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CAG slams Delhi for poor fund allocation

- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), in its recently released annual report, has said that the Delhi Government’s allocation of funds was less productive and its social welfare schemes showed serious discrepancies in implementation.

What else the report says?
- There was unrealistic budgeting and deficient financial management by several departments.
- Though the Delhi Government had invested Rs.17,060.35 crore as of March 31, 2014 in statutory corporations, rural banks, joint stock companies and cooperatives, the return on these investments was a meagre 0.07%.
- The Delhi Government paid interest at an average rate of 8.80% on its borrowings during 2013-14.
- Overall fiscal liabilities of the State increased from Rs.26,544.20 crore in 2009-10 to Rs.32,080.32 crore in 2013-14, depicting a rise of 20.86%.
- The Delhi Government has failed to obtain fund utilisation certificates (UCs) from various institutions. Over 4,780 UCs amounting to Rs.19,064.02 crore were awaited from various departments at the end of March 2014.
- The implementation of mid-day meal scheme, MLA local area development scheme and welfare schemes for persons with disabilities as well as management of jails, mechanisation of sanitation and performance of Delhi Tourism and Transport Development Corporation are also not so good. While only 1,154 children were covered under the mid-day meal scheme, jails were overcrowded with 14,209 prisoners being lodged against the capacity of 6,250.
- No State policy was developed to address the issues of persons with disabilities.

DNA test can be ordered even in maintenance cases, says HC

- The Madras High Court Bench recently ruled that Judicial Magistrates dealing with petitions seeking maintenance amount for minor children under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure can order DNA test if the person from whom the amount is claimed disputes the fact of having fathered the children and if there is no conclusive proof for establishing paternity.
- The judgment was delivered by Justice S. Nagamuthu.
What else has the court said?

- Magistrates should generally not allow litigants to drag maintenance proceedings. However, the judicial officers could order DNA tests in extraordinary cases where a legal presumption could not be drawn under Section 112 of the Indian Evidence Act with respect to disputed question of paternity.
- The fundamental question to be decided in maintenance seeking cases was to determine whether the person, from whom maintenance was claimed for minor children, was their biological father or not. Courts would have no choice but to order a DNA test when there was no conclusive proof with respect to paternity.

Background:

- The judgement came based on a petition, in which the petitioner, a married man and a Hindu by faith, had claimed that he was maintaining an illicit relationship with a woman who had approached a Judicial Magistrate in Sivakasi in Virudhunagar district last year seeking monthly maintenance of Rs. 3,500 for each of her two children. He had claimed he was the father of only one of her two children.

TAPI also on the agenda

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the five Central Asian countries — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — in July is expected to give an impetus to various energy and mining projects including the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) natural gas pipeline.
- The multi-billion dollar TAPI project could be off to a year-end start, as the legal framework is expected to be in place by September followed by the announcement of the consortium.
- TAPI will also be on the agenda for talks when Prime Minister Modi arrives in Turkmenistan.

What is TAPI?

- The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Natural Gas Pipeline (TAPI) Project is a proposed natural gas pipeline being developed by the Asian Development Bank.
- It aims to export up to 33 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas per year through a proposed approximately 1,800-kilometer (km) pipeline from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.
- This project makes way for enhanced energy trading between Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.
- The pipeline will transport Caspian Sea natural gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan into Pakistan and then to India.
**Bangladesh to open mission in Assam**

- India has given clearance to Bangladesh to open its **fifth diplomatic mission in India**.

**Details:**
- The new Deputy High Commission will be opened in Guwahati, the capital of Assam.
- **Jurisdiction:** The new mission in Guwahati will have consular jurisdiction over Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.
- Bangladesh has missions already in Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, and Agartala.
- This clearance is in line with the joint declaration issued during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s recent visit to Bangladesh when both the countries expressed the wish to open more missions.

**Mercury pollution victims seek justice**

- An ex-workers of the thermometer manufacturing unit of Hindustan Unilever Ltd. (HUL) in Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu, who resigned from the company after exposure to hazardous mercury, has sought justice from the court.
- The victim has said that he has been experiencing headaches, memory loss, skin and tooth infections and exposure to deadly mercury for over four years has left him impotent. He also said that his wife had to undergo abortion eight times.
- The unit was shut down on March 7, 2001, after a spate of protests, but workers claim that tonnes of hazardous mercury waste continue to lie scattered around the unit compound in Kodaikanal.
- A 2005 study on mercury pollution published by Elsevier Ltd., which had four experts from the BARC, Department of Atomic Energy, and Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Hyderabad, had concluded that the water, sediment and fish samples from Kodai lake showed elevated levels of mercury even four years after the stoppage of mercury emissions.
- However, the company has said that no adverse impacts on the health of employees or the environment were seen.

**Mercury- basic facts:**
- Mercury is a chemical element with symbol Hg and atomic number 80.
- It is commonly known as quicksilver and was formerly named hydrargyrum.
Mercury is the only metallic element that is liquid at standard conditions for temperature and pressure. The only other element that is liquid under these conditions is bromine.

Mercury occurs in deposits throughout the world mostly as cinnabar (mercuric sulfide).

Mercury poisoning can result from exposure to water-soluble forms of mercury (such as mercuric chloride or methylmercury), inhalation of mercury vapor, or eating seafood contaminated with mercury.

Mercury is used in thermometers, barometers, manometers, sphygmomanometers, float valves, mercury switches, mercury relays, fluorescent lamps and other devices. It is also used in lighting: electricity passed through mercury vapor in a fluorescent lamp produces short-wave ultraviolet light which then causes the phosphor in the tube to fluoresce, making visible light.

Mercury is a very rare element in the Earth’s crust. It accounts for only about only 0.08 parts per million (ppm). It is a relatively poor conductor of heat. Most metals are excellent thermal conductors.

**Effects of Mercury on Health:**

- Exposure to mercury – even small amounts – may cause serious health problems, and is a threat to the development of the child in utero and early in life.
- Mercury may have toxic effects on the nervous, digestive and immune systems, and on lungs, kidneys, skin and eyes.
- Mercury is considered by WHO as one of the top ten chemicals or groups of chemicals of major public health concern.
- People are mainly exposed to methylmercury, an organic compound, when they eat fish and shellfish that contain the compound.

**New case marks Ebola’s return to Liberia**

- The West African country, Liberia could face another outbreak of the Ebola disease nearly two months after being declared Ebola-free. Recently a boy was found to be infected with the Ebola Virus.
- The World Health Organization declared Liberia Ebola-free on May 9, after it went 42 days without a new case.
- Liberia had been hardest hit before by the outbreak with a death toll of more than 4,800 people.

**EBOLA:**

- Ebola virus disease (EVD), formerly known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever, is a severe, often fatal illness in humans. It is a disease of humans and other primates caused by an ebolavirus.
- Symptoms start two days to three weeks after contracting the virus, with a fever, sore throat, muscle pain and headaches.
- Typically, vomiting, diarrhea and rash follow, along with decreased functioning of the liver and kidneys. Around this time, affected people may begin to bleed both within the body and externally.
- The virus may be acquired upon contact with blood or bodily fluids of an infected animal.
- Fruit bats are believed to be a carrier and may spread the virus without being affected. Once human infection occurs, the disease may spread between people, as well.
- In order to reduce the spread, the World Health Organization recommends raising community awareness of the risk factors for Ebola infection and the protective measures individuals can take. These include avoiding contact with infected people and regular hand washing using soap and water. Traditional burial rituals, especially those requiring washing or embalming of bodies, should be discouraged or modified.
• **Quarantine:** Quarantine, also known as enforced isolation, is usually effective in decreasing spread. Governments often quarantine areas where the disease is occurring or individuals who may be infected.

• **Vaccine:** No vaccine is currently available for humans. The most promising candidates are DNA vaccines or vaccines derived from adenoviruses, vesicular stomatitis Indiana virus (VSIV) or filovirus-like particles (VLPs) because these candidates could protect nonhuman primates from ebolavirus-induced disease. DNA vaccines, adenovirus-based vaccines, and VSIV-based vaccines have entered clinical trials.

• **Treatment:** No specific treatment for the disease is yet available. Efforts to help those who are infected are supportive and include giving either oral rehydration therapy (slightly sweet and salty water to drink) or intravenous fluids.

• The recent outbreak in West Africa is the largest and most complex Ebola outbreak since the Ebola virus was first discovered in 1976. The most severely affected countries were Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

**Green Climate Fund to become operational soon**

• The Green Climate Fund Board recently said that the $100-billion Green Climate Fund will soon become operational in India and the process of accrediting organisations which can access the funds is going on.

• Some international agencies have already accessed funds to work towards climate change mitigation and adaptation.

**Green Climate Fund (GCF):**

• The Green Climate Fund (GCF) is a fund within the framework of the UNFCCC founded as a mechanism to redistribute money from the developed to the developing world, in order to assist the developing countries in adaptation and mitigation practices to counter climate change.

**Why it was founded?**

• It was founded as a mechanism to redistribute money from the developed to the developing world, in order to assist the developing countries in adaptation and mitigation practices to counter climate change.

• It was also founded to make a significant and ambitious contribution to the global efforts towards attaining the goals set by the international community to combat climate change.

• It is governed by a Board of 24 members and was initially supported by an Interim Secretariat.

**How it helps?**

• The Green Climate Fund will support projects, programmes, policies and other activities in developing country Parties using thematic funding windows.

• It is intended to be the centrepiece of efforts to raise Climate Finance of $100 billion a year by 2020.

• The Fund will promote the paradigm shift towards low-emission and climate-resilient development pathways by providing support to developing countries to limit or reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the impacts of climate change, taking into account the needs of those developing countries particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

• The Fund will strive to maximize the impact of its funding for adaptation and mitigation, and seek a balance between the two, while promoting environmental, social, economic and development co-benefits and taking a gender-sensitive approach.

**Who will govern the Fund?**
The Fund is governed and supervised by a Board that will have full responsibility for funding decisions and that receives the guidance of the COP. The Fund is accountable to, and functions under the guidance of, the COP.

Census data on disabled population released

The Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India has released data on disabled population by type of disability, type of households and sex – 2011. The data gives the number of households having disabled persons by type of households including normal, institutional and houseless households. The disabled persons living in different type of households are further cross-classified into eight different disabilities i.e. seeing, hearing, speech, movement, mental retardation, mental illness, any other and multiple disability for India/States/UTs.

Details of the data:
The data released shows 207.8 lakh households have disabled persons in the country constituting 8.3% of the total households. Out of the total households having disabled persons, about 99% households are normal households, 0.4% are institutional and 0.2% are houseless households.

Total households having disabled persons show an increase of 20.5 lakhs, from 187.3 lakhs in 2001 to 207.8 lakhs in 2011 (6.2 lakhs in rural and 14.3 lakhs in urban). Normal households increased by 2,02,4495, institutional households by 8,370 and houseless households by 13,560 during the decade 2001-11.

Disabled persons in normal households increased by 48,19,382, institutional households by 65,895 and houseless households by 22,948 during the said decade.

Three follow-on Water Jet Fast Attack Craft launched

The Indian Navy launched three Follow-on Water Jet Fast Attack Craft (FO-WJFAC) at Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd (GRSE) in Kolkata recently. The vessels are named- INS Tarmugli, INS Tilanchang and INS Tihayu. The names of the ships are based on picturesque places in the Andaman and Nicobar islands in the Bay of Bengal.

About the vessels:
The Follow on Water Jet Fast Attack Craft are powered by the latest 4000-series of MTU engines, along with advanced machinery control system and water jets and can attain a maximum speed of 35 knots.
The craft will also have the latest communication equipment and radars which would enable effective surveillance.

These follow-on ships have higher power generating capacity of 280 kW, enhanced capacity of RO plant from 2 TPD to 4 TPD among many other features as compared to the Water Jet Fast Attack Craft already in service. The indigenous CRN 91 Gun with Optronics Pedestal gives them the requisite firepower to undertake their basic role of patrolling effectively.

New members appointed for North Eastern Council

Two eminent persons were recently appointed as the new members of the North Eastern Council for a period of three years. The two members are- Shri Chandra Kanta Das, a senior retired IAS officer and Prof Gangmumei Kamei, a distinguished academician.
author and public activist. They will function as full time non-official members from the NEC headquarters at Shillong.

- Union Minister Jitendra Singh is the Chairman of the NEC.

**About the North Eastern Council:**

- The North Eastern Council is the nodal agency for the economic and social development of the North Eastern Region which consists of the eight States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The chief ministers and governors represent them.
- The headquarters of the council is situated in Shillong, and it functions under Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region.
- The North Eastern Council was **constituted in 1971 by an Act of Parliament**.
- The Council is an advisory body and may discuss any matter in which the north-eastern states have a common interest and advise the Central Government as to the action to be taken on any such matter.
- The funding of council mainly lies with the central government with small portions contributed by the state governments as well.
- The NEC act has been amended in 2002 to add Sikkim and restructure it as the regional planning body for the North Eastern Region.

**Digital ‘Guddi-Gudda Board’**

- The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development has adopted the ‘Digital Guddi-Gudda Board’ as a **Best Practice under Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme** on the occasion of Digital India Week being observed from 1st July to 7th July, 2015.

**About the Digital Guddi-Gudda Board:**

- The Digital Guddi-Gudda Board is an innovation of District Jalgaon in Maharashtra, initiated by its Collector, Ms Rubal Aggarwal with the support of Ms Raksha Khadse, MP, Raver and Mr. A.T. Nana Patil, MP, Jalgaon.
- The digital Board has been popularized in the district of Jalgaon, Maharashtra and works as a platform for dissemination of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Material on Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme as well as updating monthly birth statistics.
- The digital board displays audio video material as well as still frames for disseminating information.
- This Board is being currently displayed at important state offices including that of the Chief Minister, district level offices, Zila Panchayat offices, primary health centers and other public places frequently visited by the common man.
- This is a fine example of digital innovation and best practice connected with the BBBP Scheme.
- Apart from displaying disaggregated birth statistics, this Board also contains other audio video IEC material related to the Scheme.

**About BBBP:**

- Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Andolan will help in generating awareness and improving the efficiency of delivery of welfare services meant for women.
- It is set up with an initial corpus of Rs 100 crore.
- **Aim:** The adverse and declining child sex ratio (CSR) across the States is a major cause of concern as it has fallen from 927 in 2001 to 918 in 2011. The BBBP seeks to arrest the trend and over time to reverse it.

**Implementation:**

- A 100 critical low CSR districts in all States and UTs have been identified for focused and convergent action by the Ministries.
The Ministry of WCD is the nodal Ministry for this initiative and will carry out training to stakeholders, community mobilization and sensitization. It will also embark upon a range of advocacy measures and activities, not limited to the 100 low CSR districts but all across the country.

All forms of media and social media platforms would be used for this.

Vijayanagar inscription found

An inscription dating back to the times of the Vijayanagar Empire has been found at a temple at Kandavara village in Kundapur taluk of Udupi district, Karnataka.

Archaeologists said that the inscription dates back to the times of the Vijayanagar ruler Krishnadevaraya.

The inscription was brought out during the renovation of the temple and installed on its outer premises.

There are 30 lines written in Kannada on the rectangle stone slab. The writing mentioned in the inscription corresponds to 1509 AD. This date also corresponds to the first year of Krishnadevaraya’s reign.

About Vijayanagar ruler Krishnadevaraya:

- He was an emperor of the Vijayanagara Empire who reigned from 1509–1529.
- He is the third ruler of the Tuluva Dynasty.
- Krishna Deva Raya earned the titles Kannada Rajya Rama Ramana, Andhra Bhoja and Mooru Rayara Ganda.
- He became the dominant ruler of the peninsula of India by defeating the Sultans of Bijapur, Golconda, the Bahmani Sultanate and the Raja of Odisha.
- The great south Indian mathematician Nilakantha Somayaji also lived in the Empire of Krishnadevaraya.
- He was the most powerful of all the Hindu rulers of India at that time.
- Portuguese travellers Domingo Paes and Fernao Nuniz also visited the Vijayanagara Empire during his reign.

With AFSPA, India has failed statute: Amnesty

Amnesty International recently released a detailed report on the implications of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in Jammu & Kashmir, asserting that the Union government has often refused to prosecute the Army or paramilitary personal accused of human rights abuses.

Details of the report:

- The report is titled “Denied: Failures in accountability for human rights violations by security force personnel in Jammu & Kashmir”.
- The report says, “By not addressing human rights violations committed by security force personnel in the name of national security, India has not only failed to uphold its international obligations but has also failed its own Constitution.”
- The report has urged India to become signatory of international conventions on human rights and has asked the Centre to “accept and facilitate” a request from the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance to visit India.
- Citing many instances where their RTI applications failed to get a response, Amnesty has called for making the information about the cases pertaining to human rights violations in J-K public.
• The report has also sought amendments in the legislations to limit the jurisdiction of military courts. It admits that to address the issue of impunity is a “challenge” but says is essential to ensure justice.
• The report also points out that legislation like the Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990—which gives security officials special enforcement powers to act against alleged terrorists and separatists and protects them against civilian prosecution—do not conform with international human rights standards or the Indian Constitution that guarantees right to life, justice and remedy.

Recommendations made by the Amnesty International:
• It has made a slew of recommendations to the federal authorities and state government in Jammu and Kashmir.
• It asks both the federal and state governments to take immediate steps to start independent and impartial investigations into all cases of alleged human rights violations by security forces and to prosecute the suspects in proceedings that meet international fair trial standards.
• It asks the federal government to repeal AFSPA and “ensure that all other national security legislation complies fully with India’s international legal obligations and is in line with international standards.” It has identified “impunity” and “lack of political will” as a long standing problem in J-K.

World Bank approves $650 m loan for eastern freight corridor
• The World Bank has approved an additional loan of $650 million for the Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC), which is aimed at the faster delivery of goods between the northern and eastern parts of the country.
• This round of loans to the Eastern DFC follows two other loans by the World Bank. This round of World Bank funding will build the 401 km Ludhiana-Khurja section in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab.
• The Cabinet had recently approved the revised cost estimate of Rs.81,459 crore for the Eastern and Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) Project.

About the Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) Project:
• The Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor Project (EDFC) will ease congestion choking the railway system and reduce travel-time for passenger trains on the arterial Ludhiana-Delhi-Mughal Sarai railway route.
• The corridor will add additional rail transport capacity, improve service quality and create higher freight capacity.
• It will also help to develop the institutional capacity of the Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation (DFCCIL) and Ministry of Railways to best utilize heavy haul freight systems.
• This Project aims at the faster delivery of goods between the northern and eastern parts of the country.
• The project will help increase the capacity of these freight-only lines by raising the axle-load limit from 22.9 to 25 tonnes and enable speeds of up to 100 km/hr.
• An analysis of the projected greenhouse gases that are expected to be generated by the Eastern freight corridor project found that it would be 55 per cent lower than the levels of gases released without the project.
• The Eastern DFC project is expected to release 10.5 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions up to 2041-42, compared to a whopping 23.3 million tonnes in the absence of the freight corridor.
This is also part of India’s first Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) initiative – being built on two main routes – the Western and the Eastern Corridors. These corridors will help India make a quantum leap in increasing the railways’ transportation capacity by building high-capacity, higher-speed dedicated freight corridors along the “Golden Quadrilateral” – the four rail routes that connect Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata.

**Cabinet clears setting up of online national agriculture market**

- The union cabinet recently approved the setting up of an **online national agriculture market** that will provide more options to farmers for selling their produce.
- Currently, farmers are restricted to selling their produce at mandis or market committees that charge various taxes on producers.

**Details:**
- According to the decision taken, an online platform would be set up wherein farmers will be able to sell and buy fruits, vegetables and other produce from across the country.
- An agency would be set up to oversee online trading and to ensure that transactions take place smoothly, they said.
- It will also focus on creating godowns and facilitating transportation of the farm produce after the online trade, sources added.
- The move is expected to give choice to farmers to sell the farm produce both in physical mandis or online platform.
- The freer access to sell via online trade is likely to boost their incomes and improve availability, moderating price rise.
- This online agriculture market will also focus on creating godowns and facilitate transportation of the farm produce after the online trade.

**India is now a $2-trillion economy**

- According to a recently released World Bank report, India’s GDP has crossed the $2-trillion mark in 2014 and at present stands at $2.067 trillion. After taking 60 years to reach the $1-trillion mark, India has added the next trillion in just seven years.

**What else the report says?**
- Going by income, India is still in the lower middle income category.
- India’s gross national income per person has risen to $1,610, which converts to Rs 1,01,430 by present exchange rate.
- India is among the world the fastest growing economies this year.
- Despite its increase in per capita gross national income (GNI), India has remained in the ‘lower middle income’ category ($1,046–$4,125).
- The report also shows that India would become an ‘upper middle income’ country ($4,126–$12,735) in 2026. This will put it in the category China occupies now. But, it will take India till 2039 to reach the ‘upper middle income’ level, at the assumed growth rate.
- The World Bank’s data on gross national income per capita show Bangladesh, Kenya, Myanmar, Tajikistan, Mongolia, Paraguay, Argentina, Hungary, the Seychelles and Venezuela have shifted their income categories for the better. For example, Bangladesh, Kenya, Myanmar, and Tajikistan are now ‘middle income’ countries from being ‘low income’ nations.
- GNI (Gross national income) is the sum of value added by all resident producers plus any product taxes (less subsidies) not included in the valuation of output plus net receipts of primary income (compensation of employees and property income) from abroad.
World Food Prize Awarded for Enhanced Food Security

- Fazle Hasan Abed of Bangladesh has been awarded the 2015 World Food Prize.
- This prize honors Fazle’s unparalleled achievement in building the unique, integrated development organization BRAC, which is headquartered in Bangladesh and operates programs in 10 other countries around the globe. It is said to be the world’s largest NGO.

About BRAC:
- The organization, originally known as Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, was created as a temporary relief organization to help the country recover from the 1970 typhoon that killed about 500,000 people and the subsequent war fought in 1971 to win independence from Pakistan. Bangladesh was once listed as the second poorest country in the world.
- BRAC has grown into one of the world’s largest nongovernmental organizations focused on alleviating poverty — estimated to have helped more than 150 million people out of poverty in Africa and Asia and is expanding efforts to 10 additional countries.

About the World Food Prize:
- The World Food Prize was created by Nobel laureate Norman Borlaug in 1986 to recognize scientists and others who have improved the quality and availability of food. Norman Borlaug is also known as the father of the green revolution.
- The award carries a monetary reward of 250,000 dollars. The foundation that awards the $250,000 prize is based in Des Moines, Iowa.
- Since 1987, there have been 40 individuals who have won the World Food Prize and they come from a broad array of specialisations, from presidents to seed scientists and irrigation pioneers.
- So far, seven Indians have won this award.

ED attaches land in U.S. in loan fraud case

- In the first such action, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached 1,280 acres of land in the U.S. in connection with one of the biggest bank loan frauds in this country.
- This land in California, USA, belongs to Zoom Developers Pvt Ltd and Vijay Chaudhary.
- Chaudhary, who is allegedly absconding, had taken loans totalling Rs 2,200 crore from various banks for realty projects in Europe. However, no project was ever undertaken and the money was allegedly siphoned off by Mr. Chaudhary.
- The unprecedented move to attach the land in California worth Rs. 1,000 crore was initiated by the ED’s Ahmedabad zonal unit.

About the Enforcement Directorate:
- Enforcement Directorate, established in the year 1956, is a law enforcement agency and economic intelligence agency responsible for enforcing economic laws and fighting economic crime in India.
- It is a specialized financial investigation agency under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, which enforces Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (FEMA) and Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) laws.

Other functions of the directorate include:
- To collect, develop and disseminate intelligence relating to violations of FEMA, 1999, the intelligence inputs are received from various sources such as Central and State Intelligence agencies, complaints etc.
To investigate suspected violations of the provisions of the FEMA, 1999 relating to activities such as “hawala” foreign exchange racketeering, non-realization of export proceeds, non-repatriation of foreign exchange and other forms of violations under FEMA, 1999.

To adjudicate cases of violations of the erstwhile FERA, 1973 and FEMA, 1999.

To realize penalties imposed on conclusion of adjudication proceedings.

To handle adjudication, appeals and prosecution cases under the erstwhile FERA, 1973.

To process and recommend cases for preventive detention under the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act (COFEPOSA).

To undertake survey, search, seizure, arrest, prosecution action etc. against offender of PMLA offence.

To provide and seek mutual legal assistance to/from contracting states in respect of attachment/confiscation of proceeds of crime as well as in respect of transfer of accused persons under PMLA.

**Parliamentary committee recommends doubling of MPs’ salary**

A parliamentary committee has recommended a steep hike in the salaries and allowances of Members of Parliament. This recommendation was made by the Joint Committee on Salaries and Allowances of Members of Parliament and is headed by BJP MP Yogi Adityanath.

**Major recommendations:**

- The committee has sought doubling of the salary of MPs from the existing Rs. 50,000 per month, increasing the pension of ex-MPs from Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 35,000, and doubling the daily allowance of members when Parliament is in session, from Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 4,000.
- It has also sought facilities for companions in place of spouses, as many MPs are single. Currently, companions and spouses are only entitled to second class tickets.
- The panel has also recommended that ex-MPs be permitted to travel economy class by air five times a year. Sitting MPs are allowed to fly executive class around three dozen times a year.
- Since MPs rank higher than the Cabinet Secretary in protocol, the panel suggested their privileges should match their status and also include healthcare benefits for married children of MPs.

**About the Joint Committee on Salaries and Allowances of Members of Parliament:**

- It consists of five members from the Rajya Sabha nominated by the Chairman and ten members from the Lok Sabha nominated by the Speaker.
- The members of the Joint Committee elect its Chairperson.
- The Joint Committee is a Standing Committee of Parliament and a member of that Committee holds office as such member for one year from the date of his nomination.
- The Committee determines its own rules of procedure.

**National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015**

- The Union Cabinet recently gave its approval for the India’s first integrated National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015.
• The Policy acknowledges the need for an effective roadmap for promotion of entrepreneurship as the key to a successful skills strategy.
• The previous National Policy on Skill Development was formulated by the Ministry of Labour and Employment in 2009 and provided for a review after five years to align the policy framework with emerging national and international trends.

Details:
• The Vision of the Policy is “to create an ecosystem of empowerment by Skilling on a large Scale at Speed with high Standards and to promote a culture of innovation based entrepreneurship which can generate wealth and employment so as to ensure Sustainable livelihoods for all citizens in the country”.
• To achieve this Vision, the Policy has four thrust areas. It addresses key obstacles to skilling, including low aspirational value, lack of integration with formal education, lack of focus on outcomes, low quality of training infrastructure and trainers, etc.
• The Policy seeks to align supply and demand for skills by bridging existing skill gaps, promoting industry engagement, operationalising a quality assurance framework, leverage technology and promoting greater opportunities for apprenticeship training.
• Equity is also a focus of the Policy, which targets skilling opportunities for socially/geographically marginalised and disadvantaged groups.
• Skill development and entrepreneurship programmes for women are a specific focus of the Policy.
• In the entrepreneurship domain, the Policy seeks to educate and equip potential entrepreneurs, both within and outside the formal education system.
• It also seeks to connect entrepreneurs to mentors, incubators and credit markets, foster innovation and entrepreneurial culture, improve ease of doing business and promote a focus on social entrepreneurship.

National Skill Development Mission

• The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the institutional framework for the National Skill Development Mission in keeping with the commitment made during the Budget Speech for 2015-16.

About the National Skill Development Mission:
• The National Skill Development Mission aims to provide a strong institutional framework at the Centre and States for implementation of skilling activities in the country.
• The Mission will have a three-tiered, high powered decision making structure. At its apex, the Mission’s Governing Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, will provide overall guidance and policy direction. The Steering Committee, chaired by Minister in Charge of Skill Development, will review the Mission’s activities in line with the direction set by the Governing Council. The Mission Directorate, with Secretary, Skill Development as Mission Director, will ensure implementation, coordination and convergence of skilling activities across Central Ministries/Departments and State Governments.
• The Mission will also run select sub-missions in high priority areas.
• The National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the Directorate of Training will function under the overall guidance of the Mission.
• The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) provides a natural home for the Mission, organically linking all three decisions making levels and facilitating linkages to all Central Ministries/Departments and State Governments.
Review of the Sagarmala initiative

- Union Minister of Shipping, Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, recently chaired a review meeting of the Sagarmala initiative. Various developments under the initiative were reviewed.

