



Current Affairs From 4th Nov to 16th Nov 2018
General Studies-1

Groundwater Depletion:

With 230 billion metre cube of groundwater drawn out each year for irrigating agriculture lands in India, many parts of the country are experiencing rapid depletion of groundwater.

The total estimated groundwater depletion in India is in the range of 122–199 billion metre cube.

The Indo-Gangetic Plain, northwestern, central and western parts of India account for most intensive groundwater-based irrigation.

And among these regions, western India and the Indo-Gangetic Plain have more than 90% of the area irrigated using groundwater.

Significant depletion

- Based on Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) data of nearly 5,900 wells which have long-term data (1996–2016), a team of researchers found that a majority of districts in India experienced significant depletion in groundwater storage.
- The satellite data confirms the well data. The results were published in American Geophysical Union's journal Earth's Future.
- While districts with significant decrease in groundwater are located in the Indo-Gangetic Plain, northwest, and central (Maharashtra) regions, a few districts in Punjab show substantial decline in groundwater table.
- With depletion occurring at a rate of 91 cm per year, Punjab has been witnessing a steep decline in groundwater table since 1996.
- In northwestern India, the amount of groundwater extracted exceeds the total recharge leading to groundwater depletion.

Challenges:

- If groundwater is depleted and the region experiences drought for two–three years consecutively, there will be serious challenges.
- Availability of even drinking water will be a huge problem.



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- Natural recharge during monsoon may not help much if groundwater depletion becomes acute, as rainfall of past several years controls the current groundwater storage levels.

Causes of depletion:

- The study published in June this year found that groundwater recharge has declined between 1996 and 2016 in northwest and northcentral India due a reduction in low-intensity rainfall.
- Low-intensity rainfall during the monsoon is responsible for groundwater recharge in northwest and northcentral India.
- The study also found that carbon dioxide emission from pumping groundwater and release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from the soil when groundwater is depleted is less than 2-7% of the total carbon dioxide emissions in India.

Way Ahead:

- Using groundwater to irrigate the field only when necessary led to a reduction in electricity consumption and greenhouse emissions.
- Farmers are advised not to irrigate the field when the water level in the tensiometer(device to measure moisture) is in the green zone.
- When the soil gets dry the water level in the tensiometer drops and reaches the yellow zone in the device.
- Farmers should start irrigating the field at this time and never allow the water in the device to reach the red zone.
- Since stopping or reducing the subsidy in electricity prices may not be possible, farmers in the regions where groundwater depletion has already occurred should consider cultivating less water-intensive crops, use better irrigation technologies and irrigate crops only when necessary.

Aadi Mahotsav:

What is it About?

“Aadi Mahotsav” a National Tribal Festival is being organized in New Delhi by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED to celebrate, cherish and promote the spirit of tribal craft, culture, cuisine and commerce.

Details:



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- The Mahotsav will comprise of display and sale of items of tribal art and craft, tribal medicine & healers, tribal cuisine and display of tribal folk performance, in which tribal artisans, chefs, folk dancers/musicians from 23 States of the country shall participate and provide glimpse of their rich traditional culture.
- The festival will feature exhibition-cum-sale of tribal handicrafts, art, paintings, fabric, jewellery and much more through 100 stalls. Over 200 tribal artisans and artists from different States creating a Mini-India will be participating in the festival.

Theme of the festival is:

“A Celebration of the Spirit of Tribal Culture, Craft, Cuisine and Commerce”.

Significance:

- Aadi Mahotsav suggests, it is its 'Adi' factor that is important about them.
- The Adivasi way of life is guided by primal truths, eternal values and a natural simplicity.
- The greatness of the tribes lies in this that they have managed to retain the primal skills and natural simplicity.
- Their creations issue from the depths of time.
- This quality gives their arts and crafts a timeless appeal.
- The crudest tribal handicraft instantly touches a primal instinct in all of us.
- This is particularly true in tribal music and dance.

Swadesh Darshan Scheme

Two important projects under Swadesh Darshan Scheme of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India were inaugurated at PTSO Lake in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh today.

Details of Project:

- These projects are “Development of North East Circuits: Bhalukpong- Bomdila - Tawang Project & Nafra- Seppa- Pappu, Pasa, Pakke Valleys- Sangdupota- New Sagalee- Ziro- Yomcha Project”.
- Foreign Tourist Arrivals in the region have shown an upward trend over the years.
- The facilities developed under this project includes Helipad, Wayside amenities, trekking trails, Rafting Centre, Log Huts, craft bazaar, Eco Park, Tourist facilitation centres, parking, multipurpose Hall, festival ground etc.
- Development of Tourism in North Eastern Region is prime area of focus for the Ministry of Tourism.

Other steps taken



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- The Ministry has taken several initiatives for growth of domestic and international tourism in the region.
- One of the many challenges the region faces in development of tourism is the absence of quality infrastructure, services and awareness about the array of tourism products region has to offer.
- The Ministry is carrying out number of activities to handle the issues on above fronts.
- On one hand the Ministry has given great impetus to the tourism infrastructure in the region under its flagship schemes of Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD.
- For development of Tourism infrastructure, the **Ministry has sanctioned 16 projects for Rs. 1349.04 crores covering all North Eastern States under its schemes of Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD.**

About Swadesh Darshan:

- **Swadesh Darshan** scheme is one of the flagship schemes of the Ministry of tourism for development of thematic circuits in the country in a planned and prioritised manner.
- Under this scheme the Government is focussing on development of quality infrastructure in the country with objective of providing better experience and facilities to the visitors on one hand and on other hand fostering the economic growth.
- The scheme was launched in 2014 -15 and as on date the Ministry has sanctioned **73 projects worth projects for Rs. 5873.99 Crore** to 30 States and UTs.

For promotion of North East region Ministry carries out special promotion in domestic and international markets highlighting regions diversity, tourism products and its rich culture.

General Studies-2

OPERATION GREENS

Why in News?

Ministry of Food Processing Industries(MoFPI) under Union Minister Smt Harsimrat Kaur Badal has approved the operationalisation strategy for Operation Greens today.

About Operation Greens:



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Operation Greens was announced in the Budget speech of 2018-19 with an outlay of Rs 500 crores to stabilize the supply of Tomato, Onion and Potato(TOP) crops and to ensure availability of TOP crops throughout the country round the year without price volatility.

The strategy will comprise of a series of measures as decided by the Ministry which include:

(I) Short term Price Stabilisation Measures

NAFED will be the Nodal Agency to implement price stabilisation measures. MoFPI will provide 50% of the subsidy on the following two components:

(II) Long Term Integrated value chain development projects

- i. Capacity Building of FPOs & their consortium
- ii. Quality production
- iii. Post-harvest processing facilities
- iv. Agri-Logistics
- v. Marketing / Consumption Points
- vi. Creation and Management of e-platform for demand and supply management of TOP Crops.

The pattern of assistance will comprise of grants-in-aid at the rate of 50% of the eligible project cost in all areas, subject to maximum Rs. 50 crores per project.

Background of Operation Greens

In the budget speech of 2018-19, a new Scheme “Operation Greens” was announced on the line of “Operation Flood”, with an outlay of Rs.500 crore to promote Farmer Producers Organizations, agri-logistics, processing facilities and professional management.

Major objectives of “Operation Greens” are as under:

- i. Enhancing value realisation of TOP farmers by targeted interventions to strengthen TOP production clusters and their FPOs, and linking/connecting them with the market.
- ii. Price stabilisation for producers and consumers by proper production planning in the TOP clusters and introduction of dual use varieties.
- iii. Reduction in post-harvest losses by creation of farm gate infrastructure, development of suitable agro-logistics, creation of appropriate storage capacity linking consumption centres.



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- iv. Increase in food processing capacities and value addition in TOP value chain with firm linkages with production clusters.
- v. Setting up of a market intelligence network to collect and collate real time data on demand and supply and price of TOP crops.

NMCG'S Bal Ganga Mela:

National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) in partnership with HCL Foundation and German development agency GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) organized "Bal Ganga Mela" at HCL's Noida campus on Sunday, November 4, 2018.

Significance of this day:

The day is symbolic as it marks the declaration of Ganga as the National River of India in 2008 and is dedicated to raising awareness about rejuvenating the holy river and teaching children to become environmentally aware and responsible citizens.

