Topic: Indian constitution.

Demystifying the Constitution for students

The ministry of Human Resources Development has decided to observe constitution day in all schools across the country on November 26th.

- The ministry has asked schools to engage in activities related to the Constitution.
- Circulars have also been sent by the CBSE and ICSE to schools to read the preamble of the Constitution in the school assembly.
- Schools have also been suggested to conduct essay competitions or quizzes around the Constitution.

Why November 26th?

It was on November 26, 1949, that the Constitution was adopted in the Constituent Assembly following which the Constitution came into force on January 26, 1950.

sources: the hindu.

Topic: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

16 CAG reports to be tabled in winter session
The Comptroller and Auditor-General of India has submitted 16 performance and compliance audit reports on various sectors to the Union Finance Ministry, and they will be tabled in Parliament this winter session.

- The reports include the audit report on paddy procurement and milling for the Central pool.

about CAG:

- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India is an authority, established by the Constitution of India under article 148.
- CAG audits all receipts and expenditure of the Government of India and the state governments, including those of bodies and authorities substantially financed by the government.
- The CAG is also the external auditor of Government-owned corporations and conducts supplementary audit of government companies, i.e., any non-banking/ non-insurance company in which the state and Union governments have an equity share of at least 51% or subsidiary companies of existing government companies.
- The reports of the CAG are taken into consideration by the Public Accounts Committees (PACs) and Committees on Public Undertakings (COPUs), which are special committees in the Parliament of India and the state legislatures.
- The CAG enjoys the same status as a judge of Supreme Court of India in Indian order of precedence.
- Appointment: CAG is appointed by the President of India following a recommendation by the Prime Minister. On appointment, he/she has to make an oath or affirmation before the President of India.
- Removal: The CAG can be removed only on an address from both house of parliament on the ground of proved misbehaviour or incapacity. The CAG vacates the office on attaining the age of 65 years age even without completing the 6 years term.
**SC seeks Centre’s view on Governor’s removal**

The Supreme Court has sought a response from the Centre, the Madhya Pradesh government and the State’s Governor, Ram Naresh Yadav, on a plea seeking the removal of the Governor owing to his alleged involvement in the multi-crore Vyapam scam, which is currently being probed by the CBI.

- The court has given three weeks’ time to respond.

Background:

- The order came based on a petition filed by five Gwalior-based advocates. The petition had arraigned as parties the Madhya Pradesh government, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Governor in person.
- The petition contends that a “tainted” Governor cannot be allowed to discharge constitutional functions.
- It had sought the apex court to direct the MHA to move a proposal for “withdrawal of pleasure” of the President under Article 156 (1) of the Constitution, thus facilitating the Governor’s removal.

Removal of Governor:

A governor of a state in India holds office for a period of five years, but it is subject to termination earlier if:

- The Governor is dismissed by the President, at whose pleasure he holds the office. In reality, the President is advised by the Prime Minister of the country, who decides the dismissal of the Governor of
a state, usually on the grounds of gross delinquency namely corruption, bribery and violation of the Constitution.
• The Governor resigns from his post.

There is no provision of impeachment, as it happens for the president.

sources: the hindu, wiki.

**CJI Dattu recommends Thakur**

Chief Justice of India H.L. Dattu has recommended Justice Tirath Singh Thakur as his successor. Justice Thakur is the senior-most judge in the court after the Chief Justice Dattu, who retires on December 2.

• If appointed, Justice Thakur would be the 43rd Chief Justice of India. He would be in office till January 4, 2017.

Appointment of CJI:

According to the convention, the present Chief Justice recommends the name of his successor to the government. After the Law Ministry clears his name, the file will go to the Prime Minister’s Office and finally reaches the President, after whose approval the Warrant of Appointment will be issued.

sources: the hindu.

**Topic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.**

**IRDA pulls up life insurers for not highlighting projected rate of return**
The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) has pulled up life insurers for not highlighting the projected rate of return in their traditional product benefit illustrations.

- IRDA had directed insurers to follow the guidelines and incorporate scenarios taking investment returns of 4% and 8% into account in benefit illustrations in all advertisements "with equal prominence in font size, at the same place and in the same page".
- But, some of the advertisements containing illustrations being released in the market are not in tune with the regulations' spirit. And because of this, prospective policyholders are unable to get a clear picture of the possible returns they stand to earn.

About IRDAI:

- Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) is an autonomous body which regulates and develops the insurance industry in India.
- It was constituted by an act of parliament called Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999.
- The IRDA Act allows private players to enter the insurance sector in India.

sources: et, irdai.

**CBDT signs 11 new unilateral APAs; total 31 so far**

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has entered into 11 more unilateral Advance Pricing Agreements (APAs). With this, CBDT has so far signed 31 APAs (30 unilateral and one bilateral) with Indian subsidiaries of foreign companies operating in various segments.
Out of the 11 new APAs, while seven have rollback provisions contained in them, the other four are for future five years.

The CBDT aims to finalize another 30 to 40 APAs before the end of this fiscal to provide stability and confidence to foreign enterprises operating in India.

The Advance Pricing Agreements (APA) programme was introduced in the Income-tax Act, 1961 in 2012.

What is an advance pricing agreement?

An APA, usually for multiple years, is signed between a taxpayer and the tax authority (CBDT) on an appropriate transfer pricing methodology for determining the price and ensuing taxes on intra-group overseas transactions.

About CBDT:

The Central Board of Direct Taxes is a statutory authority functioning under the Central Board of Revenue Act, 1963.

