases are normally considered in calculating the value of Air Quality Index?

1. Carbon dioxide
2. Carbon monoxide
3. Nitrogen dioxide
4. Sulfur dioxide
5. Methane

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

(a) 1, 2 and 3 only

**(b) 2, 3 and 4 only**

(c) 1, 4 and 5 only

(d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

**Mains Perspective**

Model questions

The issues relating to worsening air quality and associated health risks have occupied the headlines of the newspapers recently. Discuss briefly various policy initiatives undertaken by the government to curb pollution and examine how far it have been able to achieve its objective

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

Also See : [Air Quality Index](#)

**Southern Bird Wing butterfly**

The Southern Bird Wing butterfly is officially designates as the “State butterfly” of Karnataka.

**Mains : GS 3** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

## Karnataka's butterfly

- Southern Bird Wing butterfly officially designated as 'State butterfly' of Karnataka
- Karnataka is second State in the country to adopt a State Butterfly
- Maharashtra had chosen the Blue Mormon in 2015

### Why was it picked

- Butterfly has distinctive red and yellow colours
- Resembles Karnataka colours
- Southern Bird Wing is the largest butterfly in India, and endemic to south India, particularly Karnataka
- Females can grow up to 190 mm in length

### Taking wing

- First proposed in June 2016
- Approved by the State Wildlife Board in September 2016
- Official gazette notification published in May 2017



### What the future holds

- State butterfly tag does not come with additional protection
- Hope is to raise awareness of the importance of butterflies in ecosystem

Sanjay Mohan, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Research and Utilisation), who first proposed the concept of State butterfly, says the 91-acre Doraisanipalya Jallary Reserve Forest off Bannerghatta Road will now be planted with flower and shrub species that attract the Southern Bird Wing in large numbers.

*Image : The Hindu*

## Prelims perspective

Model questions [UPSC Mains 2016]

Recently, for the first time in our country, which of the following States has declared a particular butterfly as 'State Butterfly'?

- a. Arunachal Pradesh
- b. Himachal Pradesh
- c. Karnataka
- d. Maharashtra**

**Sources:** The Hindu

## Combustible ice

Japan China have successfully extracted frozen fossil fuel known as combustible ice.

**Mains : GS 3** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

## What is Combustible ice?

- Combustible ice is a frozen mixture of water and concentrated natural gas.

- Technically known as methane hydrate, it can be lit on fire in its frozen state and is believed to comprise one of the world's most abundant fossil fuels.

*Methane clathrate also called methane hydrate, hydromethane, methane ice, fire ice, natural gas hydrate, or gas hydrate, is a solid clathrate compound in which a large amount of methane is trapped within a crystal structure of water, forming a solid similar to ice*

### **Significance**

- Commercial development of **Combustible ice's** huge reserves moved closer to reality following the extraction of the same by Japan and China
- Methane hydrate has been found beneath seafloors and buried inside Arctic permafrost and beneath Antarctic ice.
- Methane hydrate reserves could meet global gas demands for 80 to 800 years at current consumption rates.

### **Challenges in fuel extraction**

- Large-scale production remains many years away and if not done properly could flood the atmosphere with climate-changing greenhouse gases.
- The fuel was successfully mined by a drilling rig operating in the South China Sea by China and a drilling crew in Japan reported a similar successful operation offshore the Shima Peninsula.
- Efforts to successfully extract the fuel at a profit has not been developed.
- Environmental concerns regarding the fuel remains.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Consider the following statements about Combustible ice.

1. It is mixture of dry Carbon dioxide and water.
2. It is used in fire extinguisher

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#)

### **International Solar Alliance**

The world's smallest republic, the tiny island nation of Nauru ratifies International solar alliance.

**Mains : GS 3** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

### **The news**

- Nauru is the sixth country to ratify the International Solar Alliance (ISA)

Framework pact

- Five more African nations – Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Somalia, Ghana and Djibouti – have committed to sign the pact during the ongoing meeting of the African Development bank in India.
- With this around 31 countries will

### **International Solar Alliance**

- The International Solar Alliance is an alliance of more than 120 countries, most of them being sunshine countries, which come either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.
- The alliance's primary objective is work for efficient exploitation of **solar energy** to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
- The alliance is a treaty-based inter-governmental organization.
- The ISA was unveiled jointly by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Francois Hollande in 2015 at Paris on the sidelines of the COP 21 meeting of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
- The ISA will strive to bring together more than 121 solar resource rich nations for coordinated research, low cost financing and rapid deployment.
- The foundation stone of the ISA Headquarters was laid at Gwal Pahari, Guragaon in Haryana.
- The Agreement was opened for signature on the sidelines of 22<sup>nd</sup> CoP meeting at Marrakesh, Morocco.
- UNDP and World Bank have already announced their partnership with the ISA.
- ISA will become a legal entity once at least 15 countries ratify and deposit the framework agreement.
- India has already committed the required support of operationalization of ISA. ISA will put India globally in a leadership role in climate and renewable energy issues. It will also give a platform to showcase its solar programmes.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions [*UPSC Prelims 2016*]

Consider the following statements:

1. The International Solar Alliance was launched at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2015.
2. The Alliance includes all the member countries of the United Nations.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

### **Mains Perspective**

Similar questions

Should the pursuit of carbon credits and clean development mechanisms set up under UNFCCC be maintained even though there has been a massive slide in the value of a carbon credit? Discuss with respect to India's energy needs for economic growth.

**[UPSC Mains 2014]**

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#)

### **GM mustard's a major step forward**

Why India should allow cultivation of GM mustard?

