

MPSC

CURRENT AFFAIRS APRIL-2019

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INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL AND MAHARASHTRA

India signs agreement to set agriculture institute in Malawi

- India signed an agreement with a development bank for setting up India- Africa Institute of Agriculture and rural development (IAIARD) in Malawi .
- The agreement was signed as a part of India's efforts to enhance capacity in the areas of agro-financing and entrepreneurship development for African countries, the ministry of External Affairs said in a statement.
- The ministry signed the MoU with National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development Consultancy Service (NABCONS).

India-Africa Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- IAIARD would be a Pan-African Institute wherein trainees not only from Malawi but also from other African countries, will receive training to develop their human resources and build their capacity.
- IAIARD will impart training in the areas of micro-financing and agro-financing, among others. The expenditure on faculty from India, the travel, logistics and training course expenses for students from other African countries will be borne by the Government of India for an initial period of three years.
- IAIARD is the first of its kind initiative undertaken in an African country by India. IAIARD will further strengthen the bilateral relations with Malawi and India's relations with the African Union.

NABARD Consultancy Services:

- NABARD Consultancy Services (Nabcons) is a fully owned subsidiary promoted by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).
- Nabcons is engaged in providing consultancy in all spheres of agriculture, rural development and allied areas.
- Nabcons leverages on the core competence of the NABARD in the areas of agricultural and rural development, especially multidisciplinary projects, banking, institutional development, infrastructure, training, etc., internalized for more than two decades.

INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE – In NEWS:

- Bolivia has joined the International Solar Alliance by signing the framework agreement on International Solar Alliance.

Background:

- The agreement of the International Solar Alliance was open for signature during the COP22 at Marrakech on November 15, 2016. The signatories of the agreement include India, France, Australia, UAE, UK, Japan amongst others.

About ISA:

- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is an alliance of more than 122 countries initiated by India, most of them being sunshine countries, which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, now extended to all members of UN.
- The Paris Declaration establishes ISA as an alliance dedicated to the promotion of solar energy among its member countries.

- **Objectives:** The ISA's major objectives include global deployment of over 1,000GW of solar generation capacity and mobilisation of investment of over US\$ 1000 billion into solar energy by 2030.
- **What it does?** As an action-oriented organisation, the ISA brings together countries with rich solar potential to aggregate global demand, thereby reducing prices through bulk purchase, facilitating the deployment of existing solar technologies at scale, and promoting collaborative solar R&D and capacity building.
- **When it entered into force?** When the ISA Framework Agreement entered into force on December 6th, 2017, ISA formally became a de-jure treaty based International Intergovernmental Organization, headquartered at Gurugram, India.
- International Solar Alliance is the first body that will have a secretariat in India. India plays a significant role in the alliance in terms of being a host as well as a major contributor for achieving the target of 1 TW of solar energy by 2030 which would require \$1 trillion to achieve with a target to produce 100 GW of solar energy by 2022, would account for a tenth of ISA's goal.

Bhutan govt to place bill for ratification of BBIN initiative at its upper senate

- The Bhutan government will place the bill for ratification of Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) initiative for road and rail connectivity at its upper senate.
- Briefing media on the occasion of Bhutan's Prime Minister Dr. Lotay Tshering's visit to Bangladesh, Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh Shahidul Haq told reporters that BBIN is a big initiative in the region for improving rail and road connectivity in the region and he expressed the hope that the bill will be passed by the Bhutanese Parliament soon.
- The Motor Vehicle Agreement of BBIN countries was signed in 2015 by the four member countries. Bangladesh, India and Nepal have implemented the agreement but Bhutan is yet to accord its ratification of the agreement.
- The Bhutan government has decided to send the bill for ratification of the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) initiative for road and rail connectivity to its upper senate.

Background:

- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) had signed a framework MVA in June 2015 to enable movement of passenger and cargo vehicles across borders among the four countries. Bhutan has not yet ratified the pact for its entry to come into force.
- However, Bhutan had given its consent for the BBIN MVA to enter into force amongst the other 3 countries i.e. Bangladesh, India and Nepal, who have already ratified it.

About BBIN MVA:

- The landmark MVA was signed by Transport Ministers of the BBIN countries in Thimphu, Bhutan on 15 June 2015.
- As per the agreement, member countries would allow vehicles registered in the other countries to enter their territory under certain terms and conditions.
- Customs and tariffs will be decided by the respective countries and these would be finalised at bilateral and trilateral forums.

- **Objective:** The main objective of the agreement is to provide seamless people-to-people contact and enhance economic interaction by facilitating cross border movement of people and goods.
- **Benefits:** It would permit unhindered movement of passenger and cargo vehicles among the four countries.
- Cargo vehicles do not have to be changed at the border, a practice that has prevailed until now. The BBIN agreement will promote safe, economical efficient and environmentally sound road transport in the subregion and will further help each country in creating an institutional mechanism for regional integration.
- **Assistance from ADB:** The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has been providing technical, advisory, and financial support to the BBIN MVA initiative as part of its assistance to the South Asia Sub regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) program, a projects-based economic cooperation initiative that brings together the BBIN countries, Maldives, Sri Lanka and more recently, Myanmar. ADB is the secretariat of SASEC.

NAMAMI GANGE GETS GLOBAL RECOGNITION AT WORLD SUMMIT

- The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) was awarded the distinction of “Public Water Agency of the Year” by Global Water Intelligence at the Global Water Summit in London.

About NamamiGange Programme:

- NamamiGange Programme – is an umbrella programme which integrates previous and currently ongoing initiatives by enhancing efficiency, extracting synergies and supplementing them with more comprehensive & better coordinated interventions. Government of India is supplementing the efforts of the state governments in addressing the pollution of river Ganga by providing financial assistance to the states.
- Need: Each day, more than 500 million liters of wastewater from industrial sources are dumped directly into Ganga. In many places, this wastewater entering the rivers is completely raw, completely untreated.

Main Pillars of the NamamiGange Programme are:

- Sewerage Treatment Infrastructure
- River-Surface Cleaning
- Afforestation
- Industrial Effluent Monitoring
- River-Front Development
- Bio-Diversity
- Public Awareness
- Ganga Gram

Its implementation has been divided into:

- Entry-Level Activities (for immediate visible impact),
- Medium-Term Activities (to be implemented within 5 years of time frame) and Long-Term Activities (to be implemented within 10 years).

Global Water Awards:

- The Global Water Awards are presented at the Global Water Summit, the major business conference for the water industry worldwide.
- The awards recognise excellence across the international water industry and reward those initiatives in the water, waste water, and desalination sectors, which bring remarkable improvements in the lives of people.

Global Water Summit:

- Global Water Summit is the annual business conference for the water industry worldwide. The summit attracts high-level executives from industry, municipalities and international water companies and provides the opportunity to connect with hard-to-reach industry insiders that will not attend any other water event.
- The summit provides a platform for connecting the public and private sector and for accelerating change and innovation within the sector, it attracts the most influential industry representatives and also becomes a forum for business development and expanding your network.

About NMCG:

- National Mission for Clean Ganga, endeavors to deploy best available knowledge and resources across the world for Ganga rejuvenation.
- Clean Ganga has been a perennial attraction for many international countries that have expertise in river rejuvenation.
- The National Mission for clean Ganga (NMCG) was awarded the distinction of “Public Water Agency of the Year” by Global Water Intelligence at the Global Water Summit in London on April 9, according to a release issued by the NMCG.

MELAMINE- In NEWS:

- The government has extended the ban on import of milk and its products, including chocolates, from China till laboratories at ports for testing presence of toxic chemical melamine are upgraded.

Background:

- Food regulator FSSAI had recommended extending the ban until all labs at ports are modernised to test the chemical.
- The ban was first imposed in September 2008 and extended subsequently from time to time.

Salient features :

- India is the world’s largest producer and consumer of milk. It produces around 150 million tonne milk annually.
- Uttar Pradesh is the leading state in milk production followed by Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- Although India does not import milk, milk products from China, it has imposed the ban as a preventive measure.

Why is melamine added into milk and powdered infant formula?

- In China, where adulteration has occurred, water has been added to raw milk to increase its volume. As a result of this dilution the milk has a lower protein concentration.
- Companies using the milk for further production (e.g. of powdered infant formula) normally check the protein level through a test measuring nitrogen content. The addition of melamine increases the nitrogen content of the milk and therefore its apparent protein content.

- Addition of melamine into food is not approved by the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius (food standard commission), or by any national authorities.

Has melamine been found in other food products?

- In 2007, melamine was found in wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate exported from China and used in the manufacture of pet food in the United States. This caused the death of a large number of dogs and cats due to kidney failure.
- melamine contamination has also been found in a number of different brands of powdered infant formula, in one brand of a frozen yogurt dessert and in one brand of canned coffee drink. All these products were most probably manufactured using ingredients made from melamine-contaminated milk.

What are the health effects of melamine consumptions in humans?

- While there are no direct human studies on the effect of melamine data from animal studies can be used to predict adverse health effects. Melamine alone causes bladder stones in animal tests. When combined with cyanuric acid, which may also be present in melamine powder, melamine can form crystals that can give rise to kidney stones.
- Melamine has also been shown to have carcinogenic effects in animals in certain circumstances, but there is insufficient evidence to make a judgment on carcinogenic risk in humans.

WORLD IMMUNIZATION WEEK 2019

- World Immunization Week is celebrated in the last week of April month.
- The week aims to promote the use of vaccines to protect people against various diseases. Immunization is recognised as the most successful and cost-effective health invention, which saves millions of lives every year.
- The theme for this year's immunization week is – Protected Together: Vaccines Work! The week will also be celebrating Vaccine Heroes from around the world.
- Vaccine heroes are the people from parents, community members to innovators and health workers who help ensure that everyone is protected from diseases by getting vaccinated.

World Immunisation Week:

- Every year last week of April is observed as World Immunisation Week to promote the use of vaccines to protect people of all ages against disease.

How does vaccination work?

- Our immune system is composed of various types of cells. These cells defend us against invaders and remove the harmful pathogens. However, for that our immune system needs to recognise that an invader is dangerous.
- Vaccination works by teaching our immune system how to recognise new diseases. Vaccines stimulate our bodies to make antibodies against antigens of pathogens. It also teaches the immune system to remember the antigens that cause infection, which leads to a faster response to the same disease in the future.
- In simple terms, vaccines work by exposing you to a safer version of a disease. While the body responds to the vaccine, it builds an adaptive immune system, which helps the body to fight off the actual infection in the future.
- A vaccine has two parts: A vaccine usually consists of two parts and is usually given through an injection.