Sagarmala Initiative:

- The Sagarmala project seeks to develop a string of ports around India’s coast. The objective of this initiative is to promote “Port-led development” along India’s 7500 km long coastline.
- It aims to develop access to new development regions with intermodal solutions and promotion of the optimum modal split, enhanced connectivity with main economic centres and beyond through expansion of rail, inland water, coastal and road services.
- The Union Ministry of Shipping has been appointed as the nodal ministry for this initiative.

The Sagarmala initiative will address challenges by focusing on three pillars of development, namely:

- Supporting and enabling Port-led Development through appropriate policy and institutional interventions and providing for an institutional framework for ensuring inter-agency and ministries/departments/states' collaboration for integrated development,
- Port Infrastructure Enhancement, including modernization and setting up of new ports, and
- Efficient Evacuation to and from hinterland.

Details:

- In addition to strengthening port and evacuation infrastructure, it also aims at simplifying procedures used at ports for cargo movement and promotes usage of electronic channels for information exchange leading to quick, efficient, hassle-free and seamless cargo movement.
- The Sagarmala initiative would also strive to ensure sustainable development of the population living in the Coastal Economic Zone (CEZ). This would be done by synergising and coordinating with State Governments and line Ministries of Central Government through their existing schemes and programmes such as those related to community and rural development, tribal development and employment generation, fisheries, skill development, tourism promotion etc.
- A National Sagarmala Apex Committee (NSAC) is envisaged for overall policy guidance and high level coordination, and to review various aspects of planning and implementation of the plan and projects. The NSAC shall be chaired by the Minister incharge of Shipping, with Cabinet Ministers from stakeholder Ministries and Chief Ministers/Ministers incharge of ports of maritime states as members.

Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yoiana (PMKSY)

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has given its approval to the “Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana” (PMKSY).

About the Scheme:

- It is a central scheme that aims at providing irrigation facilities to every village in the country by converging ongoing irrigation schemes implemented by various ministries.
• Under the project, a dynamic annual fund allocation methodology, which mandates states to allot more funds to irrigation sectors for becoming eligible to access funds under this scheme, is also being considered.

• The Scheme also intends to focus on ‘end-to-end solution’ in irrigation supply chain by implementing the new programme in a “project mode” with decentralised state-level planning and execution.

• It will have an outlay of Rs. 50,000 crore over a period of five years (2015-16 to 2019-20). The allocation for the current financial year is Rs. 5300 crore.

• The programme architecture of PMKSY aims at a ‘decentralized State level planning and execution’ structure, in order to allow States to draw up a District Irrigation Plan (DIP) and a State Irrigation Plan (SIP).

• DIP will have holistic developmental perspective of the district outlining medium to long term developmental plans integrating three components namely, water sources, distribution network and water use application of the district to be prepared at two levels – the block and the district. All structures created under the schemes will be geotagged.

• The programme will be supervised and monitored at the national level by an Inter-Ministerial National Steering Committee (NSC) under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister with Union Ministers of all concerned Ministries.

• A National Executive Committee (NEC) will be constituted under the Chairmanship of the Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog to oversee programme implementation, allocation of resources, inter ministerial coordination, monitoring and performance assessment, addressing administrative issues etc.

• At the state level the scheme will be administered by a State Level Sanctioning Committee (SLSC) to be Chaired by the Chief Secretary of the respective States. The committee will have all authority to sanction the project and also monitor the progress of the scheme.

• At the district level there will be a district level implementation committee for ensuring last mile coordination at the field level.

• It is expected that PMKSY will provide convergence to existing schemes of water management, thus bringing efficiency to the use of water.

• The state agriculture department would be the nodal agency for implementation of PMKSY projects.

• A state will become eligible to access PMKSY funds only if it has prepared the district irrigation plans and state irrigation plans and sustained an increasing expenditure trend in irrigation sector in state plan.

• PMKSY funds would be given to states as 75% grant by the central government and the remaining 25% share is to be borne by the state government. For northeastern region and hilly states, the funding pattern would be 90:10.

57 MLAs want motion against Lokayukta

• The pressure on Karnataka Lokayukta Y. Bhaskar Rao to quit has increased further with 57 MLAs seeking permission from the Speaker to move a motion in the Assembly for initiating the process of his removal from the office.

• Bhaskar Rao is caught in row over an alleged bribery scandal involving his son.

• The Opposition parties are also seeking the recourse under Section 6 of the Karnataka Lokayukta Act, 1984, relating to the process for removal of a Lokayukta or Upalokayukta for “proved misbehaviour or incompetency.

How Lokayukta can be removed?
Under the Karnataka Lokayukta Act, 1984, the Lokayukta can be removed by an order of the Governor after an address by each House of the legislature, supported by not less than two thirds of the members of that house present and voting.

The investigation for proof of misbehaviour or incapacity of Lokayukta has to be done as provided in the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, by a three-member committee, comprising two judges and a jurist.

The procedure is similar to that for impeachment of a High Court or Supreme Court judge, except that the Karnataka Lokayukta Act, 1984, uses the word “removal”, instead of impeachment.

Who is Lokayukta?

As per the Lokayukta act, Lokayukta means the person appointed as the Lokayukta (Note: the institution and the head of the institution have the same name), who either held the office of a Judge of the Supreme Court of India or that of the Chief Justice of a High Court in any states of India.

Appointment: The Lokayukta is appointed by the Governor of Karnataka on advice of Chief Minister of Karnataka in consultation with the Chief Justice of the High Court of Karnataka, the Chairman of Karnataka Legislative Council, the Speaker of Karnataka Legislative Assembly, the Leader of the Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Council and the Leader of the Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly.

Powers: The Lokayukta has the power to investigate Chief Minister, all other Ministers and Members of the State Legislature and all state government employees.

**BLACK MONEY RULES NOTIFIED**

The Union government has notified the rules under the Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and Imposition of Tax Act.

Details of the Notified Rules:

- All deposits made in an undisclosed overseas bank account since opening will be clubbed while assets like immovable property, shares and jewellery will be valued at fair market price for levy of tax and penalty under the new black money law.
- All overseas income and assets, including the ones voluntarily declared within the 90-day compliance window ending September 30, will be valued in rupee terms.
- The fair market value of assets like bullion, jewellery or precious stone, immovable property, drawings, paintings, archaeological collections, and sculptures or work of art, will be “its cost of acquisition” or the price that the asset “shall ordinarily fetch if sold in the open market on the valuation date”, whichever is higher.
- As per the rules, for shares and securities, the fair market value will be the higher of the cost of acquisition or average of the lowest and highest price on the date of valuation.
- The rules also provide a formula for calculating the fair market value of an unquoted equity shares and provided a methodology for calculating the interest of a person in a partnership firm, association of persons or Limited Liability Partnership (LLP).
- The rules also say that in case the person disclosing foreign income does not have a PAN, he or she would be required to apply for it.

**Loss of polar bear habitat is imminent, warns study**

A recent U.S. government report shows that about a third of the world’s polar bears could be in imminent danger from greenhouse gas emissions in as soon as a decade. A report
by the U.S. Geological Survey said scientific models don’t bode well for polar bear populations across the world.

**Important observations made by the report:**
- Greenhouse gases are blamed for the climate warming that’s reducing polar bears’ summer sea ice habitat.
- Polar bears use sea ice for feeding, mating and giving birth. When the ice retreats in the summer, polar bears are forced to the land. The report says that the land-based food would not help bears adapt to the loss of sea ice.

**Polar Bear- Basic Facts:**
- It is a carnivorous bear whose native range lies largely within the Arctic Circle, encompassing the Arctic Ocean, its surrounding seas and surrounding land masses.
- Their scientific name means “maritime bear”.
- Polar bears hunt their preferred food of seals from the edge of sea ice, often living off fat reserves when no sea ice is present.
- The polar bear is classified as a vulnerable species, with eight of the nineteen polar bear subpopulations in decline.
- The World Conservation Union (IUCN) estimates that there are between 20,000-25,000 polar bears in the world.

**BSNL launches ‘mobile wallet’**
- State-run operator BSNL recently launched a pre-paid card linked mobile wallet service which would allow its customers to transfer money, pay for services as well as withdraw cash of up to Rs. 1 lakh.

**Details:**
- The wallet service, Speed Pay, allows a customer to load money even if he does not have a bank account.
- The money loaded in the mobile wallet can be transferred to a bank account and even withdrawn at bank branches or BSNL outlets.
- Loading money into wallet from a bank account is an option. BSNL customers, who don’t have bank accounts, can also load money by visiting any BSNL retail outlet and asking the retailer to recharge their mobile wallet account and pay for various services.
- The service has been launched in partnership with IT company Pyro.

**Govt releases socio-economic and caste census for better policy-making**
- The union government recently released socio-economic and caste census (SECC) 2011.
- This is the first paperless census conducted on hand-held electronic devices by the government.

**Details of the Census:**
- According to the census, there are a total number of 24.39 crore households in the country, of which 17.91 crore live in villages. Of these, 10.69 crore households are considered as deprived.
- The census says that 23.52% rural families have no literate adult above 25 years, suggesting a poor state of education among rural masses.
- The census indicates that one out of three families living in villages is landless and depends on manual labour for livelihood. The deprivation data reveal that 5.37 crore
(29.97%) households in rural areas are landless deriving a major part of their income from manual labour.

- As many as 2.37 crore (13.25%) families in villages live in houses of one room with ‘kaccha’ walls and roof.
- 53%, or 3.86 crore, families living in villages belong to SC/ST categories.
- 6% of all rural households in the country pay income tax.
- As for sources of income, 9.16 crore households (51.14%) depend on manual casual labour followed by cultivation (30.10%).
- 5 crore (14.01%) rural families are dependent on income from other sources which include government service, private sector and PSUs.
- 08 lakh households fall back on ragpicking while 6.68 lakh depend on begging and charity alms.
- Transgenders comprise 0.1% of India’s rural population. Andaman & Nicobar islands, West Bengal, Gujarat, Odisha and Mizoram have the highest proportions of transgenders.
- 6% of rural Indians were unmarried, 40% are currently married and 3.5% are divorced.
- Daman and Diu lead the country in the proportion of their rural population that has remained unmarried — at 55.9%, this is far higher than the national average. Chandigarh, on the other hand, has only 23.2% of its population that has never married.
- The rural development ministry has taken a decision to use the SECC data in all its programmes.

Data on Literacy:

- The Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011 (SECC) has found that 36% of the 884 million people in rural India are illiterate. This is higher than the 32% recorded by the Census of India 2011.
- Of the 64% literate rural Indians, a more than a fifth have not even completed primary school. The SECC also found that only 5.4% of rural India has completed high school with a mere 3.4% having graduated from college.
- This poor state of rural education is reflected in the fact that 23.5% of rural households had no adults above the age of 25 who are literate — one of the categories of deprivation measured by the SECC.
- The performance within States is hugely varied, with an alarming 47.6% of rural Rajasthanis remaining illiterate, compared to 9.3% in Lakshadweep and 11.4% in Kerala.
- Delhi performs the best when it comes to percentage of its rural population that has completed graduate studies — at 9.6%, its performance is almost thrice as good as the national average.

**Know Your College (KYC)**

- “Know Your College” is a portal developed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development which is aimed at helping the students make an informed decision on the choice of college and the courses.

**Details:**

- This portal covers almost 10,500 colleges which conduct about 14,000 programs in Technical Education and 35000 colleges conducting at least 20,000 programs in Non-Technical education.
- It is a repository of information pertaining to colleges and information related to its faculty, labs, library, infrastructure, and availability of hostel facilities etc.
- Students are also encouraged to send their complaints on discrepancies of information provided by colleges through this portal.
This portal is being maintained by AICTE. This portal also acts as a single stop destination for students for making an informed choice.

**BSNL launches Wi-Fi service at Hampi**

- Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), as part of Digital India Project, has provided Wi-Fi hotspot service in Hampi, which is on the international tourist map.
- The service could be used free for 30 minutes. Thereafter, one has to pay Rs. 30 for 30 minutes, Rs. 50 for 60 minutes, Rs. 90 for 120 minutes and Rs. 150 for the entire day as usage charges.
- Under the Digital India Project, it has been planned to connect 2.5 lakh gram panchayats in the country, including 5,631 in the State, with Internet service by December 2015.

**About Hampi:**

- Hampi is one of the [UNESCO World Heritage Sites](http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/121) in India located near Hospet town in the Karnataka state.
- It is located within the ruins of the city of Vijayanagara, the former capital of the Vijayanagara Empire.
- The emperor Ashoka’s minor rock edicts in Nittur & Udegolan (both in Bellary district, Karnataka) lead one to believe that this region was within the Ashokan kingdom during the 3rd century BCE.
- A Brahmi inscription & a terracotta seal dating to the 2nd century CE were also discovered from the excavation site.
- The first historical settlements in Hampi date back to 1 CE.
- It is situated on the banks of the Tungabhadra River.
- Hampi has various notable Hindu temples with some vedanta mythology inside the temples, some of which are still active places of worship.

**‘A.P. spreading canard about Pranahita project’**

- Telangana Chief Minister recently said that he is personally studying various options with regard to fixing a site for construction of the barrage of the mega Pranahita-Chevella project. He said he was also studying design proposals for the project so that maximum benefit was achieved from it.
- The Maharashtra government has agreed to lifting of water from the Pranahita but objected only to submergence in its area. Hence, the feasibility of the project is being studied keeping this in mind.

**About Pranahita-Chevella project:**

- It is a lift irrigation scheme to harness the water of Pranhita tributary of Godavari river for use in the Telangana state of India. The project would cost Rs 40,000 cr.
- Under Godavari Water Disputes Tribunal award agreements, Maharashtra state earlier agreed for construction of barrages by the undivided Andhra Pradesh state across the Pranhit river which is forming common boundary between the two states.
- The project had been mired in controversy with regard to submergence of villages in Maharashtra. Telangana chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao has reached an agreement with his Maharashtra counterpart Devendra Fadnavis agreeing to make some changes in the Pranahita-Chevella project design paving way for the works on the project to start early.
Pranhita is the River flows on the border of Gadchiroli district in Maharashtra and Adilabad district in Telangana. Pranhita is the name given to the combined flow of the rivers Wardha and Wainganga.

**Dramatic drop in number of underfed children: UNICEF**

A recently released data by UNICEF shows that despite remarkable improvements in child nutrition over the last decade in India, some States, such as Gujarat, have struggled to reduce the numbers of underweight and stunted children. The report is named the Rapid Survey on Children (RSOC). It is a sample survey of over one lakh households conducted by the UNICEF.

**Important observations made by the survey:**

- Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Uttarakhand and Tripura are the only States which have reduced the proportion of underweight adolescent girls.
- While some States have made remarkable progress in battling child malnourishment, others have made little progress despite a decade of high growth.
- Among the developed States, Gujarat is the only one to perform worse than the national average in reducing the numbers of child stunting cases and underweight children.
- Almost all States have performed poorly in reducing the number of underweight adolescent girls.
- Uttar Pradesh still has the highest levels of child stunting, with over 50% of the children under the age of five underdeveloped, meaning that their height is more than two standard deviations less than the expected height for their age for that population.
- Jharkhand has the highest number of underweight children under the age of five, meaning their weight for age is more than two standard deviations less than what would be expected.
- Kerala remains the best performing State in the number of child stunting cases, while Manipur and Mizoram have the lowest numbers of underweight children.
- Delhi and Mizoram reduced child stunting at the fastest rate between 2004-05 — when the last official National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) was conducted — and 2013-14.
- While Madhya Pradesh and Bihar still have high levels of underweight children, both States reduced these numbers at fast rates along with Himachal Pradesh.
- No State reported an increase in the proportion of children underweight or stunted, a significant reversal from past trends.
- The RSOC findings show that at the national level, stunting is higher in rural areas (41.7%) than in urban areas (32.1%), as is the case for underweight children.

**Corporation Bank launches first MUDRA card**

The MUDRA (Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency) card under the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) scheme was launched by the Corporation Bank recently.

- The card facilitates the withdrawal and use of the working capital finance by micro entrepreneurs.
- Corporation Bank is the first bank to launch the MUDRA Card based on the RuPay platform.

**About the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) scheme:**

- The MUDRA scheme is aimed at “funding the unfunded”.
- The scheme, which has a corpus of Rs 20,000 crore, can lend between Rs 50,000 and Rs 10 lakh to small entrepreneurs.
MUDRA will be set up through a statutory enactment. It will be responsible for developing and refinancing all micro-finance institutions (MFIs) which are in the business of lending to micro and small business entities engaged in manufacturing, trading and service activities.

**Role of MUDRA bank?**
- MUDRA Bank will refinance Micro-Finance Institutions through a Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana. In lending, priority will be given to SC/ST enterprises.
- It will also partner with State and regional-level coordinators to provide finance to last-mile financiers of small and micro business enterprises. Its proposed role includes laying down policy guidelines for micro enterprise financing business, registration, accreditation and rating of MFI entities.
- The agency will also lay down responsible financing practices to ward off over-indebtedness and ensure proper client protection principles and methods of recovery.

**Benefits:**
- These measures will greatly increase the confidence of young, educated or skilled workers who would now be able to aspire to become first generation entrepreneurs.
- Existing small businesses, too, will be able to expand their activities.
- By floating MUDRA bank, the Centre has ensured credit flow to SMEs sector and has also identified NBFCs as a good fit to reach out to them.
- People will now be able to get refinance at subsidised rate and it would be passed on to the SMEs. Moreover, it would enable SMEs to expand their activities.

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**Sahara was once home to world’s largest lake**

- According to a recent study, conducted by the researchers from the University of London, the Sahara desert contained the world’s largest freshwater lake until it evaporated in just a few hundred years.
- The researchers used satellite images to map abandoned shore lines and analysed sediments to calculate the age of these shore lines, producing a lake level history spanning the last 15,000 years.
- At its peak around 6,000 years ago, Palaeolake Mega-Chad was the largest freshwater lake on Earth, with an area of 3,60,000 square km. Today’s Lake Chad is reduced to a fraction of that size, at only 355 square km.
- Researchers said that the drying of Lake Mega-Chad reveals a story of dramatic climate change in the southern Sahara, with a rapid change from a giant lake to desert dunes and dust, due to changes in rainfall from the West African Monsoon.

**Sahara Desert – Basics:**
- It is the largest hot desert and third largest desert after Antarctica and the Arctic.
- combined surface area: 9,400,000 square kilometres (3,600,000 sq mi).
- It comprises much of the land found within North Africa, excluding the fertile coastal region situated against the Mediterranean Sea, the Atlas Mountains of the Mahgreb, and the Nile Valley of Egypt and Sudan.
- The Sahara is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the Atlas Mountains and the Mediterranean to the north, the Red Sea to the east, and the Sudan and the valley of the Niger River to the south.
- It covers large parts of Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Western Sahara, Sudan and Tunisia.
- It is the world’s largest low-latitude hot desert. The area is located in the horse latitudes under the subtropical ridge.
Unwed mother can be sole guardian: SC

- In a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court recently said that an unwed mother in India can become the sole legal guardian of a child without the consent of the father. Hence, now an unwed mother can apply for sole guardianship over her minor son without prior consent of the child’s absentee biological father.

**Important observations made by the court:**

- In situations where the father has not exhibited any concern for his offspring, giving him legal recognition would be an exercise in futility.
- In today’s society, where women are increasingly choosing to raise their children alone, we see no purpose in imposing an unwilling and unconcerned father on an otherwise viable family nucleus.
- A man who has chosen to forsake his duties and responsibilities is not a necessary constituent for the well-being of the child.
- It is necessary to protect the child from social stigma. But it is equally important to protect the unmarried mother’s fundamental right by not forcing her to disclose the name and particulars of her child’s father.

**Background:**

- The order came on a plea by a Christian woman, who had challenged orders passed by a trial court and Delhi high court. Both had directed her to reveal the name of her child’s father when she sought guardianship of the child to make him nominee to her property. The child, born in 2010, was raised by the woman without any assistance from his biological father.

Controversial Meiji sites get world heritage status

- The UN’s cultural body recently conferred world heritage status on a number of new sites including some seen as representative of Japan’s industrial revolution, as South Korea lifted its opposition to the listing.
- UNESCO’s World Heritage committee added 23 sites considered representative of Japan’s industrial revolution under Emperor Meiji (1868-1910) to its vaunted list.
- The 23 Meiji period (1868-1912) sites include coalmines and shipyards that Japan says contributed to its transformation from feudalism into a successful modern economy.
- Japan is celebrating the sites’ inclusion, which is expected to boost tourism and opens up sources of funding for preservation work.
- Inclusion on UNESCO’s World Heritage list can bring economic benefits, because as well as being a powerful tourist draw, world heritage sites are eligible for financial assistance towards preservation.
- South Korea had, in the past, opposed the application for world heritage status unless clear reference was made to the use of an estimated 60,000 labourers forced to work at seven of the sites, including the island coalmine Gunkanjima, during Japan’s 1910-1945 colonial rule over the Korean peninsula.
- The period from 1868 until 1912 in Japan is called the Meiji era – after the name chosen by the young prince Mutsuhito, when he followed his father to the throne. Meiji means in Japanese ‘the enlightened rule’. During the Meiji period Japan underwent a stunning development from a medieval society to a leading economic and military power in Asia.
**Chinese ex-FM to be AIIB chief**

- China has named its former Finance Minister, Jin Liqun, as its choice to head the Beijing-backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which is being seen as a rival to the U.S. and Europe-dominated banking institutions.
- Former Finance Minister Jin Liqun has been formally nominated by China as its preferred candidate to head the $100 billion AIIB. He is currently the secretary-general of the interim multilateral secretariat for establishing AIIB.

**Why he was chosen?**

- Since, China has 26.06% share of the votes in AIIB it gives China veto power over the choice of the president, which requires a 75% majority.
- What about the vice-president?
- India by virtue of being the second largest shareholder may get the post of vice-president.

**India mulling proposal to join Eurasian Union**

- India is considering the option of signing a pact with the EEU, which has Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia as members, and will see the inclusion of Tajikistan later this year.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s ongoing visit to Russia and five Central Asian nations could expedite the feasibility studies under way to assess whether India should sign a free trade agreement (FTA) with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).
- For this purpose, a joint study group, headed by a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce, has been constituted and has been mandated to study the benefits of joining the trade bloc.
- An invitation to join the bloc was extended by Russia, and a joint statement for establishment of a joint study group between India and the EEU was signed when Commerce and Industry Minister Nirmala Sitharaman visited Russia recently.

**How India will be benefitted?**

- India has to protect investment and trade from becoming imbalanced. It also has to ensure that its goods are not discriminated against. Hence, it is best for India to gain access to all important trade blocs.
- India is keen to enhance its ties with the Central Asian countries, which have huge oil and gas reserves and are an important link to Afghanistan.
- It will be an opportunity for improving trade ties as well as foster relations to check the menace of growing radicalization in the region.

**About Eurasian Economic Union:**

- The Eurasian Economic Union is an international organization for regional economic integration. It has international legal personality and is established by the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union.
- It provides for free movement of goods, services, capital and labor, pursues coordinated, harmonized and single policy in the sectors determined by the Treaty and international agreements within the Union.
- The Member-States of the Eurasian Economic Union are the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation.
- The Union was created to comprehensively upgrade, raise the competitiveness of and cooperation between the national economies, and to promote stable development in order to raise the living standards of the nations of the Member-States.
- The Supreme Council is the Union’s supreme authority. The Heads of the Member-States form the Supreme Council.
- The Intergovernmental Council is a Union’s body consisting of the Heads of the Member-States Governments.
- Eurasian Economic Commission is a permanent supranational regulatory body of the Union, with its members appointed by the Council of the Commission and the Board of the Commission. The core tasks of the Commission are fostering the conditions to support the operation and development of the Union, and drafting proposals in the field of economic integration within the Union.
- The Court of the Eurasian Economic Union is the court of justice of the Eurasian Economic Union, which ensures the uniform application of the EAEU Treaty and other Union treaties by the Union Member-States and bodies.
- The Eurasian Economic Union has an integrated single market of 176 million people and a gross domestic product of over 4 trillion U.S. dollars (PPP).

**Ministers make a plea on Sec. 8**

- The A. P. Government has urged President Pranab Mukherjee to ensure the enforcement of provisions under Section 8 of the AP Reorganisation Act.
- A delegation of Ministers of the A. P. State Cabinet recently called on the President and submitted a representation on the problems faced by the Government ‘owing to the confrontationist attitude adopted by the Telangana Government’.
- The delegation apprised Mr. Mukherjee of the alleged tapping of telephones of 120 important functionaries of the AP Government and the TDP by the Telangana Government.

**What is Section 8 all about?**

- Section 8 of AP Reorganisation Act, 2014 empowers the governor to have control over administration of law and order in Hyderabad.
- It gives the Governor in the common capital area (Hyderabad) the special responsibility for the security, life, liberty and property of all those who reside in the area.
- The Section grants special powers to the governor to ensure security in Hyderabad, the shared capital of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, for 10 years.
- The provisions were incorporated by the UPA government to address the concerns of people hailing from Andhra and Rayalaseema but residing in the common capital.
- Section 8 says the governor can, after consulting the council of ministers of Telangana, use his personal judgment and take action in matters relating to law and order, including police transfers in the shared capital.
- The police commissioners of Hyderabad, Cyberabad and the SP of the neighbouring district of Ranga Reddy are also required to furnish reports on law and order frequently to the governor.
- The Act says the governor’s decision is final and the validity of anything he or she does cannot be called into question.

**Why it is in news?**

- The issue has come to the fore again following the allegations of the AP government that the phones of its leaders have been illegally tapped by the Telangana police.

**Kalpakkam breeder reactor to go on stream**

- The 500-MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor at Kalpakkam is getting ready to be commissioned in September.
• When the reactor goes critical, it will signal India’s triumphant entry into the second stage of its three-stage nuclear power programme.

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

• It is a 500MWe fast breeder nuclear reactor presently being constructed at the Madras Atomic Power Station in Kalpakkam, India.
• It will use plutonium-uranium oxide as fuel and 1,750 tonnes of liquid sodium as coolant.
• The Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR) is responsible for the design of this reactor.
• Total costs, originally estimated at 3500 crore are now estimated at 5,677 crore.
• The PFBR is part of the three-stage nuclear power program.
• A breeder reactor is one that breeds more material for a nuclear fission reaction than it consumes.

**What is India’s 3-Phase Nuclear Power Programme?**

• The Indian nuclear power programme, launched in 1954, envisaged a three-stage development of nuclear power generation from the country’s uranium and thorium resources.
• The **first stage programme** consists of setting up of pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs). PHWRs are natural uranium-fuelled, heavy water moderated and cooled. The uranium reserves in the country are adequate to support the first stage nuclear power programme of 10,000 MWe through PHWRs. In addition to generating power, PHWRs progressively make available plutonium as a by-product. The technologies for the reprocessing of plutonium from spent PHWR fuel and for fabrication of plutonium bearing fuels have been systematically established in India through research and development over the past several years.

• The **second stage** of the nuclear power programme consists of effective utilisation of plutonium in Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs) which will provide the key to full utilisation of the country’s uranium resources and prepare the way for the long-term utilisation of the more abundant thorium reserves. FBRs enable generation of more fresh fissile material than is consumed for power production. With the deployment of FBRs, the depleted uranium and plutonium generated in the first stage will permit an additional power potential to the extent of 3,50,000 MWe.
During the later part of the second stage programme, it is proposed to use thorium as blanket material in FBRs to generate U-233, another fissile material for use in the third stage programme based on U-233 fuelled reactor systems.

The 3-stages of Nuclear Power Programme are:
- Stage-I: envisages, construction of Natural Uranium, Heavy Water Moderated and Cooled Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs). Spent fuel from these reactors is reprocessed to obtain Plutonium.
- Stage-II: envisages, construction of Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs) fuelled by Plutonium produced in stage-I. These reactors would also breed U-233 from Thorium.
- Stage-III: would comprise power reactors using U-233 / Thorium as fuel.

India on track in cutting poverty: MDG report

Recently released Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Report 2015 shows that India has halved its incidence of extreme poverty, from 49.4% in 1994 to 24.7% in 2011 ahead of the deadline of 2015 set by the United Nations.