**Mains : GS 3** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

#### **Background**

The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) recently cleared the proposal for cultivating genetically modified (GM) mustard .

#### **Why India should allow cultivation of GM mustard?**

- Dhara Mustard Hybrid will help Indian farmers increase mustard productivity which has been stagnant for several year.
- The technology, once approved, will help bring better hybrids using the same platform to improve the mustard crop yield significantly.
- GEAC has made the recommendation based on scientific evaluations and this is backed by data and evidence
- GM mustard will help the country address its shortage of edible oil

*Currently, more than 60 per cent of the domestic demand of edible oil is met by imports*

- **Misconception about safety is baseless :** For over 15 years, GM canola oil (a variant of mustard) and GM soya oil have been consumed globally without a single case of adverse impact. nIn India too, we have been importing nearly 4 million tonnes of these GM oils and consuming GM canola oil and GM soya oil for over a decade.
- GEAC has recommended this technology for commercialisation only after being satisfied about its safety.
- This technology is developed by a renowned Indian scientist in an Indian institution with the full support of public funds from NDDDB and the Government.
- Allegations that with this technology, farmers will have to buy the seeds every year has got nothing to do with the technology. Even today, farmers buy hybrid seeds (without GM) of crops every year.
- The technology was tested well for its environmental safety by GEAC before it was recommended for release.
- GM crops have been grown for over 20 years globally without a single adverse case of safety. In India, after the approval of Bt cotton in 2002, no other biotech

crops have been approved despite the huge success of Bt cotton.

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

- Commercial approval for GM mustard will not only boost the morale of our scientists, but will also provide a new path for the growth of India's largest sector – agriculture. Evaluate

**Sources:** [The Hindu BusinessLine](#)

### **Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction**

A high level Indian delegation is participating in the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) at Cancun, Mexico.

**Mains :GS 3** Disaster and disaster management.

**Why in News?**

- A high level Indian delegation is participating in the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) at Cancun, Mexico.
- India presented country statement and briefed about the steps taken by India after adoption of Sendai framework

### **About Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction**

- The Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (Global Platform), as recognized by the UN General Assembly, is the main forum at the global level for strategic advice, coordination, partnership development and the review of progress in the implementation of international instruments on disaster risk reduction.
- It was established in 2006
- The Global Platform is characterized by a format that facilitates dialogue and exchanges among all stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental.
- The Global Platform holds biennial sessions.

### **The 2017 Global Platform**

- The 2017 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction is being held in Cancun, Mexico
- The Global Platform will mark the first opportunity for the international community to review global progress in the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, which was adopted in Japan in 2015.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Consider the following statements about Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

1. It is an outcome of Sendai framework for Disaster Risk Reduction
2. The latest meeting of the organisation was held at Geneva

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only

- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

### **Mains Perspective**

#### Model questions

With increasing changes to our climate and environment, knowing about disasters, finding methods to get prepared, to mitigate and to get adapted to changes are quite essential to day to day life. This makes the topic important for UPSC. Visit our [IAS preparation page](#) to see previous year questions.

**Sources:** pib [UNISDR](#)

### **Dual onslaught on earth: Global warming and local urban heating**

Some world cities may be as much as eight degrees warmer by 2100 according to some researchers

**Prelims :** General issues on Environmental Ecology, Bio-diversity and Climate Change – that do not require subject specialisation

**Mains : GS 3** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

There are two reasons behind warming of cities

1. Global warming : nearly 5 degrees Celsius of the total rise would be attributed to global warming and the rest would be due to the so-called urban heat island.
2. Localised, urban heating - Urban heat island (UHI) effect- UHI which occurs when cooling parks, dams and lakes are replaced by heat-conducting concrete and asphalt – making cities warmer than their surroundings

*The projection is based on the worst-case-scenario assumption that emissions of planet-warming greenhouse gases continue to rise throughout the 21st century.*

#### **Significance**

- Such a temperature spike can have dire consequences for the health of city-dwellers, robbing companies and industries of able workers, and putting pressure on already strained natural resources such as water.
- UHI “significantly” increases city temperatures and economic losses from global warming, they added.
- Local actions to reduce UHI – such as planting more trees or cooling roofs and pavements, can make a big difference in limiting warming and minimising costs.

### **Prelims Perspective**

Urban Heat islands sometimes seen in news is

- a. a world wide project to preserve green spaces in urban areas
- b. urban area warmer than its surrounding due to human activities
- c. Solar Power plant designed for urban areas
- d. None of the above

### **Mains Perspective**

How effective is the international agreements when it comes to mitigating the effects of Climate change?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **International Day for Biodiversity**

The International Day for Biodiversity (IDB) 2017 was celebrated on 22nd May all over the country by different States and various organisations. The national level celebrations of IDB were held in Goa, The theme of the celebration was Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism is the theme

## **GS 3 Science and Technology**

### **SAARC satellite**

The 'South Asia Satellite,' which India has built for use by countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was successfully launched.

**Mains : GS 3** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life .

### **Details**

- All nations in the grouping, except Pakistan, will benefit from ISRO's launch
- The cost of launching the satellite will be met by the Government of India
- The GSAT-09 offers a full range of applications and services in telecommunication and broadcasting: Television, Direct-to-Home (DTH), Very Small Aperture Terminals (VSATs), Tele-education, Telemedicine and Disaster Management Support.
- The GSLV-F09 is about 50 metre tall and is the 11th flight of the GSLV.