- The first part is the antigen, which is a piece of disease one's body must learn to recognise
- The second part is the adjuvant, which sends a danger signal to the body and helps your immune system to respond strongly against the antigen.
- All this helps in developing your immunity.

Objectives: 2019:

- Demonstrate the value of vaccines for the health of children, communities and the world. Highlight the need to build on immunization progress while addressing gaps, including through increased investment.
- Show how routine immunization is the foundation for strong, resilient health systems and universal health coverage.
- The motto of the World Immunization Week is to promote the use of vaccines to protect people of all ages against disease.
- Earlier Immunization Week activities were observed on different dates in different regions of the world.
- Immunization Week was observed simultaneously for the first time in 2012, with the participation of more than 180 countries and territories worldwide after the World Health Assembly endorsed World Immunization Week during its May 2012 meeting.

STATES

AFSPA – ARUNACHAL PRADESH

- After 32 years, the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, which gives sweeping powers to security forces, was partially removed from three of nine districts of Arunachal Pradesh but would remain in force in the areas bordering Myanmar.

Background:

- The state, which was formed on February 20, 1987, had inherited the controversial AFSPA enacted by Parliament in 1958 and applied to the entire State of Assam and the Union Territory of Manipur. After Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland came into being, the Act was appropriately adapted to apply to these states as well.

What does the AFSPA mean?

- In simple terms, AFSPA gives armed forces the power to maintain public order in "disturbed areas". They have the authority to prohibit a gathering of five or more persons in an area, can use force or even open fire after giving due warning if they feel a person is in contravention of the law. If reasonable suspicion exists, the army can also arrest a person without a warrant; enter or search premises without a warrant; and ban the possession of firearms. Any person arrested or taken into custody may be handed over to the officer in charge of the nearest police station along with a report detailing the circumstances that led to the arrest.

What is a "disturbed area" and who has the power to declare it?

- A disturbed area is one which is declared by notification under Section 3 of the AFSPA. An area can be disturbed due to differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.

- The Central Government, or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory can declare the whole or part of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area. A suitable notification would have to be made in the Official Gazette. As per Section 3, it can be invoked in places where “the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary”.

What’s the origin of AFSPA?

- The Act came into force in the context of increasing violence in the Northeastern States decades ago, which the State governments found difficult to control.
- The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Bill was passed by both the Houses of Parliament and it was approved by the President on September 11, 1958. It became known as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958.

Utkarsh Bangla and Sabooj Sathi Schemes of West Bengal gets Global Recognition

- The schemes of the West Bengal government ‘Utkarsh Bangla’ (skill training of youth) and ‘Sabooj Sathi’ (cycles for students) won the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) awards of UN.
- Utkarsh Bangla got the topmost award and emerged as a winner in the Capacity Building category and the Sabooj Sathi was ranked in the first five as a champion project under ICT application: E-Government category.

Utkarsh Bangla:

- West Bengal government on 16 February 2016 launched Utkarsh Bangla Scheme, a welfare scheme for school-dropouts, in Kolkata.
- Utkarsha Bangla is aimed at giving vocational training to school dropouts. Each youth will get training ranging from 400 to 1200 hours. The school-dropouts will be trained free of charge in tailoring, driving, repairing television and other electronic equipment and beauty courses etc.
- Utkarsh Bangla Scheme is aimed at providing vocational training to school dropouts. The beneficiaries of the scheme will be trained in driving, tailoring, repairing television and other electronic equipment’s, beautician courses etc.

Sabooj Sathi:

- Sabooj Sathi is a scheme of West Bengal government for distribution of bicycles to the students of class IX to XII studying in Govt. run and Govt. aided Schools and Madrashes. The scheme was launched in September 2015.
- Hon’ble Finance Minister, in the Budget speech of 2015-2016, announced the scheme for distribution of bi-cycles to estimated 40 lakh students of class IX to XII studying in Govt. run and Govt. aided Schools and Madrashes of the State.
- It was further announced that around 25 lakh students would be covered in 2015-16 thereafter 15 lakh in the next fiscal.
- **Objective:** Empower the students, especially the girls and reduce drop outs in higher education.
- **Implementation agency:** West Bengal SC ST Development & Finance Corporation has been declared as the nodal agency for procurement and distribution of bi-cycles.

Decolourisation of River Periyar

- The River Periyar in Kerala is again witnessing the decolourisation. The decolourisation of River Periyar which provides drinking water to Kochi city and adjoining areas has become the cause of worry for the people and government of Kerala.
- The water turned pitch black in one stream, it was milky near the Pathalam regulator-cum-bridge.
- The pollution control Board (PCB) has attributed the change in colour to the poor quality of water as a result of eutrophication.

Background:

- The discolouration of Periyar and fish kill has been a serious issue for last couple of years. Decrease in dissolved oxygen level has caused several fish-kills in the past few years.
- Environmental activists have been protesting against the pollution of the river and demanding steps for its protection.
- For the record, the pollution of the river system had earlier led to violent protests in the region.

Eutrophication:

- The pollution control Board (PCB) has attributed the change in colour to the poor quality of water as a result of eutrophication.
- PCB has stated that huge quantities of organic load in the form of sewage from nearby townships are regularly reaching the river system. This is contributing to the eutrophication, resulting in the change of colour.

River Periyar:

- River Periyar flows in the state of Kerala. It originates in the Western Ghats and flows north for a short distance to Periyar Lake.
- Periyar Lake. is an artificial reservoir created by Mullaperiyar Dam across the river. From the Periyar Lake, tunnel carries water through mountains to the Vaigai River in Tamil Nadu, where it is used for irrigation.
- Further downstream Idukki dam is constructed across the river. The river descending out of the mountains into the coastal plain and empties into the Arabian Sea.

KANDHAMAL HALDI:

- Odisha's Kandhamal Haldi (turmeric), famous for its healing properties, has received GI tag.

Salient features :

- The golden yellow spice, named after the district where it is produced, has been cultivated since time immemorial and is known for its medicinal value.
- Turmeric is the main cash crop of tribal people in Kandhamal. Apart from domestic use, turmeric is also used for cosmetic and medicinal purposes.
- More than 60,000 families (nearly 50% of Kandhamal population) are engaged in growing the variety. The crop is sustainable in adverse climatic conditions.

About GI tag:

- What is it? A GI is primarily an agricultural, natural or a manufactured product (handicrafts and industrial goods) originating from a definite geographical territory.
- Significance of a GI tag: Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the place of its origin.

- Security: Once the GI protection is granted, no other producer can misuse the name to market similar products. It also provides comfort to customers about the authenticity of that product.
- Provisions in this regard: GI is covered as element of intellectual property rights (IPRs) under Paris Convention for Protection of Industrial Property.
- At international level, GI is governed by WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). In India, Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection Act), 1999 governs it.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Congress's Proposed NYAY Scheme

- In its election manifesto for the Lok Sabha Elections 2019, the Congress party has announced a Minimum Income scheme Nyuntam Aay Yojna (Nyay) as a surgical strike against poverty.
- Last week, the Congress party announced its version of a quasi-universal basic income (UBI) scheme by promising an income guarantee of 6,000 per month to 50 million "poor" families if voted to power.
- The proposed scheme has been referred to as Nyuntam Aay Yojana, or NYAY.

Salient features about the Proposed Scheme:

- The Nyay scheme is targeted towards 5 crore families who are the poorest 20 per cent in India. Nyay scheme guarantees each family a cash transfer of Rs. 72,000 a year and as far as possible the money will be transferred to a bank account of a woman in the family.
- There will be a design phase (3 months), followed by pilot and testing phases (6-9 months) before the rollout of the plan.
- The scheme will be implemented in phases and the estimated cost will be less than 1 per cent of the GDP in the first year, and less than 2 per cent of the GDP in the second year and thereafter.
- As the nominal GDP grows and the families move out of poverty, the cost will decline as a proportion of the GDP. If brought to power, Congress announces the appointment of an independent panel of economists, social scientists and statisticians to oversee the design, testing, rollout and implementation of the programme.
- The programme will move from one stage to the other only after a go-ahead from the panel. The Nyay scheme would be a joint scheme of the central and state governments.
- Nyay scheme will be funded through new revenues and rationalisation of expenditure. Current merit subsidy schemes that are intended to achieve specific objectives will be continued.
- Economists say that income-support schemes of this type cannot coexist with subsidies on account of the resultant fiscal burden.
- On a standalone basis, the proposed scheme, for 5 crore households, will add 1.9 per cent of GDP to the fiscal deficit and the projected outlay could be higher than India's health budget estimated at about 1.4 per cent of GDP.

Background:

- 73 percent of the wealth generated last year went to the richest one percent, while 67 crore Indians who comprise the poorest half of the population saw one percent increase in their wealth.
- India's top 10% of population holds 73% of the wealth.

24x7 POWER FOR ALL

- The household electrification scheme, PradhanMantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana, or Saubhagya, has been implemented at an unprecedented pace. More than 45,000 households were electrified every day over the last 18 months.

Reasons behind the success of Saubhagya:

- The enactment of the Electricity Act, in 2003.
- The introduction of the Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana, in 2005.
- Discom engineers have evolved in their attitude from one of scepticism to that of determination.

Challenges Remaining:

- The erection of electricity poles and an extension of wires do not necessarily mean uninterrupted power flow to households.
- No 24*7 power supply-While the median hours of supply increased from 12 hours in 2015 to 16 hours a day in 2018, it is still far from the goal of 24x7.
- Low voltage Issues-Similarly, while instances of low voltage and voltage surges have reduced in the last three years, about a quarter of rural households still report low voltage issues for at least five days in a month.

In order to achieve 24x7 power for all, there is need to focus on three frontiers:

- Monitoring of Supply.
- Quality and maintenance services.
- Customer Service.

Ujjwala Beneficiaries in Four States still use Earthen Stoves

- A study from the Research Institute for Compassionate Economics (r.i.c.e) study on the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna (PMUY) makes the following observations:
- Most rural households with LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections still use chulhas with firewood or dung cakes which are the detriment of rural health.
- 85% of Ujjwala beneficiaries in rural Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan still use solid fuels for cooking, due to financial reasons as well as gender inequalities. In the four States surveyed, there was a substantial increase in LPG ownership due to the scheme, with 76% of households now owning an LPG connection.
- Overall only 27% of households exclusively used the gas stove and another 37% reported using both the chulha and the gas stove, while 36% used chulha exclusively.
- Whereas among those who received LPG connection through PMUY, almost 53% exclusively used the chulha, while 32% used both.
- The beneficiaries of PMUY are poorer, on average than households who got LPG on their own. Refilling the cylinder is a greater fraction of their monthly consumption, and they may be less likely to get a refill immediately after a cylinder becomes empty.