Details of the report:
- The report has set the limit for extreme poverty as those living on $1.25 or less a day.
- India’s reduction in poverty is still less than that achieved by several of India’s poorer neighbors. Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh have each outstripped India in poverty reduction over comparable time periods.
- India still remains home to one quarter of the world’s undernourished population, over a third of the world’s underweight children, and nearly a third of the world’s food-insecure people.
- The report says that India has already achieved 11 out of 22 parameters in the report—spanning issues like education, poverty, health, and education— and is on track to achieve one more by the end of 2015.
- On the environment front, India is one of the few countries that has reduced its carbon dioxide emissions in relation to its GDP. India emitted 0.65 kg of carbon dioxide per $1 of GDP in 1990, which fell to 0.53 kg in 2010.

MDGs: What are they?
These are eight international development goals that were established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, following the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. They were set to be achieved by 2015.

These are time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions—income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion—while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability.

They are also basic human rights—the rights of each person on the planet to health, education, shelter, and security.

Since the adoption, there has been significant progress in many of the goals. But the progress has not been uniform. The progress differs from country to country and even within the country.

The eight millennium development goals are:
- Eradicate Extreme Hunger and Poverty
- Achieve Universal Primary Education
- Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
- Reduce Child Mortality
- Improve Maternal Health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases
- Ensure Environmental Sustainability
- Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Each goal has specific targets, and dates for achieving those targets.

**Fergusson College wins heritage status**

- Pune’s Fergusson College has been accorded the special heritage status by the University Grants Commission (UGC). It was founded in 1885.
- With this status comes financial assistance for its upkeep.
- The college, with buildings of gothic architecture on its leafy, 65-acre campus, has long been regarded as a landmark educational institution in Maharashtra.
- The college, named after James Fergusson, the then Governor of Bombay Presidency, had been moulded by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, R.G. Bhandarkar and M.G. Ranade.
- The alumni include two Prime Ministers, theatre and film artists and writers.
- The college is among the 19 institutions in the country to get the heritage status.
- The idea of granting the heritage tags was mooted by the Centre in 2013 to enable the universities to receive financial grants worth Rs 8-10 crore per annum from the government for the improvement and upgradation of their respective campuses and other academic disciplines.

**Why can’t we bring you under RTI, asks SC**

- In a step towards making political parties publicly accountable for their financial assets, the Supreme Court recently asked six national parties, including the BJP and the Congress, to come clean and explain their hesitation in disclosing complete details of their income, expenditure, donations and funding, including donor details, to the public under the Right to Information Act.
- The court has given the political parties six weeks to file their responses on why they should not be declared as “public authorities” under the Right to Information Act 2005, making them liable to disclose their financial assets to the public.
The CIC had declared all national and regional political parties to be public authorities under the RTI in its 2013 order. In March this year, it had reiterated the order as “final and binding.”

**Background:**
- The order came based on a petition. The petition was filed by noted RTI activist Subhash Chandra Agarwal, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, and NGO Association for Democratic Rights (ADR).
- The petition argues that political parties should come under the RTI as they play a core role in governance, and, in fact, enjoy a “stronghold” over their elected MPs and MLAs under Schedule 10 of the Constitution. The Schedule makes it compulsory for MPs and MLAs to abide by the directions of their parent parties.
- It contends that it would be within the average voter’s fundamental right to information to know the financial details of political parties.
- The petition says that under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 all political parties must affirm their allegiance to the Constitution of India and such allegiance is made compulsory for the purpose of registration under sub-section (7) of Section 29A. Therefore, political parties so registered must furnish information to the public under the right of information under Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution of India, since right of information has been held to be a part of freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a).
- It also contends that the Law Commission of India in its 170th Report on ‘Reform of the Electoral Laws’ in May 1999 had recommended transparency in the functioning of political parties.

**Five States seek time to roll out Food Security Act**
- The government will soon take a call on extending the September 30 deadline for implementation of the National Food Security Act as most States are not yet ready to roll out the programme.
- Tamil Nadu, Jammu and Kashmir, Gujarat and Kerala have sought over a year to implement the Act while UP has asked for six months.

**What the states say?**
- Tamil Nadu says that the State has a universal public distribution system and limiting priority beneficiaries under the NFSA will “open a Pandora’s box.”
- Bihar protested the number of beneficiaries fixed for the State under the Food Security Act and said over one crore poor had been left out making it difficult to identify beneficiaries.
- J&K sought at least a year as it was still reeling under the impact of the floods that wreaked havoc in the State last year.
- Gujarat says that the State government was planning to connect PDS beneficiary data, NREGA card holders and Socio-Economic Caste Census statistics for which it required at least a year.
- Kerala has also sought a year as it was having problems with computerisation.

**About the National Food Security Act, 2013:**
- Also called as the Right to Food act, this act aims to provide subsidized food grains to approximately two thirds of India’s 1.2 billion people.
- It extends to the whole of India.
- Under the provisions of this act, beneficiaries are able to purchase 5 kilograms per eligible person per month of cereals at the following prices:
- Rice at 3 Rupees per kg
• Wheat at 2 Rupees per kg
• Coarse grains (millet) at 1 rupee per kg.

**Salient features:**
- 75% rural and 50% of the urban population are entitled for three years from enactment to five kg food grains per month at 3 Rupees, 2 Rupees, 1 Rupee per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains (millet), respectively.
- The states are responsible for determining eligibility.
- Pregnant women and lactating mothers are entitled to a nutritious “take home ration” of 600 Calories and a maternity benefit of at least Rs 6,000 for six months.
- Children 6 to 14 years of age are to receive free hot meals or “take home rations”.
- The central government will provide funds to states in case of short supplies of food grains.
- The state government will provide a food security allowance to the beneficiaries in case of non-supply of food grains.
- The Public Distribution System is to be reformed.
- The eldest woman in the household, 18 years or above, is the head of the household for the issuance of the ration card.
- There will be state- and district-level redress mechanisms and State Food Commissions will be formed for implementation and monitoring of the provisions of the Act.
- The poorest who are covered under the Antodaya yojana will remain entitled to the 35 kg of grains allotted to them under the mentioned scheme.
- The cost of the implementation is estimated to be $22 billion (1.25 lac crore), approximately 1.5% of GDP.

**No mining, polluting units in eco-sensitive zones, says Javadekar**

- Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar recently held a review meeting with State Environment and Forests Ministers to review the progress of demarcation of Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA) in the Western Ghats region.
- He also discussed the further course of action in keeping with the recommendations of the 2013 Kasturirangan Committee report. As per the report, commercial mining and polluting industries would be strictly banned in areas identified as eco sensitive zones.
- The environment Ministers of six States viz. Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat attended the meeting.

**Kasturirangan Report:**
- The Kasturirangan panel was set up to study the Gadgil committee report on the Western Ghats. The Gadgil panel report had faced unanimous opposition from state governments for recommending that almost three-fourth of the hills, including plantations, cultivated lands and large habitations, be turned into a restricted development zone with an over-arching authority to regulate the region superseding the elected authorities’ role.

**Recommendations made:**
- Around 60,000 sq km of Western Ghats, spread across six states, should be turned into a no-go area for commercial activities like mining, thermal power plants, polluting industries and large housing plans.
- It has suggested that 90% of the natural forests left in the Western Ghats complex – adding up to 60,000 sq km and constituting 37% of the entire hilly belt — be conserved under the Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) provisions of the green law. The forest area falling within the ESA would also cover 4,156 villages across the six states.
• The panel has said, “The villages falling under ESA will be involved in decision making on the future projects. All projects will require prior-informed consent and no-objection from the gram sabha (village council) of the village.”

• The panel has recommended that there should be a complete ban on mining activity in this zone and current mining activities should be phased out within five years, or at the time of expiry of the mining lease. It has banned development of any township or construction over the size of 20,000 sq m in the ESA zone.

• It has not recommended a ban on hydroelectric projects in the zone, but put a regime of stricter clearances for dams and other projects.

• The report suggests doing away with the complete moratorium on industrial and mining activity in the two Maharashtra districts of Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri. It has suggested persisting with the ban only on the area of the two districts falling within the ESA and a strict regulation in the rest.

• The report has steered clear from demanding a strict ecological control over the Western Ghat complex requiring changes and regulations on agricultural practices the way Gadgil committee report had suggested.

**Centre wants to break forex reserves**

• The central government is examining if India’s foreign exchange reserves held by the Reserve Bank can be deployed for funding infrastructure projects or recapitalising public sector banks.

• According to rough estimates of the Finance Ministry, bad loans-ridden banks would require capital infusion of about Rs. 40,000 crore over two years.

• India’s forex reserves is doing pretty well. Recently, it touched a record $355.46 billion.

• However, as of now, the proposal does not enjoy unanimous support within the government. The government doesn’t own the country’s foreign exchange reserves. **But, can the government deploy these reserves?**

• According to a former RBI Governor, the government could deploy the reserves held by the central bank for recapitalisation of banks. The government could also draw from the RBI’s balance sheet for this objective.

• However, the procedure might not be easy for the government to do so as the Board of the Reserve Bank had to approve it. Even the RBI would be unwilling to deploy reserves for such risky purposes by compromising BoP.

**Forex reserves – Quick look:**

• Foreign exchange reserves are an important component of the balance of payments and an essential element in the analysis of an economy’s external position.

• The components of India’s foreign exchange reserves are foreign currency assets (FCA), gold, SDRs and reserve tranche position (RTP) in the IMF.

• Foreign Currency Assets (FCA) is the **biggest** component of the forex reserves.

**India to contribute $18 billion to BRICS’ $100-billion foreign exchange reserves pool**

• India is all set to contribute $18 billion to the $100 billion foreign-exchange reserves pool that is being set up by five nations of the BRICS grouping.

**Why?**

• To help each other “in case of any problems with dollar liquidity”.

**Agreement:**
• The Agreement on setting BRICS Pool of Conventional Currency Reserves was signed on July 15, 2014 at the summit in Fortaleza (Brazil). The agreement was signed in Moscow after a meeting of the Finance Ministers and heads of the central banks of the BRICS countries.
• The operational agreement regarding this was signed by the central banks of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa on July 7, 2015 in Moscow. The Operational Agreement details the working procedures of the Pool to be observed by BRICS central banks, and defines their rights and obligations.
• The Agreement outlines the terms of mutual support for member states in the framework of the Agreement on BRICS Pool of Conventional Currency Reserves.

About the Pool:
• The pool is being set up according to an agreement signed by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
• It will be a $100 billion pool, with maximum $41 billion coming from China.
• India’s contribution of $18 billion to the Pool will be same as that of Brazil and Russia. South Africa would chip in $5 billion.
• The fund will be an “insurance instrument” that members nations could draw on if they experience problems with their balance of payments.
• The Pool will go into force on July 30.
• The Pool is tasked to ensure mutual provision of US dollars by the central banks of BRICS members in case of any problems with dollar liquidity.
• The Pool would help BRICS members to maintain financial stability in case of volatility in dollar exchange rate.
• The BRICS nations account for nearly $16 trillion in GDP and 40 per cent of the world’s population.

Racist slur can land you in jail for 5 years

• The Union Ministry of Home Affairs recently told the Delhi High Court that it has decided to amend the Indian Penal Code to make “racial discrimination” a non-bailable criminal offence.
• Accordingly, any derogatory reference meant to discriminate against the race of a person from the Northeast or any other part of the country will become a non-bailable offence with punishment of up to five years in jail.
• The Ministry of Home Affairs is in the process of finalising a comprehensive Bill for insertion of new Sections 153C and 509A in the Indian Penal Code, which will be introduced in Parliament after inter-Ministerial consultation.

What the Law says?
• Under the amended law, any word, sign or gesture insulting the race of a person will be punishable with a three-year prison term.
• Any word, gesture, written statement or activity aimed at discriminating against the race of a person or promoting violence against a particular race will invite a prison term of five years.

Background:
• Concerned over the spate of attacks on people from the Northeast in Delhi, the High Court had earlier asked the Ministry of Home Affairs to change the existing SC/ST Act or make other stronger prosecuting laws to protect the victims.
• The Central government had set up the M.K. Bezbaruah committee which recommended a series of punitive actions to prevent such attacks. The ministry has accepted most of the recommendations made by the committee.
Modi, Putin discuss India’s accession to Shanghai block

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin recently resolved to take strategic bilateral ties forward and discussed India’s accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).
- Modi is in Russia primarily for BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summits.
- India is currently an observer in the multilateral grouping.

About the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):
- It is a Eurasian political, economic and military organisation which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. These countries, except for Uzbekistan, had been members of the Shanghai Five, founded in 1996; after the inclusion of Uzbekistan in 2001, the members renamed the organisation.
- The SCO is seen as a counter to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).
- Its six full members account for 60% of the land mass of Eurasia and its population is a quarter of the world’s. With observer states included, its affiliates account for about half of the world’s population.
- The SCO has established relations with the United Nations, where it is an observer in the General Assembly, the European Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.
- It also has Afghanistan, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan as observers, and Belarus, Sri Lanka and Turkey as dialogue partners.

Entire Nagaland declared as ‘disturbed area’

- The Centre has declared entire Nagaland as a “disturbed area”.
- Why?
  - The centre says that it finds that a “dangerous condition” prevails in Nagaland and armed forces should assist the civil administration in maintaining law and order.
- Details:
  - The centre declared Nagaland as a disturbed area in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 for a period of one year with effect from June 30, 2015.
  - The decision came almost a month after NSCN-K, the dominant Naga rebel group, attacked an army convoy in Manipur’s Chandel district and killed 18 soldiers.

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act:
- It is an Act empowering armed forces to deal effectively in ‘Disturbed Areas’. Any area which is declared ‘Disturbed’ under the disturbed areas act enables armed forces to resort to the provisions of AFSPA.
- Who declares an area as disturbed?
  - The choice of declaring any area as ‘disturbed’ vests both with state and central government.
- Special powers provided to armed forces:
  - After an area comes under the ambit of AFSPA, any commissioned officer, warrant officer, non-commissioned officer or another person of equivalent rank can use force for a variety of reasons while still being immune to the prosecution.
- Ambit:
The act was passed on 11 September 1958 by the parliament of India to provide special legal security to the armed forces carrying out operations in the troubled areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura (seven sisters).

In 1990 the act was extended to the state of Jammu and Kashmir to confront the rising insurgency in the area.

In Manipur, despite opposition from the Central government, state government withdrew the Act in some parts in Aug, 2004.

The government can declare AFSPA in the following conditions:
- When the local administration fails to deal with local issues and the police proves inefficient to cope with them.
- When the scale of unrest or instability in the state is too large for the police to handle.

In an area declared, “disturbed” an army officer is legally free to carry out following operations:
- Fire upon or otherwise use force, even to the causing of death, against any person who is acting in contravention of any law” against “assembly of five or more persons” or possession of deadly weapons.
- Destroy any shelter (private or govt.) from which armed attacks are made or likely to be made or attempted to be made.
- Arrest any person without warrant who has committed a cognizable offence or against whom a reasonable suspicion exists that he has committed or is about to commit a cognizable offence.
- Enter and search, without warrant, any premises for purpose of arrest or to recover any person, arms, explosives.
- Search and seize any vehicle suspected to be carrying an offender or any person against whom any reasonable suspicion exists that he has or is about to commit an offence.
- Provide legal immunity to the army personnel found involved in any violation or ethical breach i.e., they cannot be sued or prosecuted.
- The decision of the government to declare a particular area ‘disturbed’ cannot be challenged in a court of law. In 2005 the Jeevan Reddy Commission said that AFSPA should be repealed and the clauses that are required should be included in other Acts.

NGT order may affect 80 projects in Tamil Nadu

- The National Green Tribunal has set aside an office memorandum by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) that allows post-facto clearance for projects. With this nearly 80 construction projects in Tamil Nadu are likely to come to a standstill.
- The projects require prior environmental clearance as per the Environment Impact Assessment Notification of 2006. Most of the projects had commenced construction and then sought environmental clearance, while a few had applied for clearance, but started construction before sanction was given.
- The Tribunal has come down on seven of the project proponents who impleaded in the case.

About the National Green Tribunal (NGT)

- The National Green Tribunal has been established under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.
- The tribunal also deals with matters relating to the enforcement of any legal right relating to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property.
The Tribunal is not bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, but shall be guided by principles of natural justice.

The Tribunal’s dedicated jurisdiction in environmental matters shall provide speedy environmental justice and help reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts.

The Tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing of the same.

Members:
- The sanctioned strength of the tribunal is currently 10 expert members and 10 judicial members although the act allows for up to 20 of each.
- The Chairman of the tribunal who is the administrative head of the tribunal also serves as a judicial member.
- Every bench of the tribunal must consist of at least one expert member and one judicial member. The Chairman of the tribunal is required to be a serving or retired Chief Justice of a High Court or a judge of the Supreme Court of India.
- Members are chosen by a selection committee (headed by a sitting judge of the Supreme Court of India) that reviews their applications and conducts interviews.
- The Judicial members are chosen from applicants who are serving or retired judges of High Courts. Expert members are chosen from applicants who are either serving or retired bureaucrats not below the rank of an Additional Secretary to the Government of India (not below the rank of Principal Secretary if serving under a state government) with a minimum administrative experience of five years in dealing with environmental matters. Or, the expert members must have a doctorate in a related field.

**NJAC: SC seeks details of States’ ratification**

- The Supreme Court has sought details from the Centre about the ratification process of the 99th Constitution Amendment incorporating the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) law by State Assemblies.
- The Centre had earlier told the court that as many as 20 states have approved the Constitutional amendment to replace the Collegium system with the NJAC.

**NJAC:**
- NJAC is a body responsible for the appointment and transfer of judges to the higher judiciary in India. It seeks to replace the collegium system of appointing the judges of Supreme Court and 24 High Courts with judicial appointments commission wherein the executive will have a say in appointing the judges.

**Details:**
- A new article, Article 124A, (which provides for the composition of the NJAC) will be inserted into the Constitution.
- The NJAC Act also seeks changes in articles 124, 217, 222 and 231.

**The commission will consist of the following members:**
- Chief Justice of India (Chairperson, ex officio)
- Two other senior judges of the Supreme Court next to the Chief Justice of India — ex officio
- The Union Minister of Law and Justice, ex-officio
- Two eminent persons (to be nominated by a committee consisting of the Chief Justice of India, Prime Minister of India and the Leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha or where there is no such Leader of Opposition, then, the Leader of single largest Opposition Party in Lok Sabha), provided that of the two eminent persons, one person would be from the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes or OBC or minority communities or a woman. The
eminent persons shall be nominated for a period of three years and shall not be eligible for re-nomination.

Functions of the Commission:
- Recommending persons for appointment as Chief Justice of India, Judges of the Supreme Court, Chief Justices of High Courts and other Judges of High Courts.
- Recommending transfer of Chief Justices and other Judges of High Courts from one High Court to any other High Court.
- Ensuring that the persons recommended are of ability and integrity.
- Under the present Collegium system, the Chief Justice of India would consult the four senior most judges of the Supreme Court for Supreme Court appointments and two senior-most judges for high court appointments.

Invasive species of snail spotted on Goa varsity campus

- The Giant African Land Snail (GALS) was spotted on the campus of Goa University at Taleigao, near Panaji, recently.
- It is listed as one of the world’s 100 most invasive species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.
- This species is one of the most damaging land snails in the world.

Why is it a cause for concern?
- If these snails multiply, there will be a threat to agro-horticulture and public health since they act as a vector of human diseases like Eosinophilic meningitis, which is caused by Angiostrongylus cantonensis, a parasite that nematode commonly resides in the pulmonary arteries of rats. The parasite is passed on to humans through eating raw or improperly cooked snails or freshwater prawns.

India, US ink pact on sharing account info

- To curb overseas tax evasion and black money, India and the U.S. recently signed an inter-governmental agreement to implement the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA).
- This agreement makes it obligatory on the part of the two nations to exchange information on offshore accounts of each other’s citizens in their respective territories.

About the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA):
- The U.S. government enacted FATCA in 2010 to obtain information on accounts held by US taxpayers in other countries.
- Under FATCA, foreign financial institutions in the U.S. will have to provide information about Indian account holders to the U.S. government’s Internal Revenue Service (IRS), which will forward the information to the Indian government.
- The Indian government will provide similar information to the IRS.
- As of now, the U.S. has such agreements with more than 110 jurisdictions and is engaged in related discussions with many other jurisdictions.
- Financial institutions such as banks, brokerages or mutual funds that do not comply with this agreement will face a 30% withholding tax on all payments from the U.S.
- This automatic exchange of information is scheduled to begin on September 30.
Indians in The Royal Society

- The names of two researchers based in Bengaluru are all set to be entered in a historic charter book containing the who’s who of the scientific world.

The two Researchers are:

- Professor of Biology Kamaljit Bawa, who founded the independent research organisation Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE).
- Indian Institute of Science (IISc) physicist Ajay Sood.

Some facts:

- These researchers will join a select group of scientists from the country to be inducted as a fellow by London’s The Royal Society.
- Sood is the only scientist whose work has been based entirely in laboratories in India.
- Among the Indian and Indian-origin scientists inducted as fellows and foreign members, two have been intimately involved with research in Bengaluru-based National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS).

About Royal Society, London:

- It is a learned society for science, and is possibly the oldest such society still in existence.
- It was founded in November 1660 and was granted a Royal Charter by King Charles II as “The Royal Society”.
- The Society today acts as a scientific advisor to the British government, receiving a parliamentary grant-in-aid.
- The Society acts as the UK’s Academy of Sciences, and funds research fellowships and scientific start-up companies.

NDDB launches mobile app for dairy farmers

- The National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) has launched a mobile application that will recommend a balanced diet for cows and buffaloes to help boost dairy farmers’ income by raising milk yield and cutting feed cost.

About the app:

- The mobile application is named ‘Pashu Poshan’.
- The application, which will be available on both web and android platforms, can be accessed by registering on the INAPH portal (inaph.nddb.coop).
- This application will benefit dairy farmers across the country. They will get information about balanced ration for their cows and buffaloes through this application. The use of this application is expected to boost milk output and income of dairy farmers.
- To use this application, the farmer needs to provide complete animal profile, including breed, age, milk production, fat content in milk apart from food items being currently fed to the animal along with the cost in order to formulate the balanced ration formula.
- India is the largest milk producer in the world, but the biggest challenge for the domestic dairy sector is low productivity of its bovine population as compared to developed countries.

Digital India: MPEDA launches mobile-based apps

- The Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), nodal agency for promotion of marine exports from India, has launched two mobile based applications, which would help farmers get prices on shrimp and capture data on aquaculture through mobile.
• These initiatives were launched under Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Digital India programme.
• Under these initiatives, MPEDA will provide price related market information of Vannamei and Black Tiger shrimp to farmers. The farmers have to give a missed call to a predetermined number and they will get the prices of various grades of these two shrimp varieties in major markets such as Japan, the U.S. and EU through an SMS.
• The service will be provided free of cost to farmers all over India and would enable them to make an informed decision on harvest of their produce and get better price realisation.
• The mobile app called mKrishi will enable farmers get expert guidance on all operations, besides helping with book keeping and weather information. mKrishi is under pilot in Gujarat and will be extended all over India in the next three months.

About the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA):
• MPEDA is a statutory body under Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
• The role envisaged for the MPEDA under the statute is comprehensive – covering fisheries of all kinds, increasing exports, specifying standards, processing, marketing, extension and training in various aspects of the industry.
• It acts as a coordinating agency with different Central and State Government establishments engaged in fishery production and allied activities.

**Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan (RAA) Launched by Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam**

• Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam, former President of India recently launched the Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan (RAA).
• About the Abhiyaan:
  - Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan is a unique concept developed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development that aims to inculcate a spirit of inquiry, creativity and love for Science and Mathematics in school children.
  - It aims to encourage students to learn sciences beyond the classrooms. It is an effort to take forward the Prime Minister’s vision of Digital India, ‘Make in India’ and ‘Teach in India’.
  - Under Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan, government schools will be mentored by Institutes like IITs/ IIMs/ IISERs and other Central Universities and reputed organisations through innovative programmes, student exchanges, demonstrations, student visits, etc to develop a natural sense of passion towards learning of Science and Maths.

**India, Pakistan become full SCO members**

• India and Pakistan were recently accepted as full members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). With this Prime Minister Narendra Modi has offered to work in combating terror and boosting trade by easing barriers.
• India has had an observer status for the past 10 years.
• The organization currently has 6 members.

About the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):
• It is a Eurasian political, economic and military organisation which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
Its six full members account for 60% of the land mass of Eurasia and its population is a quarter of the world’s. With observer states included, its affiliates account for about half of the world’s population.

It now has Afghanistan, Iran and Mongolia as observers, and Belarus, Sri Lanka and Turkey as dialogue partners.

**5 Satellites put in orbit**

India recently launched its heaviest commercial space mission with its polar rocket putting five British satellites in the orbit after a flawless takeoff.

**About the mission:**
- This mission saw the launch of three identical DMC3 optical earth observation satellites, built by Surrey Satellite Technology Limited (SSTL), United Kingdom, and two auxiliary satellites.
- The three DMC3 satellites, each weighing 447 kg, were launched into a Sun-Synchronous Orbit (SSO) using the high-end version of PSLV-XL.
- With the overall mass of five satellites being about 1,440 kg, this launch becomes the **heaviest commercial mission** ever undertaken by ISRO and its commercial arm Antrix Corporation.
- The mission is the heaviest commercial mission for Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) rockets till date and is ISRO’s first commercial mission in 2015.
- Since 1999 till date, India has launched 40 satellites of other countries with its PSLV rocket and the successful launch of the five British satellites would take the tally to 45.

**About PSLV C-28 XL:**
- PSLV C-28 XL is a high-end ‘XL’ version of PSLV.
- It is comprised of new designs consisting of circular launcher adaptor and a triangular deck called Multiple Satellite Adapter-Version 2 (MSA-V2).
- It was specially designed by ISRO to overcome the tough task of mounting the three DMC3 satellites in launch vehicle as each was having height of about 3m.
- The PSLV-XL variant costing around Rs. 140 crores is a four-stage/engine rocket with six strap-on motors for additional thrust during the initial phase of the flight.
- The first and third stages are powered by solid fuel and are cast ready while the second and fourth stages are powered by liquid fuel which will be filled during the countdown.
- Mars Orbiter Mission and Chandrayaan-1 were also launched with PSLV-XL variants.

**Invoke ESMA**

The Corporation of the City of Panaji (CCP) has written to the Goa government asking it to invoke the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) in light of the recent strike called by the garbage workers.

Workers of the Corporation of the City of Panaji (CCP) employees’ union are refusing to collect garbage in the city. The union has been demanding a hike in daily wages and had served a strike notice 51 days ago.

The corporation has also asked its officers to outsource the collection of garbage if the workers do not do so.

**About ESMA:**
- The Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) is an act of Parliament of India. It is a central law.
Insights Current Events

- It was established to ensure the delivery of certain services, which if obstructed would affect the normal life of the people. These include services like public transport (bus services), health services (doctors and hospitals).
- Although it is a very powerful law, its execution rests entirely on the discretion of the State government. Each state in the union of India, hence has a separate state Essential Services Maintenance Act with slight variations from the central law in its provisions. This freedom is accorded by the central law itself.

**SC rejects plea for U.P. Governor’s removal**

- The Supreme Court recently rejected a plea seeking removal of Uttar Pradesh Governor Ram Naik for his alleged statement favouring construction of a Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya.
- The Supreme Court said that continuance in office of Governor cannot be scrutinised in writ jurisdiction by a High Court.

**How a Governor can be removed?**

- The term of governor’s office is normally 5 years but it can be terminated earlier by:
- Dismissal by the president on the advice of the prime minister, at whose pleasure the governor holds office.
- Resignation by the governor.
- There is no provision of impeachment, as it happens for the president.

**‘Super typhoon’ pushes towards China**

- Typhoon Chan-hom has crossed China’s heavily populated eastern coast, forcing the evacuation of almost 1 million people, shutting transport links and devastating swathes of farmland.
- According to China’s National Meteorological Centre (NMC), it is the strongest typhoon to strike Zhejiang province, just south of Shanghai, since 1949.
- This is the second storm to hit China in two days after severe tropical storm Linfa made landfall on the coast of southern Guangdong province.
Pacific Basin, and is the most active tropical cyclone basin on Earth, accounting for almost one-third of the world’s annual tropical cyclones.