- It is a part of the Department of Revenue in the Ministry of Finance, Government of India.
- It provides essential inputs for policy and planning of direct taxes in India and is also responsible for administration of the direct tax laws through Income Tax Department.
- It is also India’s official Financial Action Task Force unit.
- The CBDT Chairman and Members of CBDT are selected from Indian Revenue Service (IRS) whose members constitute the top management of Income Tax Department.

sources: et, cbdt.
Govt panel to evaluate candidates for RBI Deputy Governor post

The union government has appointed a panel to interview candidates for the post of Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India.

• The term of Urjit Patel, the central bank’s incumbent in charge of monetary policy, expires in January. He was appointed for a three-year term by the previous United Progressive Alliance government and took charge in January 2013.

About Deputy Governors of RBI:

• The RBI has four deputy governors and typically two are from the outside, of which traditionally one is a commercial banker and the other an economist. The two others are promoted from within the central bank’s ranks.
• A central bank Deputy Governor can be appointed for a term with a maximum of five years or till the age of 62, whichever is earlier.

sources: the hindu.

CCI Imposes Penalties Upon Airlines for Concerted Action in Fixing Fuel Surcharge (FSC) on Cargo Transport

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has imposed penalties upon 3 Airlines for concerted action in fixing and revising Fuel Surcharge (FSC) for transporting cargo. The three airlines are Jet Airways, Indigo and SpiceJet.

• The three airlines acted in collusion to fix fuel surcharge rates which resulted in indirectly determining the rates of air cargo transport.
• According to CCI, such conduct in the air cargo industry undermines economic development of the country and ultimately acts to the detriment of end-consumers.

About CCI:

Competition Commission of India is a body responsible for enforcing The Competition Act, 2002 throughout India and to prevent activities that have an adverse effect on competition in India. It was established on 14 October 2003. It became fully functional in May 2009.

• CCI consists of a Chairperson and 6 Members appointed by the Central Government.
• The duty of the Commission is 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, 2002** prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and Merger and acquisition), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

sources: pib.

**NPPA caps price of 18 formulations packs**
NPPA has capped prices of 18 formulations packs, including anti-diabetic Metformin HCl tablets, anti-bacterial Ceftriaxone Sodium injection packs and devices among others.

- The prices of the 18 formulation packs have been fixed/revised under Drug Price Control Order (DPCO), 2013.
- Drug firms such as Cipla, Alembic Pharma and Unichem Laboratories will be impacted by the government’s move for prices fixation and revision.

How the prices are fixed?

- At present, the government caps prices of essential drugs based on the simple average of all medicines in a particular therapeutic segment with sales of more than 1%.
- In case of non-scheduled formulations companies are allowed to hike prices of medicines by only up to 10% in a year.

The government had notified DPCO, 2013, which covers 680 formulations, effective May 15, 2014, replacing the 1995 order that regulated only 74 bulk drugs.

National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA)

NPPA was established, inter alia, to fix/revise the prices of controlled bulk drugs and formulations and to enforce prices and availability of the medicines in the country, under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 1995.

- The organization is also entrusted with the task of recovering amounts overcharged by manufacturers for the controlled drugs from the consumers.
- It also monitors the prices of decontrolled drugs in order to keep them at reasonable levels.
Other important functions of National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority:

- To deal with all legal matters arising out of the decisions of the Authority;
- To monitor the availability of drugs, identify shortages, if any, and to take remedial steps;
- To collect/ maintain data on production, exports and imports, market share of individual companies, profitability of companies etc, for bulk drugs and formulations;
- To render advice to the Central Government on changes/ revisions in the drug policy;
- To render assistance to the Central Government in the parliamentary matters relating to the drug pricing.

sources: the hindu, nppa.

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

**Anju Bobby George appointed TOPS chairperson**

Former long jump champion Anju Bobby George has been appointed as the chairperson of Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS).

- The sports ministry has cleared her appointment. The post was vacant after the resignation of BJP parliamentarian and Board of Control for Cricket in India secretary Anurag Thakur.
- Anju is the only Indian to have won a medal at World Championships (Paris, 2003). She is presently a member of the TOPS' identification committee.
About Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS):

- The Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) was formulated under the National Sports Development Fund (NSDF) with the objective of identifying and supporting potential medal prospects for 2016 and 2020 Olympic Games.
- Under this scheme, the focused disciplines will be Athletics, Archery, Badminton, Boxing, Wrestling and Shooting.

About National Sports Development Fund (NSDF):

The National Sports Development Fund (NSDF) was established by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) in 1998.

- It was established with the objective of mobilizing resources from non-government resources, including private/public sector and non-resident Indians for the promotion of sports and games in the country.
- The funds available under NSDF are mainly used towards supplementing government assistance to the elite sportspersons who are medal prospects at major international events, for meeting their specific coaching/training requirements by way of provision of scientific support and training within the country and abroad, purchase of equipment, participation in international competitions etc.
- The objectives of the fund also include construction of sports infrastructure, taking up research projects and development studies and promotion of international cooperation.

sources: livemint.

All States but T.N. to roll out Food Security Act by April
Union Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan recently held discussions with the State food secretaries regarding implementation of the National Food Security Act.

- Barring Tamil Nadu, all States are ready for implementing the National Food Security Act by April next.
- Tamil Nadu has not indicated any firm date, but has indicated that computerisation of TPDS is likely to be completed by June, 2016 after which implementation of the Act will be taken up.
- It is mandatory for the States and Union Territories to adopt digital identification of the beneficiaries, arrange for doorstep delivery of foodgrains and constitute grievance redressal cells before they roll out the scheme.
- So far, 22 States and Union Territories have rolled out the Act which covers up to 67% of the population.

Union government had given three extensions till September this year for States to roll out the scheme.

About the National Food Security Act, 2013:

Also called as the **Right to Food act**, this act aims to provide subsidized food grains to approximately two thirds of India’s 1.2 billion people. It extends to the whole of India.