About NMCG:

- NMCG is committed towards afforestation and conservation of the Ganga Basin's ecosystem and its indigenous flora and fauna.
- To scale up the momentum in this direction, NMCG also signed an MoU with the HCL Foundation to work on tributaries of Ganga, - Hindon and Yamuna and increase forest cover in parts of UP and Uttarakhand. The two organizations will work for:
 - Sensitization/awareness programs on Forest and Environment Conservation.
 - Urban and peri urban afforestation under the urban forest model of HCL Foundation- "Foundation Upvan.
 - Mass afforestation on Government allotted land and creation of Urban Forests in partnership with the HCL Foundation and District Administration.
 - Ensure plantation success rate of 60 to 70% at the end of 10 years from the date of signing of the MoU between both the parties.

Global IT Challenge for Youth with Disabilities, 2018'



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“Global IT Challenge for Youth with Disabilities, 2018” is being organised by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment here during 9-11 November, 2018.

About the Event:

- This year, India is hosting the event in collaboration with Government of Korea and Rehabilitation International (RI).
- The Global IT Challenge for disability is a capacity building project that helps youth with disabilities to overcome their limitations and challenges for a better future through access to ICT.
- The Global IT Challenge was initially designed to enhance the information utilisation skill of youths with disabilities (in the category of visual disability, hearing disability, locomotor disability and developmental disorder) and to encourage their social participation.
- The event started in the year 1992 in Korea.
- Subsequently it expanded to the neighbouring countries throughout the Asia-Pacific region and since 2011 it has become a global event.

Benefits of the Event:

- It will alleviate the digital divide and expand participation of youth with disabilities in the society.
- It propagates implementation of United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) - Article 21 relates to access to information.
- Participation of high Government functionaries at the event will showcase the commitment of Government of India at the political and administrative level towards creating an environment inclusive of persons with disabilities through application of ICT and also to fulfil our international obligations enshrined under UNCRPD and SDGs.

Facts About Disability:

There are about 1 billion i.e. about 15% of the world population persons with disabilities.

- Majority of this population live in developing countries with low ICT development indexes.
- Because of this information divide, persons with disabilities are being excluded from society suffering inequality and poverty.

Global Cooling Innovation Summit



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Two-day **Global Cooling Innovation Summit** will be inaugurated by Union Science & Technology Minister, Dr. Harsh Vardhan in New Delhi on 12th November 2018.

About the Summit:

- The Summit is a first-of-its-kind solutions-focused event that will bring together leaders from around the world to explore concrete means and pathways to address the climate threat that comes from the growing demand from room air conditioners.
- The event is jointly organized by the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, along with Rocky Mountain Institute, Alliance for An Energy Efficient Economy (AEEE), Conservation X Labs and CEPT University.
- The summit will also see the launching of Global Cooling Prize— Mission Innovation challenge that aims to spur development of a residential cooling solution that has at least five times (5x) less climate impact than today's standard.

Objectives of the GCP:

- Global Cooling Prize is a competition with global reach and participation to achieve dramatic breakthroughs in cooling technologies.
- The objective of this competition would be to develop a cooling technology that requires radically less energy to operate, utilizes refrigerants with no ozone depletion potential and with low global warming potential, and has the potential to be cost-effective at scale.
- This awards programme will call world-wide attention to the most promising ideas across the globe.
- This award will celebrate successes and facilitate endeavours of innovators through providing recognition, encouragement and support.
- The award will also be able to build a collaborative platform that can utilize the potential of researchers so that public research contributes towards fostering innovation and create impact which is of social and economic good.

SIMBEX 18

Why in News?

The 25th edition of SIMBEX, an acronym for “Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise” is scheduled from 10th to 21st November 2018 off Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.

Background:

Bilateral cooperation between Singapore and India was first formalised when RSN ships began training with the Indian Navy in 1994.



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What began as a modest endeavour to exchange best practices in the field of Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), has in the recent years evolved into a complex high stakes exercise with both nations attaching premium in terms of time, complex advanced exercises and type of platforms involved.

Indo-Singapore Relation:

- Complementing India's 'Act-East' policy, there have been a number of agreements and high level visits in the recent past between the two countries.
- Indo-Singapore bilateral relations have been on an upswing in the recent past.
- Both countries have a full calendar of more than 20 bilateral mechanisms, dialogues and exercises, many of which take place annually.
- In November 2015, the robust relationship between the two countries was elevated to 'Strategic Partnership'.

What is Special about SIMBEX this year?

- SIMBEX 2018 will be the largest edition since 1994 in terms of scale and complexity.
- The 25th edition will witness a diverse range of exercises at sea ranging from live weapon drills including multiple missile firings, Heavy Weight Torpedo (HWT) and Medium Range Gun/ Anti Submarine Rocket firings; advanced Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) exercises, Submarine Rescue demonstrations; integrated Surface and Anti-Air Warfare (AAW); Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) operations and Cross Deck Helicopter flying among others.
- The number of missiles and torpedo firings being undertaken are in fact unprecedented and perhaps the largest the Indian Navy has undertaken with any foreign Navy till date, indicative of the growing trust and operational comfort between the two navies.
- This year would also witness the highest numbers and variety of platforms fielded by both sides.
- Over the years the two navies have increased their interoperability to a level that could be matched by few other navies.

US Sanction Waiver:

MEA Expressed appreciation for the United States' waiver on India-[Iran](#) energy trade and the Chabahar Port project.

Benefits of waiver:

- India is a major importer of crude oil from Iran.
- This is very important for our own energy security needs.



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- India's also expressed appreciation on the waiver for the India-Iran Chabahar Port development project, and underlined the importance of the port in regional affairs.

About the sanctions:

- **United States sanctions against Iran** refer to economic, trade, scientific and military [sanctions against Iran](#), which have been imposed by the [U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control](#), or by the international community under U.S. pressure through the [United Nations Security Council](#).
- Currently, the sanctions include an embargo on dealings with Iran by the [United States](#), and a ban on selling aircraft and repair parts to Iranian aviation companies.
- On 17 May 2018 the [European Commission](#) announced its intention to implement the [blocking statute](#) of 1996 to declare the US sanctions against Iran null and void in Europe and ban European citizens and companies from complying with them.

The Commission also instructed the [European Investment Bank](#) to facilitate European companies' investment in Iran.

Quad Meeting:

Officials from Australia, India, Japan and the United States will hold the third "Quadrilateral" or Quad meeting in Singapore on November 14th.

The meet, that comes exactly a year after the format was revived, will be held on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit, that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend, and is expected to focus on infrastructure projects, maritime security cooperation and discuss regional challenges including development.

What is Quad?

Quad or Quadrilateral is a diplomatic initiative for regional coalition between great big democracies in the Indo-Pacific.

The member countries in Quad are India, Japan, US and Australia. Recently, first meeting of Quad diplomats at office level happened in Manila. Some of the gains for India with Quad are

- The initiative may promotes free, open, prosperous and inclusive trade Indo-Pacific region and serves the long-term interests of all countries in the region including India.



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- It helps India and other three Nations to counter China's OBOR. As India is refused to join OBOR it helps India to connect with other markets like Central Asian and South East Asian markets.
- Moreover, both India and Japan will have to counter China to balance the power equation in the region

Though Quad idea was emerged for greater cooperation between the four nations Indian has less advantage with Quad compared with other Nation as India is already enjoying strategic partnership with the four countries.

Areas of Concern:

- However, officials from all four nations of the Quad conceded that while the Quad has made some progress over the year, many areas of divergence remain.
- To begin with, India has yet to agree to Australia's request to join the Malabar, and the officials said it was still "too early" to discuss "militarising" the Quad.
- The Quad has also shied away from using any strong language on maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, which may portray it as a platform against China.
- India has also resisted raising the level of the Quad from the current assistant secretary/ joint secretary level to that of Foreign Secretary/Foreign Minister level as the US and Japan have been pushing for.

Finally, some misgivings remain amongst ASEAN countries that are ringed by the Quad countries that would need to be ironed out, which would also be on the agenda at the meetings in Singapore on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit, RCEP summit and East Asia summit next week.

Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters

An Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters was signed by Shri Kiren Rijju, Minister of State for Home on behalf of the Government of Republic of India and Mr Mohamed Aujjar, Minister of Justice on behalf of the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco, here today.