- Almost 70% of households do not spend anything on solid fuels, meaning that the relative cost of an LPG cylinder refill, even if subsidised, is far higher.
- Women are not typically economic decision-makers in the household, hindering a shift to LPG usage.
- 70% of respondents thought the gas stove was better for the health of the cook (typically a woman), more than 86% felt that cooking on the chulha was better for the health of those eating, reflecting ignorance of the fact that ambient air pollution is harmful even to those who are not cooking the food.
- The survey covered a random sample of 1,550 households in 11 districts of the four States, which collectively have two-fifths of the country's rural population.

'Safe City Programme'- Progress Report;

- According to recent media reports, not much progress has been made in making cities safer for women even one year after launch of Safe City programme.
- It highlights poor guidelines and improper utilization of funds and focus on general elections as main reasons for it.

About Safe City programme:

- It was launched with objective of strengthening safety and security of women in public places.
- It is being implemented by Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in consultation with Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoW&CD), Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Ministry of Information Technology (MeitY), respective Municipal & Police Commissioners of cities and civil society organizations.
- Initially it was launched in 8 cities, which include Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Lucknow, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad.
- Lucknow was first city in country to clear the project in In November 2018.
- It was approved with total cost of Rs.194.44 crore under Nirbhaya Fund Scheme (by empowered Committee of officers for Nirbhaya funds).
- It is implemented as Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) with Centre and State sharing fund in 60:40 ratio.
- It includes identifying crime hotspots and placing them under CCTV coverage, drone-based surveillance, deployment of automated number plate reading (ANPR) equipment through an integrated smart control room.

Major component of Safe City Project:

- Setting an Integrated Smart Control Room.
- Setting Pink Out-posts (exclusively administered by Women police) for facilitating ease of filing complaint by women; Pink Patrols of Women police.
- Setting Women Help Desks in all Police Stations with Counsellors.
- Augmentation of existing Asha Jyoti Kendra.
- Implementing Safety measures in buses, including Cameras.
- Improving Street Lighting in identified crime Hotspot areas.
- Setting up Pink Toilets.
- Integrating Women power-help line with single Emergency number '112'

Longest suspension bridge over Indus river opens to public:

- Indian Army built the longest suspension bridge over Indus river in Leh in just 40 days and the bridge is named as Maitri Bridge.

Maitri Bridge:

- The 260-foot Maitri Bridge is the longest suspension bridge over the Indus River at Choglamsar village. It has been named 'Maitri Bridge', symbolising the excellent civil-military relations existing in the region.
- Naik Phunchok Angdus (retd), an 89-year-old war veteran, opened the bridge to the public
- The 260-foot Maitri Bridge, the longest suspension bridge over the Indus River at Choglamsar village in Leh was opened to the public on Monday (March 01).
- The bridge has been named 'Maitri Bridge', symbolising the excellent civil-military relations existing in the Leh-Ladakh region.
- The cable suspension bridge was built using innovative engineering methods. It was constructed by the combat engineers (Sahas aur Yogyata Regiment) of the Fire and Fury Corps of the Indian Army in a record time of 40 days, ferrying almost 500 tons of equipment and construction material.
- The construction of the bridge comes in a year when the Fire and Fury Corps is celebrating 20 years of Kargil Vijay Diwas.
- The senior war veterans of 1947-48, 1962, 1971 and 1999 operations in the Ladakh region led by Naik Phunchok Angdus (retd), an 89-year-old war veteran, opened the bridge to the public.
- Locals of the area thanked the Army for constructing the bridge, which has brought much relief to people of the area.
- The Army undertook the task of building the bridge following requests received from the civil administration to help the locals of the three largest villages in the area: Choglamsar, Stok and Chuchot.

POLITY**Punjab and Haryana High Court bars stating of caste in Proceedings**

- The Punjab and Haryana High Court has instructed states of Punjab, Haryana and Union Territory Chandigarh to not mention the caste of the accused, victims or witnesses in proceedings before the court.

What did the High Court say?

- The High Court while passing a ruling in a murder case where the Haryana police had mentioned the caste of the accused witnesses and the victim during the proceedings stated this is not permissible and the caste system was profoundly illogical and was also against the basic tenets of the Constitution.
- The High Court stated that mentioning the caste separately in the criminal proceedings is a colonial legacy and requires to be stopped henceforth.
- The Constitution guarantees a casteless and classless society. All are born equal.
- The High court directed the governments to issue instructions to all investigating officers not to mention the caste of the accused, victims or witnesses in recovery memos, FIRs, seizure memos, inquest papers and other forms prescribed under CrPC and Punjab Police Rules.

SC asks political parties to provide information on electoral bonds

- The Supreme Court has directed all political parties to furnish details about the receipts of electoral bonds in a sealed cover to the Election Commission.

Electoral Bond Scheme:

- The government had notified the Electoral Bond Scheme 2018 on January 2, 2018. As per provisions of the Electoral Bond scheme, electoral bonds may be purchased by a person, who is a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India.
- A person being an individual can buy electoral bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals.
- Political parties registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and which secured not less than one per cent of votes polled in the last general election to the House of the People or the Legislative Assembly of the State, shall be eligible to receive electoral bonds.
- Electoral bonds shall be encashed by an eligible political party only through a bank account with an authorized bank.

Interim Order of the Supreme Court:

- The Supreme Court was hearing a petition filed by an NGO which challenged the validity of the scheme and sought that either the issuance of electoral bonds be stayed or names of donors be made public to ensure transparency in the poll process.
- In an interim order passed by the Supreme Court, the apex court has directed all political parties to provide details of the amount and bank account of donors by May 30 to the Election Commission.

Central Monitoring Committee to Prepare National Plan for Polluted Rivers

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has formed a Central Monitoring Committee to prepare and enforce a national plan to make over 350 river stretches pollution free across the country.
- River pollution has caused a serious threat to the safety of water and environment.

Order of NGT:

- The committee would comprise representatives of NITI Aayog; secretaries of Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Urban Development and Ministry of Environment; the director general of National Mission for Clean Ganga and the Central Pollution Control Board chairman.
- The Committee will also coordinate with the River Rejuvenation Committees of the states and oversee the execution of the action plans, taking into account the timelines, budgetary mechanism and other factors.
- Chief Secretaries of states would be the nodal agency at the state level.
- NGT directed the Ministry of Environment to consider a policy for giving environmental awards to outstanding persons (natural and juristic) and institutions or states and introducing “dis-incentives” for non-compliant states.
- The Central Monitoring Committee may consider identifying experts, best practices and models for use of treated water, including plan to supply untreated sewage for a price or otherwise so that the concerned needy party can treat and utilise such water as is reportedly

being done at Surat in Gujarat, Nagpur in Maharashtra and Bhilwada in Rajasthan or any other place.

IMPORTANT DAYS AND DATES

World Health Day 2019

- The World Health Day was observed across the world on April 7, 2019. The day marked the 71st anniversary of the World Health Organisation.
- Theme : The theme of World Health Day 2019 was 'Universal Health Coverage: Everyone, Everywhere'.
- Some countries have already made significant progress towards universal health coverage. However, millions of people still have no access at all to health care.
- To achieve universal health coverage, over a billion more people need to benefit from health services by 2023.
- The main aim is to ensure that everyone, everywhere is able to access essential quality health services without facing financial hardship.
- The Day is celebrated around a specific health theme every year to highlight a priority area of concern for the World Health Organisation.
- The celebration is marked by activities which extend beyond the day itself and serves as an opportunity to focus worldwide attention on these important aspects of global health.

What is Universal health coverage?

- Universal health coverage (UHC) is about ensuring all people and communities have access to quality health services where and when they need them, without suffering financial hardship.
- It includes the full spectrum of services needed throughout life—from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care—and is best based on a strong primary health care system.
- Achieving UHC is one of the key targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

WORLD HERITAGE DAY

- Every year, 18th April is celebrated Worldwide as World Heritage Day to create awareness about nHeritage among communities.
- Theme: The theme for this year's celebrations is 'Rural Landscapes', which is related to the theme of the 2019 ICOMOS Scientific Symposium on Rural heritage that will take place in Marrakesh, Morocco in October.
- There are 37 World Heritage Sites located in India. These include 29 cultural sites, seven natural sites and one mixed site. India has the sixth largest number of sites in the world.

What is a World Heritage site?

- A World Heritage site is classified as a natural or man-made area or a structure that is of international importance, and a space which requires special protection.
- These sites are officially recognised by the UN and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, also known as UNESCO. UNESCO believes that the sites classified

as World Heritage are important for humanity, and they hold cultural and physical significance.

Background:

- In 1982, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) announced, 18 April as the “World Heritage Day”, approved by the General Assembly of UNESCO in 1983, with the aim of enhancing awareness of the importance of the cultural heritage of humankind, and redouble efforts to protect and conserve the human heritage.

What are rural landscapes and why are they significant?

- In the ICOMOS “Principles concerning rural landscapes as heritage”, adopted by the ICOMOS General Assembly in 2017, rural landscapes are defined as “terrestrial and aquatic areas co-produced by humannature interaction used for the production of food and other renewable natural resources, via agriculture, animal husbandry and pastoralism, fishing and aquaculture, forestry, wild food gathering, hunting, and extraction of other resources, such as salt. Rural landscapes are multifunctional resources.
- At the same time, all rural areas have cultural meanings attributed to them by people and communities: all rural areas are landscapes.”
- Rural landscapes encompass an increasing accumulation of tangible and intangible heritage which is in constant adaptation to environmental, cultural, social, political and economic conditions. They are the most common type of continuing cultural landscape.

Earth Day 2019

- Earth Day 2019 observed on 22nd April 2019 marks the 49th annual Earth Day. Earth Day 2019 is observed with the theme Protect Our Species.
- The theme Protect Our Species aims to highlight that nature’s gifts to our planet are the millions of species. But unfortunately, human beings have irrevocably upset the balance of nature. As a result, the world is facing the greatest rate of extinction and the rapid extinction of species in our world today is the result of human activity.
- The Earth Day 2019 through the theme Protect our Species urges people to:
- Educate and raise awareness about the accelerating rate of extinction of millions of species and the causes and consequences of this phenomenon.
- Achieve major policy victories that protect broad groups of species as well as individual species and their habitats.
- Build and activate a global movement that embraces nature and its values. Encourage individual actions such as adopting a plant-based diet and stopping pesticide and herbicide use.