Important features of the scheme:

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

sources: the hindu, pib.

**SC stays Delhi HC order on permanent commission to women Navy officers**

The Supreme Court has stayed the Delhi High Court order allowing women, serving as short service commission officers, to get permanent commission in the Indian Navy.

• The court has also issued notice to the concerned woman Navy officers on whose plea the High Court had passed the order allowing permanent commission for them in the force.
• The government had challenged the High Court’s order in the apex court.
• The apex court order came as Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi told it that the high court had erroneously held it as a case of gender discrimination, overlooking the fact that in the navy neither men nor
women - who are commissioned under short service category - can be given permanent commission.

Background:

- On September 4, the High Court had allowed a bunch of pleas seeking permanent commission for them in the force, saying "sexist bias and service bias" would not be allowed to block progress of women.
- The court, while granting their plea, had said the "women are here to stay" and since they "work shoulder to shoulder" with their male counterparts, it would "frown upon any endeavour to restrain the progress of women".
- While the Army and Air Force allow permanent commission for women, the Navy has limited women officers only to short service commission of 14 years.
- The High Court had passed the judgement on the plea of several naval women officers, both retired and serving, from the logistics, education and air traffic control departments of the Navy.
- The women naval officers in their pleas in the high court had sought similar rights as their counterparts in the other two wings of the armed forces. They had also alleged gender discrimination, saying while women officers were only entitled to short service commission, men were entitled to both short service as well as permanent commissions.

What is a permanent commission?

A permanent commission means a career in the Army/Navy till one retires. A permanent commission also entitles 20 years of service and a pension.

sources: the hindu, et.
50 Uttar Pradesh districts declared drought-hit

50 of the 75 districts in Uttar Pradesh have been declared drought-hit by the Uttar Pradesh state government.

- These 50 districts either received less than 60% rain from June to September this year or more than 33% crops were ruined there.
- The decision to declare these districts, which produce sugarcane, pulses, wheat, rice and cash crops, drought-hit was taken on the recommendation of a natural calamity committee.
- The government has suspended collections in the affected districts till March 31, 2016.
- The government has asked the district magistrates to chalk out a plan to deal with the situation and ensure that farmers are not harassed on the pretext of revenue realisation.
- Government departments have also been directed to start relief work in the identified districts to provide help to the farmers.
- Last year, a similar decision had been taken for the 58 drought-hit districts.

As per the guidelines issued by the Centre in relation to drought, the state government is vested with the authority to consider declaring a district as drought hit if it receives 75% or less of downpour compared to normal.

sources: the hindu.

National Resource Facility for Bio-medical Research (NARF)

The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal of the Department of Health Research in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for setting up of a National Resource Facility for Bio-medical Research (NARF) at
Genome Valley in Hyderabad by the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR).

- The estimated project cost is Rs. 338.58 crores and the resource center is expected to be functional by 2018-19.
- The institution will be the **first of its kind for quality laboratory animals for basic and applied biomedical research in the country**.
- It will be developed as a world-class facility for breeding and housing of animals such as primates, cabines and other specialized models such as transgenic and knockout rodents required for testing of various R&D products.
- The facility will create, develop and provide access to a range of laboratory animals and related technological resources for advancement of biomedical research in the country, mainly to facilitate research in medical colleges, research and academic institutions, universities and Biotech/Bio-pharma companies.
- The facility will also provide training facilities for personnel in the specialized areas in the field of biomedical research.

sources: pib.

**Rajiv Khel Abhiyan in Karwar from today**

Karwar district in Karnataka is gearing up to host various games under the State-level Rajiv Gandhi Khel Abhiyan. State-level competitions in Kho Kho, Kabaddi, Judo and Table Tennis will be conducted under the scheme.

Rajiv Gandhi Khel Abhiyan (RGKA):

It is a **centrally sponsored scheme**. It was launched in 2014 **in place of erstwhile Panchayat Yuva Krida aur Khel Abhiyan (PYKKA)**.
Aims of the scheme:

- To provide universal access to sports in rural areas and promote sports culture among both boys and girls.
- To harness available and potential sporting talent among rural youth, through a well-designed competition structure from the block level.
- To put in place an effective mechanism to identify and nurture sporting talent in rural areas.

Important provisions under the scheme:

- Under the revised scheme, construction of a sports complex in each block of the country both for outdoor and indoor sports disciplines on land measuring about six - seven acres at a Total cost of Rs. 1.60 crore (Rs. 80 lakh each for outdoor playfield and indoor sports hall) will be undertaken.
- There is also provision of Rs. 15 lakh for sports equipment and Rs. 1.5 lakh for furniture to be provided by Department of Sports.

Under the scheme, following sports competitions at block, district, state and national levels will also be held:

- Rural Sports Competitions
- Sports Competitions exclusively for Women
- North East Games
- Sports Competitions for Left Wing Extremism (LWE) Affected Areas

sources: the hindu, pib.

Now, 0.5% cess on services to support Swachh Bharat
The Union government has decided to impose two new levies —

1. A 0.5% **Swachh Bharat Cess** on all services, now liable to service tax.
2. A 2% **regional connectivity cess** on international air travel and flights between metros and big cities.

Details:

- The Swachh Bharat cess will be effective from November 15 and regional connectivity cess will be effective from New Year.
- The proceeds from Swachh Bharat cess will be used for Swachh Bharat initiatives.
- A provision for levying a Swachh Bharat cess on all or any of the services for the purpose of financing and promoting Swachh Bharat initiatives was made in the Union Budget for 2015-16 by the Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.
- The government estimates that with the increased allocation for Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, consequent to the collections from the cess, it will be able to prevent diseases. At present, an estimated Rs. 6,700 crore or about Rs. 60 per capita is spent annually on health.