## India's gift to neighbours

A look at the 2,230-kg South Asia Satellite that's being launched by ISRO from Sriharikota on May 5



ISRO

**Cost: ₹235 cr.**

- Has 12 Ku-band transponders

**LAUNCH VEHICLE**  
GSLV Mk-II

**BENEFICIARIES**  
Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Maldives

**STRUCTURE:** Cuboid built around a cylinder

**Mission life: Over 12 years**

**APPLICATIONS:**  
Telecommunications, disaster relief, DTH, tele-education, telemedicine and disaster management support

*Image : The Hindu*

### **Prelims perspective**

Similar questions [UPSC Prelims 2016]

With reference to 'Astrosat', the astronomical observatory launched by India, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Other than USA and Russia, India is the only country to have launched a similar observatory into space.
2. Astrosat is a 2000 kg satellite placed in an orbit at 1650 km above the surface of the Earth.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Solution: D**

**Mains Perspective**

Model questions [*UPSC Mains 2016*]

Discuss India's achievements in the field of Space Science and Technology. How the application of this technology has helped India in its socio-economic development?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

**Food Fortification**

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) released standards for food items such as milk, rice, oil, salt, wheat flour along with the logo, which companies can use in their labelling to indicate fortification.

**Mains : GS 3** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life .

**Details**

- MNCs, co-ops, other manufacturers will add premixes of micronutrients to products
- Some state governments have begun using fortified oil for their mid-day meal schemes. Some states are now distributing fortified wheat flour through the public distribution system, and the Maharashtra government has started a pilot project.
- The FSSAI is working with small local suppliers, to get them to add premixed micronutrients.

**What is Food fortification?**

Fortification is the practice of deliberately increasing the content of an essential micronutrient, i.e. vitamins and minerals (including trace elements) in a food, so as to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply and provide a public health benefit with minimal risk to health.

**An example - How rice is fortified?**

Rice can be fortified by adding a micronutrient powder to the rice that adheres to the grains or spraying of the surface of ordinary rice grains in several layers with a vitamin and mineral mix to form a protective coating. Rice can also be extruded and shaped into partially pre cooked grain-like structures resembling rice grains, which can then blended with natural polished rice.

## Food for thought

Fortification of eatables is aimed at fighting malnutrition

### What it means

Fortification is the addition of key vitamins and minerals, such as iron, iodine, zinc, Vitamins A & D, to staple foods such as rice, milk and salt to improve their nutritional content



- The nutrients may or may not have been originally present in the food before processing
- It is a simple, proven, cost-effective and complementary strategy in use across the globe
- The draft Food Safety and Standards Regulations, 2016, prescribe the standards for fortification of salt, oil, milk, and rice

*Image : The Hindu*

### Prelims Perspective

Food fortification sometimes seen in news is related to

- Increasing nutritional quality of food
- A method of pest control
- Preservation method for increasing shelf life of food
- An initiative by WHO to make food accessible to everyone

### Mains Perspective

Model questions

What do you mean by food fortification? How can it be helpful in elimination malnutrition.

**Sources:** The Hindu, WHO

### BrahMos missile achieves rare feat

The Army carried out a successful test of the advanced BrahMos Block III Land Attack Cruise Missile (LACM) in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

**Mains :GS 3** Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

### Details

- The missile is capable of being launched from land, sea, sub-sea and air against surface and sea-based targets.

- Testing BrahMos in the Andaman and Nicobar islands is a symbolic statement, as it brings the strategic Malacca straits under its range
- The range of the supersonic missile was initially capped at 290 km as per the obligations of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).
- After India became the member of MTCR, the range has been extended to 450 km and the plan is to increase it to 600km.
- The Army which began inducting BrahMos in 2007, currently has three missile regiments and is in the process of adding more.

*This is the fifth consecutive time when the Block-III version of BRAHMOS LACM has been successfully launched and hit the land-based target in “top-attack” mode, an incredible feat not achieved by any other weapon system of its genre.*

### **Brahmos Missile**

- The BrahMos is a short-range supersonic cruise missile that can be launched from submarines, ships, aircraft or land.
- BrahMos, derived from Russian P-800 Oniks or Yakhont missile, is a joint product of India and Russia.
- The name BrahMos is derived from the names of two rivers, the Brahmaputra of India and the Moskva of Russia.
- While it was a joint development, most of the critical systems on board the missile, including the seeker, come from Russia.
- It is the world's fastest anti-ship cruise missile in operation.
- The missile travels at speeds of Mach 2.8 to 3.0.
- The missile is capable of carrying a warhead of 300 kg.

### **Prelims Perspective**

A question can be expected from any of the following areas

Consider the following statements

1. BrahMos missile is jointly developed by India and Israel.
2. It is the world's fastest anti-ship cruise missile

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) None of the above

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#)

### **A bionic hand that can ‘see’**

Scientists have developed a new bionic hand that can ‘see’ objects and allow amputees to grasp things ten times faster than currently available prosthetics.

**Mains : GS 3** Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of

technology and developing new technology.

### **Features of the Bionic Hand**

- The bionic hand is fitted with a camera that instantaneously takes a picture of the object in front of it, assesses its shape and size and triggers a series of movements in the hand.
- Bypassing the usual processes that require the user to see the object, physically stimulate the muscles in the arm and trigger a movement in the prosthetic limb, the bionic hand 'sees' and reacts in one fluid movement.
- Responsiveness has been one of the main barriers to artificial limbs. For many amputees the reference point is their healthy arm or leg so prosthetics seem slow and cumbersome in comparison.