Earth Day:

- Earth Day was formally proposed by John McConnell at UNESCO conference on Environment in 1969.
- Later in 1971, a proclamation was signed to observe international Earth Day annually on the Vernal Equinox by UN Secretary-General U Thant and was first celebrated in 1970.
- Since April 22nd it is celebrated every year in more than 193 countries and the celebrations are coordinated globally by the Earth Day Network.
- Earth Day celebrations are a way to remind humans of the environmental deterioration caused by them and advise them to turn off the electronic devices that are not in use or

taking public transport to reduce the emission levels. It recognises that Earth and its ecosystems provide its inhabitants with life and sustenance.

- On April 22, 1970, millions of people took to the streets to protest the negative impacts of 150 years of industrial development.
- In the U.S. and around the world, smog was becoming deadly and evidence was growing that pollution led to developmental delays in children. Biodiversity was in decline as a result of the heavy use of pesticides and other pollutants.
- The global ecological awareness was growing, and the US Congress and President Nixon responded quickly. In July of the same year, they created the Environmental Protection Agency, and robust environmental laws such as the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act, among many.
- Earth Day 2018 Theme : End Plastic Pollution

World Book Day 2019

- 23rd of April is observed as World Book Day by UNESCO and other related organisations every year.
- The city of Sharjah has been selected as the World Book Capital for the year 2019.
- World Book Day 2019 is the 24th edition and the theme is centred around round celebrating literature and reading with a particular focus on enhancing and protecting indigenous languages.
- The theme is in line with the celebration of the International Year of the Indigenous Languages by the UN.
- World Book Day, also known as World Book and Copyright Day, or International Day of the Book, is an annual event organized by the United Nations Educational, scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to promote reading, publishing and copyright.
- World Book Day was first celebrated on 23 April 1995, and continues to be recognized on that day. A related event in the United Kingdom and Ireland is observed in March.

Genesis of the World Book Day:

- Often also called the World Book and Copyright Day, it aims to promote the joy of books and the art of reading. World Book Day recognises that books are a link between the past and the future, a bridge between cultures and generations.
- UNESCO chose 23rd April for the World Book Day to pay tribute to great literary figures including William Shakespeare, Miguel Cervantes and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega who died on this day and was finalised in the year 1995 in the UNESCO General Conference, held in Paris.
- Further UNESCO and organisations representing publishers, booksellers and libraries select World Book Capital for a year to maintain the celebrations of books and reading.
- For the year 2019, Sharjah, UAE has been declared as the World Book Capital. It will be preceded by Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in the year 2020.

APPOINTMENTS

PRESIDENT OF WORLD BANK

- David Malpass has been appointed as the President of World Bank. He was nominated by the US president Donald Trump.

Appointment of the President of World Bank:

- As per the guidelines of the World Bank, the World Bank president must have:
- A proven track record of leadership.
- Experience managing large organizations with international exposure, and a familiarity with the public sector.
- Ability to articulate a clear vision of the Bank's development mission.
- A firm commitment to and appreciation for multilateral cooperation.
- Effective and diplomatic communication skills, impartiality, and objectivity.

Who can nominate?

- Executive directors of the World Bank can nominate candidates for the post and the candidate must be citizens of one of the bank's member countries and cannot be a bank governor, executive director or alternate.
- If there are more than three candidates, there would be a shortlisting process to narrow the field through an informal straw poll. Then the shortlisted candidates will be interviewed by the board. The board will then make a final selection through a majority vote.

Number of votes needed to win:

- To win the presidency of the World Bank, a candidate must win approval from the institution's executive board, which has 25 members.
- The US holds a 16% share of board voting power hence more often it is the US-backed candidate gets elected for the post of the president.

Justice Pradeep Nandrajog Sworn In As Chief Justice Of Bombay High Court

- Pradeep Nandrajog is succeeding Justice Naresh Patil, who retired as Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court.
- He was earlier Chief Justice of the Rajasthan High Court.
- He now succeeds Justice Naresh Patil, who retired as Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court on Saturday.
- Maharashtra Governor Ch Vidyasagar Rao administered the oath of office to Justice Nandrajog at a brief ceremony held at the Raj Bhawan, the governor's office said in a statement.
- Mr Rao and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis welcomed Justice Nandrajog by presenting him bouquets of flowers.
- State Higher and Technical Education Vinod Tawde, Mumbai Mayor Vishwanath Mahadeshwar, judges of the Bombay High Court and the Rajasthan High Court, retired Chief Justice Mohit Shah and Lokayukta M L Tahaliyani were present on the occasion.
- Justice Nandrajog, 61, was enrolled as an advocate with the Bar Council of Delhi in 1981.
- As a lawyer, he specialised in arbitration, commercial, service and company matters and also land revenue, elections, etc.
- He served as counsel for the Municipal Corporation of Delhi for about six years. Justice Nandrajog was elevated as an additional judge of the Delhi High Court on December 20, 2012.
- He was appointed Chief Justice of the Rajasthan High Court on April 2, 2017

ENVIRONMENT

The hump-backed mahseer is now 'critically endangered'- IUCN

- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has listed Hump-backed Mahseer as Critically Endangered in the Red List of Threatened Species.

Hump-backed Mahseer:

- The Hump-backed Mahseer is a species of freshwater ray-finned fish and is referred to as tiger of the water.
- The hump-backed mahseer—a large freshwater fish also called the tiger of the water and found only in the Cauvery river basin (including Kerala's Pambar, Kabini and Bhavani rivers)—is now "Critically Endangered"
- The Hump-backed Mahseer is found only in the Cauvery river basin including Pambar, Kabini and Bhavani rivers. There are about 16 species of mahseer in India.
- There is a need for strong willingness and cooperation from a range of stakeholders in three states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka across the River Cauvery which is one of India's most contested rivers.
- Shoal, an international organisation working to conserve freshwater species has initiated 'Project Mahseer' in collaboration with other stakeholders to enable conservation action for the hump-backed mahseer.

Hornbill:

- Great hornbill which was earlier categorised as "Near Threatened". It is now "Vulnerable" due to high hunting pressure coupled with habitat loss and deforestation. The wreathed hornbill has moved from "Least Concern" to "Vulnerable" by IUCN.

About IUCN red list of threatened species:

- The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species is the world's most comprehensive inventory of the global conservation status of plant and animal species.
- It uses a set of quantitative criteria to evaluate the extinction risk of thousands of species. These criteria are relevant to most species and all regions of the world. With its strong scientific base, The IUCN Red List is recognized as the most authoritative guide to the status of biological diversity.

The IUCN Red List Categories:

- The IUCN Red List Categories define the extinction risk of species assessed. Nine categories extend from NE (Not Evaluated) to EX (Extinct).
- Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN) and Vulnerable (VU) species are considered to be threatened with extinction.

Earth Hour observed across the World

- Earth Hour 2019 was witnessed on March 30 by turning off lights at 8:30 pm local time for an hour as a call for global action on climate change.

- The theme of Earth Hour 2019 is #Connect2Earth. The theme signifies humanities connection to Earth and nature is undeniable: our planet's gain is everyone's gain.
- Nature not only provides us with all the things we need to live – from the air we breathe to the water we drink, and from the shelter we need to the economy we rely on – but also makes our lives better.
- However, its growing loss puts this all under threat. World Wide Fund for Nature has partnered with the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to create connect2earth movement.
- The movement partners to engage millions of people worldwide to speak up on why nature matters and take the lead in action against the harm being done to the planet we all call home.

Earth Hour:

- Earth Hour is held annually by encouraging individuals, communities, and businesses to turn off nonessential electric lights for one hour, from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. on a specific day towards the end of March, as a symbol of commitment to the planet.
- Earth Hour which began as a symbolic lights out event in Sydney in 2007 it is now the world's largest grassroots movement for the environment, inspiring millions of people to take action for our planet and nature. Earth Hour is organized by the World Wide Fund for Nature.
- Its goal is to raise awareness for sustainable energy use and create a more environmentally sustainable lifestyle.
- Since its inception, it has become annual global environmental event (movement). Now it has grown to engage more than 7,000 cities and towns across 172 countries worldwide.

BT BRINJAL: In NEWS

- Farmer groups have alleged that Btbrinjal, a genetically modified variety, is being cultivated illegally in Haryana.

Background:

- India banned Btbrinjal in 2010. The debate around BT brinjal started in 2000 when Mahyco (Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Co) came up with a GM brinjal. Seeds were exported to Bangladesh and Philippines in 2006, as the civil society resisted field trials in India.
- In 2013, the cultivation of Br brinjal was taken up by the Bangladesh government with initially successful results. A few years down the line, however, the crops lost their resistance to pests.

Need of the hour- the GEAC should:

- Visit the farms and conduct tests
- Identify the source of seeds
- Destroy GM crops
- Compensate losses incurred by farmers
- Penalise distributing companies
- Form a mechanism to avoid such incidents in the future

What is a GM crop?

- A GM or transgenic crop is a plant that has a novel combination of genetic material obtained through the use of modern biotechnology.
- For example, a GM crop can contain a gene(s) that has been artificially inserted instead of the plant acquiring it through pollination. The resulting plant is said to be "genetically

modified” although in reality all crops have been “genetically modified” from their original wild state by domestication, selection, and controlled breeding over long periods of time.

Do we need GM crops? Yes and why?

- Higher crop yields.
- Reduced farm costs.
- Increased farm profit.
- Improvement in health and the environment.

No and why?

- Lack of clarity: It is clear that the technology of genetic engineering is an evolving one and there is much, especially on its impact on human health and environment that is yet to be understood properly. The scientific community itself seems uncertain about this.
- While there are many in this community who feel that the benefits outweigh the risks, others point to the irreversibility of this technology and uncontrollability of the Genetically Modified Organisms (**GMOs**) once introduced in the ecosystem. Hence, they advocate a precautionary approach towards any open release of GMOs.
- Threat to domestic crops: One of the concerns raised strongly by those opposing GM crops in India is that many important crops like rice, brinjal, and mustard, among others, originated here, and introducing genetically modified versions of these crops could be a major threat to the vast number of domestic and wild varieties of these crops.
- In fact, globally, there is a clear view that GM crops must not be introduced in centres of origin and diversity. India also has mega biodiversity hotspots like the Eastern Himalayas and the Western Ghats which are rich in biodiversity yet ecologically very sensitive. Hence it will only be prudent for us to be careful before we jump on to the bandwagon of any technology.
- There is also a potential for pests to evolve resistance to the toxins produced by GM crops and the risk of these toxins affecting nontarget organisms. There is also the danger of unintentionally introducing allergens and other anti-nutrition factors in foods.

