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IAS MENTOR is education center for Academic & Competitive examination. IAS MENTOR offers IAS/PCS Exam preparation classes.

Mission

To bring Socio-Economic justice through most powerful weapon 'EDUCATION'

Description

IAS MENTOR is an education center founded by MR.SAHBAN ALI, Advocate, Ex. Founding Member & Director of Education360.Pvt .Ltd, one of the best teachers & mentors for CIVIL SERVICES EXAMS- I.A.S./P.C.S. & his brother SUBHAN ALI selected for I.E.S Interview (UPSC), selected in RRB as Senior Section Engineer, Selected in DDA , M.Tech (IIT Delhi), B.Tech. (Civil) JMI, New Delhi.

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Common service centres to implement Ayushman Bharat

Context: Common Service Center (CSC) and National Health Accounts (NHA) have signed a memorandum of understand to implement the Ayushman Bharat scheme through three-lakh CSCs across the country.

As per the MoU:

- A beneficiary can now visit the nearby CSC to get the benefit of this scheme and CSC will help the beneficiary to identify his name in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare database and his entitlement for the scheme.
- The CSCs will help the beneficiary to scan/ upload his KYC documents for verification of his/ her identity and claim his/ her entitlement.
- The beneficiary will also have facility to print his/ her Ayushman Scheme card through the centre which will be his/ her base source claim. CSCs will also provide requisite information about the scheme and promote the same.

Ayushman Bharat:

Ayushman Bharat is *the National Health Protection Scheme*, which will cover over 10 crore poor vulnerable families (around 50 crore beneficiaries) providing coverage of up to rs.5 lakh (per family per year) for **secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation**.

It will subsume the on-going centrally sponsored schemes –Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS).

Highlights of the scheme:

Coverage: The scheme has the benefit cover of Rs. 5 lakh per family per year. To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and elderly) there will be no cap on family size and age in the scheme. The benefit cover will also include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses.

Target: The target beneficiaries of the proposed scheme will be more than 10 crore families belonging to poor and vulnerable population based on Socio Economic and caste census 2011,(SECC) database. A beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospitals across the country.

Role of state governments: State Governments will be allowed to expand AB-NHPM both horizontally and vertically. States will be free to choose the modalities for implementation. They can implement through insurance company or directly through Trust/ Society or a mixed model.

Council: For giving policy directions and fostering coordination between Centre and States, it is proposed to set up **Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Council (AB-NHPMC)** at apex level **Chaired by Union Health and Family Welfare Minister.**

Who is eligible?

It will be an entitlement based scheme with entitlement decided on the basis of deprivation criteria in the SECC database.

- The different categories in rural area include **families having only one room with kucha walls and kucha roof; families having no adult member between age 16 to 59; female headed households with no adult male member between age 16 to 59; disabled member and no able bodied adult member in the family; SC/ST households; and landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour.**
- Also, automatically included families in rural areas having any one of the following: **households without shelter, destitute, living on alms, manual scavenger families, primitive tribal groups, legally released bonded labour. For urban areas, 11 defined occupational categories are entitled under the scheme.**

What are CSCs?

Common Services Centers (CSCs) are a strategic cornerstone of the Digital India programme. They are the access points for delivery of various electronic services to villages in India, thereby contributing to a digitally and financially inclusive society.

US gives India Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 status

Context: The US has given India Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 status.

What is Strategic Trade Authorisation (STA)?

STA allows for license exception with regards to exports from the US. This type of US government authorisation allows a certain item to be exported under defined conditions without a transaction-specific license.

- **Items eligible for export to STA-1** nations include those under control for national security, chemical or biological weapons, nuclear non-proliferation, regional stability, crime control. The categories also include electronics, lasers and sensors, information security, computers and electronics, navigation, telecommunications, aerospace, etc.

Background:

- India and the United States share an interest in countering China's expanding economic and military weight and the United States has emerged as a top arms supplier to India, selling more than \$15 billion of weapons over the past decade as New Delhi modernizes its Soviet-era military.
- Looking at current exports from the US to India, 50% of those are eligible now under STA-1. This can free up \$2.1 billion in trade, make US exporters more competitive in the global marketplace, and help provide India more advanced US technology. **India is the only South Asian nation on the STA-1 list that has 36 countries. Other Asian countries designated as STA-1 are Japan and South Korea. Till recently, India was classified as an STA-2 country along with seven others.**

Rajasthan first State to implement biofuel policy

Context: Rajasthan has become the *first State in the country to implement the national policy on bio-fuels* unveiled by the Centre in May this year.

The policy lays emphasis on *increasing production of oilseeds and establish a Centre for Excellence in Udaipur* to promote research in the fields of alternative fuels and energy resources.

National Policy on bio-fuels- salient features:

Categorization: The Policy categorises bio-fuels as “Basic Bio-fuels”.

- **1st generation bio-fuels** are also called conventional bio-fuels. They are made from things like **sugar, starch, or vegetable oil.**
- **2nd generation bio-fuels** are produced from sustainable feedstock. The sustainability of a feedstock is defined by its availability, its impact on greenhouse gas emissions, its impact on land use, and by its potential to threaten the food supply. Second generation bio-fuels are often called **“advanced bio-fuels.”**
- **3rd generation bio-fuels** are bio-fuel derived **from algae.** These bio-fuels are given their own separate class because of their unique production mechanism and their potential to mitigate most of the drawbacks of 1st and 2nd generation bio-fuels.

Protection to farmers: Farmers are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce during the surplus production phase. Taking this into account, **the Policy allows use of surplus food grains for production of ethanol for blending with petrol with the approval of National Bio-fuel Coordination Committee.**

Viability gap funding: **With a thrust on Advanced Bio-fuels, the Policy indicates a viability gap funding scheme for 2G ethanol Bio refineries of Rs.5000 crore in 6 years in addition to additional tax incentives, higher purchase price as compared to 1G biofuels.**

Boost to biodiesel production: The Policy encourages setting up of supply chain mechanisms for biodiesel production from non-edible oilseeds, Used Cooking Oil, short gestation crops like banana plant (herbaceous plant).

Significance of Bio-fuels:

Bio-fuels in India are of strategic importance as it augers well with the ongoing **initiatives of the Government such as Make in India, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill Development and offers great opportunity to integrate with the ambitious targets of doubling of Farmers Income, Import Reduction, Employment Generation, Waste to Wealth Creation.**

Cabinet clears Bill to restore the provisions of SC/ST Act

Context: The cabinet has given its nod to introduce a Bill to restore the original provisions of *the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989*, which the Supreme Court had struck down in a March ruling.

The Amendment Bill seeks to insert three new clauses after Section 18 of the original Act:

- The first stipulates that for the purposes of the Act, “preliminary enquiry shall not be required for registration of a First Information Report against any person.”
- The second stipulates that the arrest of a person accused of having committed an offence under the Act would not require any approval.
- The third says that the provisions of Section 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure — which deals with anticipatory bail — shall not apply to a case under this Act, “notwithstanding any judgment or order of any Court.”

What necessitated this?

On March 20, the Supreme Court issued a slew of guidelines to protect people against arbitrary arrests under the Act, directing that public servants could be arrested only with the written permission of their appointing authority, while in the case of private employees, the Senior Superintendent of Police concerned should allow it. A preliminary inquiry should be conducted before the FIR was registered to check if the case fell within the ambit of the Act, and whether it was frivolous or motivated, the court ruled.

The ruling was greeted by a storm of protest from Dalit groups, which said the order diluted the law. However, the court refused to stay its ruling, leading to the demand from Dalit groups that the government introduce an ordinance or an Amendment Bill to restore the provisions.

About SC/ST Act:

- The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act is popularly known as POA, the SC/ST Act, the Prevention of Atrocities Act, or simply the Atrocities Act. The SC/ST Act was enacted on September 9, 1989. The rules for the Act were notified on March 31, 1995.
- The SC/ST Act lists 22 offences relating to various patterns or behaviours inflicting criminal offences and breaking the self-respect and esteem of the scheduled castes and tribes community. This includes denial of economic, democratic and social rights, discrimination, exploitation and abuse of the legal process.
- According to the SC/ST Act, the protection is provided from social disabilities such as denial of access to certain places and to use customary passage, personal atrocities like forceful drinking or eating of inedible food, sexual exploitation, injury etc, and atrocities affecting properties, malicious prosecution, political disabilities and economic exploitation.
- For speedy trial, Section 14 of the SC/ST Act provides for a Court of Session to be a Special Court to try offences under this Act in each district.
- The prime objective of the SC/ST Act is to deliver justice to marginalised through proactive efforts, giving them a life of dignity, self-esteem and a life without fear, violence or suppression from the dominant castes.

Concessional Financing Scheme (CFS)

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved the first extension of *Concessional Financing Scheme (CFS)* to support Indian Entities bidding for strategically important infrastructure projects abroad. Under the CFS, the Govt. of India has been supporting Indian Entities bidding for strategically important infrastructure projects abroad since 2015-16.