### **How it differs from already existing prosthetics?**

- Current prosthetic hands are controlled via myoelectric signals – electrical activity of the muscles recorded from the skin surface of the stump.
- Controlling them takes practice, concentration and time.
- But in the bionic hand, using neural networks – the basis for artificial intelligence – researchers showed the computer numerous object images and taught it to recognise the 'grip' needed for different objects.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

The term "Bionic Hand" was sometimes seen in news. What does it refer to?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Disarib - Novel molecule to treat cancer**

A novel small molecule, designed and synthesised by Indian researchers, has shown promise in targeted killing of cancer cells.

**Mains : GS 3** Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

### **Disarib- The Novel Molecule**

- The molecule (Disarib) works by binding itself to a protein called BCL2.
- While BCL2 protein is produced in excess in cancer cells, its expression is almost undetectable in normal cells.
- Hence, Disarib targets and kills only cancer cells while sparing normal cells.
- Inside a cell there is always a balance between proteins that promote cell death (apoptosis) and those that suppress cell death.
- Since the proteins (BAX and BAK) that promote cell death get bound to BCL2, normal cell death is suppressed and cancer cells are able to live longer.
- Disarib was able to disrupt the interaction of BCL2 and apoptosis-causing BAK protein and cause the death of cancer cells.

### **Drawbacks**

Expression of BCL2 is low in certain cancer cell lines such as breast cancer, chronic myelogenous leukemia and cervical cancer. So the Disarib molecule would be ineffective in these cancers.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

The term “disarib” was seen in news recently. What does it relate to?

- A. New HIV treating medicine
- B. A molecule for targeted killing of cancer cells
- C. Moon of planet Uranus
- D. NASA’s mission to find exoplanets that are habitable.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **DIPP & WIPO to set up Technology and Innovation Support Centers**

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) have signed an agreement to establish Technology and Innovation Support Centers (TISC)

**Mains : GS 3** Issues relating to intellectual property rights.

### **What is Technology and Innovation Support Centers (TISC)?**

- WIPO’s Technology and Innovation Support Centers (TISC) program provides innovators in developing countries with access to locally based, high quality technology information and related services.
- It will help them to exploit their innovative potential and to create, protect, and manage their intellectual property (IP) rights.

### **Services offered by TISCs may include**

- Access to online patent and non-patent resources and IP-related publications;
- Assistance in searching and retrieving technology information;
- Training in database search;
- On-demand searches (novelty, state-of-the-art and infringement);
- Monitoring technology and competitors;
- Basic information on industrial property laws, management and strategy, and technology commercialization and marketing.

The Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) is designated as the National Focal point for the TISC national network.

### **World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)**

- The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is one of the 17 specialized agencies of the United Nations.
- WIPO was created in 1967 "to encourage creative activity, to promote the protection of intellectual property throughout the world"

- WIPO currently has 189 member states administers 26 international treaties, and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

WIPO sometimes seen in news is

- a. Organisation in US that assess IP protection worldwide
- b. An advisory body on intellectual property rights
- c. a specialized UN agency that deals with Intellectual property
- d. None of the above

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [pib](#)

### **Multidrug-resistant TB will rise in India, says new study**

A new study in the medical journal Lancet says that India's TB crisis is likely to get worse.

**Prelims :** General Science

**Mains : GS 3** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life .**GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### **Highlights of the study**

- Multidrug Resistant-Tuberculosis (MDR-TB), a version of the disease where patients do not respond to first-line drugs, will become more common than it is now.
- By 2040, 12.4% of TB patients in the country will have MDR-TB.

### **India's TB burden**

- Nearly 5 lakh patients died due to TB last year.
- The tuberculosis epidemic affects 28 lakh Indians
- India is home to the most serious 'hotspots' of MDR-TB transmission, especially overcrowded cities such as Mumbai.
- India shoulder the highest TB burden in the world, and accounts for the most drug-resistant patients.

### **About Tuberculosis**

- Tuberculosis is a contagious infection caused by Mycobacterium tuberculosis
- It usually attacks the lungs.
- It can spread to other parts of the body like the brain and spine.
- Tuberculosis is contagious and spreads through the air, much like cold or flu.

### **Efforts to eliminate TB burden**

- The Health Ministry set itself the target of eliminating tuberculosis (TB) by 2025,
- Two new TB drugs, Bedaquiline and Delamanid are being used in Europe and the U.S. for several years. But they are yet to be made available in India's national healthcare system. The drug is available only in six sites across the country,

### **Prelims Perspective**

A question can be expected from any of the following areas  
Delamanid & Bedaquiline are drugs used in the treatment of

- a) Tuberculosis
- b) HIV aids
- c) Malaria
- d) None of the above

### **Mains Perspective**

Similar questions

Can overuse and free availability of antibiotics without Doctor's prescription, be contributors to the emergence of drug-resistant disease's in India? What are the available mechanisms for monitoring and control? Critically discuss the various issues involved. *[UPSC Mains 2014]*

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

### **What's in a generic name?**

The issues related to prescribing generic medicines.

**Mains : GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### **Background**

Government is asking doctors to prescribe generic medicines instead of brand name of the drug to make healthcare affordable for all.

### **The issues regarding medicines in India**

- The core issues are affordable access to medicines and their rational prescription and use
- There exist a large number of fixed-dose combinations (FDCs), the vast majority of which have no therapeutic justification.
- Generic medicines, are not available to meet the needs of all in the market.
- Pharmacists will dispense the brand which offers them the biggest margin.
- Quality survey by the government found out that drugs of prominent companies are even not of standard quality (NSQ).