Prashant Bhushan sends notice to Centre on Bt Brinjal: Demands freeze on all genetically modified organisms

- Senior advocate Prashant Bhushan has sent a legal notice to Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan asking for a freeze on all genetically modified organisms, including field trials.
- Though growing Bt brinjal is illegal in India, Mr. Bhushan’s letter comes in the aftermath of activist groups recently proffering evidence of Bt Brinjal, a GM crop, being grown in a farmer’s field in Haryana.
- Mr. Bhushan’s letter demands that the Environment Ministry “...uproot and destroy planted Bt brinjal in farms and seedlings in nurseries, undertake a scaled-up exercise of testing of seeds and plantings (for the presence of Bt genes) and, ascertain the supply chain - from seed developers to intermediaries.”
- Developed by the Maharashtra-based seed company, Mahyco, Bt brinjal was the first food crop made to contain an insecticidal protein, called cry1 ac, sourced from the genes of the soil bacterium, *Bacillus thuringiensis*.
- Though this was cleared for commercial cultivation it was put in deep-freeze, by former Union Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh in 2010 on the grounds that there was scientific and public disagreement on its safety.

NCR districts switch to Euro-VI grade fuels (BS-VI fuels)

- The supply of ultra-clean Euro-VI grade fuel (also known as Bharat Stage VI grade fuel) began in cities adjoining the National Capital Region (NCR) on April 1, 2019.
- Several cities in the 12 neighboring districts of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh including Agra switched over to the cleaner fuel.
- The Bharat Stage VI grade fuel, both petrol and diesel containing 10 parts per million (ppm), is being supplied in Alwar, Bharatpur, Karauli and Dholpur in Rajasthan and Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Ghaziabad, Gautam Budh Nagar, Baghpat, Hapur, Bulandshahr, Shamli and Agra in Uttar Pradesh.
- However, the supplies to Gurugram and Faridabad, which were to get Euro-VI grade fuel from April 1, have been postponed.
- The Euro-VI grade fuel will be rolled out across India from April 2020. The Supreme Court on October 24, 2018 ruled that no Bharat Stage-IV vehicle shall be sold across the country with effect from April 1, 2020.

Delhi became first city to roll-out BS-VI fuel:

- Delhi in April 2018 became the first city in the country to roll-out ultra-clean Bharat Stage VI (BS-VI) grade fuel, both petrol and diesel.

Transition from Euro-IV grade to Euro-VI grade:

- India had in 2015 decided to leapfrog to Euro-VI emission norm compliant petrol and diesel from April 2020, from the Euro-IV grade at present. These norms are based on similar norms in Europe called Euro 4 and Euro 6.
- One of the major differences between BS-IV and BS-VI fuel is the presence of sulphur. The BS-VI fuel is expected to reduce the amount of sulphur released from 50 parts per million (ppm) to 10 ppm.
- Moreover, the emission of nitrogen oxides (NOx) from diesel and petrol engines is also expected to reduce by nearly 70 percent and 25 percent respectively.

What are Bharat Stage norms?

- Bharat Stage emission standards were introduced in year 2000 in line with recommendations made by RA Mashelkar Committee.
- These emission standards were set up by the Union Government to regulate the output of air pollutants from internal combustion engine equipment, including motor vehicles.
- The different norms are brought into force in accordance with the timeline and standards set up by the Central Pollution Control Board which comes under the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change.
- The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) in its 'The Auto Fuel Policy 2003' had recommended implementing BS-VI norms by 2023 by compressing the technology development time by one year.

Why is it important to upgrade these norms?

- Upgrading to stricter fuel standards helps tackle air pollution.

- Global automakers are betting big on India as vehicle penetration is still low here, when compared to developed countries. At the same time, cities such as Delhi are already being listed among those with the poorest air quality in the world. The national capital's recent odd-even car experiment and judicial activism against the registration of big diesel cars shows that governments can no longer afford to relax on this front.
- With other developing countries such as China having already upgraded to the equivalent of Euro V emission norms a while ago, India has been lagging behind. The experience of countries such as China and Malaysia shows that poor air quality can be bad for business. Therefore, these reforms can put India ahead in the race for investments too.

ECONOMICS AND HRD

WAYS AND MEANS ADVANCES (WMA)- RBI sets the limits:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in consultation with the government of India has set the limits for Ways and Means Advances (WMA) for the first half of the financial year 2019-20 (April 2019 to September 2019) at Rs 75000 crore.

What is WMA?

- The Reserve Bank of India gives temporary loan facilities to the centre and state governments as a banker to government. This temporary loan facility is called Ways and Means Advances (WMA).

The WMA for the Central Government:

- The WMA scheme for the Central Government was introduced on April 1, 1997, after putting an end to the four-decade old system of adhoc (temporary) Treasury Bills to finance the Central Government deficit.
- The WMA scheme was designed to meet temporary mismatches in the receipts and payments of the government.
- This facility can be availed by the government if it needs immediate cash from the RBI. The WMA is to be vacated after 90 days. Interest rate for WMA is currently charged at the repo rate. The limits for WMA are mutually decided by the RBI and the Government of India.

Overdraft:

- When the WMA limit is crossed the government takes recourse to overdrafts, which are not allowed beyond 10 consecutive working days. The interest rate on overdrafts would be 2 percent more than the repo rate.
- The minimum balance required to be maintained by the Government of India with the Reserve Bank of India will not be less than Rs.100 crore on Fridays, on the date of closure of Government of India's financial year and on June 30, the date of closure of the annual accounts of the RBI, and not less than Rs.10 crore on other days.
- The cash management of GoI has considerably deteriorated in the recent past, with situations of large surplus and large deficit. This has put tremendous pressure of RBI with respect to liquidity management and conduct of monetary policy.

WMA Scheme for State Governments:

- Under the WMA scheme for the State Governments, there are two types of WMA – Special and Normal WMA.
- Special WMA is extended against the collateral (mortgaging) of the government securities held by the State Government.

- After the exhaustion of the special WMA limit, the State Government is provided a normal WMA. The normal WMA limits are based on three-year average of actual revenue and capital expenditure of the state. The withdrawal above the WMA limit is considered an overdraft.
- A State Government account can be in overdraft for a maximum 14 consecutive working days with a limit of 36 days in a quarter. The rate of interest on WMA is linked to the Repo Rate. Surplus balances of State Governments are invested in Government of India 14-day Intermediate Treasury bills in accordance with the instructions of the State Governments.

COMPETITION COMMISSION OF INDIA (CCI)

- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) was established under the Competition Act, 2002 for the administration, implementation and enforcement of the Act, and was duly constituted in March 2009.
- Chairman and members are appointed by the central government.

The following are the objectives of the Commission:

- To prevent practices having adverse effect on competition.
- To promote and sustain competition in markets.
- To protect the interests of consumers.
- To ensure freedom of trade.

Functions of the commission:

- It is the duty of the Commission to eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition, promote and sustain competition, protect the interests of consumers and ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.
- The Commission is also required to give opinion on competition issues on a reference received from a statutory authority established under any law and to undertake competition advocacy, create public awareness and impart training on competition issues.

The Competition Act:

- The Competition Act, 2002, as amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007, prohibits anticompetitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and M&A), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

NIRF 2019 RANKINGS

- NIRF 2019 rankings have been released.
- The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) rankings have been released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The rankings list the best institutions and universities of India.
- The NIRF ranking framework instituted in 2016 evaluates institutions on five broad generic groups of parameters, including Teaching, Learning and Resources, Research and Professional Practice, Graduation Outcomes, Outreach and Inclusivity and Perception.

Top 5 Engineering Institutions in India-2019:**Top 5 Universities on India -2019:**

Rank	Engineering institution	Rank	University
1	Indian Institute of Technology, Madras	1	Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru
2	Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi	2	Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
3	Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay	3	Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi
4	Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur	4	University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad
5	Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur	5	Calcutta University, Kolkata

Top 5 Colleges:-2019

Rank	College
1	Miranda House, Delhi
2	Hindu College, Delhi
3	Presidency College, Chennai
4	Stephen's College, Delhi
5	Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi

What is Institutions of Eminence scheme?

- The institutes of eminence scheme under the Union human resource development (HRD) ministry aims to project Indian institutes to global recognition.

Salient features :

- The 20 selected institutes will enjoy complete academic and administrative autonomy.
- The government will run 10 of these and they will receive special funding.
- The selection shall be made through challenge method mode by the Empowered Expert Committee constituted for the purpose.
- Only higher education institutions currently placed in the top 500 of global rankings or top 50 of the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) are eligible to apply for the eminence tag.
- The private Institutions of Eminence can also come up as greenfield ventures provided the sponsoring organisation submits a convincing perspective plan for 15 years.

About NIRF:

- Started in 2015, NIRF outlines a methodology to rank educational institutions across the country.
- The parameters used for ranking broadly cover teaching, learning and resources, research and professional practices, graduation outcome, outreach and inclusivity, and perception. From 2017, besides being ranked under specific disciplines, large institutions were also given a common overall rank.
- This year as well, educational institutions across the country were ranked in nine categories – overall, universities, engineering, colleges, management, pharmacy, medical, architecture and law.

Significance of NIRF:

- Ranking promotes competition among the Universities and drive them to strive for excellence. The rankings assume significance as performance of institutions has been linked with “Institutions of Eminence” scheme.

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX 2019

- The Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has released the World Press Freedom Index 2019, reflecting growing animosity towards journalists.

Performance of various countries:

- The index has been topped by Norway again for the third year, followed by Finland and Sweden at second and third positions, respectively.
- Only 24 percent of the 180 countries and territories were classified as “good” or “fairly good”, as opposed to 26 percent last year.
- Of all the world’s regions, Americas (North and South) suffered the greatest deterioration, falling by 3.6 percent, in its regional score.
- The Middle East and North Africa region continues to be the most difficult and dangerous for journalists.
- Syria (174th) continues to be extremely dangerous for media personnel and as does Yemen (168th).
- The Asia-Pacific region continues to rank third last. The number of murdered journalists was extremely high in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. Disinformation is becoming a big problem in the region.

Observations on India:

- India’s rank dropped down to 140th from 138th in 2018, two points below the previous year.
- India has dropped two places on a global press freedom index to be ranked 140th out of 180 countries and the report indicates an increased sense of hostility towards journalists across the world, with violent attacks in India leading to at least six Indian journalists being killed in the line of their work last year.
- The report notes that at least six Indian journalists were killed in connection with their work in 2018.
- Violence against journalists including police violence, attacks by Maoist fighters and reprisals by criminal groups or corrupt politicians is one of the most striking characteristics of the current state of press freedom in India.
- The murder of journalists highlighted the many dangers that Indian journalists face, especially those working for non-English-language media outlets in rural areas.

- As per the Index, one of the most striking features of the current state of press freedom in India is violence against journalists including police violence, attacks by Maoist fighters, criminal groups and corrupt politicians.
- The media coverage in the sensitive regions like Kashmir continues to be very difficult. Even the entry of foreign reporters is prohibited in Kashmir and the Internet is often disconnected there.