Implications:

- All services, including air travel, telecom, eating out and banking, will become expensive now.
- The additional cess may yield the government an additional about Rs 400 crore during the remainder of the current fiscal year.

According to the government, Swachh Bharat Cess is not another tax but a step towards involving each and every citizen in making contribution to Swachh Bharat.
SC takes serious view of job scheme arrears

The Supreme Court has sought the Centre’s response on a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition, alleging haphazard implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), and delay in payment of wages and compensation to labourers.

- According to the petitioner, the government has a pending liability of Rs. 3,200 crore in wages to be paid to workers and irregularities in the scheme have defeated the entire objective of securing livelihood for the people of rural India, the petition claimed.
- The petition has also sought setting up of independent social audit units and indexing wage rates for MGNREGS work at a rate higher than prescribed under the Minimum Wages Act.
MGNREGA:

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, also known as the “Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act” is a labour law and social security measure.

Aims:

- To guarantee the ‘right to work’ and ensure livelihood security in rural areas.
- To create durable assets that would augment the basic resources available to the poor.
- To follow the Directive Principles of State Policy enunciated in Part IV of the Constitution of India and conforms to the Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that defines the right to work as a basic human right.

Details:

- The scheme provides at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
- This law guarantees the right to work to the people of India and hence is termed as a “People’s Act”.
- The Act sets a minimum limit to the wages, to be paid with gender equality. The states are required to evolve a set of norms for the measurement of works and schedule of rates. The unemployment allowance must be paid if the work is not provided within the statutory limit of 15 days.

sources: the hindu, mgnrega.
5-member panel mooted for deciding on monetary policy

Abandoning their original position on the proposed amendments to the RBI act, both RBI and Union Finance Ministry have arrived at a mid-way position.

What’s proposed?

The finance ministry has proposed a five-member Monetary Policy Committee which will have the responsibility of deciding India’s monetary policy, including the decision on interest rates.

**Current scenario:** At present, the Governor is advised by a technical committee but can veto decisions, being singularly responsible for monetary policy.

Composition of the newly proposed committee:

- The government will nominate two members.
- RBI will nominate one expert, besides two of its officials: the Deputy Governor and the executive director dealing with monetary policy.

Voting Powers of members:

Each of the five members would have one vote and the RBI Governor, chair of the committee, will have a casting vote in the event of a tie in situations such as the absence of a member.

Background:

- A draft of the Indian Financial Code that the Ministry had posted on its website in July proposed to strip the Governor of veto vote on the monetary policy. The draft proposed a six-member monetary policy committee, besides powers for the government to appoint four of the six members.
• The proposal had drawn sharp criticism, including from the former RBI Governors.
• RBI was also unhappy over the proposed amendments to the RBI Act that Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had announced in his Budget speech.
• Realising the RBI’s opposition, the Finance Minister had dropped the proposed amendments from the Finance Bill.

It should however be noted that the inflation target for the RBI in each financial year will be determined by the Government in consultation with the RBI itself.

sources: the hindu.

**Topic: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability.**

**Delhi Assembly Passes Bill to Penalise Officials for Delay in Providing Services**

The Delhi Assembly recently passed the **Delhi (Right of Citizen to Time Bound Delivery of Services) Amendment Bill**.

• The amendments seek to rectify the current Act which has put the "entire onus" of getting compensation, fixing the responsibility for delayed services on the citizen.
• This legislation will automatically deduct salaries of government officials in case there is a delay in delivering government services by them.

Details:
• The Bill seeks to ensure that every government department puts out comprehensive citizens charter, within 30 days of its notification and that the responsibility is fixed with Head of Departments.
• The Bill also encourages government departments, local bodies to adopt the e-governance platform to deliver their respective citizen related services in a prescribed time period through electronic means aimed at bringing transparency.
• The Bill envisages entrusting a 'Competent Officer', a person not below the rank of Deputy Secretary, with the purpose of effecting payment of compensation to an individual and recovery of the compensation from the officer or person responsible.
• It also keeps aside a service performance incentive fund to encourage officials by offering them rewards for ensuring timely service delivery.

Presently, there are a total of 371 services, covering almost all departments, under the ambit of the legislation.

sources: the hindu.

**Topic: e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential.**

*I-T department launches PAN-based litigation management system*

The Income Tax department has activated a PAN-based online system which enables the taxman to access cases in their jurisdiction on a click, amongst a building database of over 5 lakh appeals and 1.50 lakh judgements.

- This facility is part of the National Judicial Reference System (NJRS).
- The new measure will drastically cut down time in appeal and litigation management in the department.
- The system is the first of its kind in the country for comprehensive litigation management in any government department.
- The facility will be maintained by the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL).

The **National Judicial Reference System (NJRS)** is a project of Indian Income Tax Department to streamline its tax litigation system. It aims to be a comprehensive repository of all Appeals and Judgments related to Direct Taxes in India. NJRS will help the IT department in decongesting and streamlining the huge backlog of litigation in various courts and Tribunals related to direct tax cases.

sources: et.

**Topic:** Schemes, Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections.

**India re-elected as Member of International Maritime Council**

India has been re-elected to the Council of the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

- India was elected to the IMO council under Category 'B' at the 29th session of the Assembly of the IMO held recently in London.
- India ranks amongst the top twenty ship owning countries of the world in terms of Gross Tonnage as well as Deadweight.

About IMO:
• The IMO is the **United Nations specialised agency** with responsibility for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine pollution by ships.
• It has 171 Member States and three Associate Members.
• The IMO's primary purpose is to develop and maintain a comprehensive regulatory framework for shipping and its remit today includes safety, environmental concerns, legal matters, technical cooperation, maritime security and the efficiency of shipping.
• IMO is governed by an assembly of members and is financially administered by a council of members elected from the assembly.
• The IMO's structure comprises the **Assembly**, the **Council**, the **Maritime Safety Committee**, the **Marine Environment Protection Committee**, the **Legal Committee**, the **Technical Cooperation Committee**, and the **secretariat**, headed by a Secretary-General.