### **The way forward**

- Periodic testing of the product should be conducted and stringent disincentives for poor quality should be enforced.
- an enlarged list of essential and life-saving medicines should be brought under price control
- elimination of all irrational FDCs
- No brands for drugs off patent.
- Briefer officially approved names to prescribe generics including rational FDCs

### **Mains Perspective**

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### Model questions

While the promotion of generic drugs will go a long way in ensuring that healthcare becomes affordable to all more needs to be done to ensure quality of generics in India.

Comment

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **GM mustard approved for environmental release - GM mustard**

The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), India's apex regulator for genetically modified seeds, cleared GM mustard for environmental release and use in farmer fields.

**Mains : GS 3** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

#### **Details**

- The approval is contingent on a final nod from Environment Minister.
- If Minister's consent be obtained, GM mustard would be the first transgenic food crop to be allowed for commercial cultivation in India.
- Though GEAC has earlier cleared a transgenic food crop Bt Brinjal for release it was not released due to objections from Environment minister.

#### **Dhara mustard hybrid 11 (DMH 11)**

- DMH 11 is genetically modified mustard which has been developed by a team of scientists at Delhi University under a government-funded project.
- It uses a system of genes from soil bacterium that makes mustard – generally a self pollinating plant – better suited to hybridisation than current methods.
- It contains three genes sourced from soil bacterium. Bar gene, Barnase and barstar.
- The bar gene, made the plant resistant to a herbicide (or weed killer) brand-named Basta, a product sold by multinational company Bayer Cropscience. Bar gene, was necessary because when seeds varieties are crossed to make hybrids, only a fixed proportion of the next generation of seeds carry all the desirable genes. Spraying these seeds with the herbicide Basta would ensure only the right kind of seed remained.

Mustard is one of India's most important winter crops and sown between mid-October and late November.

#### **Pros and cons**

- The technology, its proponents aver, will contribute to increasing yields of such hybrids by 25 per cent when compared with existing varieties.
- Its detractors contend that the GM seeds so produced aren't substantially better than existing mustard varieties, and that seed developers and biotechnology regulators have colluded to "push" GM mustard.
- **Clearance from states :** Agriculture is a State subject in India, which means

that even if a central regulator were to deem a plant as 'safe', it would need to be cleared by State authorities.

### **Prelims Perspective**

Previous year questions

#### **The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee is constituted under the**

- (a) Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006
- (b) Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999
- (c) Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
- (d) Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

What are the issues associated with cultivation of GM crops in India? What are the solution to these issues.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

### **Pneumonia vaccine**

India rolled out anti-pneumonia vaccine as part of the government's Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).

**Mains : GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### **Highlights**

The vaccine will protect children against severe forms of pneumococcal disease, such as pneumonia and meningitis.

#### **Why vaccine for pneumococcal diseases was introduced?**

Pneumococcal disease is the leading cause of vaccine-preventable deaths in children under five years of age globally and in India.

#### **what is pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV)?**

PCV is a mix of several bacteria of the pneumococci family, which are known to cause pneumonia – hence 'conjugate' in the name. Pneumonia caused by the pneumococcus bacteria is supposed to be the most common.

#### **Universal Immunisation Programme (U.I.P.)**

- Universal Immunization Programme is a vaccination program launched by the Government of India in 1985.
- It became a part of Child Survival and Safe Motherhood Programme in 1992 and is currently one of the key areas under National Rural Health Mission(NRHM) since 2005.
- The program now consists of vaccination for 12 diseases- tuberculosis, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), tetanus, poliomyelitis, measles, Hepatitis B, Diarrhoea, Japanese Encephalitis, rubella, Rotavirus and Pneumonia.

### **Prelims perspective**

Similar question [*UPSC Prelims 2016*]

Consider the following diseases

1. Diphtheria
2. Chickenpox
3. Smallpox

Which of the above diseases has/have been eradicated in India?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 3 only
- c) 1, 2 and 3
- d) None

Answer. B

### **Mains Perspective**

Similar questions [*UPSC Mains 2015*]

Public health system has limitation in providing universal health coverage. Do you think that private sector can help in bridging the gap? What other viable alternatives do you suggest.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Indian Express](#)

### **WannaCry**

Institutions in more than 100 countries were affected by computer malware spreading across the globe

**Mains : GS 3** basics of cyber security.

### **Highlights**

- The Malware makes use of a flaw in older Microsoft Windows systems
- Several cyber security firms have identified this as the biggest cyberattack in over a decade, after the Conficker worm infected millions of computers.
- The WannaCry 2.0 'ransomware', aka WannaCry, spreads using a flaw in older Microsoft Windows systems

### **What is ransomware?**

- It is malware that encrypts the files on an infected system and then demands a ransom to decrypt them, with escalation in the demand over time.
- The ransom demand is in Bitcoins, the cyber cryptocurrency that is hard to trace.
- The WannaCry 2.0 has been asking a ransom of the Bitcoin equivalent of \$300.

### **How systems get affected?**

It often reaches victims as mail attachment. Once opened, it spreads to other computers in the network exploiting the Windows vulnerability.

### **Impact on India**

- The IT Ministry has reached out to key stakeholders to advise them to protect

their systems against 'WannaCry' ransomware to ensure that the digital payments ecosystem in the country is protected.