How CFS works?

- Under the Scheme, MEA selects the specific projects keeping in view strategic interest of India and sends the same to **Department of Economic Affairs (DEA)**.
- The strategic importance of a project to deserve financing under this Scheme, is decided, on a case to case basis, by a Committee chaired by **Secretary, DEA**.
- Once approved by the Committee, DEA issues a formal letter to EXIM Bank conveying approval for financing of the project under CFS.
- The Scheme is presently being operated through the **Export-Import (EXIM) Bank of India**, which raises resources from the market to provide concessional finance.
- Government of India (GOI) provides counter guarantee and interest equalization support of 2% to the EXIM Bank.
- Under the Scheme, **EXIM Bank extends credit at a rate not exceeding LIBOR** (avg. of six months) + 100 bps. The repayment of the loan is guaranteed by the foreign govt.

LIBOR : the acronym for **London Interbank Offer Rate**, is the global reference rate for unsecured short-term borrowing in the interbank market.

Significance of the scheme:

- Prior to the introduction of CFS, Indian entities were not able to bid for large projects broad since the cost of financing was very high for them and bidders from other countries such as China, Japan, Europe and US were able to provide credit at superior terms, i.e., lower interest rate and longer tenures which works to the advantage of bidders from those countries.
- Also, by having projects of strategic interest to India executed by Indian entities, the CFS enables India to generate substantial backward linkage induced jobs, demand for material and machinery in India and also a lot of goodwill for India.

Reconsider the ban on oxytocin

Context: The Union Health Ministry's ban on the retail sale and private manufacture of oxytocin will kick off from September 1.

About Oxytocin:

- Oxytocin has also been dubbed the moral molecule, and the bliss hormone due to its effects on behaviour, including its **role in female reproductive biological functions in reproduction**.
- Oxytocin is a hormone that is made in the brain, in the hypothalamus. It is transported to, and secreted by, the pituitary gland, which is located at the base of the brain.
- It acts both as a hormone and as a brain neurotransmitter.

- The release of oxytocin by the pituitary gland acts to regulate two female reproductive functions: Childbirth and Breast-feeding.

Why is it used?

The drug, a synthetic version of a human hormone, is a life-saver for women. Doctors use it to induce labour in pregnant women and to stem postpartum bleeding. So critical is its role in maternal health that the World Health Organization recommends it as the drug of choice in postpartum haemorrhage.

Why is it being banned?

The government's ban ignores its critical uses, and is motivated instead by the misuse of the hormone in the dairy industry. Because oxytocin stimulates lactation in cattle, dairy farmers inject the drug indiscriminately to increase milk production. This has spawned several unlicensed facilities that manufacture the drug for veterinary use.

- Much is unknown about the ill-effects of oxytocin on cattle. One of the concerns was that oxytocin leads to infertility in dairy animals, and some studies show this to be true.
- It has also been linked to mastitis, a painful inflammation of the udder. Milk consumers worry about exposure to it through dairy products.

State Energy Efficiency Preparedness Index'

Context: 'State Energy Efficiency Preparedness Index' has been released by Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) and Alliance for an Energy Efficient Economy (AEEE).

About the index:

- The nationwide Index is a joint effort of the NITI Aayog and BEE. The index assesses state policies and programmes.
- The Index will help in implementing national energy efficiency initiatives in states and meet both State as well as national goals on energy security, energy access and climate change.
- It has 63 indicators across Building, Industry, Municipality, Transport, Agriculture and DISCOM with 4 cross-cutting indicators.
- The Index examines states' policies and regulations, financing mechanisms, institutional capacity, adoption of energy efficiency measures and energy savings achieved.

Performance of states:

States are categorised based on their efforts and achievements towards energy efficiency implementation, as 'Front Runner', 'Achiever', 'Contender' and 'Aspirant'.

- The 'Front Runner' states in the inaugural edition of the Index are: Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, and Rajasthan based on available data.
- Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Haryana have been categorised in the second best category of 'achiever' states.

Significance of the Index:

- Such an index assumes significance in a country that is now the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases after the US and China, and which is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change. *India plans to reduce its carbon footprint by 33-35% from its 2005 levels by 2030, as part of its commitments to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted by 195 countries in Paris in 2015.*

141st birth anniversary of freedom fighter and designer of Indian

National Flag Pingali Venkayya

Who was Pingali Venkayya?

- Pingali Venkayya was **a freedom fighter and the designer of the Indian National Tricolour.**
- Initially, Venkayya came up with saffron and green colours, but it later evolved with a spinning wheel at the centre and a third colour-white. **(Lala Hans Raj Sondhi Suggested Adding A Spinning Wheel — Showing The Independent Indians Who Can Spin Their Own Clothing From Local Fibres.)**
- The flag was officially **adopted by the Indian National Congress in 1931.**

123rd Constitutional Amendment Bill

Highlights of the Bill:

The bill provides **for the grant of constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)** on par with the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.

Powers of the President: It states that the President may specify the socially and educationally backward classes in the various states and union territories. He may do this in consultation with the Governor of the concerned state.

The duties of the NCBC include investigating and monitoring how safeguards provided to the backward classes under the Constitution and other laws are being implemented and probe specific complaints regarding violation of rights.

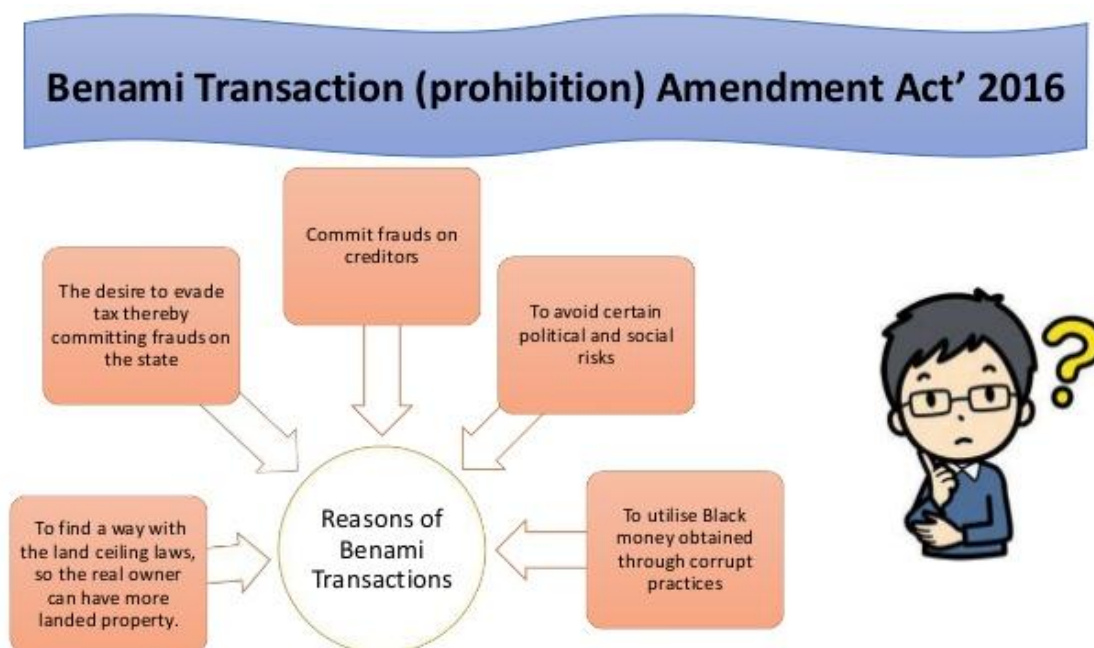
Report: The NCBC will be required to present annual reports to the President on working of the safeguards for backward classes. These reports will be tabled in Parliament, and in the state legislative assemblies of the concerned states.

Powers of a civil court: Under the Constitution Amendment Bill, the NCBC will have the powers of a civil court while investigating or inquiring into any complaints. These powers include: (i) summoning people and examining them on oath, (ii) requiring production of any document or public record, and (iii) receiving evidence.

Present status of NCBC:

- The Supreme Court, in its final verdict in the Indira Sawhney (Mandal Commission) case, had directed the establishment of the NCBC as a statutory body. Based on this, a law was passed in 1993 to set up the commission. The NCBC has been examining cases for inclusion in the BC lists for the Central government since then.

Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act



About the Benami Act:

- The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2016, designed to curb black money and passed by parliament in August, came into effect on November 1, 2016. The new law amends the 1988 Benami Transactions Act.

Highlights of the Act:

- The law provides for up to seven years' imprisonment and fine for those indulging in such transactions. The law prohibits recovery of the property held benami from benamdar by the real owner. As per the Act, properties held benami are liable for confiscation by the government, without payment of compensation.

What is benami transaction?