What is it?

- A **mutual legal assistance treaty (MLAT)** is an [agreement](#) between two or more [countries](#) for the purpose of gathering and exchanging [information](#) in an effort to enforce [public](#) or [criminal](#) laws.



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- Modern states have developed mechanisms for requesting and obtaining evidence for criminal investigations and prosecutions.
- When evidence or other forms of legal assistance, such as witness statements or the service of documents, are needed from a foreign sovereign, states may attempt to cooperate informally through their respective police agencies or, alternatively, resort to what is typically referred to as requests for “mutual legal assistance.

Benefits:

- The Agreement will strengthen bilateral cooperation with Morocco.
- It will enhance effectiveness and provide a broad legal framework for prevention, investigation and prosecution of crimes; as well as in tracing, restraint and confiscation of funds meant to finance terrorist acts.
- It shows the resolve to jointly counter the threats posed by organized crime and terrorism.

National Disaster Management Authority:

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is conducting a basic training programme at the Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru.

The six-day training programme, aimed at enhancing the preparedness of Airport Emergency Handlers (AEHs) to respond to CBRN emergencies at the airports, started today.

CBRN emergencies pertain to threats emanating due to Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear material.

About NDMA:

- **National Disaster Management Authority**, abbreviated as **NDMA** is an agency of the [Ministry of Home Affairs](#) whose primary purpose is to coordinate response to [natural](#) or [man-made disasters](#) and for capacity-building in disaster resiliency and crisis response.
- NDMA was established through the [Disaster Management Act](#) enacted by the [Government of India](#) in may 30 2005.
- The [Prime Minister](#) is the ex-officio chairperson of the same .

Responsibilities:



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The agency is responsible for framing policies, laying down guidelines and best-practices and coordinating with the State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs) to ensure a holistic and distributed approach to disaster management.

By a 9-member board chaired by the Prime Minister of India.

NDMA is operationally organized into the following divisions:

- Policy & Planning
- Mitigation
- Operations & Communications
- Administration
- Capacity Building

Indian Ocean Naval Symposium:

Why in News?

The Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) and Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) Admiral Sunil Lanba, arrived at Kochi on 12 Nov 18 for the 10th anniversary commemorative activities of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) scheduled on the 13 and 14 Nov 18 at Kochi.

Theme:

In line with the vision of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi – “SAGAR”(Security and Growth for All in the Region) - the theme for the 10th anniversary seminar is “IONS as a Catalyst for SAGAR”.

SAGAR' is in consonance with India's 'Act East' policy and the nation's diplomatic, economic and military outreach in the region.

About IONS:

- The **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium**, commonly known as **IONS**, are a series of biennial meetings among the [littoral](#) states of the [Indian Ocean region](#).
- It provides a forum to increase maritime security cooperation, providing a forum for discussion of regional maritime issues and promote friendly relationships among the member nations
- The IONS initiative endeavours to generate a flow of information among naval professionals so as to enable a common understanding of regional maritime issues and in turn facilitate generation of mutually beneficial maritime security outcomes.



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- It is a voluntary initiative among the navies and maritime security agencies of the member nations.
- In addition to the symposiums, numerous other activities like workshops, essay competitions and lectures are also held under the umbrella of the organization.

Samudra Shakti'

Why in News?

INS Rana of the Eastern Fleet based at Visakhapatnam under the Eastern Naval Command is on deployment to the South East Asia and arrived at the port of Surabaya to participate in the inaugural edition of Indian Navy – Indonesian Navy Bilateral Exercise 'Samudra Shakti' scheduled from 12 to 18 Nov 18.

Aims of Exercise:

- The aim of the exercise is to strengthen bilateral relations, expand maritime co-operation, enhance interoperability and exchange best practices.
- The exercise would start with a Harbour Phase scheduled from 12 to 15 Nov encompassing planning and briefing on various activities, professional interactions, cross deck visits, sports fixtures and social interactions.
- This would progress to a Sea Phase scheduled from 16 to 18 Nov and would include operations such as Joint Manoeuvres, Helicopter Operations, Surface Warfare exercise, ASW exercise and Anti Piracy exercises.

Background:

- The strategic partnership between the two nations was elevated to 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' during the visit of Honourable Prime Minister of India in May 18 and Defence co-operation has been a significant pillar in this partnership.
- The visit of the ship seeks to promote India's solidarity with Indonesia towards ensuring good order in the maritime domain and to strengthen existing bonds between the navies of the two nations.

Global Digital Content Market 2018

Why in News?

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, is hosting a conference on Global Digital Content Market (GDCM)2018, on 14th-15th November 2018, in New Delhi.

Highlights of Conference:



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The conference will feature sessions on music, film, broadcasting and publishing, as well as collective management, emerging models and the implications for the market and policy makers.

Focus Area:

The focus for this year's conference is the Asia Pacific region.

The GDCM 2018 will see participation of professionals from various creative fields, the digital industry around the world and delegates of the diplomatic community from Missions to the United Nations.

Aim of Conference:

- The aim of GDCM 2018 is to give industry stakeholders a platform to come together and discuss new avenues in the films, music, gaming and creative industry along with points of challenge that is presented due to the changing creative landscape because of the disruption brought about by digital technologies.
- It is hoped that through the GDCM 2018 an exchange of knowledge, culture and good practices amongst the nations of the Asia Pacific region will take place.

Background:

- India has been chosen as a host nation for the conference by World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) due to the strong creative industry in the country in films, music and media.
- GDCM is a platform to discuss vital issues and enhance development of the digital and IP generating industries such as publishing, films, music, and gaming all of which are major contributors to the Indian GDP.
- GDCM 2018 is the second edition of the conference.
- The first conference was held in Geneva 2016.

About WIPO:

- The **World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)**; [French](#): Organisation mondiale de la propriété intellectuelle (OMPI) is one of the [15 specialized agencies](#) of the [United Nations](#) (UN).
- WIPO was created in 1967 "to encourage creative activity, to promote the protection of [intellectual property](#) throughout the world".
- WIPO currently has 191 member states, administers 26 international [treaties](#), and is headquartered in [Geneva, Switzerland](#).
- The current Director-General of WIPO is [Francis Gurry](#), who took office on 1 October 2008.



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- 188 of the [UN member states](#) as well as the [Cook Islands](#), [Holy See](#) and [Niue](#) are members of WIPO. Non-members are the states of [Federated States of Micronesia](#), [Nauru](#), [Palau](#), [Solomon Islands](#) and [South Sudan](#). [Palestine](#) has permanent observer status.

Leadership for Academicians Program (LEAP)

Why in News?

The government has launched Leadership for Academicians Programme (LEAP) for higher education faculty.

About the Leadership for Academicians Programme (LEAP):

- Leadership for Academicians Programme (LEAP) is a three weeks Flagship leadership development training programme (2 weeks domestic and one week foreign training) for second level academic functionaries in public funded higher education institutions.
- The main objective is to prepare second tier academic heads who are potentially likely to assume leadership roles in the future.
- The programme would provide senior faculty, with high academic credentials, the required leadership and managerial skills including skills of problem-solving, handling stress, team building work, conflict management, developing communication skills, understanding and coping with the complexity and challenges of governance in HEIs, financial & general administration.

The implementation of LEAP Programme will be through 15 NIRF top ranked Indian Institutions namely. The foreign Universities identified for the training are also within the top 100 in the world global rankings.

Poshan Abhiyan

Why in News?

The third meeting of National Council on India's Nutrition Challenges as part of Poshan Abhiyan, was held at New Delhi today.

About Poshan Abhiyaan:

Launched on the occasion of International Women's Day (March 8, 2018), Poshan Abhiyaan aims to boost nutrition among children and women. The program targets to



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- Prevent and reduce stunting in children (0-6years): By 6% @ 2% p.a.
- Prevent and reduce under-nutrition (underweight prevalence) in children (0-6 years): By 6% @ 2% p.a.
- Reduce the prevalence of anemia among young Children(6-59 months): By 9% @ 3% p.a.
- Reduce the prevalence of anemia among Women and Adolescent Girls in the age group of 15-49 years: By 9% @ 3% p.a.
- Reduce Low Birth Weight (LBW): By 6% @ 2% p.a.