- Like any tropical cyclone, there are six main requirements for typhoon formation and development and they are:
  - Sufficiently warm sea surface temperatures
  - Atmospheric instability
  - High humidity in the lower to middle levels of the troposphere
  - Enough Coriolis force to develop a low pressure center
  - A pre-existing low level focus or disturbance
  - Low vertical wind shear.

**Indian Air Force Formally Inducts the Akash Missile**

- The indigenously-developed supersonic surface-to-air missile “Akash” that can target aircraft up to a distance of 30 km, was recently formally inducted in the Indian Air Force.

**Akash Missile:**

- It is a medium range Surface to Air missile. It is India’s first indigenously designed, developed and produced air defence system missile.
- The missile system can target aircraft up to 30 km away, at altitudes up to 18,000 m. It has the capability to neutralise aerial targets like fighter jets, cruise missiles and air-to-surface missiles.
- A nuclear warhead could potentially give the missile the capability to destroy both aircraft and warheads from ballistic missiles.
- It can be used by both Army and Air Force.
- The Akash system is fully mobile and capable of protecting a moving convoy of vehicles.
- The system provides air defence missile coverage for an area of 2,000 km².
- Akash flies at supersonic speed, reaching around Mach 2.5.
- A self-destruct device is also integrated. It is propelled by an Integrated Ramjet Rocket Engine. The use of a ramjet propulsion system enables sustained speeds without deceleration throughout its flight.
- The Missile has command guidance in its entire flight.
- Akash missiles are designed to be launched from static or mobile platforms, including battle tanks and wheeled trucks, providing flexible deployment.
- It can handle multiple targets and destroy manoeuvring targets, such as unmanned aerial vehicles, fighter aircraft, cruise missiles and missiles launched from helicopters.
- The Akash system has been developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) is the production agency.
- The advanced ECCM (electronic counter-countermeasures) features provide secure communication links with other air defence command and control networks to handle the counter electronic warfare scenario.

**PACESetter Fund**

- India and the United States of America recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation to Establish the PACESetter Fund.

**About the PACESetter Fund:**

- The fund will be set up with a corpus of about Rs.500 Million on 50:50 sharing basis.
- This fund is the principal funding arm of the Promoting Energy Access through Clean Energy (PEACE), an initiative of the US and Indian governments to harness commercial
enterprise and bring clean energy access to unserved and underserved individuals and communities.

- The PACsetter Fund will provide grants to companies that sell small-scale clean energy systems to individuals and communities without access to grid-connected power or with limited or intermittent access to power.

**Background:**
- Energy cooperation between India and the US is a core element of the India-US strategic partnership.
- The US-India Energy Dialogue was established in 2005 to enhance mutual energy security, promote increased energy trade and investment and facilitate the deployment of clean energy technologies.
- In November 2009, the two governments signed an MoU to enhance cooperation on energy security, energy efficiency, clean energy and climate change, which established PACE. Under this the Government of India and the United States of America have announced the launch of a new initiative “Promoting Energy Access through Clean Energy (PEACE)”.

**RIMES**

- The Regional Integrated Multi-hazard Early Warning Systems (RIMES) nations recently agreed to share regionally relevant meteorological and oceanographic data between partner institutions, member-states and collaborating countries. This was declared in the 2nd RIMES ministerial conference.
- The RIMES countries have also decided to launch a capacity building programme for enhancing early warning systems for small island states, in collaboration with regional and national institutions.

**About RIMES:**
- It is an international institution managed by 12 member-states and is presently chaired by India. It was established in April 2009.
- RIMES evolved from the efforts of countries in Africa and Asia in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami to establish a regional early warning system, and capacity building for preparedness and response to trans-boundary hazards.
- There are 19 collaborating countries in RIMES, including Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, and Russia among others.
- RIMES operates from its regional early warning centre located on the campus of Asian Institute of Technology in Pathumthani, Thailand.

**India’s population crosses 127-crore mark**

- On the World Population Day (11th July), India recorded a population of 127,42,39,769. It is growing at a rate of 1.6% a year, and could make the country the most populous in the world by 2050. This data was released by Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh or National Population Stabilisation Fund (NPSF), an autonomous body under the Union Health Ministry.

**Notable observations made:**
- India’s population is 17.25% of the global population.
- India’s population is growing at a faster rate than China, which is now the world’s most populous country at around 1.39 billion.
• If current population growth rates continue, India will have 1.63 billion people by 2050 and will surpass China.
• The total fertility rate (TFR) in India has seen a decline and stood at 2.3 in 2013 although the decline is not consistent.
• The data suggests that a high percentage of female (21-26%) are married below 18 years of age in States like Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Bihar.
• The population of India, at 1.21 billion as per the 2011 Census, is almost equal to the combined population of the U.S., Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Japan put together.
• The population of several States match, and in some cases, exceed that of several large countries. For example, the population of U.P. is almost that of Brazil, the fifth most populous country in the world.

About Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh:
• The “Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh” (JSK) (National Population Stabilisation Fund) has been registered as an autonomous Society established under the Societies Registration Act of 1860.
• JSK has to promote and undertake activities aimed at achieving population stabilisation at a level consistent with the needs of sustainable economic growth, social development and environment protection, by 2045.
• The Union Health Minister heads the General Body of JSK and the Ministries of Health and Family Welfare, Women and Child Development, Department of School Education & Literacy, Rural Development, Planning Commission are represented by their Secretaries on the General Body of JSK.
• All State Governments are members of JSK.
• Besides this the General Body has demographers, representatives of Industry & Trade, NGOs, medical and para-medical associations, general citizens as its members. This enables JSK run as a civil society movement drawing on the strength of its partners.

India stands second on trust in national government, says survey
• According to a survey of trust in national governments for 2014 conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), India has secured second position amongst 40 countries.
• What is ‘trust’ according to the survey?
• According to the OECD ‘Government at a Glance 2015’ report, trust represents the confidence of citizens and businesses in government to do what is right and perceived as fair.

Details of the Report:
• Switzerland has secured first position with Norway coming in third.
• The average confidence in national governments across OECD countries between the two years declined by 3.3% points. It was 41.8% in 2014 compared with 45.2% in 2007.
• The steepest declines took place in Slovenia, Finland and Spain.
• Changes in trust levels could be affected by many factors, including the economic outlook, political changes such as elections or other major events such as disasters or major scandals including corruption cases. Moreover, expectations of citizens could grow at a faster pace than government responses.
• India has scored less than the OECD average and came 24th out of 35 countries in the comparison on protection of fundamental rights.
- These are rights established under international law: the right to equal treatment and the absence of discrimination, the right to life and security of the person; due process of law and rights of the accused, freedom of opinion and expression; freedom of belief and religion, absence of arbitrary interference with privacy etc.

- India fared similarly on the count of constrained government powers where the top ranking countries – Denmark, Finland and Norway – demonstrate a highly balanced distribution of authority within societies.

- The report also shows that trust in government is negatively correlated with the perceived levels of corruption in Government.

- This is the only survey that collects data on the issue of trust in governments. It is a sampling survey of 1,000 citizens in each country conducted by World Poll, which has been doing it since 2005. Between the two selected survey years of 2007 — the year before the financial and economic crisis started — and 2014, trust levels in India dropped by 9% points.

About OECD:
- The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an international economic organisation of 34 countries founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade. It provides a forum in which governments can work together to share experiences and seek solutions to common problems.

- The OECD promotes policies designed:
  - To achieve the highest sustainable economic growth and employment and a rising standard of living in Member countries, while maintaining financial stability, and thus to contribute to the development of the world economy;
  - To contribute to sound economic expansion in Member as well as nonmember countries in the process of economic development; and
  - To contribute to the expansion of world trade on a multilateral, nondiscriminatory basis in accordance with international obligations.

- Most OECD members are high-income economies with a very high Human Development Index (HDI) and are regarded as developed countries. India is one of the many non-member economies with which the OECD has working relationships in addition to its member countries.

**Defamation should remain a penal offence: Home Ministry**

- The Centre has told the Supreme Court that defamation should remain a penal offence in India as the defamer may be too poor to compensate the victim. It has denied that criminal defamation had any chilling effect on free speech.

Why the government said so?
- Since there is no mechanism to censor the Internet from within, the government said online defamation could only be adequately countered by retaining defamation as a criminal offence. The centre has also said that criminalisation of defamation was part of the state’s “compelling interest” to protect the right to dignity and good reputation of its citizens.

What else has the government said?
- Unlike in the U. S, defamation in India cannot be treated as civil liability as there is always a possibility of the defamer being judgment free, i.e., not having the adequate financial capability to compensate the victim.

- The government has also denied that Sections 499 and 500, framed in 1860, were obsolete in a modern democratic polity. It says that 10 exceptions to Section 499 of the
IPC clearly exclude from its ambit any speech that is truthful, made in good faith and/or is for public good.

**Background:**
- This response from the center was part of an affidavit filed by the Union Home Ministry in response to petitions filed by political leaders cutting across party lines urging the court to declare criminal defamation unconstitutional. BJP leader Subramanian Swamy, Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi and Delhi Chief Minister and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal are among those who filed the petitions.
- The petitioners say criminalisation of defamation deterred free speech, was liable to abuse and choked the legitimate criticism of public officials.
- The IPC under Section 499/500 criminalizes defamatory speech. This means that a person can be imprisoned for a maximum period of 2 years, if found guilty.
- Defamation means the action of damaging the good reputation of someone.

**India’s longest road tunnel to open for traffic next year**
- India’s longest road tunnel, being built on Jammu-Srinagar National Highway, will be opened for general traffic in July next year and would reduce the distance between the two cities by 30 kms.

**About the tunnel:**
- The tunnel, connecting Chenani in Udhampur with Nashri in Ramban district, is being completed at a cost of over Rs. 2500 crore.
- The 9.2 km tunnel is part of 286 km-long four-laning project of the Jammu-Srinagar national highway.
- The state-of-the-art tunnel is simultaneously being built from the two ends and the NHAI teams will meet at the centre by drilling a hole through the final section.
- Once this tunnel becomes operational it will reduce the traffic jams on National Highway-1A that occur due to snowfall and avalanche in winter at Patnitop.

**The 12th International Symposium on Antarctic Earth Sciences (Isaes)**
- The 12th International Symposium on Antarctic Earth Sciences (ISAES) was recently inaugurated at a function in Goa.
- The Themes for the Symposium include Antarctica and Supercontinent Evolution, Antarctic Surface Processes, Landscapes, and Links with Cryosphere and Climate, Antarctic Solid Earth Structure and Interactions with the Cryosphere: Antarctica, the Southern Ocean, and Evolution of Climate and the Global Cryosphere, amongst others.

**About ISAES:**
- The International symposium on Antarctic Earth Sciences (ISAES) is a SCAR-initiative aimed at showcasing Antarctic geoscience research, taking stock of the accomplishments of the International fraternity and providing guidance for future studies.
- The first ISAES was organised way back in 1963 at Cape Town, and the last one (11th) at Edinburgh, with the Symposium traversing through Oslo, Madison, Adelaide, Cambridge, Tokyo, Siena, Wellington, Potsdam and Santa Barbara.
- In its 50-year history, Japan has been the only Asian country to hold it with India being bestowed the honor to host the 12th such International symposium now.
- Globally the scientific progress and state of the studies in earth sciences is reviewed in a gathering of all polar nations at an interval of four years in the form of International...
Symposium on Antarctic Earth Science (ISAES). A total of 11 such symposiums have been held since 1963.

India and Antarctica:
- Antarctica is recognized as a heritage of mankind and as mandated by the provisions of the Antarctic treaty, signed by 29 consultative parties, no commercial activity is permitted in Antarctica and its environment and all claims to its territory are frozen.
- The scientific programs of this natural polar laboratory are designed and approved by the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) which has a President and two to three vice-presidents and a small secretariat located at Cambridge, England.
- The science research programs are proposed and co-ordinated by three standing scientific groups (SSG’s) on Geosciences (GS), life sciences (LS) and physical sciences (PS) each having three chief officers.
- India currently has two permanent stations, Maitri at Schirmacher oasis and Bharati in the Larsemann Hill area located ~1000km east of Maitri. The first Indian station, Dakshin Gangotri, located on shelf ice is now buried and lost.

Stage set for Godavari Maha Pushkaram
- ‘Maha Godavari Pushkaram’, the once in 144-year event dedicated to worshipping rivers, will commence in the two Telugu States of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh from 14th July. The two governments have made elaborate arrangements both in terms of pilgrim convenience as well as security to ensure peaceful conduct of the 12-day event.

About the event: Quick glance:
- The pushkaram, which is observed once in 12 years, this time however is considered very auspicious from the astronomical point of view as it is Maha Pushkaralu which comes once in 144 years. This is very significant from the astronomical point of view- it is the conjunction of ‘Brihaspati’ (Jupiter) entering into ‘Simha rasi’ (zodiac sign of Leo).
- Similar to the ‘Kumbh melas’, celebrated alongside holy rivers across the country, ‘Pushkaram’ in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana is held every 12 years and taking dip in river Godavari is the main feature of the festival.
- Across the two Telugu States, all along the course of the Godavari, lakhs of people assemble on the river banks to take a holy dip in the sacred waters to mark the onset of the Pushkaram.
- Significance of Godavari Pushkaram: According to Hindu mythology, every 12 years the god Pushkar enters one of the 12 holy rivers of India. One who bathes in the river during this time will be cleansed of their sins. The festival of Pushkaram is held during the months when Jupiter transits through the 12 Zodiac signs, each sign corresponding to a particular river. Godavari is one of the 12 rivers, and is associated with the Leo zodiac sign.

SAARC satellite launch likely in December 2016
- The SAARC satellite mooted by India to provide communication and meteorological services to SAARC member-countries is likely to be launched by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in December 2016. This was stated by the ISRO chairman recently.

About SAARC satellite:
- It is a proposed communication-cum-meteorology satellite by Indian Space Research Organisation(ISRO) for the SAARC region.
• This idea of a satellite serving the needs of SAARC member nations was mooted by Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi. This was announced by him during his visit to Nepal in August, 2014.

**Satellite-based navigation system launched**

• The GPS-Aided Geo Augmented Navigation (GAGAN) system, which will offer seamless navigation to the aviation industry, was recently launched by the Civil Aviation Minister.

**About GAGAN:**

• GAGAN was developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Airports Authority of India (AAI) at a cost of Rs. 774 crore, over 15 years.
• GAGAN will provide augmentation service for the GPS over the country, the Bay of Bengal, South East Asia and Middle East and up to Africa.
• Some of its benefits are improved efficiency, direct routes, increased fuel savings, approach with vertical guidance at runways, significant cost savings because of the withdrawal of ground aids and reduced workload of flight crew and air traffic controllers.
• Gagan works by augmenting and relaying data from GPS satellites with the help of two augmentation satellites and 15 earth-based reference stations.
• The system utilises the satellite-based wide area augmentation system (SBAS) technology which has been developed by Raytheon.

**Significance:**

• India is the fourth country to offer space-based satellite navigation services to the aviation sector.
• The system bridges the gap in the coverage areas of the European Union’s European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS) and Japan’s Multi-functional Satellite Augmentation System (MSAS).
• The system would be available for the member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).
• It is intended to serve as a low-cost substitute for instrument landing system (ILS) and provide very accurate route guidance for the aircraft to save time and fuel.
• The guided approach landing with the help of GAGAN would immediately benefit nearly 50 airports in India.

**Drawback:**

• The aircraft now being used by Indian operators are not compatible with GAGAN. Only those aircraft that are fitted with SBAS will be able to use the new technology. Cost of refurbishing aircraft with new equipment and downtime for electronic restructuring are expenses that the financially-stressed Indian airline industry does not seem comfortable having to bear.

**India and Georgia Sign Memorandum of Understanding on Electoral Cooperation**

• India and Georgia recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for cooperation in the field of election management and administration.

**The major aims of MoU are:**

• Promotion of exchanges of knowledge and experience in electoral processes.
• Exchange of information, materials, expertise and training of personnel.
• Production and distribution of materials pertaining to electoral systems, voting technology, voters’ education and awareness,
• Participation of women and minorities in electoral process.
• The MoU would serve as an important mechanism for strengthening and deepening mutual collaboration between ECI and the Central Election Commission of Georgia, in electoral management and administration.
• Election Commission of India has so far signed twenty MOUs with Election Management Bodies and international organizations across the world. Some of the MoUs signed recently are with the Kyrgyz Republic, Yemen, Mauritius, Egypt, Venezuela and Republic of Korea.

**Liability law still clouds nuclear deal**

• Senior Indian and U.S. officials recently sent out a strong signal of their commitment to moving the bilateral civil nuclear deal forward despite obstacles. The officials met recently at a day-long conference on the tenth anniversary of the stalled agreement.
• However, those representing U.S. corporations worried that the Indian government’s assurances on the controversial Sections 17(b) and 46 of the law could not supersede the statute itself, and this still left the companies at risk in the event of an accident.

**Background:**
• The Indian government had recently clarified the nature of the understanding reached with the US government on the civil nuclear cooperation deal. It clarified that U.S. suppliers of nuclear reactors and parts will not be directly liable in case of a nuclear accident, nor can they be sued by Indian nuclear operators unless the contract they sign clearly states it.
• The main bone of contention in the Nuclear Liability Act, 2010 had been section 17 and section 46. Section 17 (b) says the operator (NPCIL) has the right to recourse against suppliers in case of a nuclear accident. Section 46 of the Act covers the remedies available against the operator.

**Nuclear Liability Act 2010:**
• It is a highly debated and controversial Act.
• Aim: The Act aims to provide a civil liability for nuclear damage and prompt compensation to the victims of a nuclear incident through a no-fault liability to the operator, appointment of Claims Commissioner, establishment of Nuclear Damage Claims Commission and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

**Importance of the Act:**
• After this Act was passed, India became a member of the international convention on liability in the civil nuclear arena.
• The Act made amendments in the Atomic Energy Act 1962 allowing private investment in the Indian nuclear power program.

**Important provisions:**
• The Act fixes liability for nuclear damage and specifies procedures for compensating victims.
• The Act specifies who can claim compensation and the authorities who will assess and award compensation for nuclear damage.
• Motive of the Act was to legally and financially bind the operator and the government to provide relief to the affected population in the case of a nuclear accident.
**Nasa’s New Horizons spacecraft ready for Pluto fly-by**

- Nasa’s spacecraft New Horizons (NH) is all set to become the first space probe to reach Pluto.
- The 14 July fly-by will take place on the 50th anniversary of Mariner 4’s visit to Mars, which was America’s first successful planetary fly-by.

**About New Horizons Mission:**

- New Horizons was launched on 19 January 2006, and has been travelling through space for the past nine years.
- Just over a year after launch, it passed Jupiter and used the giant world’s gravity to boost its velocity, as well as making scientific observations. This boost shortened the time to reach Pluto by years.
- At closest approach, New Horizons will be less than 12,500km above the dwarf planet’s icy surface, but 4.5bn kilometres from Earth.
- The radio connection is so weak at that distance that the data recorded by its instruments will take more than a year to trickle back. However, Nasa expects the first close-up pictures on 15 July.
- The mission will complete what NASA calls the reconnaissance of the classical solar system, and it makes the U.S. the first nation to send a space probe to every planet from Mercury to Pluto. The probe has traveled more than 3 billion miles to reach Pluto.
- New Horizon’s core science mission is to map the surfaces of Pluto and Charon, to study Pluto’s atmosphere and to take temperature readings.
- The spacecraft was launched in 2006, before the big debate started over Pluto’s status as a planet. In August of that same year, the International Astronomical Union reclassified Pluto as a dwarf planet.

**Iran reaches historic nuclear deal**

- After arduous talks that spanned 20 months, negotiators have reached a landmark deal aimed at reining in Iran’s nuclear program.
- The agreement, a focal point of U.S. President Barack Obama’s foreign policy, appears set to reshape relations between Iran and the West, with its effects likely to ripple across the volatile Middle East.
- The accord, reached on day 18 of marathon talks in Vienna, is aimed at resolving a 13-year standoff over Iran’s nuclear ambitions after repeated diplomatic failures and threats of military action.
- It was hailed by Iran, the U.S., the European Union and others.

**Highlights of the deal:**

- The deal puts strict limits on Iran’s nuclear activities for at least a decade and calls for stringent U.N. oversight, with world powers hoping this will make any dash to make an atomic bomb virtually impossible.
- In return, Iran will get sanctions relief although the measures can “snap back” into place if there are any violations.
- The international arms embargo against Iran will remain for five years but deliveries would be possible with special permission of the U.N. Security Council. Iran has accepted allowing the U.N. atomic watchdog tightly-controlled “managed access” to military bases.
- Iran will slash by around two-thirds the number of centrifuges from around 19,000 to 6,104.
• The agreement may lead to more cooperation between Tehran and Washington at a particularly explosive time in the Middle East with the emergence last year of the Islamic State group.
• The deal caps uranium enrichment at 3.67% and limits the stockpile to 300 kg, all for 15 years.
• Iran will be required to ship spent fuel out of the country forever, as well as allow inspectors from the IAEA inspectors certain access in perpetuity. Heightened inspections, including tracking uranium mining and monitoring the production and storage of centrifuges, will last for up to 20 years.
• The accord is expected to face fierce opposition from Republicans in the U.S. Congress, as well as from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a longstanding critic of the negotiations.

**Stagger office hours to cut pollution: NGT**

• The National Green Tribunal recently mooted the idea of **variable working hours for the government and private sector** to reduce vehicular pollution in Delhi during peak hours.

**What else has the NGT said?**

• It has asked the Centre to discuss the proposal with all stakeholders, saying it needed to take everyone along and come up with an innovative approach to curb pollution. The Bench also suggested including the universities in the proposal.
• It said that variable working hours could be a solution for increasing pollution. Courts and government offices in Delhi open at 10 a.m. and if there is a gap of one or two hours, it will help in reducing vehicular emissions immensely. Pressure on buses, autos and metro during peak hours could be reduced. Even business establishments’ working hours could be regulated.
• The Bench cited a report saying that in 2000 the sale of diesel cars was only 4%, but in 2014 the sale of such cars had gone up to 60% and those of multi-purpose utility vehicles had risen by more than 60%.

**National Green Tribunal (NGT):**

• The National Green Tribunal has been established under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.
• It is a specialized body equipped with the necessary expertise to handle environmental disputes involving multi-disciplinary issues.
• The Tribunal is not bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, but shall be guided by principles of natural justice.
• The Tribunal’s dedicated jurisdiction in environmental matters shall provide speedy environmental justice and help reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts.
• The Tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing of the same.

**Members:**

• The sanctioned strength of the tribunal is currently 10 expert members and 10 judicial members although the act allows for up to 20 of each.
• The Chairman of the tribunal who is the administrative head of the tribunal also serves as a judicial member.
• Every bench of the tribunal must consist of at least one expert member and one judicial member. The Chairman of the tribunal is required to be a serving or retired Chief Justice of a High Court or a judge of the Supreme Court of India.
- Members are chosen by a selection committee (headed by a sitting judge of the Supreme Court of India) that reviews their applications and conducts interviews.
- The Judicial members are chosen from applicants who are serving or retired judges of High Courts. Expert members are chosen from applicants who are either serving or retired bureaucrats not below the rank of an Additional Secretary to the Government of India (not below the rank of Principal Secretary if serving under a state government) with a minimum administrative experience of five years in dealing with environmental matters. Or, the expert members must have a doctorate in a related field.
- The Act says that decision taken by majority of members shall be binding and every order of Tribunal shall be final. Any person aggrieved by an award, decision, or order of the Tribunal may appeal to the Supreme Court within 90 days of commencement of award but Supreme Court can entertain appeal even after 90 days if appellant satisfied SC by giving sufficient reasons.

**Govt. clears Naval P-8Is and air defence guns for Army**

- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar recently cleared deals worth about Rs. 30,000 crore for new platforms and several upgrades mostly for the Army and the Navy.

**Other approvals:**
- Additional P-8I maritime patrol and surveillance aircraft for the Navy and new air defence guns for the army were the major deals cleared.
- DAC also extended Acceptance of Necessity (AON) for four large survey ships worth Rs. 2,324 crore in place of the old one which lapsed.
- Other deals for Navy include replacement of radars on Kora class ships, Gigabit Ethernet Ships Data Network (GbeSDN) on Delhi class ships for high speed data connectivity, 23 Combat Management Systems, BrahMos training facility at INS Valsura in Gujarat and Air Combat Maneuvering systems for Mig-29 fighters and Advanced Jet Trainers.

**About the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC):**
- It was set up in October 2001 following recommendations from Group of Ministers (GoMs) on ‘Reforming the National Security System.’
- The need for DAC was felt post-Kargil conflict and this high-level body is chaired by the Defence Minister.
- Other members include: Minister of State for Defence, Chief of Army Staff, Chief of Naval Staff, Chief of Air Staff, Defence Secretary, Secretary Defence Research & Development, Secretary Defence Production, Chief of Integrated Staff Committees (HQ IDS), Director General (Acquisition) and Deputy Chief of Integrated Defence Staff.
- The main aim of the DAC is to fast-track procurement process of the armed forces by optimally utilising the available budget.

**After refit, Vikramaditya ready to join Navy**

- Aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya is all set to join the Navy this week.

**About INS Vikramaditya:**
- Vikramaditya was acquired from Russia for $2.3 billion.
- It was commissioned into the Navy in November 2013 without the crucial air-defence systems. They are now being installed during the “guaranteed refit”, in addition to scheduled maintenance, by the original equipment manufacturer.
• It is a modified Kiev-class aircraft carrier. She has been renamed in honour of Vikramaditya, a legendary 1st century BCE emperor of Ujjain, India.
• The Israeli-supplied Barak-1 point defence missile system and the Russian-origin AK-630 close-in weapon system, borrowed from a to-be-decommissioned Godavari-class ship, are installed on Vikramaditya.
• The carrier was originally scheduled to receive a long-range surface-to-air missile system under joint development with Israel. But delay in its development resulted in the carrier being inducted without its own air-defence cover.

Kumbh Mela begins in Nashik
• The Nashik-Trimbakeshwar Simhastha Kumbh Mela 2015 recently began in Nashik.
• The mega religious congregation will take place over two months this time.
• Simhastha Kumbh Mela is held every 12 years in Nashik on the banks of the Godavari.
• The main features of the festival are the three ‘Shahi Snans’ (royal bathing days) that are scheduled on August 26 (Shravan Purnima), September 13 (Bhadrapad Amavasya) and September 18 (Bhadrapad Shukla Panchami).
• Other than its ritual significance, the festival is known worldwide for its elaborate logistics. Over Rs. 2,500 crore has been spent on preparations — new roads have been laid out in Nashik and over 15,000 security personnel, including paramilitary forces, have been deployed. The last edition of the festival in 2003 was marred by a stampede.

SO₂, CO prominent pollutants in Chennai
• The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) recently released a data, which shows the varying pollution level across the country. Among all 26 monitoring stations for which data is available, the IIT, Chennai, monitoring station has by far the most ‘severe’ air quality days – over 47% of all days in the last six months. Two monitoring stations in Lucknow — Central School and Lalbagh West Lucknow — have the second and fourth highest proportion of severe days, while Anand Vihar in Delhi is third, and Nehru Nagar in Kanpur is fifth.
• In Delhi, high AQI values are driven primarily by PM 2.5, while in Chennai they are driven by sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide. In Bengaluru, ozone is additionally often the prominent pollutant.
• According to the AQI index, days when the AQI value is between 401 and 500 are ‘severe’ and may cause respiratory impact even on healthy people, and serious health impacts on people with lung/heart disease. The health impacts may be experienced even during light physical activity.”

About the Air Quality Index (AQI):
• The government launched the National Air Quality Index (AQI) in April, 2015. It will put out real time data about the level of pollutants in the air and inform people about the possible impacts on health.
• The AQI is a global standard used to understand air quality.
• It takes multiple data on pollution already available with the country’s Central Pollution Control Board and presents it as a color coded scale with six levels. Dark green, the first level, indicates good quality air while maroon at the other end indicates severe pollution.
• For each category, the index identifies associated health impacts. For example when the scale touches maroon, the advisory reads: “May cause respiratory impact even on healthy
people, and serious health impacts on people with lung/heart disease. The health impacts may be experienced even during light physical activity.”