- Though no formal reports have been received so far related to the ransomware attack MeitY said a few systems of the Police Department in Andhra Pradesh were impacted

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

'WannaCryptor 2.0' recently in news is a

- a. encryption technology developed by google
- b. malicious software
- c. solar spacecraft developed by NASA
- d. technology used to mine bitcoins

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions *[UPSC Mains 2013]*

Cyber warfare is considered by some defense analysts to be a larger threat than even Al Qaeda or terrorism. What do you understand by Cyber warfare? Outline the cyber threats which India is vulnerable to and bring out the state of the country's preparedness to deal with the same.

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

### **Cabinet gives nod for 10 indigenous nuclear reactors**

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for construction of 10 units of India's indigenous Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors (PHWR).

**Mains : GS 3** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

### **Highlights**

- The total installed capacity of the Plants will be 7000 MW.
- The 10 PHWR project will result in a significant augmentation of nuclear power generation capacity.
- It would be one of the flagship "Make in India" projects in this sector.

### **Significance**

- The project will help transform Indian nuclear industry by linking our goal of a strong nuclear power sector with our indigenous industrial capacities in high-end technologies.
- It is expected to generate more than 33,400 jobs.
- The ten reactors will be part of India's latest design of 700 MW PHWR fleet with state-of-art technology meeting the highest standards of safety.
- The approval marks a statement of strong belief in the capability of India's scientific community to build our technological capacities.

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

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Across the world nuclear power plants has faced issues related to safety and cost overruns. Along with this the fall in prices of renewable energy should be seen as an opportunity to have a serious rethink on the proposed nuclear power plants. Discuss

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [pib](#)

### **ISRO gets Indira Gandhi Prize for 2014**

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was presented with the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for the year 2014.

**Prelims :** Current events of national and international importance.

- The prize was presented to ISRO Chairman A.S. Kiran Kumar by former Prime Minister and Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust (IGMT) trustee Dr. Manmohan Singh.
- The ISRO was selected for the prize in 2014
- It consists of a trophy made of banded Haematite Jasper, with a portrait of the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Jaipur miniature paintings, a cash award of ₹1 crore and a citation
- The prize was awarded in recognition of ISRO's path-breaking achievements, culminating in the Mars Orbiter Mission and its contributions in strengthening international cooperation.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions [*UPSC Prelims 2014*]

Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2014 was given to which one of the following?

- (a) Bhabha Atomic Research Centre  
(b) Indian Institute of Science  
(c) Indian Space Research Organization  
(d) Tata Institute of Fundamental Research

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **GSLV: too late for changing times**

GSLV may be ISRO's short-lived rocket, not its primary satellite vehicle as planned

**Mains : GS 3** Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

### **Why GSLV was developed?**

- The GSLV was conceived in the early 1990s to launch Indian communication satellites of 2,000-kg class to an initial and later adjusted distance from Earth, called the 'GTO' (geosynchronous transfer orbit).
- This rocket took about 25 years and 11 flights to be fully realised.
- GSLV F-09 which launched South Asian satellite was fourth successful launch of the vehicle.

### Why GSLV could be short lived?

- The GSLV is caught in a glaring mismatch: it cannot lift India's bigger satellites; and the size that it can lift is out of fashion and does not make economic sense.
- The weight of communication satellite increased several times while ISRO was perfecting the GSLV and falling behind schedule with the rocket's crucial cryogenic stage

*This was done to pack more punch (or transponders) per spacecraft.*

- The communications satellite market is consistently looking at payload sizes greater than four tonnes and the question remains whether the GSLV or [the bigger] MKIII can cater to the market
- ISRO's smaller PSLV rocket has made a niche in the world market for light lifts.
- For the GSLV, there may not be many commercial customers requiring its service.

### Prelims perspective

Similar questions **[UPSC Prelims 2016]**

With reference to 'Astrosat', the astronomical observatory launched by India, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Other than USA and Russia, India is the only country to have launched a similar observatory into space.
2. Astrosat is a 2000 kg satellite placed in an orbit at 1650 km above the surface of the Earth.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Solution: D**

### Mains Perspective

Model questions **[UPSC Mains 2016]**

Discuss India's achievements in the field of Space Science and Technology. How the application of this technology has helped India in its socio-economic development?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark III (Launch Vehicle Mark 3, LVM3 or GSLV-III)

ISRO is set to launch GSLV Mk 3 - the heaviest rocket made by India that is capable of carrying heaviest satellites.

**Mains : GS 2** Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

### The Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark III (Launch Vehicle

**Mark 3, LVM3 or GSLV-III)**

- The Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark III (GSLV Mk- III) is the heaviest rocket ever made by India.
- It is intended to launch satellites into geostationary orbit and as a launcher for an Indian crew vehicle.
- It will allow India to achieve complete self reliance in launching satellites
- It will be capable of placing 4 tonne class Geosynchronous satellites into **Geosynchronous Transfer Orbits** and will be capable of placing up to 8 tonne in a low Earth orbit, enough to carry India's crew module.
- The LVM3 will have an Indian built cryogenic stage with higher capacity than GSLV.

*A cryogenic rocket engine is a rocket engine that uses a cryogenic fuel or oxidizer, that is, its fuel or oxidizer (or both) are gases liquefied and stored at very low temperatures.*

- GSLV-Mk III (earlier named Launch Vehicle Mark-3) could be India's vehicle of choice to launch Indians into space, from Indian soil using Indian rockets.
- ISRO has already prepared plans of hoisting a two to three human crew into space as soon as the government gives it a sanction of about \$4 billion.
- Presently only three countries -Russia, the U.S. and China- have a human spaceflight programme.

**Prelims perspective**

Similar Questions **[UPSC Prelims 2016]**

With reference to 'Astrosat', the astronomical observatory launched by India, which of the following statements is/are correct?