About World Press Freedom Index:

- Published annually by Reporters Without Borders since 2002, the World Press Freedom Index measures the level of media freedom in 180 countries.
- It is based on an evaluation of media freedom that measures pluralism, media independence, the quality of the legal framework and the safety of journalists.
- It also includes indicators of the level of media freedom violations in each region.
- It is compiled by means of a questionnaire in 20 languages that is completed by experts all over the world.
- This qualitative analysis is combined with quantitative data on abuses and acts of violence against journalists during the period evaluated.

2019 PRESS FREEDOM INDEX- TOP 10 COUNTRIES:

<u>POSITION</u>	<u>COUNTRY</u>	<u>POSITION</u>	<u>COUNTRY</u>
1	NORWAY	6	SWITZERLAND
2	FINLAND	7	NEW ZEALAND
3	SWEDEN	8	JAMAICA
4	NETHERLANDS	9	BELGIUM
5	DENMARK	10	COSTA RICA

NATIONAL HOUSING BANK

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has sold its entire stakes in the National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development (NABARD) and National Housing Bank. The decision to divest its entire stake was taken based on the recommendations of the second Narasimham Committee.
- The government now holds a 100 per cent stake in both NHB and NABARD.

Disinvestment by RBI:

- The decision to divest its entire stake was taken based on the recommendations of the second Narasimham Committee.
- The committee had stated that RBI could not own those entities which are regulated by it.
- The government now holds a 100 per cent stake in both NHB and NABARD. Earlier in June 2018, the government had bought out the entire 59.7 per cent stake in SBI from the Reserve Bank.
- The RBI in 2010 divested 71.5% of 72.5% of its shares in NABARD and the remaining of were divested in February similarly RBI which held 100% in NHB, which was divested on 19 March 2019.

About NHB:

- NHB is an All India Financial Institution (AIFI), set up in 1988, under the National Housing Bank Act, 1987.

- It is an apex agency established to operate as a principal agency to promote housing finance institutions both at local and regional levels and to provide financial and other support incidental to such institutions and for matters connected therewith.

NABARD:

- It is an apex development and specialized bank established on 12 July 1982 by an act by the parliament of India.
- Its main focus is to uplift rural India by increasing the credit flow for elevation of agriculture & rural non farm sector.
- It was established based on the recommendations of the Committee set up by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) under the chairmanship of Shri B. Shivaraman.
- It replaced the Agricultural Credit Department (ACD) and Rural Planning and Credit Cell (RPCC) of Reserve Bank of India, and Agricultural Refinance and Development Corporation (ARDC).
- It has been accredited with “matters concerning policy, planning and operations in the field of credit for agriculture and other economic activities in rural areas in India”.

ICMR launched ‘MERA India’ to eliminate malaria from India by 2030

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) launched ‘MERA (Malaria Elimination Research Alliance) India’, with aim of eliminating Malaria from India by 2030.
- *The Indian Council of Medical Research* has launched the ‘Malaria Elimination Research Alliance (MERA) India’ – a conglomeration of partners working on malaria control – in order to prioritise, plan and scale up research to eliminate the disease from India by 2030.
- It is a collective group of partners working on malaria control. It was launched on occasion of World Malaria Day 2019 (Observed on 25 April).

MERA India:

- It aims to prioritize, plan and scale up a coordinated research to have impact on population facing malaria risk and to eliminate malaria from India by 2030.
- It complements and not duplicates international efforts to eliminate Malaria on a national scale, and simultaneously contributing to broader global agenda.
- It seeks to facilitate trans-institutional coordination and collaboration around shared research agenda, which responds to programmatic challenges, addresses gaps in available tools, and proactively contributes to targeted research.
- It holds importance for Ministry of Health and Family Welfare because of operational research.

India and Malaria:

- Declining Trend: Malaria burden has declined in India by over 80% from 2.03 million cases in 2000 to 0.39 million in 2018, and Deaths caused by malaria also declined by over 90% from 932 deaths in 2000 to 85 in 2018.
- This success of India in malaria control cases, provided foundation for leadership commitment towards eliminating malaria from India by 2030.
- The WHO report also appreciated India’s research for decline in malaria. India’s ‘The National Vector Borne Diseases Control Program (NVBDCP)’, developed a comprehensive framework to achieve overarching vision of “Malaria free India by 2030”.
- NVBDCP’s National Strategic Plan recognises critical role of research to support and guide malaria elimination efforts.

Way Forward:

- To achieve the stated objective, we need to have a coordinated approach, cutting edge research, research inputs, stick to timeline and tools which can guide national programme to develop strategies for regular changes endemicity in near malaria elimination era.

About Malaria:

- caused by a Plasmodium Parasites that is transmitted from one human to another by the bite of infected Anopheles mosquitoes.
- In humans, the parasites (called sporozoites) migrate to the liver where they mature and release another form, the merozoites.
- The majority of Malaria symptoms are caused by the massive release of merozoites into the bloodstream such as anaemia is caused by the destruction of the red blood cells.
- There are five parasites that can cause Malaria in humans and the deadliest of all is Plasmodium Falciparum.
- Children under the age of 5 and pregnant women are most susceptible to the disease.

IRDAI forms panel to review microinsurance framework : Suresh Mathur Committee

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) set up Suresh Mathur Committee to review regulatory framework on micro insurance, and to recommend measures to increase demand for such products.
- It was formed because of less than desired offtake of micro insurance products despite of their inherent benefits in the country.
- India was seen to be an exciting market and a pioneer in micro insurance sector in world, but its market penetration remains low.

Suresh Mathur Committee:

- Composition: It is a 13-member panel chaired by IRDAI's Executive Director Suresh Mathur, and comprises of representatives from IRDAI, life, general and health insurance companies in public and private sectors and NGOs.
- Its task is to suggest product designs with customer-friendly underwriting, such as easy premium payment methods and simple claims settlement procedures.
- It will suggest about if there is any change in distribution structure, including mobile-based and technology driven solutions and on creating effective awareness programmes.
- Their recommendations are to submitted within three month time frame.

Microinsurance:

- IRDAI created a special category of insurance policies called micro-insurance policies (a General or Life Insurance policy with a sum assured of Rs 50,000 or less) to promote insurance coverage among economically vulnerable sections of society. The micro-insurance is defined and enabled by IRDAI Micro-insurance Regulations, 2005.
- General Micro-Insurance product is a Health insurance contract that covers belongings like Hut, Livestock, tools or instruments or any personal accident contract and is either on an individual or group basis.
- Life Micro-Insurance product is a term insurance contract with or without return of premium, any endowment insurance contract or health insurance contract. It with or

without an accident benefits rider and is either on an individual or group basis. There is flexibility in regulations for insurers.

- Micro- Insurance Business is done by intermediaries such as Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs).
- Micro insurance Benefits- They are specifically intended for protection of low-income people, with affordable insurance products, and micro insurance promises to support sustainable livelihoods of poor.

WORLD COST OF LIVING SURVEY 2019 By Economist Intelligence Unit

- The Economist Intelligence Unit has released the report of the Worldwide Cost of Living Survey 2019.

About World Cost of Living Report :

- The Worldwide Cost of Living is a biannual Economist Intelligence Unit survey which compares more than 400 individual prices across over 150 products and services in cities around the world.
- These include food, drink, clothing, household supplies and personal care items, home rents, transport, utility bills, private schools, domestic help and recreational costs.

Salient features of the Report:

- For the first time three cities share the title of the world's most expensive city – Singapore, Hong Kong and Paris.
- This year's top ten is largely split between Asia and Europe, with Singapore representing the only city that has maintained its ranking from the previous year.
- Three Indian cities - New Delhi, Bengaluru and Chennai, are among the cheapest cities in the world.
- India is tipped for rapid economic expansion, but in per-head terms, wage and spending growth will remain low. Income inequality means that low wages are the norm, limiting household spending and creating many tiers of pricing as well as strong competition from a range of retail sources.
- Moreover, in India cheap and plentiful supply of goods into cities from rural producers with short supply chains as well as government subsidies on some products, has kept prices down, especially by Western standards.

Most expensive cities in the world:

Most cheapest cities in the world:

Rank	City	Rank	City
1	Paris, hong kong and Singapore	1	Caracus
4	Zurich	2	Damascus
5	Geneva	3	Tashkent
6	Osaka	4	Almaty
7	Seoul	5	Bangalore

Economic Intelligence Unit

- It is the world leader in global business intelligence.
- It helps businesses, the financial sector and governments to understand how the world is changing and how that creates opportunities to be seized and risks to be managed.
- It helps to produce the highest-quality research, analysis and data about countries, cities, industries and companies, and our consultancy, advisory and networking solutions help our clients to understand and navigate the toughest business challenges.

WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT

- The United Nations has released the World Happiness Report- 2019. 📄

About:

- The report was released by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network for the United Nations
- March 20 was designated as the World Happiness Day by the UN General Assembly in 2012.
- This is the 7th World Happiness Report. The first was released in April 2012 in support of a UN High level meeting on “Wellbeing and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm”.
- That report presented the available global data on national happiness and reviewed related evidence from the emerging science of happiness.
- The report ranks countries on six key variables that support well-being: income, freedom, trust, healthy life expectancy, social support and generosity.
- The happiness study ranks the countries of the world on the basis of questions from the Gallup World Poll. The results are then correlated with other factors, including GDP and social security.
- This year’s focus is on happiness and community: how happiness has been changing over the past dozen years, and how information technology, governance and social norms influence communities.
- In 2018 report, the theme was migration as one important source of global change, which revealed that each country’s life circumstances, including the social context and political institutions were such important sources of happiness that the international ranking of migrant happiness was almost identical to that of the native born.

Highlights of the 2019 Report :

- Indians are not as happy in 2019 as they were in 2018 and the country figures at 140th place, seven spots down from last year.
- The overall world happiness has fallen over the past few years, which has mostly been fuelled by a sustained drop in India.
- Finland has topped a global happiness ranking for the second year in a row.

Top 5 countriesBottom 5 countries

Rank	Country	Rank	Country
1	FINLAND	156	SOUTH SUDAN
2	DENMARK	155	AFRICAN REPUBLIC
3	NORWAY	154	AFGHANISTAN
4	ICELAND	153	TANZANIA
5	NETHERLAND	151	RAWANDA

What is Gallup Poll? :

- It is a global analytics and advice firm that helps leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems.
- It focuses on the choices and mood of employees, customers, students and citizens in countries of the world.
- It tries to know what matters most to them at work and in life and how those priorities change over time.