Different ministries are converging to make the mission successful. By synergising frontline functionaries and volunteers, the Ministry of Women & Child Development is planning to reach 11 crore people and thereby convert the mission into Jan Andolan.

Ancient Maritime Trade Routes- Tall Ship Sail-Together

The Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) and Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) Admiral Sunil Lanba, PVSM, AVSM, ADC along with the the Commander of Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) Navy Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadiflagged off a Tall Ship Sail-together from naval base, Kochi on 14 Nov 18.

About the Event:

The event which was organised by the the Indian Navy as part of the 10th Anniversary celebrations of IONS, was attended by chiefs from navies and delegates from 26 countries participating in the 10th anniversary commemorative activities besides a large gathering of Indian naval personnel.

The Royal Omani Vessel Zinat-al-Bihaar along with two Indian Naval Sailing Ships Sudharshini, Tarangini, with one each "Sea Rider" from Sri-Lanka, China, United Kingdom, Australia, Bangladesh and Maldives are participating in this 'Sail Together' which is planned over a distance of 1200 nm to Muscat and back.

Objective:

- It seeks to retrace the maritime trade route of yesteryears between the Malabar Coast and the Persian Gulf.
- .The event carries with it the memories of a glorious maritime past and the ancient cultural exchange that opened long-distance political and economic relations between the great civilizations of India and those in Persia and Arabia
- The route also honours the socio-cultural and maritime history that is shared among populations across the Indian Ocean as a result of this trade.



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Rationale behind Kerala as Starting Point:

- To have Kerala as the starting point for the sail-together is both apt and befitting. Kerala's coastal magnificence has been a legendary maritime hub for traders from across the world dating all the way back to the first century AD.
- Its majestic shipyards known by the iconic **Urus**, have been in the midst of intense ship-building and maritime trade over 1500 years.
- Arab traders were especially captivated by these vessels and were among the first major patrons of these boats.

Himalayan State Regional Council

Why in News?

NITI Aayog has constituted the 'Himalayan State Regional Council' to ensure sustainable development of the Indian Himalayan region.

Aims and Objectives:

The Council has been constituted to review and implement identified action points based on the Reports of five Working Groups, which were established along thematic areas to prepare a roadmap for action.

Recognizing the uniqueness of the Himalayas and the challenges for sustainable development, Five Working Groups were constituted by NITI Aayog on June 2, 2017.

These Working Groups were tasked with preparing a roadmap for action across five thematic areas namely,

- i. Inventory and Revival of Springs in Himalayas for Water Security,
- ii. Sustainable Tourism in Indian Himalayan Region,
- iii. Shifting Cultivation: Towards Transformation Approach,
- iv. Strengthening Skill & Entrepreneurship (E&S) Landscape in Himalayas, and
- v. Data/Information for Informed Decision Making.

Members:

The Himalayan State Regional Council will be chaired by the Dr VK Saraswat, Member, NITI Aayog and will consist of the Chief Secretaries of the Himalayan States as well as the Secretaries of key Central Ministries, senior officers of NITI Aayog as well as special invitees.

Key Functions:



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- The Himalayan States Regional Council will be the nodal agency for the Sustainable development in the Himalayan Region.
- The terms of reference of the Council states that it shall monitor the implementation of action points for Central Ministries, Institutions and 12 Himalayan State Governments in Indian Himalayan Region.
- These include river basin development and regional cooperation, spring mapping and revival across Himalayas in phased manner for water security; develop, implement and monitor tourism sector standards as well as bring policy coherence, strengthen skill & entrepreneurship with focus on identified priority sectors, among other action points.

Maternity Leave Incentive Scheme

Why in News?

In a section of media, there have been some reports about Maternity Leave Incentive Scheme. In this regard, the Ministry of Labour & Employment has clarified the following

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Background-

(i) The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 applies to establishments employing 10 or more than 10 persons in Factories, Mines, Plantation, Shops & Establishments and other entities.

(ii) The main purpose of this Act is to regulate the employment of women in certain establishments for certain period before and after child birth and to provide maternity benefit and certain other benefits.

(iii) The Act was amended through the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 which, inter alia, has increased the paid maternity leave to women employees from 12 weeks to 26 weeks.

Issues in Scheme:

- While the implementation of the provision is good in Public Sector, there are reports that it is not good in Private Sector and in contract jobs.
- There is also a wide perception that private entities are not encouraging women employees because if they are employed, they may have to provide maternity benefit to them, particularly 26 weeks of paid holiday.
- In addition, the Ministry of Labour & Employment is also getting complaints from various quarters that when the employers come to know that their women employee is in the family way or applies for maternity leave, the contracts are terminated on some flimsy grounds.

Steps Taken by Govt.



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- i. Ministry of Labour & Employment is working on an incentive scheme wherein 7 weeks' wages would be reimbursed to employers who employ women workers with wage ceiling upto Rs. 15000/- and provide the maternity benefit of 26 weeks paid leave, subject to certain conditions.
- ii. It is estimated that approximately an amount of Rs. 400 crores would be the financial implication for Government of India, Ministry of Labour & Employment for implementing the proposed incentive scheme.

Major Impact:

- The proposed Scheme, if approved and implemented shall ensure the women in this country an equal access to employment and other approved benefits alongwith adequate safety and secure environment.
- Also, the women shall continue to bear the major share of household work as well as child care.
- The work places will be more and more responsive to the family needs of the working women.

Annual Defence and Security Dialogue

Why in News?

Top officials of India and China held the ninth Annual [Defence](#) and Security Dialogue in Beijing after a one-year gap due to the Doklam standoff, as both countries agreed to enhance military exchanges and interactions.

Outcome:

- At the talks both sides agreed on enhancing defence exchanges and interactions at different levels between the two militaries,.

The annual dialogue did not take place last year following the [73-day tense standoff between the two militaries at Doklam](#).

About Doklam standoff

- It was triggered by the Chinese PLA's plan to build a road close to the narrow Chicken's Neck corridor connecting India's northeastern States in an area also claimed by Bhutan besides China.
- The standoff ended when Chinese troops stopped the road construction after which both countries stepped up efforts to normalise relations leading to the informal



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summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping at Wuhan in April this year.

- [National Security](#) Advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi are the designated Special Representatives for the border talks.
- Besides efforts to work out a solution to resolve the boundary dispute spanning 3,488 km, the border talks also focussed on discussions on other aspects of [India-China](#) relations.

Defence exchanges

- Also the two militaries are due to hold the annual 'Hand-in-Hand' drills next month in China after gap of one year.
- During the dialogue, both sides also agreed on specific defence exchanges for 2019.
- Both sides agreed to enhance exchanges and interactions through reciprocal high-level visits between the two ministries of defence as well as between military commands, joint training exercises, mutual visits by defence personnel including mid-level and cadet officers.
- Both sides reiterated the importance of maintaining peace and tranquillity in the border areas, implementing the consensus reached between Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi and specific additional confidence building measures at the operational level, it said.
- The two sides also had exchange of views on regional and global issues.
- Both sides underlined the importance of this dialogue as an important mechanism between the two countries for consultations on defence and security matters.
- Both sides agreed to hold the next round of the dialogue at a mutually convenient time in India in 2019.

UN Resolution on Myanmar

What is it?

A key UN committee overwhelmingly approved a resolution on Friday strongly condemning the continuing "gross [human rights](#) violations and abuses" against Rohingya Muslims who are treated as outsiders in Myanmar and were victims of a brutal campaign by the country's military.

The General Assembly's human rights committee approved the resolution by a vote of 142-10, with 26 abstentions. It is virtually certain to be formally adopted by the 193-member world body in December.



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Voting pattern:

- Among those voting against the resolution were [Myanmar](#) neighbours China, Cambodia and Laos along with Russia.
- [Bangladesh](#), which hosts 1.1 million Rohingya refugees, voted in favour.

About the Resolution:

- The resolution expresses deep concern that violence by Myanmar's military against the Rohingya has forced over 723,000 people to flee to Bangladesh since August 2017.
- It urgently calls on Myanmar's government to end discrimination and provide a path to citizenship for the embattled minority.
- The resolution, sponsored by the 57-nation Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the European Union and Canada, reiterates "deep distress" at reports that unarmed Rohingya are still being subjected to excessive use of force and rights violations by Myanmar's military and security forces, including killings and rapes.
- The resolution expresses "grave concern" at the findings of the UN fact-finding mission on Myanmar, which concluded that some top Myanmar military leaders should be prosecuted for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide against the Rohingya.
- It strongly condemns all rights abuses set out in the commission's report and calls for "a full and independent investigation" of human rights abuses against the Rohingya and other minorities.