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- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Solution: D

**Mains perspective.**

- Discuss India's achievements in the field of Space Science and Technology. How the application of this technology has helped India in its Socio-economic development? **[UPSC Mains 2016]**

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#) [ISRO](#) [Wikipedia](#) [Wikipedia](#)

### **Akash Surface to Air Missile (SR-SAM) systems**

The Defence Ministry decided to cancel the Army's global contest for Short Range Surface to Air Missile (SR-SAM) systems and instead procure two additional regiments of the indigenously developed Akash missile systems.

**Mains : GS 3** Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

## **Local warhorse**

A look at the Akash system of missiles

- Was developed by DRDO and is being built by Bharat Dynamics Limited
- It is among the missiles developed under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme in 1984
- The system can simultaneously engage multiple targets in all weather conditions
- Has a maximum range of 25km and a wide



engagement envelope from a low altitude of 30 metres to a maximum of up to 20 km

- The system has an indigenous content of 96%

*Image : The Hindu*

- The Army has a requirement for four regiments of SR-SAMs. It had earlier ordered two Akash regiments and formally began inducting them in May 2015.
- Two more regiments were meant to be procured by a global tender for which competition was under way between 3-4 global firms.
- Of the Akash systems, the first regiment has been inducted and operational and induction of the second regiment will be completed in the next 2-3 months.

### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

Which of the following statements about Akash missiles is/are correct?

1. It has a maximum range of 25km
2. It is developed under the integrated guided missile development programme

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Moon orbiting solar system's third largest dwarf planet found**

Scientists have discovered a new moon orbiting the third largest dwarf planet, that resides in the frigid outskirts in our solar system.

**Mains : GS 3** Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology

#### **About the discovery**

- The team uncovered the moon in archival images of 2007 OR10 taken by the Hubble Telescope
- With this discovery, it appears that most of the known dwarf planets in the Kuiper Belt larger than 965 kilometres across have companions.
- These bodies can provide some insight into how moons formed in the young solar system.
- The combined power of three space observatories, including NASA's Hubble Space Telescope, has helped uncover the moon orbiting the dwarf planet 2007 OR10 in the Kuiper Belt

*Kuiper belt is a region of the solar system beyond the planets, extending from the orbit of Neptune. It consist mainly small bodies or remnants from the solar system's formation.*

#### **2007 OR10,**

- The dwarf planet is about 1,528 kilometres across, and the moon is estimated to be 240 kilometres to 400 kilometres in diameter.
- 2007 OR10, like Pluto, follows an eccentric orbit, but it is currently three times further than Pluto is from the sun.
- 2007 OR10 is a member of an exclusive club of nine dwarf planets.
- Of those bodies, only Pluto and Eris are larger than 2007 OR10.
- It was discovered in 2007

#### **Prelims perspective**

Model questions

2007 OR10 sometimes seen in news is

- a. NASA's Jupiter mission
- b. Spacecraft developed by China
- c. dwarf planet
- d. ISRO's proposed mission to venus

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **Green energy target tough - issues of Rooftop solar programme**

The government is unlikely to meet its much-publicised target of 175 GW of renewable energy by 2022 due to the poor progress of the rooftop solar programme.

**Mains :GS 3** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

### **Reasons behind poor progress of rooftop solar programme**

- It is not cost-effective - The tariff structure right now is such that it is just not remunerative
- Most roofs in India are flat, and people find several alternative uses for these such as drying clothes, and even hosting parties or meals.
- There are parts of India where people even sleep on their roofs.
- India does not have financial institutions aggregating demand across a fundamentally
- disparate set of projects
- There is no regulatory clarity on guaranteed payment by utilities on the net metering basis.

### **What lies ahead?**

- To meet the renewable energy targets the Ministry is considering increasing the contribution of other sources like biogas and small hydro.

*The government's current plan is to get 10 GW from biomass powered plants and 5 GW from small hydro (hydro projects below 25 MW in scale).*

- The government is considering a new plan to incentivise rooftop solar
- Specific policy initiatives to support rooftop solar especially effective net-metering implementation and offering incentives in order to attract financial investors needs to be introduced.

### **Present status of rooftop solar programme**

- The government had announced a target of 40 GW of rooftop solar by 2022, but had achieved only about 1.3 GW as of December 2016, which is a little more than 3% of the target.

### **Mains Perspective**

Model questions

To what factors can the recent dramatic fall in equipment costs and tariff of solar energy be attributed? What implications does the trend have for the thermal power producers

and the related industry? [UPSC Mains 2016]

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

### **Monstrous cyclones cover Jupiter's poles**

Scientists working on the American space agency's Juno mission were amazed by the storms seen at the Jupiter's poles.

**Mains : GS 3** Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

#### **Highlights**

- Juno probe finds earth-sized storms in Jupiter.
- The big cyclones that cover the highest latitudes of the planet are only now being seen in detail because previous missions to the planet never really got to look from above and below — certainly not at such a high resolution.
- With Juno, features down to 50 km across can be discerned.
- The magnetic field of Jupiter is about 10 times the strength of Earth's magnetic field.
- It is the magnetic field investigation that is also at the heart of trying to understand Jupiter's very bright auroras — its northern and southern lights.

Juno's findings were not what everyone was expecting.

#### **Juno Mission**

- Juno is the space probe orbiting the planet Jupiter launched by NASA
- Juno will study the gas giant's gravitational and magnetic fields, and explore the swirling clouds that form Jupiter's colorful, trademark atmosphere.
- The spacecraft will also reveal what Jupiter is made of — and how much of it is water.