United Nations Sustainable Development Solution Network :

- The UN SDSN has been operating since 2012 under the auspices of the UN SecretaryGeneral.
- SDSN mobilizes global scientific and technological expertise to promote practical solutions for sustainable development, including the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Agreement.
- The aim is to accelerate joint learning and promote integrated approaches that address the interconnected economic, social, and environmental challenges confronting the world.
- SDSN works closely with United Nations agencies, multilateral financing institutions, the private sector, and civil society.
- The organization and governance of SDSN aims to enable a large number of leaders from all regions and diverse backgrounds to participate in the development of the network.
- It acts as the board of SDSN. Much of SDSN's work is led by National or Regional SDSNs, which mobilize knowledge institutions around the SDGs.
- Several Thematic Networks mobilize experts from around the world on the technical challenges of implementing the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement.
- SDSN has a small secretariat with offices in New York, New Delhi, and Paris.

SCI-TECH**EMISAT MISSION LAUNCHED BY THE ISRO:**

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has launched the country's first electronic surveillance satellite, EMISAT.

- Indian space agency, Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) on April 1, 2019 launched the electronic intelligence satellite EMISAT along with 28 other satellites of global customers.
- It was launched on-board PSLV-C45. As many as 28 small satellites of international customers were also put in space as secondary riders.
- These 28 satellites, together weighing about 220 kg, belong to Spain (1), Lithuania (2), Switzerland (1) and the United States (24). These include 20 Flock-4A satellites and 4 Lemur satellites.
- The satellites were launched aboard the PSLV-C45 from Satish Dhawan Space Center in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh. This was the 47th mission for ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) Programme and was the 71st launch vehicle mission from Sriharikota.
- For the first time, ISRO invited common people to view the launch.

EMISAT:

- Weighing 436 kg, the EMISAT Satellite has been developed for monitoring radar network by India.
- EMISAT is intended for electromagnetic spectrum measurement.
- It will help locate positions of enemy radars.

How does EMISAT work?

- EMISAT is an advanced electronic intelligence (ELINT) satellite jointly developed by ISRO-DRDO. It is meant for electromagnetic spectrum measurements.
- It is modelled after a famous Israeli spy satellite called SARAL (Satellite with ARGOS and ALTIKA). Both these satellites have the SSB-2 bus protocol — the core component for their sharp electronic surveillance capabilities across the length and width of a large country like India.
- EMISAT also has a special altimeter (a radar altitude measuring device) called 'AltiKa' that works in the Ka-band microwave region of the spectrum. The electronic surveillance payload of EMISAT was developed under a DRDO's project called KAUTILYA.
- The main capability of EMISAT is in signal intelligence — intercepting signals broadcasted by communication systems, radars, and other electronic systems. The Ka-band frequency that EMISAT is sensitive to, allows the 436-kg EMISAT — India's newest spy in the sky — to scan through ice, rain, coastal zones, land masses, forests and wave heights with ease.

Many Firsts In The Launch:

- First time ISRO is launching satellites in three different orbits.
- The PSLV-C45 launch vehicle is also the first PSLV rocket to use four strap-on motors. The four strap-on motor rockets are from the PSLV-QL range.
- This is the first time it has been envisaged to provide a microgravity environment for research organizations and academic institutes to perform experiments.
- The PSLV-C45 is also the first launch to use solar panels to make the fourth stage last longer in orbit. Using the solar panels in the fourth stage, the PSLV can provide power to attached payloads almost indefinitely.
- PSLV-C45: First Launch Vehicle to Use Solar Propulsion.

Bilateral Maritime Exercise 'AUSINDEX-19' BEGINS:

- The third edition of 'AUSINDEX-19' (Australia India Exercise), bilateral maritime exercise between Indian Navy and Royal Australian Navy, began on April 2, 2019 with the arrival of Royal Australian Navy's fleet at Visakhapatnam.
- The exercise seeks to 'strengthen and enhance mutual cooperation and interoperability between the Indian Navy and Royal Australian Navy, providing opportunities for interaction and exchange of professional views between the personnel of the two navies'.
- The third edition would involve exercises in all three dimensions with focus on Anti-Submarine Warfare Systems (ASW).

Salient features: AUSINDEX-19:

- The third edition would involve exercises in all three dimensions with focus on Anti-Submarine Warfare Systems (ASW).
- This year, the number of participating units of both the navies in the bilateral exercise is the highest till date. This increased scale of participation signifies the importance attached to the exercise.
- The exercise emphasises on India's vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and shared objectives of the two countries towards ensuring good order in the maritime domain.

Sub-sonic Cruise Missile 'Nirbhay' Successfully Test-Fired

- India's first indigenously designed and developed long-range sub-sonic cruise missile 'Nirbhay' from a test range Chandipur, Odisha.

Nirbhay Missile:

- Nirbhay missile has blended missile and aeronautical technologies which allows it to take off vertically like missile and cruise horizontally like an aircraft.
- Nirbhay is a long range, all-weather, subsonic cruise missile, with a sharper 'terrain hugging capability'. designed and developed in India by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- The missile has a two-stage missile powered by solid rocket motor booster developed by Advanced Systems Laboratory (ASL).
- Nirbhay Missile has an operational range of 1000 km and can carry warheads of up to 300 kg including nuclear warheads.
- It can be launched from various kind of platforms. It can travel with a turbofan or turbojet engine and is guided by a highly advanced inertial navigation system.
- It has the capability to loiter and cruise at 0.7 Mach, at altitudes as low as 100m.
- It is terrain hugging missile which keeps on encircling the area of its target for several minutes and then hits bull's eye' on an opportune time.
- It is difficult to detect by enemy's radars. It is capable to engage several targets in a single flight. The guidance, control and navigation system of missile is configured around indigenously designed Ring Laser Gyroscope (RLG) and MEMS-based Inertial Navigation System (INS) along with GPS system.

- It was the sixth experimental test of Nirbhay missile system and it achieved all mission objectives right from lift-off till the final splash, boosting the confidence of all scientists associated with the trial.
- The Nirbhay cruise missile is an Indian version of the American Tomahawk.

SCORPENE SUBMARINE KHANDERI

- The Navy is set to induct the second Scorpene submarine Khanderi .

About Scorpene-class submarines :

- These are a class of diesel-electric attack submarines jointly developed by the French Direction des Constructions Navales (DCN) and the Spanish company Navantia, and now by Naval Group.
- It features diesel propulsion and an additional air-independent propulsion (AIP).

Salient features:

- Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL), Mumbai, is manufacturing six Scorpene submarines under technology transfer from Naval Group of France under a 2005 contract worth \$3.75 bn.
- The entire project is expected to be completed by 2020.
- The first submarine of the class Kalvari joined service in December 2017.
- Khanderi was launched into water in January 2017 and has since been undergoing a series of trials.
- The third in the Scorpene series Karanj which was launched in January last year is in advanced stage of trials and could be ready for induction by year end.
- The fourth submarine Vela is ready to be launched into water for trials around the same time depending on the ocean tide.
- The last two submarines Vagir and Vagsheer are in advanced stages of manufacturing on the assembly line.
- The fifth submarine is in the final stages of being booted together. The 'Boot Together' is where the five separate sections are welded together to form the submarine.

Indian Navy's Submarine Programme:

- Kalvari Class: INS Kalvari is the first of the six Scorpene class submarines built under Project 75.
- Chakra Class: INS Chakra is an 8,140-tonne Akula class, nuclear-powered submarine. The submarine was commissioned in April, 2012.
- Sindhughosh Class: These are the Kilo class diesel-electric submarines. They are designated 877EKM, and were built under a contract between Rosvooruzhenie and the Ministry of Defence (India).
- The submarines have a displacement of 3,000 tonnes, a maximum diving depth of 300 meters, top speed of 18 knots, and are able to operate solo for 45 days with a crew of 53

- **Shishumar Class:** The Shishumar class vessels (Type 1500) are diesel-electric submarines. These submarines are developed by the German yard HowaldtswerkeDeutsche Werft (HDW).
- These submarines have a displacement of 1660 tons when surfaced, a speed of 22 knots (41 km/h), and a complement of 40 including eight officers. The submarines have the provision of an IKL-designed escape system.
- The first two of these vessels were built by HDW at Kiel, while the remainder have been built at Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL) Mumbai. The ships were commissioned between 1986 and 1994.
- All Submarines are prefixed with letters 'INS' when being referred to by their Indian Navy designated Names.

Varuna Naval Exercise 2019

- India and France will conduct their largest ever naval exercise 'Varuna' off Goa coast early May.

Varuna 2019:

- This is the 17th edition of the naval exercise between India and France which began on May 1 and is said to be the largest ever exercise undertaken by the two navies
- India will deploy its aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya with its MiG-29K fighters and French side would be represented by its aircraft carrier FNS Charles de Gaulle with its Rafale-M naval jets.
- The exercise will also see participation of FNS Forbin, the FNS Provence and the FNS Latouche Treville, a nuclear attack submarine, the FNS Amethyste, and the tanker FNS Marne from France and diesel-electric submarine INS Shankul, guided-missile destroyer INS Chennai, stealth frigate INS Tarkash and tanker INS Deepak, along with P-8I long-range maritime patrol aircraft and Dornier-228 planes from India.
- Varuna is a top-level naval exercise, with intensive dual carrier task group operations and antisubmarine warfare manoeuvres.

India-France Defence Cooperation:

- India and France are working closely to implement their action-oriented joint strategic vision for cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which was finalised in March 2018.
- The Military Logistics Agreement with France which provides Indian Navy access to French bases located in the Indian Ocean region including the Reunion Islands near Madagascar and Djibouti on the Horn of Africa and French navy access to Indian ports in the region is now operationalised with French anti-aircraft destroyer FNS Cassard docking at the Mumbai naval port.

Guided Missile Destroyer INS Imphal Launched

- The Indian Navy has launched its third guided missile destroyer, INS Imphal at Mazgaon Docks as part of its Project 15B.

INS Imphal:

- INS Imphal has been designed indigenously by the Indian Navy's Directorate of Naval Design, New Delhi.

- INS Imphal spans 163 metres in length, 17.4 metres at beam, and launch weight of 3037 tonnes can displace 7300 tonnes.
- INS Imphal is propelled by four gas turbines to achieve speeds in excess of 30 knots.
- INS Imphal destroyers incorporate new design concepts for improved survivability, sea keeping, stealth and ship manoeuvrability.
- Enhanced stealth features have been achieved through shaping of hull and use of radar transparent deck fitting, which make these ships difficult to detect. INS Imphal ships will be equipped to carry and operate two multiple role helicopters.