- A benami transaction is one where a property is held by one person and the amount for it is paid by another person. Therefore, in a benami transaction, the name of the person who paid the money is not mentioned. Directly or indirectly, the benami transaction is done to benefit the one who pays.

[World Breastfeeding Week \(August 1 to 7\)](#)

August 1 to 7 every year is observed as World Breastfeeding Week.

Organized by: World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), WHO and UNICEF.

Goal: To promote exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life which yields tremendous health benefits, providing critical nutrients, protection from deadly diseases such as pneumonia and fostering growth and development.

Significance of breastfeeding:

Breastfeeding is an important efficient and cost-effective intervention promoting child survival and health.

- Breastfeeding within an hour of birth could prevent 20% of the newborn deaths.
- Infants who are not breastfed are 15 times more likely to die from pneumonia and 11 times more likely to die from diarrhoea than children who are exclusively breastfed, which are two leading causes of death in children under-five years of age.
- In addition, children who were not breastfed are at increased risk for diabetes, obesity, allergies, asthma, childhood leukemia, sudden infant death syndrome etc. Apart from mortality and morbidity benefits, breastfeeding also has tremendous impact on improved IQ.

MAA programme:

To intensify the efforts further for promotion of breastfeeding, the Health Ministry has initiated a nationwide programme called **“MAA-Mother’s Absolute Affection” to bring undiluted focus on promotion of breastfeeding and provision of services towards supporting breastfeeding**, along with ongoing efforts of routine health systems.

- **The key components of the MAA programme** are awareness generation, promotion of breastfeeding & inter personal counselling at community level, skilled support for breastfeeding at delivery points and monitoring and Award/ recognition of health facility.
- Under this programme, **ASHA has been incentivized** for reaching out to pregnant and lactating mothers and provide information on benefits and techniques of successful breastfeeding during interpersonal communication. ANMs at all sub-centres and health personnel at all delivery points are being trained for providing skilled support to mothers referred with issues related to breastfeeding.
- Under NHM, funding support has been recommended for all States and UTs for successful implementation of the MAA programme.

UNICEF report on early initiation of breastfeeding across the world:

A new report released by UNICEF and the World Health Organisation (WHO) has ranked Sri Lanka at the top of the list of countries with early initiation of breastfeeding.

- **India ranks 56th** among the 76 countries that were analysed.
- Countries like Kazakhstan, Rwanda, Bhutan and Uruguay have fared much better than India.
- Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Montenegro are at the bottom.
- Only two in five newborns are breastfed within the first hour of life across the world.

About WABA:

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- World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declarations, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding.
- WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).

Ballistic Missile Interceptor AAD

Context: DRDO conducted the successful test of the Ballistic Missile Interceptor **Advanced Area Defence (AAD)** from **Abdul Kalam Island, Odisha**.

About Ballistic Missile Interceptor AAD:

- It is **an endo-atmospheric missile**, capable of intercepting incoming targets at an altitude of 15 to 25 kms.
- **Indigenously developed by DRDO**, the AAD interceptor is a single-stage missile powered by solid propellants.
- It has been developed **as part of indigenous efforts to have multi-layer ballistic missile defence system**, capable of destroying incoming hostile ballistic missiles.
- It is 7.5 metres tall and weighs around 1.2 tonnes.
- The interceptor missile has its own mobile launcher, secure data link for interception, independent tracking and homing capabilities and sophisticated radars.

Need for BMD:

- India follows **‘No First Use policy’**. A robust BMD provides an opportunity to the nation to strike back if a nuclear projectile is launched by an enemy state.
- BMD would shield from non-state actors initiated missile warfare and thus could avoid Mutual Destruction trap.
- BMD reduces the incentive for the enemy state to launch a nuclear attack, thus enhancing strategic stability.
- An indigenous system would reduce the import bill of defence systems from other nations.
- Technology developed for BMD can be used in other sectors, especially in space technology.

Anganwadi Centres (AWCs)

A total of **14 lakh AWCs** have been sanctioned to various States/UTs across the country which consists of about 1.36 lakh AWCs located in the urban areas. As on 01.06.2018, **13.63 lakh AWCs (rural and urban) are operational**.

As per the data captured through the ICDS Monitoring Information System, about 24.3% AWCs out of 13.63 lakh operational AWCs (rural and urban) are running in rented buildings.

What are Anganwadi Centres (AWCs)? Anganwadi is a type of rural mother and child care centre in India. They were started by the Indian government in 1975 **as part of the Integrated**

Child Development Services program to combat child hunger and malnutrition. They provide a package of six services—supplementary nutrition, referral services, immunisation, health check-up, pre-school non-formal education and health and nutrition education— to women and children.

Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS):

ICDS is one of the flagship initiatives of Govt. of India that is being implemented in the state by WCD Dept.

- ICDS seeks to provide young children with an integrated package of services such as supplementary nutrition, health care and pre-school education.
- ICDS programme seeks to provide all basic essential services to children and mothers in an integrated manner right in their villages or wards. Gradually, the scheme has been expanded to urban slums and to rural and tribal blocks.

Bhoomi Rashi and PFMS linkage

Context: The government has proposed to integrate Bhoomi Rashi with Public Financial Management System (PFMS). Integration of Public Financial Management System (PFMS) with Bhoomi Rashi is one of the key functionalities to facilitate payment related to compensation for land acquisition to all the beneficiaries directly through the Bhoomi Rashi system.

What is Bhoomi Rashi?

- Bhoomi Rashi, the portal developed by MoRTH (Ministry of Road Transport and Highway) and NIC, comprises the entire revenue data of the country, right down to 6.4 lakh villages.
- The entire process flow, from submission of draft notification by the State Government to its approval by the Hon. Minister of State for RT&H and publication in e-Gazette, is online.
- The portal, created for expediting the process of publication of notifications for Land Acquisition, is now being fully utilised for issuing the notifications.
- Bhoomi Rashi portal has been instrumental in reducing the time taken for approval and publication of notifications pertaining to land acquisition.

About PFMS:

The Public Financial Management System (PFMS) is an end-to- end solution for processing payments, tracking, monitoring, accounting, reconciliation and reporting.

- It is administered by the Department of Expenditure.
- It is implemented by the Controller General of Accounts.
- PFMS is also used for DBT payments under MGNREGA and other notified schemes of the Government of India.

Significance of PFMS: Introduction of the PFMS resulted in effectiveness and economy in public finance management through better cash management for government transparency in public expenditure and real-time information on resource availability and utilisation across schemes. It also resulted in improved programme administration and management, reduction of float in the system, direct payment to beneficiaries and greater transparency and accountability in the use of public funds.

Defence India Startup Challenge

Context: Defence Minister has unveiled the Defence India Startup Challenge.

About Defence India Startup Challenge:

- Defence India Startup Challenge is part of **iDEX (Innovation for Defence Excellence) scheme** announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in April meant to build an eco-system of innovation and entrepreneurship in India for the defence sector to make India self-reliant.
- It is **an initiative to tap startups for finding safe and futuristic Indian solutions** to critical needs of the three Armed Forces.
- **A list of 11 technologies** that the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force need, have been chosen. They included remote air vehicles, laser weapons, secure and safe communication systems and bandwidth, precision targeting systems, sensors, and protected and informed movement of soldiers in battle tanks.
- Those that come up with prototypes of usable products would be supported with Rs.1.5 crore each and friendly procurement procedures from the Ministry under **SPARK or Support for Prototype & Research Kickstart in Defence**.

Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development

Context: India has been elected as **the president of the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development**.

First time opportunity: India got the presidency of the organisation, servicing countries of the **UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)** in the field of electronic media development, for the first time by defeating Iran in the election that took place in Sri Lanka.

About Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD):

The Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) was established in 1977 under the auspices of UNESCO.

- It is a unique **regional inter-governmental organisation** servicing countries of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in the field of electronic media development.
- It is **hosted by the Government of Malaysia** and the secretariat is located in Kuala Lumpur.

Mandate:

- The AIBD is mandated to achieve a vibrant and cohesive electronic media environment in the Asia-Pacific region through policy and resource development.
- The Institute seeks to fulfill this mandate by mobilizing the intellectual and technological resources available within the national broadcasting organizations of its member countries as well as regional and international bodies through a well-established infrastructure and networking mechanism which includes government agencies, non-governmental organizations, institutions of higher learning, private sector and individual professionals.

Membership:

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- The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) are founding organisations of the Institute and they are non-voting members of the General Conference.
- The Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) is also a founding organisation of the Institute and is a non-voting member of the General Conference.
- **Full membership** of the AIBD is confined to sovereign states and they are invited to designate the broadcasting authority of the country to be the beneficiary.
- The AIBD currently has 26 Full Members (countries), represented by 34 organisations, and 67 Affiliate Members (organisations) with a total membership of 101 representing 48 countries and regions and over 50 partners in Asia, Pacific, Europe, Africa, Arab States and North America.