What is Rohingya issue?

- Buddhist-majority Myanmar has long considered the Rohingya to be "Bengalis" from Bangladesh even though their families have lived in the country for generations. '
- Nearly all have been denied citizenship since 1982, effectively rendering them stateless, and they are also denied freedom of movement and other basic rights.
- The latest crisis began with attacks by an underground Rohingya insurgent group on Myanmar security personnel in August 2017 in northern Rakhine State.
- Myanmar's military responded with a brutal campaign and is accused of mass rape, killings and the burning of thousands of homes.

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Pilot Ganga Grams

Union Minister for Drinking Water and Sanitation Ms. Uma Bharati has said that maintaining sustainable behavior towards better sanitation is everyone's responsibility.

What is Ganga Gram?

- Ganga Gram is a concept to transform the villages on the bank of river Ganga into ideal villages with emphasis on Open Defecation Free, Solid and Liquid Waste Management, Water Conservation, Ground Water Recharge, modern crematorium, tree plantation, organic and medicinal plants.
- After declaration of all 4465 Ganga Bank villages as ODF, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation is working in the direction of sustaining the ODF status of this area.

Nuclear Triad

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi received today the crew of Strategic Strike Nuclear Submarine (SSBN) INS Arihant.

The submarine recently returned from its first deterrence patrol, completing the establishment of the country's survivable nuclear triad.

What is Nuclear triad?

- A **nuclear triad** is a three-pronged military force structure that consists of land-launched nuclear missiles, nuclear-missile-armed submarines and strategic aircraft with nuclear bombs and missiles.
- Specifically, these components are land-based [intercontinental ballistic missiles](#) (ICBMs), [strategic bombers](#), and [submarine-launched ballistic missiles](#) (SLBMs).
- The purpose of having this three-branched nuclear capability is to significantly reduce the possibility that an enemy could destroy all of a nation's nuclear forces in a [first-strike](#) attack.

About INS Arihant:

- **INS Arihant** (Sanskrit for "Slayer of Enemies") is the lead ship of [India's Arihant class](#) of [nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines](#).
- The 6,000 tonne vessel was built under the [Advanced Technology Vessel \(ATV\)](#) project at the Ship Building Centre in the port city of [Visakhapatnam](#).



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- Arihant was launched on 26 July 2009, the anniversary of [Vijay Diwas \(Kargil War Victory Day\)](#) by then [Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh](#). After fitting out and extensive sea trials, on 23 February 2016, she was confirmed as ready for operations, and was commissioned in August 2016

India's Nuclear policy:

- As a responsible nation, India has put in place a robust nuclear command and control structure, effective safety assurance architecture and strict political control, under its Nuclear Command Authority.

It remains committed to the doctrine of Credible Minimum Deterrence and No First Use, as enshrined in the decision taken by the Cabinet Committee on Security in its meeting chaired by the then Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee on January 04, 2003.

Shakti- India's first indigenous microprocessor

Why in News?

Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras) researchers have designed India's first indigenous microprocessor called 'Shakti'.

About Shakti:

- It is aimed at developing industrial-grade microprocessors and other components of the microprocessor ecosystem.
- It was designed, developed and booted by IIT Madras with microchip fabricated in ISRO's Semi-Conductor Laboratory at Chandigarh.
- It has been developed under project partly funded by Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), as part of two-decade-old efforts to develop indigenous microprocessors.

Significance:

The microprocessor will reduce dependency on imported microchips especially in communication and defence sectors and thus eliminate risk of cyber-attacks. It can be used in mobile computing, wireless and networking systems. It may also provide power to mobile phones, smart meters and surveillance cameras.

Padur Strategic Petroleum Reserves



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Why in News?

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the filling of Padur Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) at Padur, Karnataka by overseas National Oil Companies (NOCs).

About Padur SPR

- The SPR facility at Padur is an underground rock cavern with a total capacity of 2.5 million metric tonnes (MMT) having four compartments of 0.625 MMT each.
- The filling of the SPR under PPP model is being undertaken to reduce budgetary support of Government of India.

Where are Other SPRs?

- The **Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve (ISPR)** is an emergency fuel store of total 5.33 MMT (million metric tons) or 36.92 [MMbbl](#) of strategic [crude oil](#) enough to provide 10 days of consumption which are maintained by the Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited.
- The Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd. (ISPRL) has constructed and commissioned underground rock caverns for storage of total 5.33 MMT of crude oil at three locations namely Vishakhapatnam (1.33 MMT), Mangalore (1.5 MMT) and Padur (2.5 MMT).
- The total 5.33 MMT capacity under Phase-I of the SPR programme is currently estimated to supply approximately 9.5 days of India's crude requirement according to the consumption data for FY 2017-18.
- Government has given 'in principle' approval in June 2018 for establishing additional 6.5 MMT SPR facilities at Chandikhol in Odisha and Padur in Karnataka, which is expected to augment India's energy security by 11.5 days according to the consumption data for FY 2017-18.

Member of Advanced Motor Fuels Technology Collaboration Programme

Why in News?

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has been apprised of India joining as Member of Advanced Motor Fuels Technology Collaboration Programme (AMF TCP) under International Energy Agency (IEA) on 9th May, 2018.

AMF TCP works under the framework of International Energy Agency (IEA) to which India has "Association" status since 30th March, 2017.

Benefits Expected:



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- The primary goal of joining AMF TCP by Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoP&NG) is to facilitate the market introduction of Advanced motor fuels/ Alternate fuels with an aim to bring down emissions and achieve higher fuel efficiency in transport sector.
- AMF TCP also provides an opportunity for fuel analysis, identifying new/ alternate fuels for deployment in transport sector and allied R&D activities for reduction in emissions in fuel intensive sectors.
- The benefits of participation in AMF TCP are shared costs and pooled technical resources.
- The duplication of efforts is avoided and national Research and Development capabilities are strengthened.
- There is an information exchange about best practices, network of researchers and linking research with practical implementation.
- After becoming member, India will initiate R&D in other areas of its interest in advanced biofuels and other motor fuels in view of their crucial role in substituting fossil fuel imports.

Background:

- Prime Minister at UrjaSangam, 2015 had directed to reduce the import in energy sector by at least 10% by 2022.
- Subsequently, MoP&NG has come up with a detailed action plan wherein Biofuels, Advanced/ alternate fuels and fuel efficiency play a major role.
- Association with AMF TCP will help MoP&NG in furthering its efforts in identification & deployment of suitable fuels for transport sector in respect of higher efficiency and lesser emissions.

Other Measures in this regard:

- Government of India has recently notified National Policy on Biofuels-2018 which focusses on giving impetus to R&D in field of advanced biofuels such as 2G Ethanol, Bio-CNG, biomethanol, Drop-in fuels, DME etc.
- These advanced fuels can be produced from various kind of wastes such as crop residues, Municipal solid waste, Industrial waste, waste gases, Food waste, plastic etc.
- Though some of these advanced biofuels have successfully been deployed in few countries, India is still awaiting its deployment in transport sector.
- These advanced fuels are presently in their early stages of development in our Country and necessitate extensive R&D for making these fuels a viable option for meeting our energy needs.
- Association with AMF will help MoP&NG in identifying advanced biofuels suitable for deployment in transport sector in near future.
- In such cases, experience of member countries in deploying advanced biofuels will be an additional benefit for MoP&NG.



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About AMF-TCP:

- AMF TCP is an international platform for co-operation among countries to promote cleaner and more energy efficient fuels & vehicle technologies.
- The activities of AMF TCP relate to R&D, deployment and dissemination of Advanced Motor Fuels and looks upon the transport fuel issues in a systemic way taking into account the production, distribution and end use related aspects.
- Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India has joined AMF TCP as its 16th member on 9th May, 2018.
- The other member Countries of AMF TCP are USA, China, Japan, Canada, Chile, Israel, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Spain, Republic of Korea, Switzerland and Thailand.

Strategic disinvestment

Why in News?