Project 15B:

- Project 15Bravo (Project 15B) is aimed at adding state-of-the-art warships to the naval fleet. INS Vishakhapatnam was the first Project 15B ship and was launched in April 2015, while the second ship, INS Mormugao, was launched in September 2016.
- Ships built under project 15B are packed with an array of state-of-the-art weapons and sensors, including multi-functional surveillance radars and vertically launched missile system for long-distance engagement of shore, sea-based and air targets.

Indian Army gets first batch of Dhanush artillery guns; Army to test AK-203 in carbine role

- The Indian army is planning to use a modified version of the AK-203 rifle in carbine role for its troops deployed during counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The Indian Army on April 8, 2019 received its first batch of Dhanush artillery guns a formal function organised at GCF, Jabalpur. The gun, which has a calibre of 155x45mm, is the first ever indigenous artillery gun of this calibre.
- The Dhanush gun system is based on Bofors acquired in the 1980s and whose purchase was mired in controversy because of alleged corruption. The gun system is expected to significantly enhance the Army's firepower.

Salient features :

- The Dhanush with a calibre of 155x45mm is classified as 'medium artillery'. The medium regiments of the Indian army's artillery arm consist of guns of this calibre and of 130mm calibre.
- The Bofors, which had played a crucial role in targeting Pakistani military positions during the 1999 Kargil War and has similar a 155mm caliber, is part of such regiments.
- Dhanush is a new generation towed artillery gun with major upgraded features over the existing 155/39 cal. FH 77 B02 gun.
- The gun system will be deployed along India's borders with Pakistan and China. It can be employed in all types of terrains.

Significance:

- The Dhanush gun system has emerged as a reliable and robust gun system at par with the world's latest artillery systems.

- The induction is being hailed as a key milestone as this is the first long range piece of artillery to be produced in India. It is expected to increase the fire power of the Indian artillery manifold.

Background :

- Dhanush has been designed and developed by the Ordnance Factory Board at the Gun Carriage Factory at Jabalpur based on the Bofors drawings.
- The OFB had received the bulk production clearance of manufacturing of 114 guns on February 18, among which six have been handed over for issuance to the Indian Army.
- Previously, the Swedish had Bofors proved its worth during the Kargil war when the gun performed exceedingly well in high altitude warfare and was considered to be a key contributor in the success of the Indian Army.

AK-203: Salient features :

- The assault rifle would be provided to troops for carrying out anti-terrorist operations. A separate tender is being floated to buy 93,000 carbines under fast track procedure.
- The Indian army is looking to try out the AK-203 in the carbine role. According to the army, more modifications can be done in the AK-203 to suit the carbine role requirement.
- The carbines are useful in close quarter combat and can be highly effective during operations like room interventions.
- Hence, efforts are under process to acquire 93,000 carbines and the Defence Ministry has formed an oversight committee to look into the case.
- A senior Lieutenant General-rank officer has been appointed as the member of the committee including other members from the Defence Ministry and the DRDO.
- The Defence Ministry is expected to take a call once the oversight committee submits its report.

Background:

- The Central government has already finalised contracts for buying two types of modern assault rifles for the Army.
- The government is also thinking to meet the requirement of carbines through foreign vendors initially and then through 'Make in India' programme under which more than three lakh carbines would be manufactured at an Indian facility.

SPORTS AND AWARDS

PM Narendra Modi awarded UAE's highest civilian honour Zayed Medal

- United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been conferred with the prestigious Zayed medal by President of the UAE Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan.
- PM Modi has been awarded in recognition of efforts in giving “a big boost” to bilateral relations between both the countries.
- The statement issued by the UAE states that PM Modi has provided “exceptional leadership” in forging a new “strategic” relationship between the two nations. It lauds Modi’s foreign policy and the way New Delhi reached out to the Islamic world.
- Previously, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping have also been conferred with the honour.

Zayed Medal:

- The ‘Order of Zayed’ is the highest civil decoration instituted by the UAE. It consists of a collar cantered by a medallion bearing the name ‘Zayed’ who is the founding father of the United Arab Emirates.
- The Order of Zayed is awarded to Heads of Government/Head of State for their international relations with UAE.

Saraswati Samman 2018

- Telugu poet K Siva Reddy has been selected for the prestigious Saraswati Samman, 2018. He has been awarded for his work Pakkaki Ottigilite which is a collection of poetry.
- K Siva Reddy was born in 1943 in a farmer’s family in Andhra Pradesh’s Guntur. He is considered as the most renowned modern poets in Telugu. Siva Reddy has also published critical essays on poetry.
- Pakkaki Ottigilite was published in 2016. It is an anthology of 104 poems in blank verse. It captures the responses of the poet over the years to social change, the evolution of his own self and his dynamic relationship with the world.

Saraswati Samman Awards:

- Saraswati Samman is an annual award bestowed upon Indian citizen for his outstanding literary work written in any 22 Indian language mentioned in Schedule VIII of Constitution and published during last 10 years.
- Saraswati Samman Award was instituted by the KK Birla Foundation in the year 1991. It is given annually for an outstanding literary work written in any official Indian language and published during the preceding 10 years.
- It carries a cash purse of Rs 15 lakh, apart from a citation and a plaque.
- Other popular literary awards constituted by the Birla Foundation are Vyas Samman (for Hindi) and Bihari Puraskar (for Hindi and Rajasthani writers of Rajasthan).

Pulitzer Prizes-2019

- The winners of the 2019 Pulitzer Prizes have been announced. The winners in the category of Letters, Drama and Music are listed below:
- Fiction: *The Overstory*, by Richard Powers (W.W. Norton).
- Drama: *Fairview*, by Jackie Sibblies Drury.
- History: *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*, by David W. Blight (Simon & Schuster).
- Biography: *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke*, by Jeffrey C. Stewart (Oxford University Press).
- Poetry: *Be With*, by Forrest Gander (New Directions).

- General Nonfiction: Amity and Prosperity: One Family and the Fracturing of America, by Eliza Griswold (Farrar, Straus and Giroux).
- Music: Prism, by Ellen Reid.
- The Pulitzer Prize is awarded for achievements in newspaper, magazine and online journalism, literature, and musical composition in the United States. Established in 1917 by provisions in the will of Joseph Pulitzer who had made his fortune as a newspaper publisher, the awards are administered by Columbia University in New York City.
- Prizes are awarded yearly in twenty-one categories. In twenty of the categories, each winner receives a certificate and a US\$15,000 cash award and the winner in the public service category of the journalism competition is awarded a gold medal.

Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize 2019

- The Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize 2019 was awarded to author Rana Dasgupta for his 2010 novel “Solo” which is a tale of estrangement and the ultimate failure of material existence. It is the second edition of the Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize.
- Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize aims to revive poetry and books that can change lives. An amount of \$10,000, a Tagore statue and a certificate for contribution to literature will be given to the awardee.
- Indian Poets, novelists and Playwrights writing in officially recognized languages or dialects of the Indian subcontinent, including English.

Other Awardees:

- Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize for social achievement was awarded to Yohei Sasakawa, the World Health Organization Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination, for “his incredible efforts to uproot leprosy and great contribution to world peace”.
- Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen was awarded as a beacon of democracy”, the organisers said.

Rabindranath Tagore Awards

- TagorePrize is founded and launched with a strong vision to be a platform and a vehicle for improving and inspiring World Peace, Literature, Art and Education.
- The prizes promotes the culture and beauty of literature just as Rabindranath Tagore had taught us to, but also, the culture and society of tolerance, harmony and non – discrimination.

FIRST IN WORLD, INDIA AND MAHARASHTRA

MOSQUIRIX: WORLD’S FIRST MALARIA VACCINE

- African Nation, Malawi will be undertaking large scale pilot tests for the world’s most advanced experimental malaria vaccine in a bid to prevent the disease. The vaccine has been recommended by WHO for pilot introduction in selected areas of 3 African countries- Ghana, Kenya and Malawi.

About Malaria:

- caused by the infectious Plasmodium
- Spread: Female Anopheles mosquitoes deposit parasite sporozoites into the skin of a human host.
- It is a life-threatening disease caused by parasites, which are transmitted by bites of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes.
- It is one of world’s leading killer disease. It is preventable and curable.

- In 2017, about 219 million cases of malaria were reported in 87 countries, and number of malaria deaths was 435 000.
- According to WHO, African Region carries highest share of global malaria burden with home to 92% of malaria cases and 93% of malaria deaths in 2017.
- Malaria is a leading cause of human morbidity and mortality. Despite huge progress in tackling the disease, there are still 212 million new cases of malaria and 430,000 malaria-related deaths worldwide each year according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). Most cases (80%) and deaths (90%) were in sub-Saharan African.

World's first vaccine against a parasitic disease: Mosquirix:

- RTS,S known by its trade name Mosquirix, uses antibodies to target proteins presented by sporozoites (such as the circumsporozoite protein of falciparum) to enhance the immune system and help prevent the parasite from infecting the liver.
- Mosquirix is also engineered using a hepatitis B viral protein and a chemical adjuvant to further boost the immune response for enhanced effectiveness.

India's efforts in this regard:

- India's progress in fighting malaria is an outcome of concerted efforts to ensure that its malaria programme is country-owned and country-led, even as it is in alignment with globally accepted strategies.
- At the East Asia Summit in 2015, India pledged to eliminate the disease by 2030. Following this public declaration, India launched the five-year National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination.
- This marked a shift in focus from malaria "control" to "elimination". The plan provides a roadmap to achieve the target of ending malaria in 571 districts out of India's 678 districts by 2022.

Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran (DAMaN) initiative: (DAMAN)

- Among states, Odisha's Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran (DAMaN) initiative is significant.
- The initiative aims to deliver services to the most inaccessible and hardest hit people of the State. The initiative has inbuilt innovative strategies to combat asymptomatic malaria.
- The programme is jointly implemented by Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Malaria Research (ICMR-NIMR), National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP), Odisha and Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV).

NEW RELEASED BOOKS

'Politics of Jugaad: The Coalition Handbook', released

- The "Politics of Jugaad: The Coalition Handbook" new book authored by journalist Saba Naqvi examines possibility of coalition government after 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

About Book:

- It examines coalition government history in India to project possibility at the end of 2019 Lok Sabha election. It questions whether 'coalitions' are inevitable even when they have been proved unstable, or

- whether they hold promise of greater democratization in our diverse nation. It also analyses possibilities of coalition formation in different states and their chances of success and failure.
- It strikes perfect balance between argument and prose, and discusses possible direction in politics and policy of India's next coalition government. It also elaborates nature of transformation in Indian political parties and their role in contemporary times.

About Author

- Saba Naqvi is one of India's renowned journalists, best known author and political analyst. Other books written by her include In Good Faith (2012), Capital Conquest (2015), and Shades of Saffron (2018).