- It gives current as well as 24-hour average data on particulate matter – PM2.5 or very fine particles smaller than 2.5 micrometres in diameter, and PM 10 which are less than 10 micrometers in diameter – as well as other pollutants including nitrogen dioxide, ozone and carbon monoxide. PM 2.5 levels are commonly used as the best indicator of severe air pollution, while PM 10 particles are also a cause of public health concern, but less lethal.
- AQI will initially cover 10 cities — Delhi, Agra, Kanpur, Lucknow, Varanasi, Faridabad, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad — each of which would have monitoring stations with Air Quality Index display boards.

‘#100Women Initiative’ launched

- The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) in collaboration with Facebook has launched the ‘#100Women Initiative’.
- **Aim of the initiative:** it aims to recognize and acknowledge women who are making a difference in their communities, across the country.

**Details:**
- The ‘#100Women Initiative’ involves a contest to select 100 women achievers of India through public nominations via social media.
- Starting from July 15, 2015, people can nominate women who have made an impact and made their community better, by visiting the Ministry’s Facebook Page until September 30, 2015. Voting will begin on November 7, 2015 on the top 200 entries as determined by an esteemed jury. Winners will be invited to join a reception organized by the Ministry around Republic Day.

Centre to set up trade facilitation council to promote exports

- The government has decided to set up a trade facilitation council comprising members of the Centre and states to promote India’s overseas shipments.
- The council will be chaired by the Union Commerce and Industry Minister and secretaries of key ministries and state ministers will be the members.
- The main objective of the council will be facilitating trade from states in a bid to boost the country’s exports.

Ottappalam to have India’s first defence industrial park

- In a major fillip to industrial infrastructure in the Palakkad region, the Union government’s Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) has approved a proposal from the Kerala Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (Kinfra) to set up the country’s first defence industrial park at Ottappalam.

**Details:**
- The proposed park will be established as part of the Make in India, Make in Kerala project
- It will have modern common infrastructure facilities aimed at attracting component manufacturers in the defence industry.
- The Union government has agreed to bring it under the Modified Industrial Infrastructure Upgradation Scheme (MIIUS).
The total expenditure for the defence park is estimated at Rs.231.25 crore. Kinfra will invest Rs.181.35 crore, while the rest of the amount is being expected as grant from the Union government.

Ottappalam has been selected for the defence park keeping in view its strategic location as far as connectivity was concerned. Apart from common facilities such as dedicated power and water supply, the park will have a research and development centre.

**Industrial Infrastructure Upgradation Scheme:**

- In 2003, an Industrial Infrastructure Upgradation Scheme (IIUS) was launched to enhance the industry’s competitiveness by providing infrastructure through the public-private partnership model in selected functional clusters. Under the scheme, central assistance would be provided for as much as 75% of the project cost, subject to a ceiling of Rs. 5 crore.
- In February 2009, the plan was recast based on the recommendations of an independent evaluation.
- The government, July 2013, approved the Modified Industrial Infrastructure Upgradation Scheme (MIIUS) with an outlay of Rs 1,030 crore during the 12th Five Year Plan period ending March 2017. It includes Rs. 450 crore for committed liability and the remaining Rs. 580 crore for taking up 14 to 16 new projects including a minimum 2 projects in the North Eastern Region (NER) for upgradation of infrastructure in existing or greenfield industrial clusters. And at least 10% outlay will be set aside for the minimum two projects in the NER.
- All States are covered under the scheme.

**SC asks govt. to review drug pricing policy**

- The Supreme Court recently directed the government to have a re-look at the drug pricing policy to help make life-saving medicines affordable for the common man.
- The court also observed that there is an impression the government favours pharmaceutical companies and is not pro-poor. Hence, the court asked the Department of Pharmaceuticals under the Ministries of Health and Chemical and Fertilisers to re-examine the National Pharmaceutical Policy (NPP) 2012 and Drug Pricing Control Order (DPCO) of 2013 in light of several recommendations made by NGO All India Drug Action Network.
- The bench also wanted the government to address the NGO’s concern that prices of drugs were fixed at levels which gave 5,000 times profit to the maker.

**Background:**

- The NGO in a public interest petition had raised objections on the formula for drug pricing.
- It said the formula institutionalised ―super-profits in the guise of price control, excluded from price control life-saving medicines for diseases such as malaria and TB, excluded all fixed dose combinations which amount to 50 per cent of the market.‖
- The NGO said the government’s pricing policy further excluded essential medicines belonging to the same chemical class, besides drugs provided in the national health programmes such as for HIV, diabetes, hypertension and anaemia, medicines with appropriate dosages for children and patented medicines.
- The DPCO lists 348 drugs for price control. The NGO wants the list to be extended to include all drugs on the national list of life-saving drugs.

**National Pharmaceutical Pricing policy, 2012:**

- The government had approved the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Policy (NPPP) in 2012.
• This policy at bringing 348 essential drugs under price control and also lead to reduction in prices. With this, the Govt would control prices of 348 essential drugs.
• The policy debars the companies from using the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) to increase the prices of the essential medicines on their own each year. Thus, the companies had to seek approval from the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority whenever they wanted to increase the prices of the items covered under the Drug Price Control Order.

**Telangana first State to make IT parks differently abled-friendly**

• Telangana will soon be the **first State in the country** to make its IT and ITES buildings differently abled-friendly.

**Details:**
• In a first-of-its-kind initiative undertaken by the NASSCOM Foundation, 175 companies based out of two IT parks in Hyderabad **will go for retrofitting** their buildings to suit the needs of differently abled employees.
• This would mean that companies will have common areas including cafeterias, restrooms, cubicles and elevators with facilities to aid their current and prospective employees who are differently-abled.
• From entry and exit gates that have ramps to placing biometric devices at accessible heights and washrooms that have handles for wheelchair-bound people, retrofitting is expected to ensure inclusive work environments.
• Efforts are also on to make websites of these companies accessible to such persons by including voice features among others.

**Implications:**
• The process is expected to increase the percentage of differently abled employees in these companies within a span of five years.
• Currently, on an average, differently-abled persons constitute just 1% of the workforce in most companies in the sector.
• Sources: The Hindu, Wiki.

**Mysore Silk to celebrate centenary in August**

• The Karnataka State Silk Industries Corporation is all set to commemorate the centenary of Mysore Silk Factory in August this year. The factory turned 100 three years ago but the celebrations could not take place for various reasons.

**About Mysore Silk factory:**
• The Mysore Silk factory is one of the oldest and historical silk manufacturing units in the country.
• It was **founded by the Wadiyars** in 1912 for manufacturing silk fabrics for the royal family and ornamental fabrics for armed forces.

**Mysore Silk has also received GI tag.**
• The GI tag is an indication which is definite to a geographical territory. It is used for agricultural, natural and manufactured goods. For a product to get GI tag, the goods need to be produced or processed or prepared in that region. It is also essential that the product has special quality or reputation.
Controversial Bill on migrants goes

- A special session of the Manipur Assembly recently withdrew the controversial Manipur Regulation of Visitors, Tenants and Migrant Workers Bill, 2015. The Bill was passed in March.
- This is the first time in the State a Bill passed by the House has been withdrawn. The state government said that it will introduce a new bill within three months.
- A special session of the Manipur Assembly was held to discuss the demands of the people to introduce a Bill to check influx of illegal immigrants who threaten the indigenous populace of Manipur.

Why the Bill was opposed?
- The Bill had come under attack from those demanding implementation of Inner Line Permit (ILP) in the state, who charged saying the bill did little to protect the interests of indigenous people of the state.
- Locals had rejected the bill passed in March, saying it does not provide the same protection as the ILP system. It claimed the “influx of migrants” is affecting the social, cultural and political practices of the people of Manipur.
- In 2012, the Union government had turned down a demand from the Manipur government to implement ILP in the state.

What is Inner Line Permit?
- The ILP, which has its origins in British regulations dating back to 1873, regulates the entry of non-domicile citizens into restricted regions in the northeastern states.
- It is currently in force in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram and people from other parts of India are required to obtain a permit to visit these states.
- The ILP is issued under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, by the state governments.
- It can only be used for travel purpose and not for permanent residency in the area.
- Even, Indian citizens who wish to travel to these places have to obtain ILP.
- Critics of the ILP system say it creates unnecessary hurdles for development and trade activities and impedes the growth of tourism.

90% of enclave dwellers give choice of nation

- India and Bangladesh will complete a survey asking each of the 51,000 people living in 162 enclaves on the border to give their choice of citizenship of either nation this week.
- The survey precedes the exchange of the enclaves between the two nations under the Land Boundary Agreement signed during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Dhaka a month ago.
- The survey teams comprise officials of the External Affairs and Home Ministries and the West Bengal government.

About the land swap deal:
- The swap will involve handing over 17,000 acres of land to Bangladesh in return for 7,000 acres in 162 enclaves in West Bengal, Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya, and was first decided under the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) between India and Bangladesh, but never ratified by Parliament.
- It required an amendment to the Constitution (the 119th amendment) ratified by both Houses of Parliament with a two-thirds majority.
- The deal relates to demarcation of boundary under the Land Boundary Agreement between the two countries.
Prime Minister launches National Mission for Skill Development

- On the occasion of the first ever World Youth Skills Day (July 15th), the Government has launched SKILL INDIA Campaign.
- On this historic occasion, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi formally launched the “National Skill Development Mission”

About the National Skill Development Mission:
- The National Skill Development Mission aims to provide a strong institutional framework at the Centre and States for implementation of skilling activities in the country.
- The Mission will have a three-tiered, high powered decision making structure. At its apex, the Mission’s Governing Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, will provide overall guidance and policy direction.
- The Steering Committee, chaired by Minister in Charge of Skill Development, will review the Mission’s activities in line with the direction set by the Governing Council. The Mission Directorate, with Secretary, Skill Development as Mission Director, will ensure implementation, coordination and convergence of skilling activities across Central Ministries/Departments and State Governments.
- The Mission will also run select sub-missions in high priority areas.
- The National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the Directorate of Training will function under the overall guidance of the Mission.
- The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) provides a natural home for the Mission, organically linking all three decisions making levels and facilitating linkages to all Central Ministries/Departments and State Governments.

SC seeks Centre’s reply on re-promulgation of land ordinance

- The Supreme Court recently sought the Centre’s response after farmers’ bodies challenged the government’s re-promulgation of the land acquisition ordinance as “a mockery of the Constitution and running the country through ordinances.”

What the petition says?
- The petition alleges that re-promulgation is a “clever device and ruse” to subvert the legislative process.
- It contends that the “lack of political will or consensus or the fear of the executive of getting defeated on the floor of the House, is not a ground for exercise of power under Article 123.
- The petition wants the ordinance to be declared unconstitutional.

Background:
- The government recently re-promulgated the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Amendment) Ordinance, 2015.
- The ordinance was first promulgated in December 2014, re-promulgated in April this year and again in May.

Important provisions in the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Amendment) Ordinance, 2015:
Land shall be acquired up to 1 km on both sides of designated railway lines or roads for industrial corridor.

Government shall undertake a survey of wasteland and arid land and maintain a record.

A provision is included for providing employment to project affected families.

Hearings to be held in districts where land acquisition takes place.

Courts won’t need government nod to take cognizance of offence under CrPC.

‘Five year’ clause for completion of project on acquired land will be augmented and amended by the length of the project. No acquisition will be transferred to private persons.

Under section 33 compulsory employment clause shall be inserted.

Land acquired for Hospitals, Educational Institutions and other Social Projects will not come under definition of Industrial Corridor.

Government to ensure before notification land acquired would be bare minimum required for a project.

Infrastructure projects including projects under public private partnership where the ownership of the land continues to vest with the Government, appropriate governments are empowered to take steps for exemption from “Social Impact Assessment” and “Special Provisions for Safeguarding Food Security”. In addition acquisition for such projects is exempted from the “Consent” provisions of the Act as well.

Soil Health Card scheme takes off gingerly

- A recent finding shows that only 34 lakh Soil Health Cards have been issued so far, against a target of 84 lakh cards.
- Some of the States such as Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Kerala, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal have not issued a single card to farmers against the targets set for them for 2015-16.
- This programme has been projected as a flagship programme by the government.

**What is a Soil Health Card?**

- The Soil Health Card is a printed report that will be given to farmers once in three years for each of his/her land holding.

**What it contains?**

- It will contain crucial information on macro nutrients in the soil, secondary nutrients, micro nutrients, and physical parameters. The card will be accompanied by an advisory on the corrective measures that a farmer should take to improved soil health and obtain a better yield.

**Progress in other states:**

- So far the Andhra Pradesh has taken the lead in disbursement of the Soil Health Cards to farmers.
- Tamil Nadu and Punjab exceeded targets for collection of soil samples during the kharif season. But Tamil Nadu has not even started distribution of cards.
- Till July 7, Andhra Pradesh had distributed 16.3 lakh cards followed by Uttar Pradesh that disbursed 47,378, Punjab (27,307), Chhattisgarh (22,570), Telangana (15,171) and Odisha (10,245).
- Kerala, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh among others have not even begun to collect soil samples for testing.

**About Soil Health Card scheme:**

- It is a scheme to provide every farmer a Soil Health Card in a Mission mode. It is a scheme under which the Central Government provides assistance to State Governments for setting up Soil Testing Laboratories for issuing Soil Health Cards to farmers.
The scheme will be implemented in all states to promote soil testing services, issue of soil health cards and development of nutrient management practices.

State Governments have adopted innovative practices like involvement of agricultural students, NGOs and private sector in soil testing, determining average soil health of villages, etc., to issue Soil Health Cards.

The state governments will prepare yearly action plan on the issue and the cost will be shared in the ratio of 75:25 between the Centre and states.

The scheme assumes importance as the imbalanced application of fertilisers have caused deficiency of primary nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium), secondary nutrients (such as sulphur), and micro-nutrients (boron, zinc, copper etc.) in most parts of country.

Though a few states like Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh have made progress in soil testing but no uniform norms are followed in the country for soil analysis and distribution of soil health cards. The central scheme aims to address this issue.

**Bill to scrap 295 obsolete laws approved**

The Union cabinet recently gave its approval for two bills.

- It gave its ex-post facto approval for [Repealing and Amending (Third) Bill, 2015](http://www.insightsonindia.com), which was introduced in Lok Sabha on May 13, 2015 for repealing 187 acts.
- The Cabinet also approved introduction of a new bill, namely, the [Repealing and Amending (Fourth) Bill, 2015](http://www.insightsonindia.com) in the Lok Sabha for the repeal of 295 Acts, identified for repeal by the concerned Ministries/Departments and the Legislative Department.
- As an ongoing process, the Repealing and Amending Bill is one of the periodical measures by which enactments which have ceased to be in force or have become obsolete or the retention whereof as separate Acts become unnecessary are repealed, or by which the formal defects detected in enactments are corrected.

**Ban on tourist activities in Rohtang Pass to continue**

- The National Green Tribunal has declined to relax its recent order, banning all tourist activities in and around the Rohtang Pass overlooking the picturesque tourist resort Manali, to check environmental degradation.
- The NGT has issued a show-cause notice to the Himachal government, asking them about the steps initiated to prohibit commercial activities after its July 7 order.
- The Bench has also asked the government to come out with a rehabilitation policy for the people, mostly from the hospitality industry, going to be affected by the ban.
- The tribunal has also made it clear that from now on, only computerized permits would be issued for Rohtang Pass and journey beyond.
- **Rohtang Pass** is a high mountain pass on the eastern Pir Panjal Range of the Himalayas around 51 km (32 mi) from Manali. It connects the Kullu Valley with the Lahaul and Spiti Valleys of Himachal Pradesh, India. Manali-Leh Highway, a part of NH 21, transverses Rohtang Pass.

**National Green Tribunal (NGT):**

- The National Green Tribunal has been established under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.
It also ensures the enforcement of any legal right relating to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property.

It is equipped with the necessary expertise to handle environmental disputes involving multi-disciplinary issues.

The Tribunal is not bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, but is guided by principles of natural justice.

The Tribunal’s dedicated jurisdiction in environmental matters shall provide speedy environmental justice and help reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts.

The Tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing of the same.

Members:

The sanctioned strength of the tribunal is currently 10 expert members and 10 judicial members although the act allows for up to 20 of each.

The Chairman of the tribunal who is the administrative head of the tribunal also serves as a judicial member.

Every bench of the tribunal must consist of at least one expert member and one judicial member. The Chairman of the tribunal is required to be a serving or retired Chief Justice of a High Court or a judge of the Supreme Court of India.

Members are chosen by a selection committee (headed by a sitting judge of the Supreme Court of India) that reviews their applications and conducts interviews.

The Judicial members are chosen from applicants who are serving or retired judges of High Courts. Expert members are chosen from applicants who are either serving or retired bureaucrats not below the rank of an Additional Secretary to the Government of India (not below the rank of Principal Secretary if serving under a state government) with a minimum administrative experience of five years in dealing with environmental matters. Or, the expert members must have a doctorate in a related field.

Other details:

The powers of tribunal related to an award are equivalent to Civil court and tribunal may transmit any order/award to civil court have local jurisdiction.

The Act says that decision taken by majority of members shall be binding and every order of Tribunal shall be final. Any person aggrieved by an award, decision, or order of the Tribunal may appeal to the Supreme Court within 90 days of commencement of award but Supreme Court can entertain appeal even after 90 days if appellant satisfied SC by giving sufficient reasons.

**DoT's Net neutrality panel offers a mixed bag**

The government panel on Net neutrality recently submitted its report to the government. The six-member panel was chaired by A.K. Bhargava, Adviser, Technology, Department of Telecommunication. The panel recommends that the core principles of Net Neutrality must be adhered to.

Important recommendations made:

- It has recommended that apps offering domestic calling be brought under the regulatory framework prescribed for telecom operators, but those providing messaging and international calling services over the Internet be kept free from licensing requirements.
- It suggests that **controversial plans such as Airtel Zero be allowed with prior clearance from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, but opposes platforms such as Internet.org of Facebook**.
- Airtel Zero and Internet.org are similar as they offer customers a specific set of services or applications that are free to use without paying data charges. But on Internet.org, the
committee says it is of the “firm opinion that content and application providers cannot be permitted to act as gatekeepers and use network operations to extract value, even if it is for an ostensible public purpose”.

- The report says **over-the-top applications**, which use the Internet to deliver services, enhance consumer welfare and increase productivity. Therefore, such services should be actively encouraged and any impediments in expansion and growth of OTT application services (such as e-commerce, radio taxis and YouTube) should be removed.

**Background:**

- The report gains importance as, for the past few months, a raging debate has been on in the country on Net neutrality, which, basically, **is the principle that service providers should treat all data on the Internet equally and not discriminate against, or charge differently, any website or service**.
- Globally, the debate has been on for a long time, but in India, Airtel triggered it last December by announcing plans to start charging subscribers for VoIP services such as Skype and Viber, which allows making calls using the Internet. While cellphone users came out against the move, telecom operators called for a level-playing field to run a “viable” business and demanded that same rule apply for same services, even VoIP.

**Net neutrality:**

- Net neutrality is the principle that Internet service providers and governments should treat all data on the Internet equally, not discriminating or charging differentially by user, content, site, platform, application, type of attached equipment, or mode of communication.
- Neutrality proponents claim that telecom companies seek to impose a tiered service model in order to control the pipeline and thereby remove competition, create artificial scarcity, and oblige subscribers to buy their otherwise uncompetitive services. Many believe net neutrality to be primarily important as a preservation of current freedoms.
- **There are no laws enforcing net neutrality in India.** Although TRAI guidelines for the Unified Access Service license promote net neutrality, it does not enforce it. The Information Technology Act 2000 also does not prohibit companies from throttling their service in accordance with their business interests.
- Proponents of the principle of net neutrality hold that all traffic on the Internet should be treated equally or in other words, service providers such as Airtel should allow access to all content without favouring any particular product or website.

**Telecom/service provider’s argument:**

- The telecom/ISPs argue that they have made huge investments in broadband capacity, and, therefore, they should be allowed to charge for the services, which generate lot of traffic. Preventing the service providers from charging for over-the-top services (OTT) services would mean that they would reduce their investments in building networks.
- The net neutrality debate becomes even more relevant in case of India where the penetration of smart phones is increasing and efforts are on to bring more people to the Internet, through the digital India campaign.

**12th National Awards for Excellence in Cost Management 2014**

- A PSU of Ministry of Railways, namely, RailTel Corporation of India Ltd. has added yet another jewel in its crown by bagging the **12th National Awards for Excellence in Cost management 2014**.
- This award is organized by The Institute of Cost Accounts of India.
- RailTel has won the award in the category of Public- Service Sector (Medium).
• National Awards for Excellence in Cost management is an initiative to promote practice of Cost management and recognizing outstanding contributions of Finance fraternity

About RailTel:
• RailTel Corporation a “Mini Ratna (Category-I)” PSU is one of the largest neutral telecom services providers in the country owning a Pan-India optic fiber network covering all important towns & cities of the country and several rural areas covering 70% of India’s population.
• RailTel is in the forefront in providing nationwide Broadband Telecom & Multimedia Network in all parts of the country in addition to modernization of Train operations and administration network systems for Indian Railways.
• With its Pan India high capacity network, RailTel is working towards creating a knowledge society at various fronts and has been selected for implementation of various mission-mode Govt. of India projects in the telecom field.

Approval for Phase II of eCourts Mission Mode Project
• The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister recently gave its approval for the second phase of eCourts Mission Mode Project at an estimated cost of Rs.1670 crore.
• It envisages enhanced ICT enablement of courts through universal computerisation, use of cloud computing, digitization of case records and enhanced availability of e-services through e-filing, e-payment gateways and mobile applications etc.

Background:
• The eCourts project of the Government is aimed at providing necessary hardware and software applications to enable courts to deliver e-services to citizens, and to enable the judiciary to better monitor and manage the functioning of courts.
• In Phase I of the project more than 13000 District and Subordinate courts have been computerised and case information linked to the respective District court websites.
• These courts are now providing online eServices such as cause lists, case status and judgments, to litigants and public through the eCourts portal.
• Litigants and lawyers are also provided services through Judicial Service Centre at the court complexes. More than 24 crore transactions have already been recorded regarding online access of court information.

Phase 2:
• The Phase II of the eCourts project would also help in the automation of workflow management in courts thereby contributing to better court and case management.
• Touch screen based Kiosks and Video Conferencing facility will be installed at all Court Complexes and corresponding jails.
• Hand held process service devices will be provided to process servers to ensure transparent and time bound delivery of court notices and summons. Also, the use of solar energy has been proposed at 5 percent of the court complexes on a pilot basis.
• In line with the Digital India Programme of the Government of India which emphasises on Citizen centric services, this project would also focus on Digital Infrastructure as a core utility to every citizen providing Governance and Services on demand eventually making the citizens digitally empowered.
India and World Bank Pact

- The Financing Agreement for World Bank (IDA) assistance of US$ 250 million for Andhra Pradesh Disaster Recovery Project was signed between Government of India and the World Bank recently.
- The objective of the project is to restore, improve and enhance resilience of public services, environmental facilities, and livelihoods in targeted Communities of Andhra Pradesh, and increase the capacity of the State to respond promptly and effectively to an eligible crisis or emergency.

Details of the Project:
- The project, through its different components, will provide both direct and indirect benefits to the State of Andhra Pradesh. Direct beneficiaries include populations of the coastal areas affected, specifically the four heavily impacted districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam and East Godavari with a total approximate population of 13.3 million residents.

The project will have seven components:
- Resilient electrical network
- Restoration of connectivity and shelter infrastructure
- Restoration and protection of beach front
- Restoration of environmental services and facilities and livelihood support
- Capacity building and technical support for disaster risk management
- Project implementation support
- Contingency Emergency Response
- Government of Andhra Pradesh is the implementing agency.

State to tap financial markets for infra projects

- The Kerala state government has mooted a new idea to give a fillip to infrastructure development. The government has decided to appoint a financial advisor-cum-consultant (FAC).

Why?
- to help the government access financial markets for raising funds for a slew of infrastructure projects, some of which are either in the process of implementation or will come up soon for implementation.
- The selection of the consultant or a consultancy agency will be through a two-stage competitive bidding or selection process. It will help the State mobilise resources for infrastructure development.

Role of FAC:
- The financial consultant’s main job will be to help the government source funds for State’s major projects.
- The FAC will have three specific roles – management and financial consultancy services, issue advisory services, and legal services.
- It will also assist the government in preparation of memorandum of associations, MoUs, bylaws, contracts, and agreements.

Hampi’s Stone Chariot on Rs. 10 note

- The Stone Chariot at the Vijaya Vittala temple complex in Hampi, Karnataka will now adorn the new Rs. 10 note.
This decision was taken at a joint meeting between the Secretary of the Union Finance Ministry, the Chief General Manager of the Currency Management Department, Reserve Bank of India, and the Director-General of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

**Details:**

- The Stone Chariot is among the six monuments — the others are the Red Fort in Delhi; the Sun Temple in Konark, Odisha; the Taj Mahal in Agra; the Goa churches and the Padmapani painting in the Ajanta Caves — to have been chosen to feature on new currency notes of the denomination of Rs. 10, Rs. 20, Rs. 50, Rs. 100, Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000, respectively.
- The Stone Chariot is among the ancient monuments of the country that have been conserved as an “architectural marvel of human genius with outstanding universal values”, and it has been a major attraction for tourists thronging Hampi.

**About Hampi:**
- Hampi is one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India located near Hospet town in the Karnataka state.
- It is located within the ruins of the city of Vijayanagara, the former capital of the Vijayanagara Empire.
- The emperor Ashoka’s minor rock edicts in Nittur & Udegolan (both in Bellary district, Karnataka) lead one to believe that this region was within the Ashokan kingdom during the 3rd century BCE.
- A Brahmi inscription & a terracotta seal dating to the 2nd century CE were also discovered from the excavation site.
- The first historical settlements in Hampi date back to 1 CE.
- It is situated on the banks of the Tungabhadra River.
- Hampi has various notable Hindu temples with some vedanta mythology inside the temples, some of which are still active places of worship.

**TS gears up for Bonalu festivities**

- The Telangana government has made it clear that total expenditure of the ‘Bonalu’ festivities will be officially borne by the government, as it has been declared as the State festival.

**About Bonalu festival:**

- Bonalu is a Hindu festival celebrated in parts of Telangana and Rayalaseema in Andrapradesh, India.
- The Word Bonalu came from “Bhojanalu” meaning food, which is offered to the goddess during festival time.
- It is celebrated during ashada masam. It is believed that during Ashada Maasam, the Goddess comes back to her maternal home. So people come to see her and bring offerings of food (Bonalu) to show their love and affection, just as they would prepare a special meal when their own daughters visit them.

**GST: Government firm on extra tax**

- Even as the long-pending Goods and Services Tax Bill is being examined by a parliamentary committee, the government has categorically said that it would not reconsider withdrawing the 1% additional tax, over the GST, to help manufacturing States.
- This provision is strongly opposed by the Congress and some states.
Arguments against this provision:
- Opponents of this provision say that the 1% tax goes against the spirit of GST.
- It could make intra-state movement of goods expensive and hurt the ‘Make in India’ campaign.
- It would favour international trade over intra-national trade, because every time a good passes a border it had to bear an extra tax.

Why was it introduced?
- In order to address concerns of the manufacturing states, the GST Constitution Amendment Bill has provided for an additional one per cent tax for a period of two years.
- As Goods and Services Tax (GST) is a destination-based levy, it would help the manufacturing states make good the loss of revenue.
- The Centre has also promised to compensate states for a period up to five years for any loss of revenue arising from implementing the GST.

GST:
- The goods and services tax (GST) is a comprehensive value-added tax (VAT) on goods and services. It is an indirect tax levied on manufacture, sale and consumption of goods as well as services at a national level.
- Through a tax credit mechanism, this tax is collected on value-added goods and services at each stage of sale or purchase in the supply chain.
- The system allows the set-off of GST paid on the procurement of goods and services against the GST which is payable on the supply of goods or services. However, the end consumer bears this tax as he is the last person in the supply chain.
- Experts say that GST is likely to improve tax collections and boost India’s economic development by breaking tax barriers between States and integrating India through a uniform tax rate.