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has given 'in principle' approval for strategic disinvestment of 100% Government of India's shares in DCIL to consortium of four ports namely, Vishakhapatnam Port Trust, Paradeep Port Trust, Jawahar Lal Nehru Port Trust and Kandla Port Trust.

Strategic sale of a PSU is different from the ordinary disinvestment. This is because in the case of strategic sale, the control and a significant proportion of a PSU's share goes to a private sector strategic partner.

According to the Department of Disinvestment, in the strategic sale of a company, the transaction has two elements:

1. Transfer of a block of shares to a Strategic Partner and
2. Transfer of management control to the Strategic Partner

What is the amount of shares to be transferred to the strategic partner?

- Understandably strategic sale aptly takes place when more than 51% of shares go to the private sector strategic partner.
- At the same time, it is not necessary that more than 51% of the total equity goes to the Strategic Partner for the transfer of management to take place.
- Or in other words strategic sale can take place even if the private sector partner gets less than 51% shares.



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- According to the strategic sale guidelines in India, the Strategic Partner, after the transaction, may hold less percentage of shares than the Government but the control of management would be with him.
- For example, in a PSU, where the government holding 51%, and out of this, sale of 25% to the strategic partner while the government holding 26% share also is a case of strategic sale.
- Here, the remaining shares (49%) will be dispersed among the public.
- But the necessary condition is that the control of the firms should be with the strategic partner.

Ralph Space Mission:

Why in News?

NASA's Ralph – a space instrument that has travelled as far as Pluto – is set to explore Jupiter's Trojan asteroids, which are remnants from the early days of the solar system.

About the Ralph:

- Ralph was first launched aboard the New Horizons spacecraft in 2006m and obtained stunning flyby images of Jupiter and its moons.
- This was followed by a visit to Pluto where Ralph took the first high-definition pictures of the iconic minor planet.
- In 2021, Ralph is set to journey with the Lucy mission to Jupiter's Trojan asteroids.
- The instrument will fly by another Kuiper Belt object called 2014 MU69 – nicknamed Ultima Thule – in January 2019.
- Ralph's observations of 2014 MU69 will provide unique insights into this small, icy world.
- The Lucy spacecraft carries a near-twin of Ralph, called L'Ralph, which will investigate Jupiter's Trojan asteroids.
- The L'Ralph instrument suite will study this diverse group of bodies; Lucy will fly by six Trojans and one Main Belt asteroid – more than any other previous asteroid mission. L'Ralph will detect the Trojan asteroids' chemical fingerprints.

Uses of Observation:

- L'Ralph allows scientists to interpret data provided by the Sun's reflected light that are the fingerprints of different elements and compounds.
- These data could provide clues about how organic molecules form in primitive bodies, a process that might also have led to the emergence of life on Earth.



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Integrated Check Posts and Border Management projects

The Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh today reviewed progress of ongoing projects being executed by the Land Ports Authority of India and the Border Management Division under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Facilities at ICP:

- At each ICP, facilities have been constructed for customs clearance, Immigration, warehouses for storage of goods, approach roads and terminal buildings to adequately handle import and export of goods and entry and exit of people.
- Work on ICP Moreh on India-Myanmar Border and ICP Dawki on India-Bangladesh Border is in advanced stage of completion.
- The total approved expenditure for the seven ICPs is more than Rupees 700 crores.
- Under the Border Management Division, projects have been taken up for construction of 18 Coastal BOPs in Gujarat and improvement of Border Floodlighting in Punjab and Rajasthan.
- Some Floating BOPs have also been approved in Gujarat and West Bengal.

Other measures for Border Security:

- Projects under the Border Area Development Programme (BADP) to improve road and mobile connectivity in the border villages as well as imparting skills to the people living there have also made good progress.
- To improve coastal security, 121 Coastal Police Stations have been operationalised, 30 jetties have been constructed and Biometric Cards have been issued to 18.5 lakh fishermen.
- Newly established National Academy of Coastal Policing has started functioning at Okha, Gujarat.

Ozone Layer

Why in News?

The ozone layer that shields life from cancer-causing solar rays is recovering at a rate of one to three percent per decade, reversing years of dangerous depletion caused by the release of harmful chemicals, a U.N. study said on November 5.

Observations made:

- The four-yearly review of the Montreal Protocol, a 1987 ban on man-made gases that damage the fragile high-altitude ozone layer, found long-term decreases in the



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atmospheric abundance of controlled ozone-depleting substances and the ongoing recovery of stratospheric ozone.

- The Antarctic ozone hole was expected to gradually close, returning to 1980 levels in the 2060s, the report said.

Complete healing

- Evidence presented by the authors shows that the ozone layer in parts of the stratosphere has recovered at a rate of 1-3 percent per decade since 2000," U.N. Environment and the World Meteorological Organization said in a statement.
- At projected rates, Northern Hemisphere and mid-latitude ozone is scheduled to heal completely by the 2030s followed by the Southern Hemisphere in the 2050s and polar regions by 2060.

Reasons for Healing:

The U.N. had already hailed the success of the Montreal Protocol, which banned or phased out ozone depleting chemicals, including chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) once widely used in refrigerators and spray cans, but the report said it was the first time that there were emerging indications that the Antarctic ozone hole had diminished in size and depth since 2000.

Cause for Concern:

- While most of the banned gases have been phased out, the report found at least one violation of the protocol: an unexpected increase in production and emissions of CFC-11 from eastern Asia since 2012.
- The report said the source country or countries had not yet been identified.
- If CFC-11 emissions continued at the same rate, return of mid-latitude and polar ozone-depleting chemicals to their 1980 values would be delayed by about 7 and 20 years, respectively.

Bionic mushrooms

Why in News?:

In their latest feat of engineering, researchers at Stevens Institute of Technology have taken an ordinary white button mushroom from a grocery store and made it bionic, supercharging it with 3D-printed clusters of cyanobacteria that generate electricity and swirls of graphene nanoribbons that can collect the current.



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About the Mushrooms:

- Researchers used a robotic arm-based 3D printer to first print an “electronic ink” containing the graphene nanoribbons.
- This printed branched network serves as an electricity-collecting network atop the mushroom’s cap by acting like a nano-probe — to access bio-electrons generated inside the cyanobacterial cells.
- Next, they printed a” bio-ink” containing cyanobacteria onto the mushroom’s cap in a spiral pattern intersecting with the electronic ink at multiple contact points.
- At these locations, electrons could transfer through the outer membranes of the cyanobacteria to the conductive network of graphene nanoribbons.
- Shining a light on the mushrooms activated cyanobacterial photosynthesis, generating a photocurrent.

Uses of Bionic mushrooms:

- This bionic mushroom produces electricity. By integrating cyanobacteria that can produce electricity, with nanoscale materials capable of collecting the current, researchers were able to better access the unique properties of both, augment them, and create an entirely new functional bionic system.
- The amount of electricity these bacteria produce can vary depending on the density and alignment with which they are packed, such that the more densely packed together they are, the more electricity they produce.

East Coast and East-West corridors

Odisha's railway infrastructure is likely to get a boost with the Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Limited’s (DFCCIL) proposed East Coast and East-West Corridor, both of which traverse through the State.

About the corridor:

- The DFCCIL considers the two proposed corridors to be a natural extension of the eastern and western dedicated corridors being implemented in the country.
- The 762-km-long East Coast corridor will originate from Kharagpur in West Bengal and culminate in Andhra Pradesh.
- In Odisha, the corridor will pass through Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Cuttack, Khordha, Ganjam and Gajapati.



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- Similarly, the East-West corridor planned between Kharagpur and Nagpur is 1,142-km long. The infrastructure will benefit three Odisha districts: Sundargarh, Jharsuguda and Sambalpur.
- As per preliminary estimates, while the East Coast corridor entails an investment of close to Rs. 25,000 crore, the East-West corridor will require investment to the tune of Rs. 45,000 crore.

Benefits of Corridor:

- The proposed corridors will cater to the transportation requirements of industries, mines on the eastern sector and ports.
- The existing rail network, runs on a combination of diesel + electrical trains.
- The Dedicated freight corridor will operate entirely on electric trains= less greenhouse gases.
- After Dedicated freight corridor, the passenger traffic and freight (goods) traffic will be separated = leading to faster speeds and efficiency.