UNESCAP:

The **Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP or ESCAP)**, located in the United Nations Building in Rajadamnern Nok Avenue in Bangkok, Thailand, is one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, under the administrative direction of the United Nations headquarters. It was established in 1947 (then as the **UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, ECAFE**) to encourage economic cooperation among its member states. UNESCAP has 53 member States and nine Associate members, home to more than two-third of the world population. As well as countries in Asia and the Pacific, it includes France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States.

[India's first Blockchain district in Telangana](#)

Context: Tech Mahindra and the Telangana government have signed an agreement to establish a **Blockchain district in Hyderabad, a first-of-its-kind** Centre of Excellence for Blockchain in India.

What is it and how it works?

- Initially it would be a virtual cluster, connecting with the stakeholders working in the emerging technology. It would have a physical building at a later phase.
- In short, it will be “a cluster of buildings”, which will house start-ups and other stakeholders working on the development of the platform.
- Tech Mahindra, as a founding member of the Blockchain district, will provide platform and technology assistance to all the incubators in the district.
- On its part, the Telangana government would provide regulatory and policy support to promote the growth of Blockchain.

What is Blockchain technology?

- **Blockchain is a new-age technology that helps in record-keeping through the use of cryptography, a secure method of writing digital codes. With blockchain, many people can write entries into a record of information, and a community of users can check the records to reduce the scope of fraudulent practices in altering information.**

Benefits of blockchain technology:

- As a public ledger system, blockchain records and validate each and every transaction made, which makes it secure and reliable.
- All the transactions made are authorized by miners, which makes the transactions immutable and prevent it from the threat of hacking.
- Blockchain technology discards the need of any third-party or central authority for peer-to-peer transactions.
- It allows decentralization of the technology.

How blockchain can be used in public administration?

Blockchain has the potential to optimize the delivery of public services, further India's fight against corruption, and create considerable value for its citizens.

- By maintaining an immutable and chronologically ordered record of all actions and files ("blocks") linked together ("chain") in a distributed and decentralized database, Blockchain creates an efficient and cost-effective database that is virtually tamper-proof. By doing so, blockchain promises to create more transparent, accountable, and efficient governments.
- In addition to creating a more efficient government, blockchain can also help create a more honest government. A public blockchain, like the one Bitcoin uses, records all information and transactions on the decentralized database permanently, publicly, and most importantly, securely. By allowing governments to track the movement of government funds, blockchain can hold state and local actors accountable for any misappropriations.
- Blockchain not only deters corruption through accountability, but it can also do so by bypassing the middleman entirely. Earlier this year, the World Food Programme began testing blockchain-based food and cash transactions in Pakistan's Sindh province. Refugees in Jordan's Azraq camp are now using the same technology, in conjunction with biometric registration data for authentication, to pay for food.

IMPRINT-2

Context: For advancing research in the high education institutions, the government has approved 122 new research projects at a cost of Rs 112 crore under IMPRINT-2 covering Energy, Security, Healthcare, Advanced Materials, ICT and Security/Defence domains.

About IMPRINT:

- ***IMPacting Research, INnovation and Technology (IMPRINT)*** is a national initiative of the ***Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)*** designed to address all major engineering challenges relevant to India through an inclusive and sustainable mode of translational research.
- IMPRINT-2 has been approved by Government of India (GoI) with a revised strategy under which, this national initiative will be jointly funded and steered by MHRD and Department of Science and Technology (DST).

- While any faculty member from an MHRD funded Higher Education Institute (HEI) including Centrally Funded Technical Institution (CFTI) may lead as the Principal Investigator (PI), single or multiple partners from stake holder ministry, institutions, PSUs, strategic agencies and industry are welcome as Co-PI, partner or collaborator.
- **Proposals under IMPRINT II Projects should (a) address any declared theme** (thrust area) under one of the 10 domains of IMPRINT, and (b) connect either with already identified or new research topics defined by the PI under the same 10 domains.
- Projects proposals should provide clear and convincing evidence of promise for translational research leading to viable technology (product, process or prototype) development.

Jal Marg Vikas Project

Context: Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) recently held a large public outreach along Ganga for Jal Marg Vikas Project. Two-Day long advocacy meetings were held in Jharkhand leg of Ganga.

About Jal Marg Vikas Project:

What is it?

- The Jal Marg Vikas Project seeks to facilitate plying of vessels with capacity of 1,500-2,000 tonnes in the **Haldia- Varanasi** stretch of the River Ganga. The major works being taken up under JMVP are development of fairway, Multi-Modal Terminals, strengthening of river navigation system, conservancy works, modern **River Information System (RIS)**, **Digital Global Positioning System (DGPS)**, night navigation facilities, modern methods of channel marking etc.

Implementation: The JMVP, which is expected to be completed by March, 2023, is being implemented with the financial and technical support of the World Bank. The project will enable commercial navigation of vessels with the capacity of 1500-2,000 tons on NW-I.

Benefits of this project: Alternative mode of transport that will be environment friendly and cost effective. The project will contribute in bringing down the logistics cost in the country. Mammoth Infrastructure development like multi-modal and inter-modal terminals, **Roll on – Roll off (Ro-Ro) facilities**, ferry services, navigation aids. Socio-economic impetus; huge employment generation.

- **Roll-on/roll-off (RORO or ro-ro) ships** are vessels designed to carry wheeled **cargo**, such as **cars, trucks, semi-trailer trucks, trailers, and railroad cars**, that are driven on and off the ship on their own wheels or using a platform vehicle, such as a **self-propelled modular transporter**. This is in contrast to **lift-on/lift-off (LoLo)** vessels, which use a **crane** to load and unload cargo.

Environmental challenges:

Though the project is ambitious in its intent, it does not account for the monetary value of the environmental costs that are imposed upon society. The river Ganga meanders across the landscape and spreads over its riverbed making pools and shallow areas. Fish and turtles lay eggs in these shallow areas. But thanks to dredging, which is already being done in the Ganga under the NW-1 project, the river is now channelised in one deep channel. The river no longer meanders and no longer has pools and shallow areas, destroying the habitat of fish and turtles. **The stretch of**

the Ganga near Varanasi has been declared as a turtle sanctuary and studies in other countries indicate that large numbers get hit by fast-moving tourist boats because turtles move slowly. The stretch of the Ganga near Bhagalpur has been declared a wildlife sanctuary for the conservation of the Ganges Dolphin. This animal does not have eyes. It navigates and catches its prey by the sound made by the movement of other aquatic creatures. The plying of large barges will create a high level of sound and make it difficult for them to survive. The paint on ships and barges will also pollute the water. The carbon dioxide released by the ships will be absorbed more by the water because of its proximity and this too pollutes the river.

What can be done to minimize impacts in sensitive zones?

- A ban on dredging in protected habitat areas. In other areas that are known to be the habitat of valued aquatic species, no dredging should be allowed in the breeding and spawning seasons.
- The speed of barges travelling along the protected areas of the sanctuaries should be restricted to 5km per hour. All vessels plying on the Ganga should be fitted with noise control and animal exclusion devices so that aquatic life is not unduly disturbed. All vessels will also have to comply with 'zero discharge' standards to prevent solid or liquid waste from flowing into the river and affecting its biodiversity.

Know about IWAI:

- Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is the statutory authority in charge of the waterways in India. Its headquarters is located in Noida, UP. It does the function of building the necessary infrastructure in these waterways, surveying the economic feasibility of new projects and also administration.

SBM- Gramin

Overall Recommendations

				
Improve incentives and capacity building activities	Incorporate technology solutions	Involve voluntary monitors	Incorporate program outcome driven audit	Sharpen communication (IEC/IPC)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Two-stage incentives for beneficiaries •Provide officials with capacity building and training opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •State level MIS+FMS* solution, with alerts •External sponsorship of technology •Best practices database 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Community involvement in monitoring of construction to encourage ownership of the SBM scheme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Shift focus from just physical verification to beneficiary feedback, usage of toilet, and long term sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Government to structure IEC content and develop toolkits as guidelines •Partner with CSOs to build effective communication to beneficiaries

* Financial Management System

World Health Organisation has released the progress report on potential health impact from increased sanitation coverage through the Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin (SBM-G).

Highlights of the report: Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin (SBM-G) will result in preventing more than three lakh deaths due to diarrhoea and protein-energy malnutrition between 2014-October 2019.

- India's rural sanitation coverage has escalated to 89.07% till August 2. Under the SBM-G, 19 States and Union Territories were declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) and 7.9 crore toilets were built, while 421 districts were declared ODF. Also, more than 4.9 lakh villages in the country were declared ODF.
- The WHO study showed that before the initiation of SBM-G, unsafe sanitation caused 199 million cases of diarrhoea annually and that by 2019, the initiative aims to achieve 100% sanitation coverage.

About SBM- Gramin: Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Gramin, launched on October 2, 2014 is the largest behaviour change campaign ever attempted in the field of sanitation in the world.