**IMO council:**

• The IMO Council acts as the IMO's Governing Body. It has a crucial role to play in deciding various matters in relation to the global shipping industry, including its work programme strategy and budget.
• Members of the Council consist of 40 member states, elected by its Assembly including 10 members in category A with the largest interest in providing international shipping services; 10 members in category B with the largest interest in international seaborne trade and 20 members in category C with special interests in maritime transport or navigation.
• India has been one of the earliest members of the IMO, having ratified its Convention and joined it as a member-state in the year 1959.

sources: pib, imo.
**Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, partners ICRC for Enable Makeathon**

The union ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has partnered with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for Enable Makeathon.

What is Enable Makethon?

- The Enable Makeathon is a project initiated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and its partners to help create new assistive devices for persons with disabilities living in rural areas across the world.
- It is motivated by the spirit of broad collaboration with the government, the private sector, the academia as well as other interested individuals.
- It is a 60-day programme by the end of which participants – including technology and design experts, persons with disabilities and mentors – would have developed solutions and products for persons with disabilities in the form of prototypes.

sources: pib.

**Topic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.**

**Technology Acquisition and Development Fund**

The union government has launched the **Technology Acquisition and Development Fund (TADF) under the National Manufacturing Policy.**
About TADF scheme:

- The Scheme facilitates acquisition of clean & green technologies by micro, small and medium units across the sectors.
- It aims to bridge the technological gap at an affordable cost.
- The Scheme is conceptualised to catalyse the manufacturing growth in MSME sector to contribute to the national focus of Make in India.
- The Scheme would be implemented through Global Innovation and Technology Alliance (GITA), a joint venture company of CII and Department of Science and Technology.
- Under the scheme financial support will be provided in acquiring of technology/Patent from across the Globe based on applications received from MSMEs.
- The fund will support, via subsidies, manufacturing of equipment for controlling pollution, reducing energy consumption and water conservation.
- The scheme will also facilitate resource conservation activities in industries located in NIMZ through the introduction of subsidy schemes for energy/ environmental/ water audits, construction of green buildings, implementation of waste treatment facilities and implementation of renewable energy projects through financial support.

sources: pib.

New look for backward region sops

A committee of chief ministers, headed by Madhya Pradesh’s Shivraj Singh Chouhan, constituted by the Centre to revamp the centrally-sponsored schemes (CSS) has asked the centre to review the existing arrangements in the Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF) scheme.
• BRGF scheme was delinked completely from central support in the 2015-16 Union Budget and was transferred to state governments, causing much heartburn between the Centre and the states.
• The committee has also suggested that the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog and the Union finance ministry could recommend area-based interventions in some of the states as special packages to take care of the state component in the BRGF.
• The committee has also disagreed with the notion that the central government's assistance to states had been reduced because of the higher devolution to states through the 14th Finance Commission.

About BRGF:

Launched in 2007, the fund signifies a new approach to addressing persistent regional imbalances in rural development. The programme subsumed the Rashtriya Sama Vikas Yojana (RSVY), a scheme earlier being administered by the Planning Commission.

• The BRGF programme represents a major shift in approach from top-down plans to participative plans prepared from the grassroots level upwards.

Under the scheme, fund is provided to:

• Bridge critical gaps in local infrastructure and other development requirements that are not being adequately met through existing inflows.
• Strengthen Panchayat and Municipality level governance with more appropriate capacity building.
• Provide professional support to local bodies for planning, implementation and monitoring their plans.
• Improve the performance and delivery of critical functions assigned to Panchayats, and counter possible efficiency and equity losses on account of inadequate local capacity.

The BRGF Programme covers 250 districts in 27 States, of which 232 districts fall under the purview of Parts IX and IX-A of the Constitution dealing with the Panchayats and the Municipalities, respectively. The remaining 18 districts are covered by other local government structures, such as Autonomous District and Regional Councils under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and state specific arrangements as in the case of Nagaland and the hill areas of Manipur.

sources: pib.

One Rank One Pension

The Government recently issued the much awaited One Rank One Pension or OROP notification. Although, a formal announcement on OROP was made in September 2015, no official order was issued because of Bihar elections and the Election Commission’s Model Code of Conduct.

• With this announcement, over 25 lakh veterans across the country will get at least Rs. 3,000 to 5,000 more in pensions - depending on their last rank and years of service.

• The increased pension will be paid with effect from July 1, 2014.

Details:

• According to the notification, the government will pay the arrears of OROP in four equal half-yearly installments. However, all family pensioners, including those receiving special or liberalized family
pension and gallantry award winners, will get their arrears in a single installment.

• The pension of past pensioners would be fixed on the basis of the pension of retirees of 2013, and the benefit will be granted from July 1, 2014.

• The government has reversed its contentious proposal to exclude ex-servicemen who had sought premature retirement from the ambit of OROP.

• The government has also notified the appointment of a judicial committee to look into anomalies of OROP. The panel will submit its report in six months.

However, Ex-servicemen are not happy with this notification mainly because of the following reasons:

• According to the notification, pension would be re-fixed on the basis of pension of retirees of calendar year 2013 and the benefit will be effective with effect from July 1, 2014. The veterans had demanded that the period for pension should be financial year 2013-14 and not the calendar year. Also, they wanted April 1 as the effective date instead of July 1.

• The notification says that in future, the pension would be re-fixed every 5 years. However, ex-servicemen had been demanding revision of pension every two years, if not one.