Stubble burning:

Why in News?

Stating that State governments had failed to curb stubble burning, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on Monday summoned the Chief Secretaries of Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and [Uttar Pradesh](#).

What is it?

Stubble burning is the deliberate setting fire of the straw [stubble](#) that remains after wheat and other grains have been harvested.

The practice was widespread until the 1990s, when governments increasingly restricted its use.

The burning of stubble, contrasted with alternatives such as ploughing the stubble back into the ground has a number of consequences and effects on the environment.

Stubble burning:

- Quickly clears the field and is cheap.
- Kills weeds, including those resistant to herbicide.



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- Kills slugs and other pests.
- Can reduce nitrogen tie-up

However, it has a number of harmful effects on the environment:

- Loss of nutrients.
- Pollution from smoke.
- Damage to electrical and electronic equipment from floating threads of conducting waste.
- Risk of fires spreading out of control.

There is a perception that stubble burning contributes to atmospheric CO₂. However carbon dioxide releases are only slightly greater than those from natural decomposition.

About NGT:

National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 (NGT) is an Act of the [Parliament of India](#) which enables creation of a special tribunal to handle the expeditious disposal of the cases pertaining to environmental issues.

It draws inspiration from the India's constitutional provision of [Article 21](#), which assures the citizens of India the right to a healthy environment.

Members

- The [tribunal](#) shall consist of a full time chairperson, judicial members and expert members.
- The minimum number of judicial and expert member prescribed is ten in each category and maximum number is twenty in each category.
- A judge of the Supreme Court of India or Chief Justice of High Court are eligible to be Chairperson or judicial member of the Tribunal.
- Even existing or retired judge of High Court is qualified to be appointed as a Judicial Member.

INSPIRE 2018

Why in News?



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This is the second edition of International Symposium to Promote Innovation & Research in Energy Efficiency (INSPIRE) and is being organised by **Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL)** and **World Bank**.

The three-day symposium will focus on enhancing grid management, e-Mobility, financial instruments and technologies for energy efficiency in India.

About INSPIRE:

- INSPIRE 2018 has been organised in collaboration with the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), The Energy & Resources Institute (TERI), Asian Development Bank (ADB), the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), and the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI).
- The event is bringing together policy-makers, influencers, innovators, thought leaders, researchers, leading energy-efficient companies, government agencies, business leaders and other stakeholders to deliberate on key energy policies, market transformation strategies, and sustainable business models that will help leverage the full potential of energy efficiency and bring its multiple co-benefits to the fore.

About EESL

- Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), under the administration of Ministry of Power, Government of India, is working towards mainstreaming energy efficiency and is implementing the world's largest energy efficiency portfolio in the country.
- Driven by the mission of Enabling More – more transparency, more transformation, and more innovation, EESL aims to create market access for efficient and future-ready transformative solutions that create a win-win situation for every stakeholder.
- By 2020, EESL seeks to be a US\$ 1.5 billion (INR 10,000 crore) company.
- EESL has pioneered innovative business approaches to successfully roll-out large-scale programs that allow for incentive alignment across the value chain and rapidly drive transformative impact.
- EESL aims to leverage this implementation experience and explore new overseas market opportunities for diversification of its portfolio.

Central Board of the RBI

Why in the news?

The RBI Board recently entered the news during the public spat between the central bank and the Finance Ministry. One of the reasons for the disagreement was the government's alleged threat of invoking Section 7 of the RBI Act.



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Section 7 basically empowers the government to supersede the RBI Board and issue directions to the central bank if they are considered to be “necessary in public interest”.

About RBI Board

- The RBI Board is a body comprising officials from the central bank and the Government of India, including officials nominated by the government.
- According to the RBI, the “general superintendence and direction of the affairs and business of the RBI is entrusted to the Central Board” and the Board exercises all powers and does all acts and things that are exercised by the RBI.
- The Board is also to recommend to the government the design, form and material of bank notes and also when and where they can serve as legal tender.

Members of the Board

The Board consists of official directors, who include the Governor and up to four Deputy Governors, non-official directors, who include up to ten directors from various fields and two government officials, and one director from each of four local boards of the RBI.

- The Governor and Deputy Governors hold office for not more than five years, the ten directors nominated by the government hold office for four years, and the government officials are to hold a term on the RBI Board as long as the government sees fit.
- According to the RBI Act, the director of the RBI Board cannot be a salaried government official (except for the ones specifically nominated by the government), be adjudicated as insolvent or have suspended payments to creditors, an officer or employee of any bank (again, this does not include the government nominee), or, interestingly, “is found lunatic or becomes of unsound mind”.

WB Ease of doing Business:

Why in News?

India’s leap in the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business rankings this year has slipped under the radar, in the cacophony over demonetisation and the RBI-Centre spat.

Observations :



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- The country has, in fact, been one of the biggest 'improvers' in the 2019 study, with its rank shooting up from 100 to 77, among 190 countries.
- This is quite a big jump, given that its rank crept up from 142 to 100 in the four years from 2015 to 2018.
- The World Bank now deems India an easier place to do business in than BRICs peers such as Brazil (109) and South Africa (82) and West Asian economies such as Qatar (83) and Saudi Arabia (92).
- But it has a long way to go before it can catch up with China (46, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is at 4), the U.S. (8) or Singapore (a lofty 2). New Zealand is the top dog here.

What improved?

- India's climb in the 2019 rankings seems to have come mainly from sharply higher scores on two 'doing business' indicators — securing construction permits and trading across the borders. It also made smaller improvements in starting a business and getting credit.
- Upgrades in port infrastructure, a move to online documentation and facilities for exporters to seal their containers on their own, helped.
- On starting up a business, its rank improved from 156 to 137, as the time taken to start a new company was crunched from 30 days to 17 days, thanks to quicker GST registration and the abolition of site inspections in Mumbai.

What didn't improve?

- While India managed dramatic changes in some indicators, there were others where its scores barely budged.
- Its score remains dismal on registering property, where it ranks 166.
- While it takes 69 days to register a piece of property and costs about 8% of its value in India, the norm for OECD countries is just 20 days at half that cost. New Zealand gets this done in a single day.
- The other vexatious aspect that most business folk will readily identify with, is paying taxes. Despite the advent of GST, India has remained a back-bencher on this at a rank of 121.
- India also fares poorly, at rank 163, on enforcing contracts. While enforcing a claim through the courts in Mumbai takes 1,445 days and costs 31% of claim value, OECD nations manage this feat in 582 days at a cost of 21%.



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What is measured?

- But how exactly does World Bank manage to reduce a fuzzy thing such as 'ease of doing business' to a single number?
- The EODB study tries to capture the experience of small and mid-sized companies in a country with their regulators, by measuring the time, costs and red tape they deal with.
- To collect data, it empanels experts from the largest business cities in each country, with Mumbai and Delhi surveyed in India.
- It has many rounds of interactions with them — typically lawyers, business consultants, accountants, freight forwarders, government officials — who can capture the experience of multiple businesses.

Shortcoming of Study:

- In short, the World Bank's intent is to measure a country's progress on a few 'doing business' indicators in great depth, without trying to be comprehensive about the indicators, or striving for a statistically large sample.
- In India, it may not reflect the experience of partnership or proprietorship firms that dominate the small business space, or those located in tier 2 or tier 3 towns.
- With the ten indicators measured by the study well-known, it is also easy for governments to specially target these areas for reforms.
- But the EODB rankings do serve as the most trusted ready-reckoner for foreign investors looking to set up shop in a country. For that reason, this is an achievement for India to celebrate.

Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC)

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, [today](#) met and interacted with the members of his Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC).

About PM-STIAC

- This Council renders advice on all matters related to Science, Technology and Innovation and monitors the implementation of the Prime Minister's vision on these issues.
- Members of the Council briefed the Prime Minister on various steps being taken to nurture innovation and research in key sectors of science and technology.
- The Prime Minister emphasized that the fruits of science, technology and innovation must reach the common man, solve common day-to-day problems, and facilitate ease of living for the people of India.



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- In this context, he urged the Council members to work towards establishing strong linkages between the educational institutions, R&D labs, industry and various government departments.
- He reiterated the need to break silos among academic and research institutions.
- The Prime Minister called for development of suitable platforms and mechanisms which can identify and nurture scientific talent among schoolchildren, and link them to Atal Tinkering Labs at the district and regional level.
- In this context, the Prime Minister mentioned some priority areas of research such as raising agricultural income, solutions for chronic and genetic diseases such as sickle cell anaemia, waste management and cyber security.