Aim: It aims to build an ODF (Open Defecation Free) and Swachh Bharat by October 2, 2019 as a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary.

'Ujjwala' programme

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana has achieved the 5 crore mark. Lok Sabha Speaker Smt Sumitra Mahajan handed over 5 crore LPG connection under Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) to Smt Takrdiran of Delhi in the Parliament House.

The target:

- Through PMUY, initially, 5 crore BPL households were targeted for providing deposit free LPG connections to BPL households by 31st March, 2019. In a record time of 28 months for its launch, PMUY achieved the initial target of providing 5 crores LPG connection to BPL households.
- In the current year, considering the huge success of the Scheme, target was revised to 8 crores with budgetary allocation of Rs 12,800 crore.

About the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana aims to provide LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to poor households.

Who is eligible? Under the scheme, an adult woman member of a below poverty line family identified through the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) is given a deposit-free LPG connection with financial assistance of Rs 1,600 per connection by the Centre.

Some of the objectives of the scheme are:

- Empowering women and protecting their health.
- Reducing the serious health hazards associated with cooking based on fossil fuel.
- Reducing the number of deaths in India due to unclean cooking fuel.
- Preventing young children from significant number of acute respiratory illnesses caused due to indoor air pollution by burning the fossil fuel.

What makes LPG adoption necessary?

According to the World Health Organization, solid fuel use is responsible for about 13% of all mortality and morbidity in India (measured as Disability-Adjusted Life Years), and causes about 40% of all pulmonary disorders, nearly 30% of cataract incidences, and over 20% each of ischemic

heart disease, lung cancer and lower respiratory infection.

Strategic Investment Fund under NIIF

As on date, three funds have been established by the Government under the NIIF platform and registered with SEBI as Category II Alternative Investment Funds and **National Investment and Infrastructure Fund II ('Strategic Fund')** is one of those three funds.

The other two funds are National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (or Master Fund) and NIIF Fund of Funds – I.

About Strategic Fund:

- The objective of National Investment and Infrastructure Fund II ('Strategic Fund') is to invest largely in equity and equity-linked instruments. **The Strategic Fund will focus on green field and brown field investments in the core infrastructure sectors.**

About NIIF:

- NIIF was set up in 2015 as an investment vehicle for funding commercially viable **greenfield, brownfield and stalled projects in the infrastructure sector.** NIIF will invest in areas such as **energy, transportation, housing, water, waste management and other infrastructure-related sectors in India.**
- **The corpus of the fund** is proposed to be around **Rs40,000 crore**, with the government investing 49% and the rest to be raised from third-party investors such as sovereign wealth funds, insurance and pension funds, endowments etc.
- **NIIF's strategy** includes anchoring equity, quasi-equity and debt funds in partnership with investors targeting investments across the relevant sectors in India.

Kadaknath chicken meat from Jhabua gets GI tag

The famous Kadaknath chicken meat from Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh has now got a Geographical Indication (GI) tag. GI registration is valid up to a period of around five years till February 7, 2022.

Kadaknath:

- Kadaknath is famous for its delicious black meat ('kali-masi'), which is supposed to be invigorating and full of medicinal properties.
- The Indian poultry breed is famous for its unique black colour of feathers as well as black meat, which is claimed to contain **low cholesterol level as compared to the routine table chicken.**
- **Kadaknath is found mainly in the tribal district of Jhabua. This poultry is reared mainly by the tribal community of Bhil & Bhilala** in the districts of Jhabua and Dhar.
- **It is locally known as Kalamasi** and is used for treatment of many diseases, besides being considered an aphrodisiac.

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.

Facts for Prelims

Akshay Venkatesh, a renowned Indian-Australian mathematician, is one of four winners of mathematics' **prestigious Fields medal, known as the Nobel prize for math**. He has won the Fields Medal for his profound contributions to an exceptionally broad range of subjects in mathematics.

About Fields Medal:

- The Fields medals are awarded every four years to the most promising mathematicians under the age of 40.
- Each winner receives a 15,000 Canadian-dollar cash prize. At least two, and preferably four people, are always honoured in the award ceremony.
- The prize was inaugurated in 1932 at the request of Canadian mathematician John Charles Fields, who ran the 1924 Mathematics Congress in Toronto.

Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)

Context: NITI Aayog has identified 117 districts as 'Aspirational Districts' for Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA).

Selection of the districts:

- These districts have been selected on the basis of the composite index which includes published data of deprivation enumerated under Socio-Economic Caste Census, Health & Nutrition, Education and Basic Infrastructure.

Key facts:

Support by the Centre: Under the scheme, central assistance is provided for opening of new Model Degree Colleges (MDCs) in these districts and in unserved & underserved districts in North Eastern and Himalayan States.

Kind of support: The central support provided under the component of new MDCs is infrastructural in nature in which funds are released for creation of Colleges with requisite infrastructure.

States' role: Under this component, a commitment is given by the State Governments that all recurring expenditure (including salaries) in respect of the MDC being established, will be borne by the respective State Government. Additionally, under a separate component of RUSA viz., Faculty Recruitment Support, central support is provided for creation of

additional posts of Assistant Professors.

About RUSA:

Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), launched in 2013 aims at providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions.

Funding:

The central funding (in the ratio of 60:40 for general category States, 90:10 for special category states and 100% for union territories)

Objectives:

The key objectives of RUSA are to improve access, equity and quality in higher education through planned development of higher education at the state level.

Components:

- RUSA would create new universities through upgradation of existing autonomous colleges and conversion of colleges in a cluster.
- It would create new model degree colleges, new professional colleges and provide infrastructural support to universities and colleges.
- Faculty recruitment support, faculty improvements programmes and leadership development of educational administrators are also an important part of the scheme.
- In order to enhance skill development the existing central scheme of Polytechnics has been subsumed within RUSA. A separate component to synergise vocational education with higher education has also been included in RUSA.
- Besides these, RUSA also supports reforming, restructuring and building capacity of institutions in participating state.

Restricted Area Permit (RAP) regime

Context: The Union government has decided to exclude 29 inhabited Andaman & Nicobar Islands from the Restricted Area Permit (RAP) regime, subject to certain conditions, to boost tourism and overall development of Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Key facts:

- The list of the islands permitted for foreigners visit includes East Island, North Andaman, Smith Island, Curfew Island, Stewart Island, Land Fall Island, Ayes Island, Middle Andaman, Long Island, Strait Island, North Passage, Baratang, South Andaman, Havelock, Neil Island, Flat Bay, Little Andaman, Chowra, Tillang Chong Island, Teresa, Katchal, Nancowry, Kamorta, Pulomilo, Great Nicobar, Little Nicobar, Narcondam Island and Interview Island.
- Foreigners will also be allowed to visit 11 uninhabited Islands, to be notified by Andaman and Nicobar Islands Administration, only for day visits.

Exceptions:

- Citizens of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan and foreign nationals having their origin in these countries would continue to require RAP to visit Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

- In such cases, RAP may be granted only after obtaining prior approval of the ministry of home affairs. For visiting **Mayabunder and Diglipur**, citizens of Myanmar will continue to require RAP which shall be issued only with the prior approval of the MHA.

What is Restricted Area Permit (RAP) regime?

- **RAP regime was notified under the Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963.** Under it, *foreign nationals are not normally allowed to visit protected or restricted area unless Government is satisfied that there are extra-ordinary reasons to justify their visit.*
- *Every foreigner, except citizen of Bhutan, who desires to enter and stay in protected or restricted area, is required to obtain special permit from competent authority having power to issue such permits to foreigner, seeking it.*
- Citizens of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan and foreign nationals of Pakistani origin are exception and are not allowed to enter such areas.

Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)

Context: A revised Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) has been signed amongst Govt. of India (through MoWR, RD & GR), NABARD and National Water Development Agency (NWDA) for funding of central share of 99 prioritized irrigation projects under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) through **Long Term Irrigation Fund (LTIF)**.

The MoU will enable this Ministry to release Central Assistance to prioritized projects under PMKSY as per the requirements from time to time.

About LTIF:

- To cater to the large fund requirement and ensure completion of the projects, the Union Finance Minister, during his Budget speech 2016-17, announced creation of dedicated **Long Term Irrigation Fund (LTIF) in NABARD** with an initial corpus of Rs. 20,000 crore for funding of Central and State share for the identified ongoing projects under PMKSY (AIBP and CAD).
- Corpus would be raised by way of budgetary resources and market borrowings to fund fast tracking of implementation of incomplete major & medium irrigation projects.

About PMKSY:

- PMKSY has been conceived amalgamating ongoing schemes viz. **Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP) of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation (MoWR, RD&GR), Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) of Department of Land Resources (DoLR) and the On Farm Water Management (OFWM) of Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC)**.
- The scheme will be *implemented by Ministries of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development.*

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

Context: The Centre has constituted a Group of Ministers (GoM) headed by Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Suresh Prabhu to decide on 16-member Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations.