What are the benefits of GST?
- Under GST, the taxation burden will be divided equitably between manufacturing and services, through a lower tax rate by increasing the tax base and minimizing exemptions.
- It is expected to help build a transparent and corruption-free tax administration. GST will be levied only at the destination point, and not at various points (from manufacturing to retail outlets).
- Currently, a manufacturer needs to pay tax when a finished product moves out from a factory, and it is again taxed at the retail outlet when sold.

How will it benefit the Centre and the States?
- It is estimated that India will gain $15 billion a year by implementing the Goods and Services Tax as it would promote exports, raise employment and boost growth. It will divide the tax burden equitably between manufacturing and services.

What are the benefits of GST for individuals and companies?
- In the GST system, both Central and State taxes will be collected at the point of sale. Both components (the Central and State GST) will be charged on the manufacturing cost. This will benefit individuals as prices are likely to come down. Lower prices will lead to more consumption, thereby helping companies.

Cloudburst

- Cloudbursts were reported from several areas of Kashmir and the Met department has forecast more rain in the next 24 hours across the state. The Amarnath yatra has also been affected by these cloudbursts.

What is a Cloudburst?
A cloudburst is an **extreme amount of precipitation**, sometimes accompanied by hail and thunder that normally lasts no longer than a few minutes but is capable of creating flood conditions.

A cloudburst can suddenly dump 72,300 tons of water over one acre. However, cloudbursts are infrequent as they occur only via orographic lift or occasionally when a warm air parcel mixes with cooler air, resulting in sudden condensation.

**It’s occurrence:**

- Cloud burst is a situation when the inter-molecular forces between the H2O molecules get very high due to the rapid decrease in the temperature or excess of electrostatic induction in the clouds causing the lighting to remain inside the cloud only, which causes hyperactive energy inside the cloud. The water molecules get denser and denser and get condensed but do not leave the cloud due to excess of electroforces.
- As the water concentration get higher and higher and so the weigh gets heavier the water no longer is able to maintain force with the clouds and so they fall and it precipitates.
- In the Indian subcontinent, a cloudburst usually occurs when a monsoon cloud drifts northwards, from the Bay of Bengal or Arabian Sea across the plains, then onto the Himalaya and bursts, bringing rainfall as high as 75 millimeters per hour.

**State submits Rs. 4,000 cr. worth proposals under Sagarmala**

- The Andhra Pradesh State government has submitted proposals worth Rs. 4,000 crore under Sagarmala project for development of port and connectivity infrastructure.
- The first phase of infrastructure investment is expected for Masula and Bhavanapadu ports and also for the Rs.1,100 crore Viziangaram – Raipur railway line for which work has already commenced.

**Sagarmala Initiative:**

- The Sagarmala project seeks to develop a string of ports around India’s coast. The objective of this initiative is to promote “Port-led development” along India’s 7500 km long coastline.
- It aims to develop access to new development regions with intermodal solutions and promotion of the optimum modal split, enhanced connectivity with main economic centres and beyond through expansion of rail, inland water, coastal and road services.
- The Union Ministry of Shipping has been appointed as the nodal ministry for this initiative.

**The Sagarmala initiative will address challenges by focusing on three pillars of development, namely:**

- Supporting and enabling Port-led Development through appropriate policy and institutional interventions and providing for an institutional framework for ensuring inter-agency and ministries/departments/states’ collaboration for integrated development,
- Port Infrastructure Enhancement, including modernization and setting up of new ports, and
- Efficient Evacuation to and from hinterland.

**Details:**

- In addition to strengthening port and evacuation infrastructure, it also aims at simplifying procedures used at ports for cargo movement and promotes usage of electronic channels for information exchange leading to quick, efficient, hassle-free and seamless cargo movement.
• The Sagarmala initiative would also strive to ensure sustainable development of the population living in the Coastal Economic Zone (CEZ). This would be done by synergising and coordinating with State Governments and line Ministries of Central Government through their existing schemes and programmes such as those related to community and rural development, tribal development and employment generation, fisheries, skill development, tourism promotion etc.

• A National Sagarmala Apex Committee (NSAC) is envisaged for overall policy guidance and high level coordination, and to review various aspects of planning and implementation of the plan and projects. The NSAC shall be chaired by the Minister incharge of Shipping, with Cabinet Ministers from stakeholder Ministries and Chief Ministers/Ministers incharge of ports of maritime states as members.

Govt fast-tracks Pattiseema, sends team to China

• With the August 15 deadline for the start of the first phase of Pattiseema project fast approaching, the Irrigation department of Andhra Pradesh government has intensified its efforts to ensure completion of the project within the stipulated timeframe.

• The department has deputed a team of senior engineers to China to undertake a detailed inspection of the design and construction of the lift scheme for drawl of water from Godavari near Pattiseema village and dropping it into the Polavaram right main canal in single stage.

About the Project:
• It is a lift irrigation project.
• The project envisages diversion of 80 tmcft of water from Godavari river to Krishna delta by tapping water at Pattiseema.
• Apart from providing water to the Krishna delta, the Pattiseema project will give a fillip to industrial activity around the new capital city.

RBI inks pact with Sri Lanka’s Central Bank

• The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently signed a currency swap agreement with the Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

• Under this agreement, Sri Lanka can draw a maximum of $1.1 billion for a period of up to six months.

• The agreement is in addition to the existing framework on currency swap arrangement for the SAARC member countries, an arrangement by which SAARC members can draw currency $100 million-$400 million, with a total limit of $2 billion, from an RBI financing facility set up for this purpose.

• India and Sri Lanka’s central banks signed a currency swap agreement in March 2015 under the SAARC Framework, agreed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the island nation.

• A currency swap is an exchange of a liability in one currency for a liability in another currency. Currency swap agreements exist to assist countries during periods of tight liquidity or balance of payments and liquidity crises.
SC judge seeks clarity on constitutional role of CJI

- A Supreme Court judge has asked the government whether the Chief Justice is actually the ‘Chief Justice of India’ or the ‘Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India’, triggering a debate.

Background:
- The question came from Justice Kurian Joseph, one of the five judges on the Constitution Bench deciding the crucial issue whether the political class, through the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC), should be given an equal role in the appointment of judges, including the Chief Justice of India.

This query stems from the inconsistency in the way the Constitution identifies the Chief Justice in two different places:
- In Schedule 3 of the Indian Constitution, which deals with ‘Forms of Oath and Affirmations’, the Chief Justice takes oath as the ‘Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India’.
- But under Article 124 of the Constitution, the President’s Warrant of Appointment identifies him as the ‘Chief Justice of India’.

What experts say?
- Legal experts say the confusion lies in the fact that the Constitution does not provide a separate oath for the Chief Justice as in the case of the President under Article 60 and the Vice-President in Article 69.
- Some experts also say that there is no ambiguity and there is hardly a need to administer a separate oath for the Chief Justice. When he takes oath as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, he also takes on the constitutional identity of the Chief Justice of India.

‘Changes in law needed to ban eucalyptus plantations’

- In reply to a petition, the Karnataka Forest Department recently said that it would be impossible to ban eucalyptus plantations across the State without changes in the legal framework to allow for Forest Department to crackdown on planting of trees in private land.
- The Forest Department has prohibited the planting of the high-water-consuming tree in forest land since 2011, but not in private land.

Background:
- The Karnataka High Court had asked the forest department to consider banning eucalyptus plantations across the State.
- The move came after a petitioner said the non-native eucalyptus tree was responsible for the lowering groundwater levels in the region.

Some facts:
- A eucalyptus tree consumes 90 litres of water a day
- During summers and times of drought, its roots can go down up to 30ft
- It was introduced in Karnataka in 1960s. In the 1970’s, eucalyptus plantations were spread across 2.1 lakh hectares. Now, after reduction of use by the Forest Department, it is on around 70,000 hectares
- 90% of plantations are in Kolar, Chickballapur and Bengaluru Rural in Karnataka.
- There are more than 700 species of eucalyptus and most of them are native to Australia.

Previous legal action:
- On February 27, 2014: Madras High Court (Madurai) Bench orders the Tamil Nadu Forest Department to take action to “annihilate” eucalyptus plantations along the Western Ghats.
- February 2011: Karnataka Forest Department bans plantation of eucalyptus in Western Ghats and surrounding districts.

**GSLV Mk III engine completes ‘full endurance test’**
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully conducted the much-awaited ‘full endurance test’ of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mk III’s indigenous cryogenic CE-20 engine recently.
- The CE-20 was ignited and tested for 800 seconds to study the performance of the engine though the actual required duration was only 635 seconds.
- During the actual flight of the GSLV, the engine will be ignited for only 635 seconds.
- The successful conduct of ‘full endurance test’ is being termed as another milestone in developing a bigger and more powerful indigenously built high thrust cryogenic upper stage for the 43-metre-tall GSLV Mk III that would position heavier payloads (satellites weighing about 4,000 kg) in the geostationary orbit.

**About GSLV Mk III:**
- The GSLV-III or Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark III, is a launch vehicle developed by the Indian Space Research Organization.
- GSLV Mk III is conceived and designed to make ISRO fully self reliant in launching heavier communication satellites of INSAT-4 class, which weigh 4500 to 5000 kg.

Source: Offoindia
- It would also enhance the capability of the country to be a competitive player in the multimillion dollar commercial launch market. The vehicle envisages multi-mission launch capability for GTO, LEO, Polar and intermediate circular orbits.
- GSLV-Mk III is designed to be a three stage vehicle, with 42.4 m tall with a lift off weight of 630 tonnes. First stage comprises two identical S200 Large Solid Booster (LSB) with 200 tonne solid propellant, that are strapped on to the second stage, the L110 restartable liquid stage. The third stage is the C25 LOX/LH2 cryo stage. The large payload fairing measures 5 m in diameter and can accommodate a payload volume of 100 cu m.
- The GSLV-III features an Indian cryogenic third stage and a higher payload capacity than the current GSLV.

**Child labour Bill likely this session**

- The government will push a Bill amending the law on child labour in the coming session of Parliament. It was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in December 2012 and then sent to a standing committee for scrutiny. The final shape was cleared by the Cabinet in May.

**Details of the Bill:**
- The new bill proposes a full ban on employment of children below 14 years of age across all industries and processes. However, a child will be allowed to “help” her family in their own businesses after school hours or during vacations, and also work as a child artist. Ban on children working in a circus will continue.
- According to the provisions of the bill the district magistrate will be made responsible for enforcement of the law. At present, state or central governments can appoint inspectors. However, if a district magistrate is empowered, the quality of enforcement will improve dramatically.
- The bill also proposes for the constitution of a child and adolescent labour rehabilitation fund. For every rescued child or adolescent, state governments will contribute Rs 15,000 towards the fund. Apart from this, fine collections from an employer will be added.
- Offenders would face imprisonment of up to three years and a fine of up to Rs 50,000 for an offence under the new law. Parents or guardians would not be punished for the first offence. The penalty would be a maximum of Rs 10,000 for second and subsequent offences.
- To bring the child labour law in tune with international standards, the government has also defined ‘adolescents’ in the new Bill. Children in the age group of 14-18 years will be prohibited from work in hazardous occupations and processes. International Labour Organization conventions prohibit employment of persons below 18 years in work likely to harm health, safety and morals.

**Present Laws:**
- The present law — Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986 — prohibits employment of children below the age of 14 years in 18 occupations and 65 processes. These include working in an automobile workshop, restaurants, hotels, ports, a circus and some other industrial activities.

**Current scenario:**
- In India, there are an estimated 4.3 million children working in factories or processes, according to the Census of 2011. However, this has declined sharply from 12.6 million employed as labourers in 2001.
Centre yet to notify crucial FEMA amendments

- The Union government has not yet notified the amendments to the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) that were incorporated into the legislation after President Pranab Mukherjee’s assent in May.
- The delay may have implications for the pending cases of foreign exchange violations, including those allegedly involving the former IPL chief, Lalit Modi.

Background:
- In March, the government proposed amendments to the FEMA and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The Special Investigation Team on black money had also come up with similar suggestions. After being passed by Parliament, the Finance Act received the President’s assent on May 14. However, as provided in the law itself, the amendments to the FEMA do not come into force automatically.

Details of the amendments:
- The amendments have been made to Sections 2, 6, 13, 18, 46, and 47 and introduction of Section 37A of the FEMA. An important introduction is that of Section 37A, which empowers an authorised officer to seize assets equivalent in value to the foreign exchange, foreign security or immovable property held abroad in violation of the law.
- The amended Section 13 empowers the investigation agency to levy a penalty of up to three times the sum involved in contravention of the law and confiscate property equivalent to the assets created abroad. The adjudicating authority may recommend prosecution against the accused in fit cases.
- Under the above provision, the Enforcement Director may also, after recording reasons, order prosecution by filing a criminal complaint against the guilty person. In case of violation, the guilty can be, in addition to the penalty, punished with imprisonment of up to five years and a fine.

Experts bat for space law

- Indian space industry experts recently opined that there is a need to have a space law to protect sovereign, public or commercial interests in India.

Why such a law is needed?
- To ensure that space assets and applications are used for the right causes.

Current scenario:
- Currently, space activities are guided by a handful of international space agreements, the Constitution, national laws, the Satellite Communications (SatCom) Policy of 2000 and the revised Remote sensing policy or 2011.
- India is among the five countries that do not have a space law; while 15 others including the US, Russia, Japan, China, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, have laws based broadly on the Outer Space Treaty of 1967.

Provisions related to space in the Indian constitution:
- Space and space-related matters in India are regulated by legal rules belonging to different areas of the Indian domestic law, since there is no special space legislation. The legal position of the space industry is largely determined by the Constitution of India. The constitutional provisions relating to general international law are also relevant to the aerospace law.

They include the following:
- Article 51 of the Constitution imposes on the state the obligation to strive for the promotion of international peace and security, including maintaining just and honourable relations between nations, respect for international law and treaty obligations, and settlement of international disputes by arbitration.
• Under **Article 73** the executive power of the Union extends (a) to the matters with respect to which Parliament has power to make laws, and (b) to the exercise of such rights, authority and jurisdiction as are exercisable by the government of India by virtue of any treaty or agreement.

• **Article 245** empowers Parliament and state legislatures to enact laws. The Constitution enumerates three lists of subjects – the Union list, the State list and the Concurrent list – in respect of which the legislative power may be exercised, provided that the legislative power of Parliament overrides that of the state legislature in respect of the concurrent list.
  
  o The “space” as a subject is not mentioned in the Union List. The reason was that the Constitution was adopted in 1950, but the space activities started in India in the early Sixties; a number of items on the Union list related to the aerospace activities in India.
  
  o They include the items relating to defence and armed forces of India; foreign affairs, UNO; participation in international conferences, associations and other bodies and implementing decisions made thereat; entering into treaties and agreements with foreign countries and implementing of treaties, agreements and conventions with foreign countries etc.
  
  o By virtue of item 97 read with **article 248**, Parliament retains residuary legislative power in respect of “any matter not enumerated” in any of the three lists.

• **Article 253** empowers Parliament to make any law for the whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing treaties, international agreements and conventions. It enables the Government of India to implement all international obligations and commitments. Following the commonwealth practice treaties are not required to be ratified by Parliament in India. They are, however, not self-executory. Parliamentary legislation is necessary for implementing the provisions of a treaty within the country. Parliament has passed many Acts to implement international treaties and conventions (including environment civil aviation etc.) but not in outer space activities.

**Navy aligns indigenisation plan with ‘Make in India’**

• The Navy has unveiled a 15-year plan to achieve **full indigenisation in all phases of warship construction, from ship-building to systems to weapons**, and aligned it with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s “Make in India.”

• The Navy has also planned to involve private industry in a big way in this initiative.

**Details:**

• The **Indian Naval Indigenisation Plan 2015-2030** is aimed at enabling the development of equipment and systems through the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Indian industry over a 15-year period.

• The Navy issued its **first 15-year indigenisation plan in 2003** and then revised it in 2008.

• The current revision was done to dovetail it with the ‘Make in India’ pitch.

• The plan’s objective is to have a 200-ship navy by 2027.

**Key areas:**

• A warship can be broadly divided into three segments — float, move and fight. The Navy has achieved **90% indigenisation in the float category**, while the **move** (propulsion) and **fight** (weapons) components stand at **60 and 30% respectively**, which are priority areas to be addressed.

• Among platforms, a major area of concern is helicopters. The navy has also planned for indigenisation in this segment.
The Navy has individual plans for capacity augmentation — the Indian Maritime Capability Perspective Plan for fleet augmentation, Maritime Infrastructure Augmentation Plan and the Maritime Cooperation Roadmap all of which are from 2012 to 2027.

**U.N. endorses Iran nuclear agreement**

- The U.N. Security Council (UNSC) has unanimously adopted a resolution that endorses the historic deal on Iran’s nuclear programme and clears a path for international sanctions crippling its economy to be lifted.
- The passing of the resolution marks formal U.N. endorsement for the hard-won, groundbreaking agreement reached between Iran and the so-called P5+1 group after 18 straight days of talks that capped almost two years of momentous negotiations.
- Accordingly, seven U.N. resolutions passed since 2006 to sanction Iran will be gradually terminated.

**Highlights of the Iran nuclear deal:**

- The deal puts strict limits on Iran’s nuclear activities for at least a decade and calls for stringent U.N. oversight, with world powers hoping this will make any dash to make an atomic bomb virtually impossible.
- In return, Iran will get sanctions relief although the measures can “snap back” into place if there are any violations.
- The international arms embargo against Iran will remain for five years but deliveries would be possible with special permission of the U.N. Security Council. Iran has accepted allowing the U.N. atomic watchdog tightly-controlled “managed access” to military bases.
- Iran will slash by around two-thirds the number of centrifuges from around 19,000 to 6,104.
- The agreement may lead to more cooperation between Tehran and Washington at a particularly explosive time in the Middle East with the emergence last year of the Islamic State group.
- The deal caps uranium enrichment at 3.67% and limits the stockpile to 300 kg, all for 15 years.
- Iran will be required to ship spent fuel out of the country forever, as well as allow inspectors from the IAEA inspectors certain access in perpetuity. Heightened inspections, including tracking uranium mining and monitoring the production and storage of centrifuges, will last for up to 20 years.

**UNSC:**

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.
- Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions.
- It is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.

**Why was it created?**

- Like the UN as a whole, the Security Council was created following World War II to address the failings of another international organization, the League of Nations, in maintaining world peace.

**Members:**
The Security Council consists of fifteen members. Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, and the United States—serve as the body’s five permanent members. These permanent members can veto any substantive Security Council resolution, including those on the admission of new member states or candidates for Secretary-General.

The Security Council also has 10 non-permanent members, elected on a regional basis to serve two-year terms. The body’s presidency rotates monthly among its members.

When a complaint concerning a threat to peace is brought before it, the Council’s first action is usually to recommend that the parties try to reach agreement by peaceful means. If a dispute leads to hostilities, the council’s primary concern is to bring them to an end as soon as possible by issuing ceasefire directives and by deploying military observers/peace keeping force if necessary. The council may also opt for economic sanctions, blockade or even collective military action.

India and UNSC:

India was among the founding members of United Nations.

It is the second largest and a one of the largest constant contributor of troops to United Nations Peacekeeping missions.

Today, India has over 8,500 peacekeepers in the field, more than twice as many as the UN’s five big powers combined.

West Bengal govt transfers hydro projects to NHPC

West Bengal government has given a fillip to Centre’s mega merger plan of all state-owned hydro electric units with National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), by handing over state’s four hydro power projects with a combined capacity of about 293 MW to the central PSU.

The four projects are:

- Teesta Low Dam-V
- Teesta low dam I & II combined
- Teesta Intermediate Stage
- Rammam Stage-I

All these projects are located in Darjeeling district of West Bengal. So far, they were under West Bengal government-run power agency West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (WBSEDCL).

Background:

- This move comes at a time, when the central government has taken up a plan to merge all central hydro power companies with NHPC and create a mega entity. For this an initiative has already been taken up for merger of central hydro power utilities — the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), Tehri Hydro Development Corporation, Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam and North Eastern Electric Power Corporation — into a single entity, which will see NHPC taking the lead role.
- NTPC is India’s single-largest thermal power company generation with capacity of over 43,000 MW.

National Renewable Energy Act to change landscape of RE

The government has drafted the National Renewable Energy Bill, 2015 which aims to consolidate the renewable energy sector and give it an institutional structure.
• After it is passed by Parliament it would enable a National Renewable Energy Policy, Renewable Energy Corporation of India, an advisory group and a committee on the same.
• At present, the renewable energy sector is governed by the Electricity Act, 2003, which is also undergoing amendments.

Implications:
• The policy would enable a supportive system for growth of the sector.
• The various segments which are the focus of the policy are: Renewable energy resource assessment, technical and safety standards, monitoring and verification, manufacturing and skill development and data management.
• Through a separate law, the ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE) would get freedom to execute projects and not depend on other ministries and departments for necessary clearances, said officials.
• The law also aims to set up dedicated renewable electricity investment zones. The law makes it clear who will finance, who will plan and monitor and what support will come from where.

National Renewable Energy Fund:
• To financially support the sector and the projects, the central government will set up ‘National Renewable Energy Fund’ and also push states to set up their own ‘State Green Funds’.
• The fund may be used for supporting the objectives such as but not limited to R&D, resource assessment, demonstrations and pilot projects, low cost financing, investments for skills development, supporting RE technology manufacturing, infrastructure development, promoting all forms of decentralised renewable energy etc. provided such activities are selected in a transparent manner, and in line with the provisions of the National RE Policy/Plan.

Hawking launches $100-mn search for aliens

• With $100 million from a Russian billionaire and the backing of physicist Stephen Hawking, scientists are about to embark on the biggest search yet for alien life, sweeping the skies for signals of civilisations beyond our solar system.

Details of the project:
• The new project dwarfs anything else in the field, known by the acronym SETI for the “search for extraterrestrial intelligence”.
• The 10-year project, dubbed Breakthrough Listen, is funded by Russian internet entrepreneur Yuri Milner, himself a physicist by training, who made his fortune from savvy early investments in start-ups such as Facebook Inc.
• Some of the world’s largest radio telescopes will be used to scan for distinctive radio signals that could indicate the existence of intelligent life. Astronomers will listen to signals from the million star systems nearest to Earth and the 100 closest galaxies, although they do not yet plan to send messages back into space.
• Breakthrough Listen will book time at radio telescopes, including at Australia’s Parkes Observatory in New South Wales and the Radio Astronomy Observatory in Green Bank, West Virginia.
• In addition to checking for radio signals, Breakthrough Listen will hunt for light signals using a telescope at the Lick Observatory in California.
New Development Bank of BRICS opens in Shanghai

- The Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) grouping has formally opened the New Development Bank (NDB) as a dedicated channel of alternate finance, which will focus on emerging economies and the Global South.
- The BRICS countries have stressed that the NDB would not rival but complement the western backed International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, born out of the Bretton Woods Conference of the forties.
- However, the emergence of the NDB and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) — a China-led initiative to fund infrastructure in Asia — was hastened by the reluctance by the West, especially the United States, since 2010, to grant emerging economies a greater say within the IMF.
- NDB’s first President is Kundapur Vaman Kamath.

The New Development Bank:
- It is a multilateral development bank operated by the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). It is seen as an alternative to the existing US-dominated World Bank and International Monetary Fund.
- The New Development Bank was agreed to by BRICS leaders at the 5th BRICS summit held in Durban, South Africa in 2013.
- The bank is set up to foster greater financial and development cooperation among the five emerging markets.
- The bank will be headquartered in Shanghai, China.
- Unlike the World Bank, which assigns votes based on capital share, in the New Development Bank each participant country will be assigned one vote, and none of the countries will have veto power.

What it does?
- The New Development Bank will mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, to supplement existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development.

Benefits:
- The establishment of the Bank will help India and other signatory countries to raise and avail resources for their infrastructure and sustainable development projects.
- It would also reflect the close relations among BRICS countries, while providing a powerful instrument for increasing their economic cooperation.
- It is expected to allow India to raise and obtain more resources for the much needed infrastructure development, the lack of which is coming in the way of inclusiveness and growth as of now.
- It will make available additional resources thereby recycling the savings accumulated in emerging countries which are presently being locked up in Treasury bonds having much lower returns.

Surakshit Khadya Abhiyan

- Surakshit Khadya Abhiyan, a countrywide campaign was launched recently. It was launched to create mass awareness and capacity building for safe and hygienic food.

Details:
- The initiative complements the widely popular multi-media campaign “Jago Grahak Jago” which empowers the consumers of its rights and demands.
- This initiative is also an effort towards building a culture of food safety in the country.
• Under the campaign, nationwide sensitisation sessions on cleaning, hygiene & sanitation for safe food, Walkathons and Media dissemination programmes for Consumers, Street Food Industries will be organized across the country.

Mission Indradhanush: Creating Awareness on Immunisation

• In a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha, the Minister of Health and Family Welfare recently said that Mission Indradhanush was launched to cover all partially vaccinated and un-vaccinated children in the country and 201 high priority districts which account for nearly 50% of such children in the country have been selected in the first phase. The first round started from 7th April 2015.

Mission Indradhanush:

• Mission Indradhanush was launched by the Health & Family Welfare Ministry. The Mission was launched on Good Governance Day to mark the birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna Madan Mohan Malaviya and birthday of Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Aim:

• The Mission Indradhanush, depicting seven colours of the rainbow, aims to cover all those children by 2020 who are either unvaccinated, or are partially vaccinated against seven vaccine preventable diseases which include diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, tuberculosis, measles and hepatitis B.

Details:

• The Mission will be implemented in 201 high focus districts in the country in the first phase which have nearly 50% of all unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children (Of the 201 districts, 82 districts are in just four states of UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and nearly 25% of the unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children of India are in these 82 districts of 4 states).

• These districts will be targeted by intensive efforts to improve the routine immunization coverage.

• The campaign is part of the Universal Immunisation Programme by 2020 and is being implemented under the National Health Mission across the country.

• Between 2009-2013 immunization coverage has increased from 61% to 65%, indicating only 1% increase in coverage every year. To accelerate the process of immunization by covering 5% and more children every year, the Mission Mode has been adopted to achieve target of full coverage by 2020.

• The focused and systematic immunization drive will be through a “catch-up” campaign mode where the aim is to cover all the children who have been left out or missed out for immunization.

• Under Mission Indradhanush, four special vaccination campaigns will be conducted between January and June 2015 with intensive planning and monitoring of these campaigns.

• The learnings from the successful implementation of the polio programme will be applied in planning and implementation of the mission.

• The Ministry will be technically supported by WHO, UNICEF, Rotary International and other donor partners. Mass media, interpersonal communication, and sturdy mechanisms of monitoring and evaluating the scheme are crucial components of Mission Indradhanush.
Scraping Aadhaar will hurt welfare schemes

- The Centre recently told the Supreme Court that it had spent Rs. 5000 crore of public money on the Aadhaar scheme and accessed 80 crore people. And hence, it is difficult to scrap Aadhaar now.
- The Centre said that any move to scrap the scheme now would create a severe dent in several government welfare schemes, subsidies and services for which the Aadhaar card has become an essential document.

Background:
- In March this year, the Supreme Court had confirmed that the Aadhaar card was not compulsory, and further, officials who insist on it would be taken to task.
- In the 2013 order, the Supreme Court had directed that “no person should suffer for not getting the Aadhaar card, in spite of the fact that some authority had issued a circular making it mandatory.”

About Aadhaar:
- Aadhaar is a 12 digit individual identification number which will serve as a proof of identity and address, anywhere in India.

How the scheme is helpful:
- Aadhaar-platform is aimed at providing social security benefits / subsidies based on eligibility through direct benefit transfer.
- It provides access and options to rural and poor people.
- It helps bring transparency and eliminate corruption, leakage and inefficiency.
- It was conceived as an initiative that would provide identification for each resident across the country and would be used primarily as the basis for efficient delivery of welfare services.
- It would also act as a tool for effective monitoring of various programs and schemes of the Government.

Who assigns the number?
- The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) assigns Unique Identification Number “Aadhaar” to residents of India on voluntary basis.

Issues:
- Aadhaar lacks legal or statutory authority as of now.
- The AADHAAR number is not recognized as a legal proof of residence due to issues with the data protection.
- India’s Intelligence Bureau claims anyone with an Aadhaar number can introduce others without any documentation to get the identity number, which makes it vulnerable to terrorism and other issues.