INDRA 2018

The joint military exercise between Indian and Russia EXERCISE INDRA 2018 on combating insurgency under the aegis of United Nations (UN) is being conducted at Babina Field Firing Ranges, Babina Military Station from 18 November 2018.

Company sized contingents of the 5th Army of the Russian Federation and a Mechanised Infantry Battalion of Republic of India will participate in the training exercise spanning for eleven days including induction and de-induction of the Russian contingent.

Aim of the Exercise:

- The aim of the exercise is to practice joint planning and conduct to enhance interoperability of the two Armies in the peace keeping/ enforcement environment under the aegis of the UN.
- It focuses upon training on enhancing team building, special tactical level operations such as Cordon and Search, house intervention, handling and neutralisation of Improvised Explosive Devices and integrated employment of force multipliers.
- The primary focus of the tactical field exercise is to share best practices amongst the militaries and hone existing skills of the troops in the backdrop of interoperability between the two Armies in the peace keeping/ enforcement environment.
- The topics chosen for the exercise are both live and contemporary affecting both the nation alike.

Background:

- **INDRA** is a joint, bi-annual [military exercise](#) conducted by [India](#) and [Russia](#) starting in 2003.



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- The exercise is tasked with boosting cooperation and interoperability between the Russian and Indian navies. The word INDRA is a portmanteau of the participants' respective countries.
- The exercise involves live firing drills, as well as air defence and anti submarine operations. Additionally, counterpiracy, terrorism and drug smuggling operations are carried out.
- The tenth exercise in the series of Exercise INDRA is aimed at sending a strong message to the world with an intent of appreciation of interoperability between Indian and Russian Armies for joint tactical level operations in the peace keeping / enforcement environment under the aegis of UN.

Infosys Prize:

Six eminent professors have been awarded the Infosys Prize 2018 across different categories of science and [research](#), the software major's science foundation announced on Tuesday.

About the Prize:

- The annual award includes a pure gold medal, a citation and a prize purse worth \$100,000 (or its equivalent in Indian rupees), the Infosys Science Foundation (ISF) said in a statement.
- The Infosys Prize seeks to honour the efforts of some of the brightest scientists and researchers and highlight the country's ongoing quest for science excellence.
- A six-member jury of renowned scientists and professors selected the winners from 244 nominations received in six categories.
- By recognising these researchers and celebrating their achievements, the Infosys Prize aims to inspire young minds to explore science as a career option and advance innovation in the country..

Engineering and Computer Science

- In the field of Engineering and Computer Science, Navakanta Bhat, Professor, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore was awarded for his work on the design of novel biosensors based on his research in biochemistry and gaseous sensors that push the performance limits of existing metal-oxide sensors.

Humanities



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- In the Humanities category, Kavita Singh, Professor and Dean, School of Arts & Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi was awarded for her study of Mughal, Rajput and Deccan art.

Life Sciences

- The prize for Life Sciences was awarded to Roop Mallik, Associate Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai for his work on molecular motor proteins, which are crucial for the functioning of living cells.

Mathematical Sciences

- Nalini Anantharaman, Professor and Chair of Mathematics, Institute for Advanced Study, University of Strasbourg, France was awarded the prize in Mathematical Sciences for her work related to “Quantum Chaos”.

Yuva Sahakar-Cooperative Enterprise Support and Innovation Scheme

To cater to the needs and aspirations of the youth, the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) has come up with a youth-friendly scheme ‘**Yuva Sahakar-Cooperative Enterprise Support and Innovation Scheme**’ for attracting them to cooperative business ventures.

Background:

- The Central Government has been encouraging ‘Start-Ups’ for ease of doing business, non-conventional opportunities are emerging and are being encouraged.
- The conducive environment is being leveraged by private and corporate sectors and ‘Hub Start-ups’ are being promoted.
- The newly launched scheme would encourage cooperatives to venture into new and innovative areas.

About the Scheme:

- The scheme will be linked to Rs 1000 crore ‘Cooperative Start-up and Innovation Fund (CSIF)’ created by the NCDC.
- It would have more incentives for cooperatives of North Eastern region, Aspirational Districts and cooperatives with women or SC or ST or PwD members.



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- The funding for the project will be up to 80% of the project cost for these special categories as against 70% for others.
- The scheme envisages 2% less than the applicable rate of interest on term loan for the project cost up to Rs 3 crore including 2 years moratorium on payment of principal. All types of cooperatives in operation for at least one year are eligible.
- The scheme is expected to meet the needs of today's youth. He added that NCDC, being the most preferred financial institution in the world of cooperatives, has embarked on Sahakar 22, a Mission for Doubling Farmers' Income by 2022.

About NCDC

- The NCDC has the unique distinction of being the sole statutory organisation functioning as an apex financial and developmental institution exclusively devoted to cooperative sector.
- It supports cooperatives in diverse fields apart from agriculture and allied sectors.
- It is an ISO 9001:2015 compliant organisation and has a distinctive edge of competitive financing.
- It has extended financial assistance of Rs 63702.61 crore during 2014-2018 (as on November 13), 220% more than Rs 19850.6 during 2010-14.

GSAT-29

Why in News?

India's GSAT-29 communication satellite was successfully launched by the second developmental flight of Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle MarkIII (GSLV MkIII-D2) today from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) SHAR, Sriharikota.

About GSLV Mk-III

- GSLV Mk III is a three-stage heavy lift launch vehicle developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- Two massive boosters with solid propellant constitute the first stage, the core with liquid propellant form the second stage and the cryogenic engine completes the final stage.

About GSAT-29

- GSAT-29 is a multiband, multi-beam communication satellite, intended to serve as test bed for several new and critical technologies.



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- Its Ku-band and Ka-band payloads are configured to cater to the communication requirements of users including those from remote areas especially from Jammu & Kashmir and North-Eastern regions of India.
- In addition, the Q/V-Band communication payload onboard is intended to demonstrate the future high throughput satellite system technologies.
- Geo High Resolution Camera will carry out high resolution imaging.
- Optical Communication Payload will demonstrate data transmission at a very high rate through optical communication link.

Significance:

- India has achieved significant milestone with our heaviest launcher lifting off the heaviest satellite from the Indian soil.
- The launch vehicle has precisely placed the satellite in its intended orbit
- The launch will help to bridge the digital divide. He also said several next generation payload technologies will be demonstrated with this mission soon.
- The success of GSLV MkIII-D2 marks an important milestone in Indian space programme towards achieving self-reliance in launching heavier satellites.
- The success of this flight also signifies the completion of the experimental phase of GSLV Mark III.

Background:

The first successful mission of GSLV Mark III was an experimental suborbital flight in 2014. Subsequently, GSLV Mark III-D1 launched GSAT-19, a high throughput communication satellite, with a lift-off mass of 3150 kg, into GTO on June 5, 2017.

Network for Development of Agricultural Cooperatives in Asia and the Pacific (NEDAC)

Why in News?

Shri Parshottam K Rupala, Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Addressed the inaugural session of the General Assembly of Network for Development of Agricultural Cooperatives in Asia and the Pacific(NEDAC) in New Delhi today.

About NEDAC:

- NEDAC is a unique organization encompassing mix of Government and non Government organizations created by FAO.
- It aims at for synergizing policies and programmes of government and cooperative institutions at country level.
- The cooperatives have exhibited better form of success stories to enhance production and better returns to produce from market through collective action.



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- Parallel thematic sessions are going to be held on 'Cooperatives to Cooperative Trade' and 'Capacity Development partnerships in NEDAC'.
- The ultimate aim would be to bring about an increase in farmers income and raise their economic standard by bringing cooperative trade in the mainstream and enhance cooperative professionalism.
- The general assembly of 22 prominent cooperative organizations from eight countries unanimously decided to focus on C2C and capacity development to meet challenges of climate change as transformative cooperatives.

Background:

- NEDAC was set up in 1991 by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).
- NEDAC sensitises Governments in the region on the role of agricultural cooperatives in promoting agricultural and rural development to ensure rural food and livelihood security for millions of people in Asia and Pacific.