Objectives:

It has been mandated to find *way forward from current deadlock over issues of joining RCEP or not*. It will also help fine tune India's strategy for the upcoming **RCEP ministerial meet in August 2018 in Singapore**.

What's the issue with India?

- There's a Mounting pressure on New Delhi to give an early consent to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. India has, however, refused to take responsibility for the long-winding negotiations and has stressed that it is important to address the sensitivities and aspirations of all participants.
- India is not comfortable with the ambitious dismantling of import tariffs being pushed for by the ASEAN, especially as it would also mean allowing duty-free access to Chinese goods.
- The Indian industry does not want the country to commit to high levels of liberalisation as it fears that it could get out-priced in the domestic market.
- India has also stressed on the need for other RCEP members to deliver in the area of services to arrive at an agreement. So far proposals in the area of services, including on work-visas for movement of professionals, have been disappointing with no member ready to make meaningful contributions.

What you need to know about RCEP?

- RCEP is proposed between the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and the six states with which ASEAN has existing FTAs (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand).
- RCEP negotiations were formally launched in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia. RCEP aims to boost goods trade by eliminating most tariff and non-tariff barriers — a move that is expected to provide the region's consumers greater choice of quality products at affordable rates. It also seeks to liberalise investment norms and do away with services trade restrictions.

Why has it assumed so much significance in recent times?

- *When inked, it would become the world's biggest free trade pact. This is because the 16 nations account for a total GDP of about \$50 trillion and house close to 3.5 billion people. India (GDP-PPP worth \$9.5 trillion and population of 1.3 billion) and China (GDP-PPP of \$23.2 trillion and population of 1.4 billion) together comprise the RCEP's biggest component in terms of market size.*

Why is China so much interested in this deal?

- China, using its influence as the global leader in goods exports, has been deploying quiet diplomacy to ensure consistent focus on attempts to obtain commitments on elimination of tariffs on most traded goods. China is keen on an agreement on a 'high level' of tariff liberalisation — eliminating duties on as much as 92% of traded products. This deal helps China fulfil its objectives.
- China is also speeding up the RCEP negotiation process and striving for an early agreement, so as to contribute to realising the greater common goal of building the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP).
- The FTAAP spans 21 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation countries, including the U.S. and China, but does not cover India. With the U.S. withdrawing from the Trans Pacific Partnership

— a mega-regional FTA not involving India and China — that similarly aimed to help establish the FTAAP, the path is clear for China to push ahead with this strategic initiative to its advantage through the RCEP.

Way ahead:

- India's FTA strategy has to be guided by the 'Make In India' initiative that aims to boost domestic manufacturing and job creation within India. In return for greater market access in goods, *India, with its large pool of skilled workers and professionals, should try to use the RCEP to gain on the services side, by securing commitments from the other nations to mutually ease norms on movement of such people across borders for short-term work.*

World Network of Biosphere Reserves

Context: The Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve has become *the 11th Biosphere Reserve from India to be included in the UNESCO designated World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNB)*.

This decision was taken at the recently concluded 30th Session of International **Coordinating Council (ICC) of Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme of UNESCO held at Palembang, Indonesia.**

Facts:

- **India has 18 Biosphere Reserves.** With the inclusion of Khangchendzonga, the number of internationally designated *World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNB) has become 11, with 7 Biosphere Reserves being domestic Biosphere Reserves.*

Biosphere reserves:

- Launched in 1971, UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) is an Intergovernmental Scientific Programme that aims to establish a scientific basis for the improvement of relationships between people and their environments.
- MAB combines the natural and social sciences, economics and education to improve human livelihoods and the equitable sharing of benefits, and to safeguard natural and managed ecosystems, thus promoting innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate, and environmentally sustainable.
- *Its World Network of Biosphere Reserves currently counts more than 600 sites in 122 countries all over the world, including 20 transboundary sites.*
 - ***The first of India's reserves to make it to UNESCO's list was Tamil Nadu's Niligiri Biosphere Reserve in 2000.***
 - Protection is granted not only to the flora and fauna of the protected region, but also to the human communities who inhabit these regions, and their ways of life.

Key facts on Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve:

- ***Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve is a National Park and a Biosphere Reserve located in Sikkim, India.*** The park is named after the mountain Kangchenjunga, which with a height of 8,586 metres (28,169 ft), is the third-highest peak in the world.
- The Biosphere Reserve is one of the highest ecosystems in the world, reaching elevations of 1, 220 metres above sea-level. It includes a range of ecolines, varying from sub-tropic to Arctic, as well as natural forests in different biomes, which support an immensely rich diversity of forest types and habitats.

- **The core zone – Khangchendzonga National Park was designated as a World Heritage Site in 2016 under the 'mixed' category.**

BIOSPHERE RESERVES- DEFINITION:

- A Biosphere Reserve is a unique and representative ecosystem of terrestrial and coastal areas which are internationally recognized, within the framework of UNESCO's Man and Biosphere (MAB) programme.
- The biosphere reserve should fulfill the following three objectives:
 1. In-situ conservation of biodiversity of natural and semi-natural ecosystems and landscapes.
 2. Contribution to sustainable economic development of the human population living within and around the Biosphere Reserve.
 3. Provide facilities for long term ecological studies, environmental education and training and research and monitoring.
- In order to fulfill the above objectives, the Biosphere Reserves are classified into zones like the **core area, buffer area**. The system of functions is prescribed for each zone.

World Biofuel day 2018

Context: World Biofuel Day is observed every year on 10th August to create awareness about the importance of non-fossil fuels as an alternative to conventional fossil fuels and to highlight the various efforts made by the Government in the biofuel sector.

About World Bio Fuel Day:

- Every year **10th August** is observed as World Bio-Fuel Day in a bid to create awareness about non fossil-fuels (Green Fuels). On this day in 1893, **Sir Rudolph Diesel (inventor of the diesel engine)** for the first time successfully ran mechanical engine with Peanut Oil. His research experiment had predicted that vegetable oil is going to replace the fossil fuels in the next century to fuel different mechanical engines. Thus to mark this extraordinary achievement, World Biofuel Day is observed every year on 10th August.

Government initiatives to promote the use of Biofuels:

- Since 2014, the Government of India has taken a number of initiatives to increase blending of biofuels. The major interventions include administrative price mechanism for ethanol, simplifying the procurement procedures of OMCs, amending the provisions of Industries (Development & Regulation) Act, 1951 and enabling lignocellulosic route for ethanol procurement.
- The Government approved the National Policy on Biofuels-2018 in June 2018. The policy has the objective of reaching 20% ethanol-blending and 5% biodiesel-blending by the year 2030. Among other things, the policy expands the scope of feedstock for ethanol production and has provided for incentives for production of advanced biofuels. Recently, the Government has increased the price of C-heavy molasses-based ethanol to Rs. 43.70 from Rs. 40.85 to give a boost to EBP Programme. Price of Bheavy molasses-based ethanol and sugarcane juice-based ethanol has been fixed for the first time at Rs. 47.40. The Government has reduced GST on ethanol for blending in fuel from 18% to 5%.

- The Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas is making all efforts to increase ethanol supply for petrol and has taken several steps in this direction.

Outcomes:

- These interventions of the Government of India have shown positive results. Ethanol blending in petrol has increased from 38 crore litres in the ethanol supply year 2013-14 to an estimated 141 crore litres in the ethanol supply year 2017-18.
- Bio-diesel blending in the country started from 10th August, 2015 and in the year 2018-19, Oil Marketing Companies have allocated 7.6 crore litres of biodiesel. Oil PSUs are also planning to set up 12 Second Generation (2G) Bio-refineries to augment ethanol supply and address environmental issues arising out of burning of agricultural biomass.

Indecent Representation of the Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986

Context: After taking into account of the recent technological advancement in the field of communications such as social media platforms, etc, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has decided to move fresh Bill to broaden the scope of *the Indecent Representation of the Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986* to cover the audio-visual media and content in electronic form.

The reformulated Bill proposes following amendments in the parent Act:

- **Amendment in definition of term advertisement** to include digital form or electronic form or hoardings, or through SMS, MMS etc.
- **Amendment in definition of distribution** to include publication, license or uploading using computer resource, or communication device or in.
- Insertion of **a new definition to define the term publish.**
- **Amendment in section 4** to include that No person shall publish or distribute or cause to be published or cause to be distributed by any means any material which contains indecent representation of women in any form.
- **Penalty** similar to that provided under the Information Technology Act, 2000
- **Creation of a Centralised Authority** under the aegis of National Commission of Women (NCW). This Authority will be headed by Member Secretary, NCW, having representatives from Advertising Standards Council of India, Press Council of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and one member having experience of working on women issues.
- **Functions:** This Centralised Authority will be authorized to receive complaints or grievances regarding any programme or advertisement broadcasted or publication and investigate/ examine all matters relating to the indecent representation of women.