• The notification says pension will be re-fixed for all pensioners on the basis of the average of minimum and maximum pension of personnel retiring in 2013 in the same rank and with the same length of service. The veterans had demanded to take into account the maximum and not the average.

• The Government has appointed a one man judicial commission to examine issues, while veterans want the committee to comprise soldiers only.
**Topic: Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.**

**National Legal Services Day**

The 21st National Legal Services Day was recently celebrated across the nation. The National Legal Services Day was initiated by the Supreme Court in the year 1995 all across the India to offer help and support to the weaker and poor group of sections of people which may be women, disabled persons, Scheduled Tribes, children, Scheduled Castes, human trafficking victims as well as natural calamities victims.

**Aim:** The aim of the observance is to offer the free of charge, proficient and legal services to the people of weaker sections of society.

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

**Now, COPD to take your breath away**

Some recent studies have indicated that Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) — a progressive disease that makes it hard to breathe — is on the rise in the Capital.

- Doctors in the city are now being advised to identify and counsel patients who visit them with the problem.
- According to experts, after pollution, lack of awareness about this condition is the major reason for increased risk of COPD deaths.
About COPD:

- **COPD** is a **non-communicable lung** disease that progressively robs sufferers of breath.
- **Symptoms** include shortness of breath or complete breathlessness, chest congestion, wheezing, coughing mucus, excessively scratchy throat, presence of sputum, feeling lethargic and abrupt weight loss.
- COPD is caused by tobacco, smoking, biomass fuel smoke and exposure to industrial pollution, fumes and environmental pollutants.
- It is the third leading cause of death worldwide and in India approximately 15 million suffer from COPD.
- It causes four times more deaths in metro cities of India as compared to the US and Europe due to common tobacco and smoking habits in people and environment pollution.
- Studies indicate that 25-50% of people with clinically significant COPD don’t even know they have it. That is because the early stages of COPD are often unrecognised.
- People with existing COPD disease are considered to be at an increased risk of developing morbidities like cardiovascular issues, lung cancer and a variety of other medical anomalies.

sources: the hindu.

**Chennai’s new strategy to eliminate TB**

Chennai has been chosen as one of two cities in the world where the Zero TB Cities project will try to create an “island of elimination”. Lima in Peru is the other city.

- The project will be formally launched in Chennai in a few months’ time.
With the implementation of this project, Chennai may drastically reduce TB mortality, shrink the number of new cases annually and impact TB prevalence in the city in a matter of 3-5 years.

The project will be implemented by the Municipal Corporation of Chennai with the Chennai-based REACH and the National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis (NIRT) assisting it.

About the project:

- The Zero TB Cities project began in 2014. It has earnestly embraced the Zero TB Declaration in 2012 that calls for a “new global attitude” in the fight against TB.
- Making a marked departure from the current highly ineffectual methods used to tackle the disease, the project envisages a comprehensive tuberculosis elimination strategy at the community level by using all the currently available arsenals.
- The “island of elimination” strategy does not call for any breakthroughs but only requires a change of mindset and better use of methods and tools that already exist.
- The main goal of the project is to help communities move to zero deaths from tuberculosis in their own way, and create “islands of elimination”, which will reverse the overall tuberculosis epidemic.
- The Project is a collaborative effort between Harvard’s Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, Duke University’s Sanford School of Public Policy and Duke Center for International Development.
- The very objective of the project is that other cities in India and elsewhere take the initiative in a similar way and tackle their own TB epidemics urgently.

To cut the transmission cycle and reduce mortality, the project intends to fight the TB war in Chennai by actively searching for people with TB disease, providing preventive therapy to people infected with TB and belonging to high-risk groups, controlling TB transmission by routinely
using efficient tools for early and accurate diagnosis and providing appropriate therapy immediately, and finally by making sure the right supportive programmes are in place to keep patients on therapy.

sources: the hindu.

**AMRIT outlet**

The Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare, Shri J P Nadda recently inaugurated the Affordable Medicines and Reliable Implants for Treatment (AMRIT) outlet at AIIMS, Delhi.

About AMRIT outlets:

- These are retail outlets, which will sell drugs for the two ailments at highly discounted rates.
- The main aim of these outlets is to reduce the expenditure incurred by patients on treatment of cancer and heart diseases.
- The AMRIT pharmacy will sell 202 cancer and 186 cardio-vascular drugs, and 148 types of cardiac implants at very affordable prices.
- Patients can buy medicines and implants at 50 to 60% cheaper prices than the open market from AMRITs.
- The project has been floated in a tie-up with government-owned HLL Lifecare Ltd (HLL) which is deputed to establish and run the AMRIT chain of pharmacies across the country.

Soon, AMRITs will be launched in all Central Govt hospitals. Lakhs of patients will benefit from this initiative.

Significance of this move:
The government’s move comes amid statistics that peg Indians diagnosed with cancer at 700,000 every year. About 2.8 million people have cancer at any point of time and half a million die of the disease each year. The annual figure of women being diagnosed with breast cancer in India is 145,000, according to the World Health Organisation. A significant number of patients (nearly over 50 per cent) stop visiting hospitals after two or three cycles of chemotherapy due to unaffordable costs.

sources: pib.

**IISc Makes Indian Debut in Top 100 World University Ranking**

The Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore has broken India’s poor ranking spell by making a debut in the world’s top 100 universities for engineering and technology in the ’Times Higher Education (THE) Ranking for Engineering & Technology’.

- IISc has made its entry at the 99th spot in the list.
- The list is dominated by US institutions with Stanford, CalTech and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the top three positions.
- In the list, the US holding 31 positions - down from 34 last year -while Asia holds 25 positions in the Top 100, up from 18 last year.
- Asian universities have occupied six positions in the Top 30 this year, with Japan, China, Korea, Taiwan and India all improving their representation, while Singapore and Hong Kong maintained theirs.

sources: the hindu.