#### **Prelims Perspective**

Similar question UPSC prelims 2016

What is 'Greased Lightning-10 (GL-10)', recently in the news?

- (a) Electric plane tested by NASA
- (b) Solar-powered two-seater aircraft designed by Japan
- (c) Space observatory launched by China
- (d) Reusable rocket designed by ISRO

Sources: [The Hindu](#) <https://www.missionjuno.swri.edu/mission/>

#### **Time for biodegradable electronics**

Scientists at the University of Stanford have developed a new ultra thin, flexible electronic device that is biodegradable, an advance that may help tackle the problem of mounting electronic waste

### **National biopharma mission**

The recently launched national Biopharma mission focuses on developing home grown vaccines to prevent dengue, human papilloma virus and pneumococcal infection.

**Mains : GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### **National biopharma mission**

#### **Objective**

- The objective of the mission is to accelerate early leads through the product development pipeline to ensure they reach the market in a time-bound manner.
- Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), a public sector undertaking under the DBT, will be the implementing agency for the mission, which is also supported through a World Bank loan.
- The Mission is part of an attempt to push India's share in the global biopharmaceuticals market from the current 3 per cent to 5 per cent by 2022.
- It focuses on developing home grown vaccines to prevent dengue, human papilloma virus and pneumococcal infection.
- Apart from vaccines and biosimilars, the five-year mission will also support development of newer platform technologies for medical devices and diagnostics.
- This mission is not for new discovery, but for creating infrastructure to move important early leads, which are in different stages, through the pipeline, and come out with products.
- The mission will follow a consortium-based approach, wherein academia and industry working in an identified area will be encouraged to work together. The government will handhold them through various regulatory processes so that product development can be hastened.

#### **Mains Perspective**

##### Model Questions

Examine the major provisions of National Biopharma mission. How will it help in developing an indigenous biopharmaceutical industry?

**Sources:** [The Hindu](#)

### **National Technology Day celebrated on 11th May**

Technology Day commemorates India's success in using science and technology to address the challenges facing the country. On 11 May 1998 the Pokhran test was conducted. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee declared India a full-fledged nuclear state after operation 'Shakti' and it made India the 6<sup>th</sup> country to join the Nuclear Club. The theme of the day is Technology for Inclusive and Sustainable Development

### **China tests a 'lunar palace' on earth - Yuegong-1**

Chinese students will live in a laboratory simulating a lunar-like environment for up to 200 days as China prepares for its long-term goal of putting humans on the moon. The structure that has lunar like conditions is called "Yuegong-1", or "Lunar Palace". The volunteers will live in the sealed lab to simulate a long-term, self-contained space mission with no input from the outside world. A successful 105-day trial was conducted in 2014. The Lunar Palace is the world's third bioregenerative life-support base, and the first developed in China.

### **Indian Navy and Space Application Centre, Ahmedabad Sign Memorandum of Understanding**

Indian Navy and Space Application Centre, Ahmedabad signed a 'Memorandum of Understanding on Data Sharing and Scientific cooperation in the field of Meteorology and Oceanology' at Ahmedabad. With this initiative, both the organisations have embarked on a common platform of mutual cooperation, wherein the scientific advancements and expertise achieved by SAC would be synergised into the Indian Naval efforts to keep the Nation's Defence Forces in step with rapid development in the field of Environment Sciences and Satellite Data acquisition technology.

### **Australian scientists create world's thinnest hologram**

Scientists have created the world's thinnest hologram that can be seen without 3D goggles and may be integrated into everyday electronics such as smartphones, computers and TVs. Researchers led by RMIT University in Australia have designed a nano-hologram that is simple to make, can be seen without 3D goggles and is 1,000 times thinner than a human hair. Conventional computer-generated holograms are too big for electronic devices but the new ultrathin hologram overcomes the size barriers.

### **New bacteria named after Kalam**

Scientists at NASA have named a new organism discovered by them after Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. Till date, the new organism – a form of bacteria – has been found only on the International Space Station (ISS) and has not been found on earth. Researchers at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), the foremost lab of NASA for work on interplanetary travel, discovered the new bacteria on the filters of the International Space Station (ISS) and named it *Solibacillus kalamii*.

### **Dhola-Sadiya Bridge, India's longest river bridge**

Prime Minister inaugurated the Dhola-Sadiya Bridge in Assam, which is India's longest river bridge. Spanning 9.15 km, the bridge is built across the Lohit river, which is a tributary of the Brahmaputra. It will connect Assam and eastern Arunachal Pradesh. The total length of the project, including the approach roads on each side, is 28.50 km. The bridge will reduce the travel time between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh from six

hours to just one hour as the distance will shrink by 165 km. It is 3.55 km longer than the Bandra-Worli sea link in Mumbai. The sea link has now become the second longest river bridge in the country. The construction of the Dhola-Sadiya bridge began in 2011 by the Ministry of Road Transport along with Navayuga Engineering Company Ltd., under the public-private-partnership agreement

Built at a cost of ₹ Rs 2,056 crore the bridge that can withstand 60 tonnes of weight

#### **A gene that staves off heart disease**

Scientists have identified a unique gene variant in people living in isolated Greek villages that protects them from heart diseases despite enjoying a high-fat diet. The variant, rs145556679\*, is associated with lower levels of both 'bad' natural fats and 'bad' cholesterol, the factors that lower the risk of cardiovascular disease. The cardioprotective variant was found in Mylopotamos in northern Crete, where the population is isolated and live a long life despite having a diet rich in animal fat.