Need for revisiting the law:

The Government of India has enacted the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (IRWA), 1986 to prohibit indecent representation of women through advertisements, publications, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner.

- Since the enactment of the Act, **technological revolution has resulted in the development of new forms of communication**, such as internet, multi-media messaging, cable television, over-the-top (OTT) services and applications e.g. **Skype, Viber, WhatsApp, Chat On, Snapchat, Instagram etc.**

- Therefore, these technological advancements make it necessary to widen the scope of the law so as to cover such forms of media on one hand and to strengthen the existing safeguards to prevent indecent representation of women through any media form on the other.

“PARIVESH”

What is it? It is an environmental single window hub for Environment, Forest, Wildlife and CRZ clearances launched recently. This Single-Window Integrated Environmental Management System has been developed in pursuance of the spirit of ‘Digital India’ initiated by the Prime Minister and capturing the essence of Minimum Government and Maximum Governance.

PARIVESH: Pro-Active and Responsive facilitation by Interactive, Virtuous and Environmental Single-window Hub.

Key features:

- “PARIVESH” is a workflow based application, based on the concept of web architecture. It has been rolled out for online submission, monitoring and management of proposals submitted by Project Proponents to the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEFCC)**, as well as to the State Level Environmental Impact Assessment Authorities (SEIAA).
- It seeks to give various types of clearances (e.g. Environment, Forest, Wildlife and **Coastal Regulation Zone Clearances**) from Central, State and district-level authorities.
- The system has been designed, developed and hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, with technical support from National Informatics Centre, (NIC).
- **It provides single registration and single sign-in for all types of clearances (i.e. Environment, Forest, Wildlife and CRZ)**, unique-ID for all types of clearances required for a particular project and a single Window interface for the proponent to submit applications for getting all types of clearances (i.e. Environment, Forests, Wildlife and CRZ clearances).

Significance and benefits of the platform:

- PARIVESH offers a framework to generate economic growth and strengthens Sustainable Development through e- Governance. With automatic highlighting of non-compliance by the system, PARIVESH helps in improving the overall performance and efficiency of the whole appraisal process.
- **It also helps the processing authorities, as it has a Single Window System for Central, State and District level clearances.**
- **The facility of Geographic Information System (GIS) interface for the Appraisal Committee will help them in analyzing the proposal efficiently, automatic alerts (via SMS and emails) at important stages to the concerned officers, committee members and higher authorities to check the delays, if any.**
- It also enables project proponents, citizens to view, track and interact with scrutiny officers, generates online clearance letters, online mailers and alerts to state functionaries in case of delays beyond stipulated time for processing of applications.

Zero Budget Natural Farming

Context: Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) under Network Project on Organic Farming (NPOF) and All India Coordinated Research Projects (AICRP) on Integrated Farming Systems, has initiated an experiment on **“Evaluation of zero budget farming practices in basmati rice-wheat system”** at Modipuram (Uttar Pradesh), Ludhiana (Punjab), Pantnagar (Uttarakhand) and Kurukshetra (Haryana) from rabi 2017 to study the zero budget farming practices on productivity, economics and soil health including soil organic carbon and soil fertility.

What is Zero Budget Natural Farming?

- Zero Budget Natural Farming, as the name implies, is a method of farming where the cost of growing and harvesting plants is zero. This means that farmers need not purchase fertilizers and pesticides in order to ensure the healthy growth of crops. It is, basically, a natural farming technique that uses biological pesticides instead of chemical-based fertilizers. *Farmers use earthworms, cow dung, urine, plants, human excreta and such biological fertilizers for crop protection. It reduces farmers' investment. It also protects the soil from degradation.*

Government initiatives to support ZBNF:

- Government of India has been promoting organic farming in the country through the dedicated schemes of Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) since 2015-16 and also through Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY).
- In the revised guidelines of PKVY scheme during the year 2018, various organic farming models like Natural Farming, Rishi Farming, Vedic Farming, Cow Farming, Homa Farming, Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) etc. have been included wherein flexibility is given to states to adopt any model of Organic Farming including ZBNF depending on farmer's choice.
- Under the RKVY scheme, organic farming/ natural farming project components are considered by the respective State Level Sanctioning Committee (SLSC) according to their priority/ choice.

Recently Developed Races of Silk Worm Seed

Context: Central Silk Board (CSB) has notified recently developed races of silkworm seed of **mulberry and Vanya silk for increasing the productivity of cocoons and to increase the income of the farmers engaged in sericulture.**

Key facts: **Tropical Tasar ,Thissilkworm ,Multivoltine x Bivoltine Mulberry hybrid ,Eri**
Significance:

Silk worm breeds for specific agro-climatic condition are essential for increasing the productivity of cocoons. The recently notified silkworm races will improve the income of the farmers by its enhanced productivity and quality.

CSB: Central Silk Board (CSB) is **a Statutory body** established in 1948 by an Act of Parliament. It is working under the administrative control of Ministry of Textiles, Government of India.

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana

Context: Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved continuation of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) beyond 12th Five Year Plan period ((2012–2017)).

- It will help in connecting 38,412 habitations at estimated cost of Rs. 84,934 crore. The centre's share will be Rs 54,900 crore and states' share is Rs 30,034 crore.

Background:

- Initially the targets of PMGSY were to be achieved by March 2022, however, the sunset date of achievement of PMGSY-I was pre-poned to March, 2019, with enhanced fund allocation and changed funding pattern i.e. in the ratio of 60:40 between the Centre and State for all States except for 8 North Eastern and 3 Himalayan States (Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh & Uttarakhand) for which it is 90:10.
- Under, PMGSY-II, against the target length of 50,000 km works of upgradation almost 32,100 km road length have been sanctioned in 13 States, which have transited to PMGSY-II. Against the sanctions issued, 12,000 km road length has been completed up to March, 2018.

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY):

- The scheme, launched in 2000, aims to provide single all-weather road connectivity to all eligible unconnected habitations in rural areas with population of 500 persons and above (in plain areas) and 250 persons and above (in hilly states, desert areas, tribal areas and selected tribal and backward districts).
- Union Ministry of Rural Development is nodal ministry for implementation of Scheme.

Triple talaq bill

Context: The Union Cabinet has approved a few amendments in the instant triple talaq bill. The amended triple talaq bill will be tabled in Rajya Sabha for its approval.

Background:

In December, the Lok Sabha passed the Muslim Women (Protection Bill, 2017), which criminalises the practice of talaq-e-bidda. This came after *the Supreme Court on August 22, 2017, struck down triple talaq, calling the Islamic practice unconstitutional.*

Changes in the triple Talaq Bill- The Cabinet made three amendments to the triple talaq law:

- **One: provision for bail:** While the proposed law will remain “non-bailable” offence, the accused can approach a magistrate even before the trial to seek bail. Under a non-bailable offence, bail cannot be granted by police at the police station. A provision has been added to allow the magistrate to grant bail ‘after hearing the wife’. “But the offence of instant triple talaq under the proposed law remains non-bailable.
- *The magistrate would ensure that bail is granted only after the husband agrees to grant compensation to the wife as provided in the bill. The quantum of compensation will be decided by the magistrate, as per the bill.*

Two- check misuse:

- Another amendment makes it clear that the police would lodge FIR only if approached by the victim (wife), her blood relations or people who become her relatives by virtue of her marriage. This would settle fears that even a neighbour can file FIR as is the cases in any cognisable offence. This would check misuse.

Third- A compoundable offence:

- The third amendment makes the offence of instant triple talaq “compoundable”. Now, a magistrate can use his powers to settle the dispute between a husband and his wife. Under a compoundable offence, both parties have the liberty of withdrawing the case. However, the jail term for a Muslim man who resorts to triple talaq remains three years and only a magistrate, and not a local police officer, can release the accused on bail.

What did the original Bill include?

- If a Muslim man resorts to triple talaq then he will face a jail term of three years, as instant triple talaq will now be considered a non-bailable, cognisable offence.
- Opting for triple talaq could also attract fine and the amount would be the magistrate’s call who would be hearing the case.
- A Muslim wife can also approach a magistrate and ask for subsistence allowance for herself and her minor children.
- A victim of triple talaq can seek the custody of her minor children from the magistrate who will take the final decision on the issue. Only Jammu and Kashmir will be out of the ambit of the proposed law.

What is instant triple talaq?

There are three forms of talaq (divorce) in Islam: Ahsan, Hasan and Talaq-e-Biddat (triple or instant talaq). Ahsan and Hasan are revocable but Biddat is irrevocable. Biddat is considered sinful but is permissible in Islamic law. It has been banned in more than 20 Muslim countries, including Pakistan and Bangladesh.

India’s first genetic bank for wildlife conservation

Context: In a step that would further the cause of conservation of endangered and protected animals, India has got its first scientific and most modern national wildlife genetic resource bank.