**AIDS preventive medicine available from December in Sonagachi**
An experimental project aimed at providing HIV-preventive medicine to sex workers will shortly be launched in Sonagachi, West Bengal. Sonagachi is one of Asia’s largest red light districts.

- The feasibility project recently received clearance from the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) and Union Health Ministry.

Details:

- Under the project, ‘Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis’ (PrEP), regular medicine would be given to an HIV-negative sex worker who engages sexually with an HIV-positive person.
- The medicine is designed to prevent sex workers from contracting HIV infections. It has been very successful abroad in preventing HIV infection.
- PrEP has the potential to bring down the HIV risk factor by 60-70% among high-risk groups such as sex-workers.
- According to experts, the use of condoms and taking PrEP medicine everyday would offer double protection against HIV infection.
- The project is to be financed by the Melinda Gates Foundation.
- An awareness drive for the campaign has already been taken up among the sex workers.

The feasibility project could soon turn into a policy to prevent AIDS, given that the PrEP Medicine is very cheap.

sources: the hindu.

WHO declares end of Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone
WHO has officially declared Sierra Leone Ebola-free. Sierra Leone recorded around half of the total Ebola cases that had infected 28,600 people across the three hardest-hit west African nations - Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea.

- The announcement represents a hugely significant milestone in UN-backed efforts to wipe out Ebola, leaving neighbouring Guinea as the only country still registering cases.
- In Ma 2015, WHO had declared Liberia as the first country to be Ebola-free.

**EBOLA:**

- Ebola virus disease (EVD), formerly known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever, is a severe, often fatal illness in humans. It is a disease of humans and other primates caused by an ebolavirus.
- Symptoms start two days to three weeks after contracting the virus, with a fever, sore throat, muscle pain and headaches.
- The virus may be acquired upon contact with blood or bodily fluids of an infected animal.
- Fruit bats are believed to be a carrier and may spread the virus without being affected. Once human infection occurs, the disease may spread between people, as well.
- In order to reduce the spread, the World Health Organization recommends raising community awareness of the risk factors for Ebola infection and the protective measures individuals can take. These include avoiding contact with infected people and regular hand washing using soap and water. Traditional burial rituals, especially those requiring washing or embalming of bodies, should be discouraged or modified.
**Science and Technology of Yoga and Meditation (SATYAM)**

A new programme called SATYAM—"Science and Technology of Yoga and Meditation"—has been launched by the Ministry of Science and Technology to strengthen research in the areas of yoga and meditation.

**Main objective of the programme:** To harness knowledge obtained in academic institutions and other related agencies for finding Science & Technology-led solutions that would enable the government to cope with stress and strain associated with fast changing social, economic, environmental and professional circumstances.
The programme will encourage research in two major thematic areas:

- Investigations on the effect of Yoga and meditation on physical and mental health.
- Investigations on the effect of Yoga & meditation on the body, brain and mind in terms of basic processes occurring therein.

Research under SATYAM will seek to identify various issues and challenges related to human well-being and address them.

Significance:

Given the ever increasing prevalence of physical and mental health problems, the holistic approach of Yoga and meditation is believed to have the potential to find beneficial treatment that is relatively safer and more cost-effective.

Sources: pib.

**Govt. forms committee to review drug pricing policy**

The Union government has formed an inter-ministerial committee to review the Drug Price Control Order (DPCO) 2013, following the Supreme Court verdict in July this year that termed the drug pricing policy as irrational and unreasonable.

Composition:

The committee will be composed of representatives from DIPP, Ministry of Health, National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) and Department of Pharmaceuticals.

Functions of the committee:
• The committee will look into the drug pricing mechanism as there have been complaints that the companies are making significant profits which go up to few thousand per cent.
• The committee will also look into the pricing of medicines, and specifically in the market based pricing formula which is being used at present under DPCO 2013.

Background:

• In July this year, while hearing the petition of NGO All India Drug Action Network, the Supreme Court had observed that the Centre was fixing maximum price of a medicine above the retail price of the leading company.
• The NGO, in its plea, had also argued that MBP (Market Based Pricing) was never used for any price regulatory purposes and under the new policy, simple average ceiling prices were, in many cases, higher than the market leader price.
• The NGO had also sought inclusion of more life-saving medicines of diseases such as diabetes and tuberculosis in the list of drugs whose prices would be regulated by the government.

As stipulated under DPCO 2013, drug price regulator NPPA fixes the ceiling price of essential medicines of schedule-I. So far, the authority has fixed the ceiling price of 530 formulations from the list. And no one is authorised to sell any scheduled medicine to a consumer at a price higher than the one notified by NPPA under the order. While fixing the ceiling price, 16% margin is allowed for retailers.

sources: the hindu.
**Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.**

*Sebi, Bangla regulator sign pact over co-operation*

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) on co-operation and technical assistance.

- The MoU was signed by the chairmen of the two bodies in the presence of Sheikh Hasina Wazed, prime minister of Bangladesh.

Details:

- The MoU is aimed at promoting economic links, enhancing investor protection, and development of capital markets.
- Utilising the experience of Sebi, the MoU also aims to create an opportunity for strengthening the Bangladesh capital market.
- It will further facilitate training and technical assistance program between the two jurisdictions.
- It also aims at enhancing investor protection and creating conditions for an effective development of securities markets in the two countries.

Sebi has so far signed MoUs with 21 nations.

**About SEBI:**

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is the regulator for the securities market in India.