RS panel backs majority of GST Bill proposals

- With the Rajya Sabha Select Committee endorsing almost all provisions in the GST Bill, the chances of the Constitution (122nd Amendment) Bill, meant to introduce the Goods and Services Tax (GST), clearing Parliament in the current session has brightened.
- The committee was headed by Bhupender Yadav of the Bjp. The committee recently submitted its report to the Parliament.

Recommendations made by the committee:
- The GST rate should not go beyond 20% as standard rate and 14% as reduced rate.
- Full compensation from the Centre for any revenue loss to the States during the transition.
The provision in the Bill that the Centre “may” compensate the States for up to five years for any revenue loss be replaced with a commitment of compensation for five years.

**Status of the Bill:**
- The Lok Sabha has already approved the Bill. It will now have to be taken up for passage in the Rajya Sabha.
- As it is a Constitution amendment Bill, it will have to be approved by two-thirds of the members in the Upper House, where the ruling BJP does not enjoy a majority. The government will have to depend upon the support of regional parties and allies.

**Various demands by the opposition parties:**
- Cap GST at 18% to avoid imposing unfair tax burden on consumers.
- Exclude petroleum from the ambit of GST.
- Reduce centre’s say in GST council.

**Areas of conflicts:**
- Some see this bill as pro-corporates. They say this bill aims at promoting the interests of corporates who want a free flow of goods and services.
- The GST Council, as a constitutional body, would impinge on the legislative sovereignty of both Parliament and the State legislature and would jeopardise the autonomy of the States in fiscal matters.

**GST council:**
- The GST Bill seeks to establish a GST Council tasked with optimising tax collection for goods and services by the State and Centre.
- Composition: The Council will consist of the Union Finance Minister (as Chairman), the Union Minister of State in charge of revenue or Finance, and the Minister in charge of Finance or Taxation or any other, nominated by each State government.
- The GST Council will be the body that decides which taxes levied by the Centre, States and local bodies will go into the GST; which goods and services will be subjected to GST; and the basis and the rates at which GST will be applied.

**Privacy not a right, Aadhaar legit: Centre**
- The Centre has told the Supreme Court that Right to Privacy is not a fundamental right under the Constitution, adding it cannot be invoked to scrap the Aadhar scheme. It has further said that “Right to Privacy is not absolute and is subject to restrictions.”

**Background:**
- The centre’s reply came in response to petitions which contended that the scheme of Aadhar based on collecting personal data violates the citizens right to privacy.

**What petitioners say?**
- Petitioners feel iris scans and fingerprinting are an invasion of privacy.
- Such personal information would help the State possess unbridled powers over its citizens and provide an easy opportunity to snoop on their private lives.
- Petitioners also point out that nowhere in the Aadhaar scheme is the word ‘biometrics’ used; yet there are iris scans being done in the camps. Even the enrolment form does not use the word ‘bio-metrics’.
- On a September 23, 2013 order, the court had directed that “no person should suffer for not getting the Aadhaar card.” In March this year, the Supreme Court had confirmed that the Aadhaar number was not compulsory, and further, officials who insisted on them would be taken to task.
No dual citizenship for Devyani’s children

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has rejected IFS officer Devyani Khobragade’s plea for dual citizenship for her two daughters who are U.S. nationals, saying Indian law does not allow this.

**Background:**
- Khobragade had approached the Home Ministry officials recently and requested them to consider her plea.

**What has the Home Ministry said?**
- Khobragade’s children are not eligible for dual citizenship. Her daughters were born in India but took U.S. citizenship as Ms. Khobragade’s husband is an American national.

**Controversy:**
- Her children had Indian passports too. The IFS officer is accused of suppressing this fact from her employer (Ministry of External Affairs).
- After coming to know that the children were having U.S. passports, the MEA revoked their Indian passports and this was challenged in the Delhi High Court.
- The government took the action as dual citizenship is granted only to those children who were born outside India.
- The Ministry had said that Devyani Khobragade’s submission that the US passports were only used for travel to USA does not in any way dilute the gravity and seriousness of her misdemeanour and are blatant violations of Indian Passports Act.
- Children of foreign diplomats, who are born in India, are also given dual citizenship till the period of their parents’ service in India.

Himachal HC bans buffalo, bull fights

- The Himachal Pradesh High Court has imposed a complete ban on all types of buffalo and bull fights in the State, stating that it is against the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960.
- The court has termed them a severe brutality against the animals.

**Details:**
- The court order said that all animal fights, involving bulls or buffaloes, birds, roosters or dogs are against the Act.

**Background:**
- This decision came based on a PIL petition, moved by People for Animals NGO in Kasauli in 2013, seeking implementation of the Supreme Court judgment prohibiting bull fights in Tamil Nadu.
- The petitioner had sought to do away with the century-old practice during the village fairs in Himachal Pradesh as cruelty could not be justified in the name of religious practices and traditions or for the sake of entertainment as it violates the provisions of the PCA Act.
- In May of 2014, the Supreme Court had banned jallikattu and bullock cart racing in Tamil Nadu, citing animal welfare issues.

**Jallikattu:**
- Jallikattu is a bull taming sport played in Tamil Nadu as a part of Pongal celebrations on Mattu Pongal day.
- Jallikattu is a Tamil tradition called ‘Yeru thazhuvuthal’ in Sangam literature(meaning, to embrace bulls), popular amongst warriors during the Tamil classical period.
According to legend, in olden days the game was used by women to choose their husbands. Successful “matadors” were chosen as grooms.

Jallikattu is based on the concept of “flight or fight”. All castes participate in the event. The majority of jallikattu bulls belong to the pulikulam breed of cattle.

Controversy surrounding Jallikattu:
- Injuries and even deaths occur in jallikattu.
- Two hundred have died over the past two decades. Unlike in Spanish bullfighting, the bull is not killed. There are rarely any casualties suffered by the bulls.
- Jallikattu is loaded against the matadors, unlike in Spain bullfighting. For instance, the bull’s horns are sharpened and the matador cannot use any weapons.
- The Animal Welfare Board of India took the case to the Supreme Court. The SC banned the game in May 2014 because of the cruelty to animals and the threat to public safety involved. Villagers throw themselves on top of the terrified animals in an effort to “tame” them and claim the prize. This is opposed by animal advocates.
- SC’s observation: Forcing a bull and keeping it in the waiting area for hours and subjecting it to the scorching sun is not for the animal’s well-being. Forcing and pulling the bull by a nose rope into the narrow, closed enclosure or ‘vadi vassal’ (entry point), subjecting it to all forms of torture, fear, pain and suffering by forcing it to go the arena and also over-powering it in the arena by bull tamers, are not for the well-being of the animal.

TRAI names firms faulting on call drop service norms
- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has named Vodafone, Idea, Reliance and Airtel among the cell phone service providers failing to meet the quality of service norms in Delhi or Mumbai, especially on mobile call drops.
- The audit, done by an independent agency in the two metros, on behalf of the regulator, found that Tata (CDMA) in Delhi and Bharti Airtel in Mumbai are the only service providers meeting the benchmark of less than 2% call drops.

Background:
- The drive was conducted by TRAI in view of complaints on call drops and other network issues on June 23 and June 24 in Mumbai and July 9 to 11 in Delhi.
- The number of call drop complaints by mobile phone subscribers has been on the rise, especially in metros. However, operators, on their part, have cited lack of spectrum and delay in its allocation as one of the reasons for network-related issues along with hurdles in installing mobile towers due to radiation issues.

What is a Call Drop?
- There is no standard definition of a dropped call. In telecommunications, it refers to the telephone calls which, due to technical reasons, were cut off before the speaking parties had finished their conversation and before one of them had hung up (dropped calls).
- There are many reasons why a call drops, including network infrastructure, spectrum allocation, traffic, as well as the handsets that consumers use.

About TRAI:
- It is the independent regulator of the telecommunications business in India.
- It was established in 1997 by an Act of Parliament to regulate telecom services and tariffs in India.
- In January 2000, TRAI was amended to establish the Telecom Disputes Settlement Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) to take over the adjudicatory functions of the TRAI. The TDSAT was set up to resolve any dispute between a licensor and a licensee, between two or more service providers, between a service provider and a group of consumers. In
addition, any direction, TRAI orders or decisions can be challenged by appealing to TDSAT.

**Expansion of Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojna**

- Union Minister of State for Tribal Affairs Shri Mansukhbhai Dhanjibhai recently said that the Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana will gradually be expanded.

**About Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana:**

- The Scheme “Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana (VKY)” was included as a Central Sector Scheme in the Annual Plan of Ministry of Tribal Affairs with an initial allocation of Rs. 100.00 Crore for 2014-15.
- Aim of the scheme: The VKY is broadly a process, aiming at overall development of tribal people with an outcome-base approach, which would ensure that all the intended benefits goods and services to the tribal people through various programmes/schemes of Central and State Governments covered under the respective Tribal Sub-Plans actually reach them by way of appropriate convergence.
- Through VKY, it is envisaged to develop the backward blocks in the Schedule V States as model Blocks with visible infrastructural facilities to further the mission development while ensuring the following:
  - Qualitative and sustainable employment.
  - Emphasis on quality education & higher education.
  - Accelerated economic development of tribal areas.
  - Health for all.
  - Housing for all.
  - Safe drinking water for all at doorsteps.
  - Irrigation facilities suited to the terrain.
  - All weather roads with connectivity to the nearby town/cities.
  - Universal availability of electricity.
  - Urban development.
  - Robust institutional mechanism to roll the vehicle of development with sustainability.
  - Promotion and conservation of Tribal Cultural Heritage.
  - Promotion of Sports in Tribal Areas.

**A third of HC judges’ posts vacant, Lok Sabha told**

- The government recently said that one-third of all judges’ posts at the High Court level and over a fifth of posts at the subordinate court level are currently vacant in India. This was disclosed by the Union Law Minister in response to a question in Lok Sabha.

**Stats:**

- In the High Courts, 381 of 1017 positions are vacant.
- The situation in the Chhattisgarh High Court is the worst, with nearly 60% of positions vacant, closely followed by the Allahabad High Court with over half of all sanctioned posts vacant.
- At the subordinate judiciary level, over a fifth of all posts are vacant, with only 15,643 judges currently working as against a sanctioned strength of 20,214.
- In Delhi, Gujarat and Bihar, over a third of all judges’ posts are vacant.
- All levels taken together, India has **17 judges for every million**

Why the government says?
• Since the collegium system of appointing judges has ceased to exist with the passing of the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act, and a final Supreme Court verdict on the NJAC has been reserved, no action on the appointment of judges can be taken without court orders.

• Article 217(1) says that Every Judge of a High Court shall be appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal after consultation with the Chief Justice of India, the Governor of the State, and, in the case of appointment of a Judge other than the chief Justice, the chief Justice of the High court.

Govt. proposes to strip RBI chief of veto power on monetary policy

• The Union government has proposed to strip the Reserve Bank Governor’s veto vote on India’s monetary policy. The government has also proposed to grant itself the power to appoint four of the six members of the Monetary Policy Committee, whose remit will include setting interest rates to maintain inflation at the targeted level.

• This was stated by the Union Finance Ministry in its recently released draft of the Indian Financial Code.

• However, the Ministry has not stated this clearly. In the draft, it proposes that the Reserve Bank “Chairperson” shall head the committee, with no reference to the Governor. Hence, it is not clear from the draft if a re-designation is planned.

Details:
• Under the revised draft, the non-government members of the committee are to be drawn from the Reserve Bank.

• The Reserve Bank’s Board will nominate one of its executives as the fifth member of the committee. The Chairperson will nominate one of its employees as the sixth member.

Background:
• The earlier draft, released by the Ministry, had proposed to give the Governor the right to overrule the monetary policy committee decision. If the inflation target is not met, then the Reserve Bank will have to explain the reasons and propose remedial actions.

• The present move comes in the wake of a severe breakdown of talks between the Centre and the Reserve Bank over amendments to the RBI Act, which Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had announced in his Budget speech. Seeing the Reserve Bank’s opposition to them, the Finance Minister had later dropped the proposed amendments from the Finance Bill.

Current position:
• At present, the RBI governor consults a Technical Advisory Committee, but does not necessarily go by the majority opinion while deciding on the monetary policy stance.

SAARC satellite to cost Rs. 235 cr.

• The government recently said that the launch of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) satellite has been pegged at an estimated Rs. 235 crore and the cost associated with the launch will be met by the country.

Details:
• The satellite was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the SAARC summit in Nepal in November last year.
The objective of this project is to develop a satellite for the SAARC region that enables a full range of services to all our neighbours in the areas of telecommunications and broadcasting applications like television, DTH, tele-education and disaster management.

The Indian Space Research Organisation will build the satellite with 12 Ku-band transponders and launch it using the Indian Geostationary Launch Vehicle Mk-II.

Meeting on Motor Vehicle Agreement

Recently, a meeting of the Secretaries of Transport of India, Myanmar and Thailand (IMT) was held in Bangkok, Thailand to reach consensus on signing and operationalising the IMT Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) which has been under negotiation since March 2015.

The text of the MVA was already finalized by the three countries in the Transport Secretaries meeting, held in June 2015 at Bengaluru, India and the meeting at Bangkok was primarily to discuss and finalize the Protocol of the IMT MVA.

Why such an agreement is necessary?

- For closer regional economic cooperation and integration through enhanced regional connectivity by road.
- To improve connectivity and people to people contact for furthering the shared goal of overall economic development.

About the Initiative:

- This initiative is aimed at fostering better ties with neighbours and boosting trade and economy.
- The initiative will establish road connectivity between South Asia and Southeast Asia, which will strengthen economic integration and cooperation between the two sub-regions and boost their collective economic progress and development.
- The signing of the agreement and its implementation is planned by December 2015 and is expected to be operational in 2016, opening the way for movement of cargo and passengers (including personal vehicles) on the India-Myanmar-Thailand road corridor.

Two Anglo-Indians nominated members of Lok Sabha

- The President of India has nominated two Anglo-Indians as members of Lok Sabha.
- They are: George Baker and Prof Richard Hay.
- With the nomination of two members from Anglo-Indian community, the present strength of Lok Sabha has reached 545.
- The maximum strength of the Lok Sabha envisaged by the Constitution of India is 552, which is made up by election of up to 530 members to represent the states, up to 20 members to represent the Union Territories and not more than two members of the Anglo-Indian Community to be nominated by the President of India, if, in his/her opinion, that community is not adequately represented in the House. Under the current laws, the strength of Lok Sabha is 545, including the two seats reserved for members of the Anglo-Indian community.

Who is an Anglo Indian?

- According to the Constitution of India, a person from the Anglo-Indian community is defined as, “a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent; but who is domiciled within the territory of India, and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only.”
Basic facts:
- The President of India nominates two members from this community as MPs in the Lok Sabha, when it is felt that the community is not represented.
- The role of the Anglo-Indian MPs therefore, is primarily, to safeguard the community and its vibrant presence within the jurisdiction of India.
- Like other MPs, the Anglo-Indian MPs vacate their office every five years before fresh elections are held to decide the next tenure of the Lok Sabha. It is permissible for the same MP from the Anglo-Indian community to be re-nominated to the Parliament in successive Parliamentary sessions.

Kerala begins intensive drive against anthrax
- The Animal Husbandry Department of Kerala has launched an intensive disease prevention drive in the anthrax-hit Kadamankulam area of the Kallooppara grama panchayat in Kerala.
- Recently, few cows in this village were found to be infected with Bacillus anthracis.

About anthrax:
- Anthrax is a disease caused by Bacillus anthracis, a germ that lives in soil.
- It affects animals such as cattle, sheep, and goats more often than people. People can get anthrax from contact with infected animals, wool, meat, or hides. It can cause three forms of disease in people.

Spread:
- Anthrax does not spread directly from one infected animal or person to another; it is spread by spores. These spores can be transported by clothing or shoes.

Symptoms & Infection:
- In most cases, symptoms develop within seven days of exposure to the bacteria. The one exception is inhalation anthrax, which may take weeks after exposure before symptoms appear.
- Respiratory infection in humans initially presents with cold or flu-like symptoms for several days, followed by pneumonia and severe (and often fatal) respiratory collapse.
- Gastrointestinal (GI) infection in humans is most often caused by consuming anthrax-infected meat and is characterized by serious GI difficulty, vomiting of blood, severe diarrhea, acute inflammation of the intestinal tract, and loss of appetite.
- Cutaneous anthrax, also known as Hide porter's disease, is the cutaneous (on the skin) manifestation of anthrax infection in humans. It presents as a boil-like skin lesion that eventually forms an ulcer with a black center (eschar).

Exposure:
- Occupational exposure to infected animals or their products (such as skin, wool, and meat) is the usual pathway of exposure for humans. Workers who are exposed to dead animals and animal products are at the highest risk, especially in countries where anthrax is more common.
- It does not usually spread from an infected human to a noninfected human. But, if the disease is fatal to the person's body, its mass of anthrax bacilli becomes a potential source of infection to others and special precautions should be used to prevent further contamination. Inhalational anthrax, if left untreated until obvious symptoms occur, may be fatal.
- Anthrax can be contracted in laboratory accidents or by handling infected animals or their wool or hides.

Treatment:
The standard treatment for anthrax is a 60-day course of an antibiotic. Treatment is most effective when started as soon as possible. Although some cases of anthrax respond to antibiotics, advanced inhalation anthrax may not. By the later stages of the disease, the bacteria have often produced more toxins than drugs can eliminate.

**Use in Bioterrorism:**
- Anthrax has been used in biological warfare by agents and by terrorists to intentionally infect.
- It was spread in US through a mail. It killed 5 people and made 22 sick.

**Megalithic burial site unearthed**
- Recently, 30 megalithic burials, believed to be dated between 1,000 B.C. and 200 A.D were unearthed in a tiny village located at SiddiPet Mandal in Medak district of Telangana.

**Details:**
- The burials have huge boulders arranged around them and at least one of these has a Menhir (a tall, huge standing stone) near it.
- The biggest capstone on the site has also been found.
- An iron dagger, black pottery and a bowl, and a small sharp stone that was used to cut skin, meat and other food items, one sickle, some pottery and a hunting tool were also found.
- Archaeologists have not ascertained whether the burials were in pits, cists or dolmens, typical of that period.
- Archaeologists believe that the site may open new doors to the past. It could give an insight into the lifestyles of the Megalithic period.

**Government constitutes ‘All India Council of Sports’**
- The Govt. of India has constituted ‘All India Council of Sports’.
- The council will be an advisory body for the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.
- The advice rendered by the council will not be binding and obligatory on the government.
- The council may organize national, international conferences, seminars, symposia etc, for promotion of sports and games in the country.
- The Council will be headed by a President in the rank of Minister of State and will include four Members of Parliament, Sports personalities, coaches, sports experts, sports administrators, DG SAI, DG NADA, Vice Chancellor of LNIPE, officials from Sports Ministry, representatives from National Sports Federations, Indian Olympic Association, corporate bodies and NGOs.
- Appointments of the President and members of the Council other than ex-officio members will be made by the Government.
- The Council will meet from time to time, at least once in a quarter, and deliberate on matters relating to the promotion and development of sports and games in the country.

**Aims and objectives of the council:**
- popularizing sports amongst the youth as a way of life;
- increasing outreach of sports to rural and tribal areas, areas affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE), North East and Jammu & Kashmir;
- implementation of policies for promotion of sports and games in the country;
matters relating to promotion of inclusiveness in sports with special focus on women, differently-abled, tribals etc;
preventing drug abuse in sports, fraud of age and sexual harassment of women in sports;
bringing professionalism, transparency and good governance in functioning of National Sports Federations;
augmenting sports infrastructure and ensuring its proper utilization;
matters relating to participation and performance of sportspersons and teams in international sporting events;
issues arising out of match fixing and other malpractices in competitive sports; and
ways and means to promote indigenous games in the country

**ATAL Innovation Mission**

- NITI Aayog has constituted an Expert Committee under the Chairmanship of Prof. Tarun Khanna to work out the detailed contours of Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) and Self-Employment & Talent Utilisation (SETU).

The Terms of Reference of the Expert Committee are as under:

- To review the existing initiatives aimed at promoting innovation and entrepreneurship in India, especially those efforts that result in widespread job growth and the creation of globally competitive enterprises;
- To make short and medium term recommendations for actionable policy initiatives aimed at creating an innovation and entrepreneur friendly eco-system including such elements as creation of world class innovation hubs and digital SMEs and innovation driven entrepreneurship in such sectors as education and health.
- To address any other related issues.
- **Self-Employment & Talent Utilisation (SETU):** It will be a Techno-Financial, Incubation and Facilitation Programme to support all aspects of start up businesses, and other self-employment activities, particularly in technology-driven areas. An amount of Rs.1000 crore is being set up initially in NITI Aayog for SETU.
- **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):** It will be an Innovation Promotion Platform involving academics, entrepreneurs and researchers and draw upon national and international experiences to foster a culture of innovation, R&D and scientific research in India. The platform will also promote a network of world-class innovation hubs and Grand Challenges for India. Initially a sum of Rs.150 crore will be earmarked for this purpose.

**Conakry named as World Book Capital for 2017 by UNESCO**

- The Unesco has announced that Conakry – the capital of Guinea in west Africa – will be the World Book Capital for 2017.
- The UN organisation said the decision by an international committee of experts was based on west Africa’s “quality and diversity of its programme, in particular its focus on community involvement” and “for its well-structured budget and clear development goals with a strong emphasis on youth and literacy”.
- Conakry is the 17th city to be designated as the World Book Capital. Incheon city of South Korea is World Book Capital for 2015.

**About World Book Capital:**
• World Book Capital is a title bestowed by UNESCO to a city in recognition of the quality of its programs to promote books and reading and the dedication of all players in the book industry.
• The designation runs from UNESCO’s World Book and Copyright Day (April 23) of one year until April 22 of the following year.
• UNESCO initiated the concept of World Book Capital City and nominated Madrid as the Capital for Year 2001.
• The nomination does not imply any financial prize, but an exclusively symbolic acknowledgement of the best programme dedicated to books and reading.
• New Delhi was recognised as World Book Capital in 2003.

Mount Nalini, in honour of her Himalayan efforts
• A Himalayan peak is all set to be named after a veteran mountaineer named Nalini Sengupta. This was announced by the trekkers of the Giripremi Mountaineering Institute after they conquered Peak 5260 in the Hamta Pass region of the Himalayas. This is to salute her efforts to inculcate the thrill of mountaineering in youngsters since 1970.
• Sengupta has scaled several summits. She will be the first Puneite to have a Himalayan peak christened in her honour.

Naming:
• Survey of India is the authority which sanctions names to a mountain which fall under the Indian Territory.
• Generally, the team which conquers a virgin peak is granted the honour to name it. Till today, many teams that have conquered new peaks have named them after their favourite gods, local deities and villages.

26 cities in State to be developed under AMRUT
• A total of 26 cities in Karnataka have been selected for implementing infrastructure development under the Centre’s flagship programme of Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT). This was stated by the Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister recently.
• All these selected cities have population more than 1 Lac.

AMRUT:
• AMRUT is the new avatar of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). But, in a significant departure from the earlier mission, the Centre will not appraise individual projects.

Details of the Mission:
• AMRUT adopts a project approach to ensure basic infrastructure services relating to water supply, sewerage, storm-water drains, transportation and development of green spaces and parks with special provision for meeting the needs of children.
• Under this mission, 10% of the budget allocation will be given to states and union territories as incentive based on the achievement of reforms during the previous year.
• AMRUT, which seeks to lay a foundation to enable cities and towns to eventually grow into smart cities, will be implemented in 500 locations with a population of one lakh and above.
• It would cover some cities situated on stems of main rivers, a few state capitals and important cities located in hilly areas, islands and tourist areas.
• Under this mission, states get the flexibility of designing schemes based on the needs of identified cities and in their execution and monitoring.
• States will only submit state annual action Plans to the centre for broad concurrence based on which funds will be released. But, in a significant departure from JNNURM, the central government will not appraise individual projects.
• Central assistance will be to the extent of 50% of project cost for cities and towns with a population of up to 10 lakhs and one-third of the project cost for those with a population of above 10 lakhs.
• Under the mission, states will transfer funds to urban local bodies within 7 days of transfer by central government and no diversion of funds to be made failing which penal interest would be charged besides taking other adverse action by the centre.

**Set up SHRC in six months, SC tells Delhi**

• The Supreme Court has ordered the Delhi government to set up a State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) within six months. The Delhi government has not set up the SHRC even 22 years after Parliament enacted the Protection of Human Rights Act in 1993.
• Delhi accounts for the second largest number of human rights violation cases.

**Background:**
• The judgment came on a series of petition filed for the protection of human rights against police custody and torture.
• The Supreme Court has also directed Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Tripura and Nagaland to set up SHRCs within six months.

**State Human Rights Commission:**
• The Protection of Human Rights Act of 1993 provides for the creation of not only the National Human Rights Commission but also a State Human Rights Commission at the state level. Accordingly, twenty three states have constituted the State Human Rights Commissions through Official Gazette Notifications.
• A State Human Rights Commission can inquire into violation of human rights only in respect of subjects mentioned in the State List (List-II) and the Concurrent List (List-III) of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. However, if any such case is already being inquired into by the National Human Rights Commission or any other Statutory Commission, then the State Human Rights Commission does not inquire into that case.

**Composition:**
• The State Human Rights Commission is a multi-member body consisting of a chairperson and two members.
• The chairperson should be a retired Chief Justice of a High Court and members should be a serving or retired judge of a High Court or a District Judge in the state with a minimum of seven years experience as District Judge and a person having knowledge or practical experience with respect to human rights.
• The chairperson and members are appointed by the Governor on the recommendations of a committee consisting of the chief minister as its head, the speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the state home minister and the leader of the opposition in the Legislative Assembly.
• In the case of a state having Legislative Council, the chairman of the Council and the leader of the opposition in the Council would also be the members of the committee.
• A sitting judge of a High Court or a sitting District Judge can be appointed only after consultation with the Chief Justice of the High Court of the concerned state.
• The chairperson and members hold office for a term of five years or until they attain the age of 70 years, whichever is earlier.
After their tenure, the chairperson and members are not eligible for further employment under a state government or the Central government.

Although the chairperson and members of a State Human Rights Commission are appointed by the governor, they can be removed only by the President (and not by the governor).

The President can remove them on the same grounds and in the same manner as he can remove the chairperson or a member of the National Human Rights Commission.

**Modi government now keen on tougher SC/ST Atrocities Act**

The government is gearing up to push a key Bill to strengthen the law against atrocities on people belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes during the Monsoon Session of Parliament.

**Background:**
- The United Progressive Alliance government had promulgated the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Ordinance on March 4, 2014, just before the Lok Sabha elections.
- But the new government, after bringing the Bill in Parliament in July that year, ensured that it was sent to a Standing Committee. The ordinance has since lapsed.
- The Congress had argued against sending the Bill to the committee as most parties supported the legislation.

**Details of the Bill:**
- The Bill seeks to strengthen the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, by adding new categories of actions to be treated as offences. For instance, forcing an individual from a Scheduled community to vote or not to vote for a candidate unlawfully and occupying land belonging to such individuals wrongfully will now be treated as offences.
- The Bill specifies punishment for public servants from other communities who neglect their duties relating to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people, such as not registering a complaint or a First Information Report. The Bill mandates the setting up of special courts at the district level, with exclusive public prosecutors, to speed up the trial process.
- These measures were thought necessary since the original Act had failed to deter crimes. National Crime Records Bureau figures show that cases registered under the Act in conjunction with Indian Penal Code provisions increased from 38,449 in 2010 to 46,114 in 2013. More worryingly, the conviction rate under the law stands at below 30% in several States.

**Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana**

- The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, recently launched the Deendayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana in Bihar.

**About DeenDayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY):**
- It was launched by the Ministry of Power.
- Aim: to augment power supply to the rural areas and to strengthen sub-transmission and distribution systems.

**The Yojana also includes the components:**
- To separate agriculture and non agriculture feeders facilitating judicious rostering of supply to agricultural and non-agricultural consumers in rural areas and
• Strengthening and augmentation of sub transmission and distribution infrastructure in rural areas, including metering of distribution transformers/feeders/consumers.

The scheme would help in:
• Improvement in hours of power supply in rural areas,
• Reduction in peak load,
• Improvement in billed energy based on metered consumption and
• Providing access to electricity to rural households.