It is located in Hyderabad at the Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES), a research wing of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB).

Key facts:

- The state-of-the-art bank is equipped with sophisticated equipment to preserve the genetic resources that could be utilised to virtually resurrect an animal species in case it goes extinct.
- The bank that contains genetic resources of about 250 wildlife species.
- The Genetic Resource Bank will store genetic material of Indian species. It will also help in protecting India’s biodiversity and environment.

Achievements of Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES):

- **It is India's only research facility engaged in conservation and preservation of wildlife and its resources.** It was established in 1998 with the help of **Central Zoo Authority of India, CSIR and the government of Andhra Pradesh.**
- LaCONES has helped the Mouse Deer Conservation Breeding Centre at Nehru Zoological Park to increase the population of mouse deer in Telangana forests. Amrabad forest, for instance, ran out of mouse deer and through the efforts of LaCONES, the animal is now reintroduced in Amrabad Tiger Reserve.
- Earlier, LaCONES has developed universal DNA based marker for identification of wild animals from parts and remains. It has a DNA banking of more than 250 species of mammals, birds and reptiles.

Important terms related to Mughal Administration

Context: The Telangana Archives and Research Institute holds a whopping 1.55 lakh documents — all on handmade paper — including 5,000 from the period of **Shah Jahan (1628-1658)** and another 1.5 lakh of **Aurangzeb (1658-1707)**. Written in **Persian in Shikasta script, cursive style,** the documents are linked and arranged in chronological order — date, month and regnal year-wise.

- **Farman-** order of the emperor.
- **Nishan-** order of a member of the royal family.
- **Yaddasht-i-ahkam-i-muqaddas-** Memorandum containing imperial orders.
- **Parwana-** orders issued by higher authorities.
- **Siyaha huzur-** proceedings of the provincial court.
- **Roznamcha-i-waqai-** daily news report.
- **Qabzul wasil-** bill payments.
- **Andarz-o-chiehra-** documents on personnel and horses.
- **Daftar-i-Diwani-** the administrative wing of Hyderabad State.
- **Theyaddasht-i-ahkam-i-muqaddas-** Reports on recommendations of pay hikes for staff sent to the emperor.

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act

Context: As per the latest amendment to the **Companies (Accounts) Rules, 2014,** it is now **mandatory to disclose compliance under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act in the Annual Reports of Private companies.**

THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AT WORKPLACE (PREVENTION, PROHIBITION AND REDRESSAL) ACT 2013:

The Act seeks to **cover all women, irrespective of their age or employment status** and protect them against sexual harassment **at all workplaces both in public and private sector, whether organized or unorganized.** It came into force on December 9, 2013.

Some important provisions of the Act: The Act defines sexual harassment at the work place and creates a mechanism for redressal of complaints. It also provides safeguards against false or malicious charges.

The definition of “aggrieved woman”, who will get protection under the Act is extremely wide to cover all women, irrespective of her age or employment status, whether in the organized or unorganized sectors, public or private and covers clients, customers and domestic workers as well.

Definition of workplace: While the “workplace” in the Vishaka Guidelines is confined to the traditional office set-up where there is a clear employer-employee relationship, the Act goes much further to include organisations, department, office, branch unit etc. in the public and private sector, organized and unorganized, hospitals, nursing homes, educational institutions, sports institutes, stadiums, sports complex and any place visited by the employee during the course of employment including the transportation.

Every employer is required to constitute an Internal Complaints Committee at each office or branch with 10 or more employees. The District Officer is required to constitute a Local Complaints Committee at each district, and if required at the block level.

Functions of the committee: The Committee is required to complete the inquiry within a time period of 90 days. On completion of the inquiry, the report will be sent to the employer or the District Officer, as the case may be, they are mandated to take action on the report within 60 days.

Powers: The Complaints Committees have the powers of civil courts for gathering evidence. The Complaints Committees are required to provide for conciliation before initiating an inquiry, if requested by the complainant.

Penalties have been prescribed for employers. Non-compliance with the provisions of the Act shall be punishable with a fine of up to 50,000. Repeated violations may lead to higher penalties and cancellation of licence or registration to conduct business.

Facts for Prelims: Companies Act, 2013 provides the disclosure framework which the Directors of every company are required to comply with in the Annual Reports. It also includes the penal provisions for non-disclosure.

Ease of Living index

Context: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has released Ease of Living Index.

About the index:

- The index has been developed **to allow city managers to get a grip on the city’s baseline and compare its performance across key indicators.**
- The index covers 111 cities that are smart city contenders, capital cities, and cities with population of 1 million plus.
- **The index captures** the quality of life based on the data collected from the urban local bodies on four parameters, which were further broken down into 15 categories.
- **The four parameters include institutional (governance), social (identity, education, health, security), economic (economy, employment) and physical factors (waste water and solid waste management, pollution, housing/ inclusiveness, mixed land use, power and water supply, transport, public open spaces).**

- **Institutional and social parameters** carry 25 points each, physical factors have a weightage of 45 points and economic factors five points totaling to a 100 mark scale on which cities were evaluated.

Performance of states:

- **Pune has ranked first while two more Maharashtra cities — Navi Mumbai and Greater Mumbai — figure in the second and third spots.**
- **Tirupati, Chandigarh, Thane, Raipur, Indore, Vijaywada and Bhopal also figure in the top 10 list in that order.** Among other major cities, Chennai holds 14th rank, Ahmedabad 23rd, Hyderabad 27th, and Bengaluru 58th.
- **Rampur in Uttar Pradesh has ranked the worst on the scale with Kohima and Patna on the bottom two and three ranks while Varanasi stands at 33.**
- **Kolkata is excluded from the index.**

Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act

Context: The Centre has notified rules for operationalising a Rs 66,000 crore fund collected as compensations under Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act passed in 2016 to promote the green cover in the country.

As per the new rules:

13 activities are permitted for funding. They include **plantation, assisted natural regeneration of forests, forest fire prevention, pest and disease control in forests, soil and moisture conservation works and improvement of wildlife habitat.**

Usage of funds: **80% of the compensatory afforestation amount will be utilised by states for plantations, assisted natural regeneration of forests, forest fire prevention, pest and disease control in forest, soil and moisture conservation works and improvement of wildlife habitat, among others, in the list of 13 permissible activities.** The remaining **20% will be used for 11 listed works to strengthen forest and wildlife protection related infrastructure.**

Role of gram sabhas: Besides enlisting the 24 activities which are to be taken up using the fund, the rules also specify that the working plan will be taken up **“in consultation with the gram sabha or village forest management committee”.**

Significance of the move:

The move will help India re-green its forest and non-forest areas which have lost trees due to forest diversions — amounting to more than 1.3 million hectares after the Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980 kicked in — for allowing various developmental activities.

Background: Over the last ten years, the fund had accumulated the amount as compensations by user agencies for diverting forest land for industries and infrastructure projects. **The CAMPA was created as per a Supreme Court ruling in 2009.**

- Much of the funds collected under the legislation had been left unspent with an ad hoc Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) in absence of enabling rules.
- Until now, the funds were disbursed to states under a temporary and time consuming mechanism. With the relevant rules now in place, the implementation of the act is expected to gather pace.

Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act 2016:

- This act provides for setting up **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA)** at both central and state level to ensure expeditious and transparent utilization of amounts realized in lieu of forest land diverted for non-forest purpose.
- The act also seeks to establish the **National Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of India**, and a State Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of each state. The payments into the funds include compensatory afforestation, NPV, and any project-specific payments.

Uttarakhand high court appoints itself legal guardian of cows in state

Significance of the judgment:

This is *the first time in India that a court has had invoked the 'parens patriae' doctrine* for cow protection.

Parens patriae: The court did this by invoking the 'parens patriae' doctrine. Parens patriae in Latin means 'parent of the country' and is a doctrine that grants the court inherent power and authority to act as guardian for those who are unable to take care for themselves.

Implications of the judgment: The court can now act as the legal guardian of the cows in the state and keep a tab on all issues related to cows especially its directions with regard to their protection. If there are any violations in laws and rules regarding cows, the court can take suo moto cognizance and issue directions to the state.

Important Directions issued by the Court:

- All civic bodies in the state shall construct "gaushalas/kausadans" or shelters/homes for housing cows and other stray cattle within one year.
- No commercial charges shall be levied for supplying the electricity and water connections to gaushalas/shelters.
- The state government shall register cases against people who abandon cows and owners of cattle found on the streets, roads and public places under the Indian Penal Code, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 and Uttarakhand Protection of Cow Progeny Act, 2007.
- The state government shall also set up a special squad to be headed by an officer not below the rank of deputy superintendent of police in both the Kumaon and Garhwal regions with one veterinary doctor to protect cows.
- The court banned slaughter of cows, bulls, bullocks, heifers or calves in the state and ruled that no person shall sell beef or beef products in any form in Uttarakhand.