Abdul Kalam, ‘People’s President’, passes away
• A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, widely acclaimed as the “people’s president” for his warmth and accessibility, passed away on 27th July. He was 83.
• Kalam was also called as the Missile Man of India. He was a scientist by training and played a critical role in India’s nuclear tests in May 1998.

Contributions and Achievements:
• Apart from leading the Indian Space Research Organisation’s satellite launch programme, Mr. Kalam headed the country’s guided missile programme for many years.
• He was President between 2002 and 2007.
• As scientific adviser to the Defence Minister, he led the “weaponisation of strategic missile systems and the Pokhran-II nuclear tests.”
• His taking over the Satellite Launch Vehicle (SLV-3) programme as its Project Director led to its spectacular success in 1980 and it was the turning point in India’s space programme.
• As director of Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), he envisioned India’s Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP) and led teams that built India’s Agni, Akash, Prithvi and Nag missile programmes.
• He was instrumental in forging India’s collaboration with Russia to build the world’s first supersonic cruise missile called BrahMos.
• As Director-General of DRDO and Scientific Advisor to the Defence Minister, he played important role India’s nuclear tests in 1998.
• He has been honored with Bharat Ratna, Padma Vibhushan and Padma Bhushan.
• He has received honorary doctorates from over 30 institutions.
• His 79th Birthday was recognized as the ‘World Student Day’ by the United Nations.
• Switzerland has declared 26th May as ‘Science Day’ to commemorate Visit of APJ to Switzerland in 2005.

Royal Bengal Tiger count falls rapidly
• A recently conducted survey showed that the tiger population in Bangladesh has declined sharply to 106 from 440 last year.

Why?
• Experts say that the loss of habitat, unchecked wildlife poaching, animal-human conflict in the forest and lack of forest management are the main reasons behind the rapid fall in the tiger population.

Details:
• The new tiger census project was carried out under ‘Strengthening Regional Cooperation for Wildlife Protection in Asia Project’ with financial support from the World Bank.
• The survey was based on footage from hidden cameras.
• Bengal Tiger is the national animal of both India and Bangladesh. It has been classified as endangered by the IUCN. The Bengal tigers inhabiting the mangrove forests of the Sundarbans in India and Bangladesh are the only tigers in the world which exist in a mangrove.

**India a source, destination, transit country for trafficking:**

**U.S. report**

• The U.S. state department recently unveiled its annual anti-trafficking report.

**Details:**

• According to the report, India is classified as a “Tier II” nation for human trafficking concerns, implying that the U.S. viewed India as a country whose government did not fully comply with its Trafficking Victims’ Protection Act’s (TVPA) minimum standards, but was making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.

• India’s ranking has been at the Tier II level since 2011. But, until 2010 India was ranked as a Tier II “Watch List,” nation, implying that the absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking was highly significant or increasing; that there was a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year; or that the assessment of its progress in combating human trafficking was based on future commitments made by the Indian government.

• The report has urged India to ramp up its reporting of anti-trafficking data, noting that India continued to be “a source, destination, and transit country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking.”

**Froome wraps up his second Tour triumph**

• Chris Froome has won his second Tour de France in three years. With this, he has become the first cyclist from Britain to win the Tour De France for the second time.

• **About Tour de France:**
  - It is an annual multiple stage bicycle race primarily held in France, while also occasionally making passes through nearby countries.
  - The race was first organized in 1903 to increase paper sales for the magazine L’Auto. It is currently run by the Amaury Sport Organisation.
  - The 3 week long race covers around 3500 Kms passing through the mountain chains of Alps and Pyrenees.

**IT secretary Ram Sewak Sharma appointed new TRAI chief**

• The government has named Ram Sewak Sharma, currently the IT secretary, as the next telecom regulator.

• The appointments committee of the Union Cabinet has approved Sharma’s selection as chairman of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India for three years or until further orders, whichever is earlier. The post had been lying vacant since mid-May.

**About TRAI:**

• It is the independent regulator of the telecommunications business in India.

• It was established in 1997 by an Act of Parliament to regulate telecom services and tariffs in India.
In January 2000, TRAI was amended to establish the Telecom Disputes Settlement Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) to take over the adjudicatory functions of the TRAI. The TDSAT was set up to resolve any dispute between a licensor and a licensee, between two or more service providers, between a service provider and a group of consumers. In addition, any direction, TRAI orders or decisions can be challenged by appealing to TDSAT.

Centre returns controversial Gujarat Bill

The controversial Gujarat Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime (GCTOC) Bill, 2015, has been sent back to the State by the Home Affairs Ministry following an objection by the Information Technology (IT) Ministry. This means the Bill will not be sent for Presidential assent and cannot become law yet.

Any Bill passed by an Assembly on issues contravening Central laws needs Presidential assent.

Background:

The Gujarat Assembly had passed the Bill in March this year. The Bill was previously rejected thrice by two former Presidents — the late A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in 2004 and Pratibha Patil in 2008 and 2009.

The Bill was first introduced as the GUJCOC Bill in 2003 — when Narendra Modi was Chief Minister — with provisions like increasing the period to file charge sheet from 90 to 180 days and strict conditions for granting bail to an accused.

About Gujarat Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime (GCTOC) Bill:

The Bill is a re-worked version of the Gujarat Control of Organised Crime Bill (GUJCOC), 2003, which was earlier rejected twice by the President due to some of its contentious provisions.

Why was it needed?

Citing past terror attacks in Gujarat, the state government had raised concerns over Pakistan’s attempts at cross-border terrorism, Gujarat’s vulnerable coastline and the proliferation of criminal gangs, while underscoring the need for a strong law.

The government also says that the organised criminal syndicates make a common cause with terrorist gangs and foster macro terrorism which extends beyond the national boundaries. There is reason to believe that organised crime syndicates are operating in the State and thus, there is immediate need to curb their activities and hence this bill.

Controversial provisions in the Bill:

The Bill was respectively returned twice to the State legislature in 2004 and 2008 by then Presidents A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Pratibha Patil recommending the deletion of some controversial clauses. Some of the controversial provisions in the Bill are as follows:

Clause 16, which makes confessions before police officers admissible in court.

Empowers police to tap telephonic conversations and submit them in court as evidence.

Extends period of probe from stipulated 90 days to 180 days before filing of charge sheet.

The legislation makes offences under the Gujarat Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime Act, 2015, non-bailable. Clause 20 (4) of the Bill states, “Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code of Criminal Procedure, no person accused of an offence punishable under this Act shall, if in custody, be released on bail or on his own bond.”

The Bill makes “evidence collected through the interception of wire, electronic or oral communication” admissible in the court.

The Bill provides immunity to the State government from legal action. Clause 25 of the Bill states, “No suit, prosecution or other legal proceeding shall lie against the State.
government or any officer or authority of the State government for anything which is in good faith done or intended to be done in pursuance of this Act.”

**Rules in place for compulsory rural service**

- The Karnataka State government has notified rules **making one-year rural service mandatory for medical students**. Violating this will cost them their medical degree, besides a penalty ranging between Rs. 15 lakh and Rs. 30 lakh.

**Details:**
- The Karnataka Compulsory Service Training by Candidates Completed Medical Courses (Counselling, Allotment and Certification) Rules, 2015, is applicable to State-run colleges and government-quota students in private medical colleges.
- If medical students fail to comply with these rules, besides penalty, their certificates will be withheld.
- The penalty will be more for students studying under the Common Entrance Test quota and less for those who get seats under management quota.
- However, rural service will not be applicable for those who graduated this academic year.
- These rules are aimed at addressing all problems related to shortage of doctors in government hospitals in district, taluk and interior rural parts of Karnataka.

**E-visa facility for Chinese tourists from tomorrow**

- The electronic tourist visa facility for Chinese nationals, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to China in May, will be rolled out shortly.
- The government has said that along with the citizens of China, the e-tourist visa facility will also be offered to the nationals of Hong Kong and Macao.

**About the e–tourist visa scheme:**
- India had last year launched **e-tourist visa** facility (which was earlier called ‘tourist visa on arrival enabled by electronic travel authorisation’) for more than 40 countries, including the U.S.
- The scheme was later extended to 36 more countries with effect from May.
- Under the e-visa scheme, an applicant receives an email authorising him or her to travel to India after it is approved and he or she can travel with a print-out of this authorisation. On arrival, the visitor has to present the authorisation to the immigration authorities who would then stamp the entry into the country.
- The number of foreign tourists availing themselves of the e-tourist visa facility has increased by over 700% in May as compared to the same period last year.

**Who is not eligible?**
- Not available to Diplomatic/Official Passport Holders.
- Not available to individuals endorsed on Parent’s/Spouse’s Passport i.e. each individual should have a separate passport.
- Not available to International Travel Document Holders.

**Vijayawada to Puducherry by boat**

- The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is planning to conduct a trial run in December this year from Kakinada to Puducherry, a much-hyped inland waterways project National Waterway 4.
• It has asked the Andhra Pradesh State Government to conduct a delineation survey all along the Buckhingam Canal to ascertain government lands, private properties and other obstructions, if any.
• Accordingly, the State Government has invited tenders. The successful bidder has to complete the survey in three months. Once the survey report is ready, a trial run would be conducted from Kakinada to Krishnapatnam using a 100 tonne vessel.
• Once the delineation survey is done, officials would be in a position to estimate the land to be acquired, the challenges of widening the canal, etc.
• The Central Government will fund the State Government to acquire land and other expenditure. Once the land is acquired, IWAI will prepare the estimates and identify locations for construction of bridges, terminals and other facilities.
• The entire project is estimated to cost Rs. 3,200 crore. The operational cost is likely to be Rs 1 per km.

Existing canal:
• The existing canal network, which was built by the British, is suitable for vessels up to 100 tonnes. But the present canal network needs to be widened at several places to allow movement of vessels of 1000 tonne capacity. For this, the canal width has to be expanded to 120 m (60 m from the centre of the canal on either side) and the bottom width of the canal (that is, the underwater bed of the canal) to be 42 m. Then there should a 5 m road along the canal for movement of vehicles. And also the existing canal width is not uniform.

Tripura: pension for transgenders launched
• The Tripura government has introduced a pension scheme for transgenders. The Council of Ministers of Kerala State government has also decided to a pay a monthly pension to women domestic workers and patients suffering from leprosy and AIDS.
• The government has decided to pay monthly pension up to Rs. 500 to transgenders. The State government was currently sponsoring 20 pension schemes that benefited more than one lakh people.

Loan Agreement with ADB
• The Government of India and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have signed a $300 million loan to support the government’s flagship program, the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM) that is aimed at improving the health status of the country’s urban population.
• The loan will reinforce ongoing government efforts under the NUHM to develop health systems in urban areas that can deliver quality health services and that reach the urban poor and vulnerable.
• It will focus on strengthening primary health care and also promote better coordination between health and urban sectors and opportunities for public-private partnerships.
• Technical cooperation will also be provided. The use of ADB’s results-based lending modality will strengthen NUHM systems and overall results orientation, while allowing states the flexibility they need to pursue targets that they need locally.

About National Urban Health Mission (NHUM):
• The National Urban Health Mission (NUHM) is a sub-mission of National Health Mission (NHM).
NUHM envisages to meet health care needs of the urban population with the focus on urban poor, by making available to them essential primary health care services and reducing their out of pocket expenses for treatment.

This will be achieved by strengthening the existing health care service delivery system, targeting the people living in slums and converging with various schemes relating to wider determinants of health like drinking water, sanitation, school education, etc.

The scheme will be implemented by the Ministries of Urban Development, Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation, Human Resource Development and Women & Child Development.

NUHM endeavours to achieve its goal through:

- Need based city specific urban health care system to meet the diverse health care needs of the urban poor and other vulnerable sections.
- Institutional mechanism and management systems to meet the health-related challenges of a rapidly growing urban population.
- Partnership with community and local bodies for a more proactive involvement in planning, implementation, and monitoring of health activities.
- Availability of resources for providing essential primary health care to urban poor.
- Partnerships with NGOs, for profit and not for profit health service providers and other stakeholders.
- NUHM would cover all State capitals, district headquarters and cities/towns with a population of more than 50000. It would primarily focus on slum dwellers and other marginalized groups like rickshaw pullers, street vendors, railway and bus station coolies, homeless people, street children, construction site workers.

Funding pattern: The centre-state funding pattern will be 75:25 for all the States except North-Eastern states including Sikkim and other special category states of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, for whom the centre-state funding pattern will be 90:10.

Whistleblower, activist win Magsaysay Award

- Whistleblower officer Sanjeev Chaturvedi and human rights activist Anshu Gupta are among the five winners of the Ramon Magsaysay Award this year.

Details:

- **Sanjeev Chaturvedi** is a 2002-batch Indian Forest Service officer.
- **Anshu Gupta** is the founder of the non-governmental organisation Goonj. He is recognised for his creative vision in transforming the culture of giving in India, his enterprising leadership in treating cloth as a sustainable development resource for the poor, and in reminding the world that true giving always respects and preserves human dignity.

About Ramon Magsaysay Award:

- The prize was established in April 1957 by the trustees of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund based in New York City with the concurrence of the Philippine government.
- It is an annual award established to perpetuate former Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay's example of integrity in governance, courageous service to the people, and pragmatic idealism within a democratic society.
- The Ramon Magsaysay Award is often considered to be an **Asian equivalent to the Nobel Prize**.
- The award is given to individuals and organisations from Asia region for their service to the society.
Anuradha Roy, Sahota on Booker longlist

- The man Booker Prize committee recently said that Indian writer Anuradha Roy and British-Indian Sunjeev Sahota are among the 13 international authors on the longlist for the Man Booker Prize of 2015.
- Roy has been selected for Sleeping on Jupiter, her third novel, and Mr. Sahota for The Year of the Runaways.

About Man Booker Prize:
- The Man Booker Prize for Fiction is a literary prize awarded each year for the best original novel, written in the English language, and published in the UK.
- The winner of the Man Booker Prize is generally assured of international renown and success; therefore, the prize is of great significance for the book trade.
- The prize was historically limited to authors from the U.K., the Commonwealth, Ireland and Zimbabwe; this is only the second year that it has been open to anyone writing in the English language and published in the U.K.
- The prize is the world’s most important literary award and has the power to transform the fortunes of authors and publishers.

Cabinet clears changes to GST Bill

- The Union Cabinet has cleared the changes suggested by the Rajya Sabha Select Committee to the proposed GST Constitutional Amendment Bill.

The changes include:
- Giving States full five-year compensation for any revenue loss due to the introduction of the goods and services tax.
- Exempting stock transfers within group companies from the 1% additional tax on inter-State supplies.
- The Rajya Sabha Select panel was set up by the government in the budget session to break the deadlock in Parliament.

GST:
- The goods and services tax (GST) is a comprehensive value-added tax (VAT) on goods and services. It is an indirect tax levy on manufacture, sale and consumption of goods as well as services at a national level.
- Through a tax credit mechanism, this tax is collected on value-added goods and services at each stage of sale or purchase in the supply chain.
- The system allows the set-off of GST paid on the procurement of goods and services against the GST which is payable on the supply of goods or services. However, the end consumer bears this tax as he is the last person in the supply chain.
- Experts say that GST is likely to improve tax collections and boost India’s economic development by breaking tax barriers between States and integrating India through a uniform tax rate.

What are the benefits of GST?
- Under GST, the taxation burden will be divided equitably between manufacturing and services, through a lower tax rate by increasing the tax base and minimizing exemptions.
- It is expected to help build a transparent and corruption-free tax administration. GST will be levied only at the destination point, and not at various points (from manufacturing to retail outlets).
- Currently, a manufacturer needs to pay tax when a finished product moves out from a factory, and it is again taxed at the retail outlet when sold.
The GST Bill’s passage will require a constitutional amendment, which means a two-thirds majority is required in Parliament. The Assemblies too will have to approve the Bill ahead of the April 2016 deadline.

**Infrastructure fund**

- The Union Cabinet has approved creation of National Infrastructure and Investment Fund (NIIF) as a trust that will have a corpus of Rs 20,000 crore.
- The government’s contribution would be limited to 49% of the subscribed capital.
- The government will seek participation from strategic investors such as sovereign fund, quasi sovereign funds and multilateral or bilateral investors, which can help leverage this fund to many times.
- Cash-rich PSUs, pension funds, provident funds, National Small Saving Fund will be able to pick up stake in the fund. It will be able to use funds from monetisation of government-owned land.
- The decision to set up NIIF was announced by the union Finance minister Arun Jaitley in his budget speech.

**Anti-hijacking Bill**

- The Union Cabinet has approved amendments to the Anti-Hijacking Bill, 2014, which looks to give the government more teeth in dealing with hijacking incidents involving Indian aircraft.
- The Cabinet’s approval of these amendments comes after the Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha last December and then referred to a Parliamentary Standing Committee, which recommended the amendments.
  
  **Why is it required?**
  - The current law, the Anti-Hijacking Act, 1982, was last amended in 1994.
  - After the hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC-814 in December, 1999, it was felt necessary for providing the award of death penalty to perpetrators of the act of hijacking.
  - The incident of 9/11, where aircrafts were used as weapons, also created the need to further amend the existing Act.

**About the Bill:**

- The Anti-Hijacking (Amendment) Bill, 2010 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in August, 2010.
- The Bill seeks to amend the Anti-Hijacking Act, 1982.
- The Act states that any person who unlawfully, by force or intimidation seizes an aircraft commits the offence of hijacking. The Bill adds that any person (whether alone or in a group) who attempts to commit hijacking is guilty of the offence. Any person who abets such an offence is also guilty.
- The Act stipulates a penalty of life imprisonment and fine for the offence of hijacking. The Bill enhances the penalty for hijacking to death or life imprisonment and fine.

**India under pressure to declare emission targets**

- Ahead of the UN climate summit in Paris in December this year, India is under growing pressure to announce its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), containing emission reductions targets, at the earliest date.

**What are INDCs?**
• These are individual country commitments which are expected to indicate through their form and strength what shape any 2015 agreement might take.

• Countries across the globe have committed to create a new international climate agreement by the conclusion of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP21) in Paris in December 2015.

• In preparation, countries have agreed to publicly outline what post-2020 climate actions they intend to take under a new international agreement, known as their **Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)**.

• The INDCs combine the top-down system of a United Nations climate agreement with bottom-up system-in elements through which countries put forward their agreements in the context of their own national circumstances, capabilities and priorities, within the ambition to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions enough to keep global temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius.

• The INDCs will not only contain steps taken towards emission reductions, but also aim to address steps taken to adapt to climate change impacts, and what support the country needs-or will provide to address climate change.

• In February 2015, Switzerland became the first nation to submit its INDC to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, later followed by the European Union.

**State ready with draft anti-superstitions law**

• The Kerala State government is all set to push its draft anti-superstitions legislation for discussion, before moving it.

• The working draft of the Kerala Exploitation by Superstition (Prevention) Act, 2014 says all acts “purported to be undertaken invoking supernatural or magical powers, with the intention of obtaining wrongful gratification” will be made accountable as “exploitation by superstition.”

**Details of the Draft:**

• The draft seeks to make all offences under the Act **cognizable and non-bailable**.

• It aims to cover all elements involved in invoking supernatural powers for any kind of gratification, including monetary or of a sexual nature.

• It emphasizes that the definition of gratification will not be restricted to just money, but will cover all forms of sexual gratification as well.

• However, the draft has excluded all traditional ceremonies, rituals and practices either associated with places of worship or with different faiths. The exception clause in the draft says these cannot be construed as acts of exploitation by superstition.

• The draft penal provisions include up to three years in jail and a fine of Rs.50,000 if the injury caused is “simple hurt or harm to the reputation or mind, which would go up to 3 to 7 years in jail and fine up to Rs.2,00,000 in case of “grievous hurt or harm to property.”

• The punishment has been drastically scaled up in the case of sexual exploitation using superstitious practices. The draft says it would entail imprisonment ranging from 5 years to a life term. It recommends capital punishment or a life conviction, if the victim dies.

• The draft also says that propagating any kind of information, which could potentially induce people to be victims of exploitation by superstitious practices, should entail three to seven years in jail and a fine.

• Only police officers of the rank of Inspectors and above will be authorised to investigate offences under the Act, and no court lower than that of a First Class or Metropolitan magistrate may be competent to try the cases under it.
**Lokayukta Bill passed**

- The Karnataka State Assembly passed the Karnataka Lokayukta (Amendment) Bill, 2015 recently.

**Background:**
- The Bill was tabled in the Assembly in the wake of controversy over an alleged bribery scandal that has hit the state’s anti-corruption ombudsman with growing clamor for his removal.

**Details:**
- The assembly passed the bill after bringing in an amendment to the clause pertaining to removal of the Lokayukta. The amended clause states that the Lokayukta or Upalokayukta shall not be removed from his office **except by an order of the Governor**.
- According to the Bill, now, once the Chief Justice of the Karnataka High Court or the judge nominated finds the Lokayukta guilty of misconduct or incapacity, then both the Houses of the legislature can pass a motion with two-thirds majority stating that the Lokayukta should be removed. The previous amendment bill had provided that such a motion could be passed if half of the members voted for it.
- The eligibility criteria have also been changed. The 1984 Act makes the judge of the Supreme Court or Chief Justice of the high court eligible to be appointed the Lokayukta. But as per the new bill, a judge who has served not less than 10 years is eligible to be the Lokayukta, and a judge who has put in not less than five years as high court judge, can become the Upa Lokayukta.

**Appointment of Lokayukta:** The Lokayukta is appointed by the Governor of Karnataka on advice of Chief Minister of Karnataka in consultation with the Chief Justice of the High Court of Karnataka, the Chairman of Karnataka Legislative Council, the Speaker of Karnataka Legislative Assembly, the Leader of the Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Council and the Leader of the Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly.

**Powers:** The Lokayukta has the power to investigate Chief Minister, all other Ministers and Members of the State Legislature and all state government employees.

**ED registers money laundering case in Antrix-Devas deal**

- The Enforcement Directorate has registered a money laundering case in connection with the Antrix-Devas spectrum deal worth Rs.1,000 crore, which is also being probed by the CBI.
- ED has instituted this fresh case under stringent provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act based on the basis of CBI case registered in March. The Directorate has already been scrutinising the 2005 agreement under the Foreign Exchange Management Act since 2012.

**What is the issue?**
- According to an agreement, ISRO’s marketing arm Antrix was to provide 70 MHz of S-band spectrum to Devas. As part of the agreement, 10 transponders in satellites GSAT-6 and GSAT-6A – then to be launched by ISRO for the purpose – were to be leased out to Devas in lieu of payments to be made over 12 years.
- But the CBI found that some members of the ISRO, ANTRIX and Department of Space have allegedly favoured Devas Multimedia by giving the rights for delivery of video, multimedia and information services via S-band, causing wrongful gain of Rs.578 crore to the ineligible company. The company had allegedly submitted false information about its capability to deliver the services.
Enforcement Directorate:

- Enforcement Directorate, established in the year 1956, is a law enforcement agency and economic intelligence agency responsible for enforcing economic laws and fighting economic crime in India.
- Directorate of Enforcement is a specialized financial investigation agency under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, which enforces the following laws:
  - Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (FEMA) – A civil law having quasi judicial powers, for investigating suspected contraventions of the Exchange Control laws and regulations with powers to impose penalties on those adjudged guilty.
  - Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) – A Criminal Law, with the officers empowered to conduct investigations to trace assets derived out of the proceeds of crime, and to provisionally attach/ confiscate the same, to arrest and prosecute the offenders found to be involved in Money Laundering.

Other important functions include:

- To collect, develop and disseminate intelligence relating to violations of FEMA, 1999, the intelligence inputs are received from various sources such as Central and State Intelligence agencies, complaints etc.
- To investigate suspected violations of the provisions of the FEMA, 1999 relating to activities such as “hawala” foreign exchange racketeering, non-realization of export proceeds, non-repatriation of foreign exchange and other forms of violations under FEMA, 1999.
- To adjudicate cases of violations of the erstwhile FERA, 1973 and FEMA, 1999.
- To realize penalties imposed on conclusion of adjudication proceedings.
- To process and recommend cases for preventive detention under the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act (COFEPOSA)

Avoid travel to Yemen, India tells nationals

- India has asked its nationals to refrain from travelling to Yemen in view of the ongoing conflict and fragile security situation there. The External Affairs Ministry said that the security situation in Yemen continued to be fragile and the United Nations had raised the humanitarian crisis level of the country to the highest rung.
- Earlier this year, the government evacuated Indians from Yemen and also helped rescue more than 550 foreigners from 32 countries, including a dozen Americans and three Pakistanis from the region.

What is happening in Yemen?

- The 2015 military intervention in Yemen began in March, 2015 when the Royal Saudi Air Force led a coalition of Arab states in attacking Shiite Houthi rebels. This was preceded by weeks of turmoil during which Houthi guerrillas toppled the government of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and took over the large parts of the country.
- Yemen is lurching closer to civil war as the Houthi militants who rule its capital try to consolidate their control over the rest of the country and challenge the embattled president, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

Censure motion notice against Sushma

- A Member of Parliament in Lok Sabha has opted for the censure motion route in a bid to secure a statement from the Government in the Parliament on the Lalit Modi controversy
involving External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj. The Lok Sabha Speaker is yet to decide on its admissibility.

**Censure Motion:**
- This motion can be moved only in the Lok Sabha and by the Opposition of the House.
- It can be moved against the Council of Ministers or an individual Minister or a group of Ministers for their failure to act or not to act or for their policy and may express regret, indignation or surprise of the House at the failure of the Minister or Ministers.
- The Motion should be specific and self-explanatory so as to record the reasons for the censure, precisely and briefly.
- No leave of the House is required to move a Censure Motion.
- If the Censure Motion is passed, the Council of Ministers is bound to seek the confidence of the Lok Sabha as early as possible.
- This motion is mentioned under the Rule 184 of the Rules and Procedures of the Lok Sabha.

**RBI to issue 10 rupee coin to mark International Yoga Day**
- The Reserve Bank recently announced its plans to put into circulation 10 rupee coins to **commemorate the International Day of Yoga**.

**Details:**
- The coin bears the logo of the International Day of Yoga, with the inscription “*Saamanjasya evam shanthi ke liye yog*” in Devnagri script and “*yoga for harmony and peace*” around the logo. At the bottom of the logo the date June 21 will be inscribed.
- The inscription Anthar rashtriya yoga divas in Devnagri script is on the left periphery and “international day of yoga” in English on the right periphery is written on this side of the coin.
- The coin also bears the Lion Capitol of Ashoka Pillar in the centre with the legend Sathyamev Jayate inscribed below.
- This is flanked on the left periphery with the word Bharat in Devnagri script and on the right periphery flanked with the word “INDIA” in English.
- The coins have been minted by the Central government and are legal tender as provided in The Coinage Act 2011.

**NHRC writes to State on farmers’ suicides**
- Taking suo motu cognisance of a media report that 16 farmers committed suicide in Mandya district of Karnataka, The National Human Rights Commission has issued a notice to the Chief Secretary, Government of Karnataka, and called for a report on the issue within four weeks.
- The commission has observed that the spate of deaths due to suicides by farmers is of grave concern, and calls for prompt remedial steps by the government.
- The NHRC cites a media report which quotes a group of farmers saying “the negligence by the State and Union governments in the matter of fixing fair price, payment of arrears by sugar mills, and a sugarcane glut, are the main reasons for the sudden spike in the suicides”.

**NHRC:**
- It is a statutory body established in 1993.
It consists of a Chairman and 4 members. Chairman should be a retired Chief Justice of India. Members should be either sitting or retired judges of the supreme court or a serving or retired Chief Justice of a High Court and 2 persons having practical knowledge in this field.

Ex officio members are the chairmen of National Commission for Scheduled Caste, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, National Commission for Minorities and National Commission for Women.

The chairman and members are appointed on the recommendation of a 6 member committee consisting of Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, leaders of opposition in both the houses of parliament and Union Home Minister.

Term of the chairman and members is 5 years or 70 years whichever is earlier.

After retirement they are not eligible for further reappointment.

Removal: President has to refer the matter to Supreme Court and if after enquiry Supreme Court holds it right then they can be removed by the President.

The commission is not empowered to enquire into matters which were committed one year before.

Its recommendations are just advisory and not binding in nature.

It submits Annual report to the Central government and to the concerned state governments.