- It was established in the year 1988 and given statutory powers on 12 April 1992 through the SEBI Act, 1992.
SEBI is composed of-

- The chairman who is **nominated by Union Government of India**.
- Two members, i.e., Officers from Union Finance Ministry.
- One member from the Reserve Bank of India.
- The remaining five members are nominated by Union Government of India, out of them at least three shall be whole-time members.

Important functions performed by SEBI:

- Approve by–laws of stock exchanges.
- Require the stock exchange to amend their by–laws.
- Inspect the books of accounts and call for periodical returns from recognized stock exchanges.
- Inspect the books of accounts of financial intermediaries.
- Compel certain companies to list their shares in one or more stock exchanges.
- Registration of brokers.

Sources: The Hindu, Wiki.

**India, Singapore enter into strategic tie-up**

India and Singapore have signed a joint declaration envisaging a Strategic Partnership which aims at broadening engagement in existing areas of cooperation.

- This declaration was signed along with 10 other agreements during the recent visit of Prime Minister Modi to Singapore.

Strategic partnership:

- The strategic partnership aims to catalyze the relations between the two countries in various sectors ranging from political, defence and
security cooperation to economic, cultural and people-to-people contacts.

- The strategic partnership would also enhance cooperation in areas such as the promotion of investments, urban solutions, smart cities, water and waste management, and skill development.

India and Singapore:

- India was one of the first countries to recognize Singapore's sovereignty, doing so on Aug 24, 1965.
- Singapore is India’s 10th largest trading partner, and both militaries train together regularly.
- The close ties between Singapore and India reflect bilateral trade flows that reached $19.4 billion in 2013-14.
- Singapore is one of the largest sources of foreign investment into India. Total foreign direct investment flows from Singapore to India reached a cumulative total of $36 billion between 2000 and mid-2015.

2015 marks the golden anniversary of bilateral relations.

sources: the hindu, et.

**ASEAN to ease travel, mobility of labour**

By signing the **Kuala Lumpur declaration on the establishment of the AEC**, ASEAN leaders have declared the establishment of an EU-style regional economic bloc, **ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)**.

About the AEC:
The AEC envisages a single market with a free flow of goods, capital and skilled labour across borders in the highly competitive economic region.

It will integrate Southeast Asia's diverse economies. South Asia is a region with 620 million people and a combined gross domestic product of USD 2.4 trillion.

The move is also expected to boost political and diplomatic cooperation between members of the grouping.

This community could give India greater access to a market with a combined GDP of $2.57 trillion. The grouping is also seen as a huge middle-class market that Indian industries and services can take advantage of.

ASEAN 2025:

- The ASEAN leaders have also adopted the declaration on "ASEAN 2025, forging ahead together".
- The ASEAN 2025 document charts the path for the AEC building over the next ten years.
- It is a forward looking roadmap that articulates ASEAN goals and aspirations to realise further consolidation.
- ASEAN 2025 means a community committed to working with external partners to strengthen cooperation in combating non-traditional security challenges like terrorism, drug related crimes, human trafficking and maritime issues through various initiatives and projects.

About ASEAN:

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the Founding
Fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

• At present there are 10 members namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The motto of ASEAN is “One Vision, One Identity, One Community”.

sources: the hindu, asean.

UN approves resolution urging action against IS

The UN Security Council has unanimously approved a French-sponsored resolution calling on all nations to redouble and coordinate action to prevent further attacks by Islamic State terrorists and other extremist groups.

• This is the 14th terrorism-related resolution adopted by the UN’s most powerful body since 1999.

About the resolution:

• The resolution says the Islamic State group constitutes a global and unprecedented threat to international peace and security and expresses the council’s determination to combat by all means this unprecedented threat.

• The resolution unequivocally condemns horrifying terrorist attacks carried out by the Islamic State this year in Sousse, Tunisia and Ankara, Turkey.

• The resolution also calls on UN member states that have the capacity to do so to take all necessary measures against the Islamic State group and all other violent extremist groups to eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria.
• The resolution also urges UN member states to intensify their efforts to stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters in Iraq and Syria and to prevent and suppress the financing on terrorism.

Significance of this resolution:

• It was adopted a week after violent extremists launched a coordinated gun and bomb assault that killed 130 people in Paris which the Islamic State claims it carried out.
• It also comes eight days after twin suicide bombings in Beirut killed 43 people, and three weeks after a Russian airliner crashed over Egypt’s Sinai peninsula killing all 224 people on board both attacks also claimed by IS.

sources: the hindu.

**First batch of enclave residents from Bangladesh arrives in West Bengal**

The first batch of people who have been living in erstwhile Indian enclaves in Bangladesh, who opted to come to India, recently arrived in West Bengal’s Cooch Behar district.

• They were greeted by the district administration at the international border check-post at Changrabandha in the district on their arrival.
• The district administration is providing all the facilities to the people.
• According to the administration, the second batch of people will arrive by November end this year.
• About 980 persons are likely to come to India and the formalities have to be completed by November 30.
Land boundary agreement:

Under the Land Boundary Agreement between, the Bangladeshi enclaves in India and Indian enclaves in Bangladesh were transferred on July 31, 2015.

- The agreement involved handing over 17,000 acres of land to Bangladesh in return for 7,000 acres in 162 enclaves in West Bengal, Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya.
- It also required an amendment to the Constitution (the 119th amendment) ratified by both Houses of Parliament with a two-thirds majority.

It should be noted that under the agreement not a single person from the erstwhile Bangladesh enclaves in India has decided to go to Bangladesh. About 980 persons from Indian enclaves in Bangladesh have decided to move to India.

sources: the hindu.

**Tripartite Agreement among India, Brazil and South Africa**

The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of the Tripartite Agreement among India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA), on the IBSA Fund for the Alleviation of Poverty and Hunger.

- This decision will help in strengthening the IBSA Fund which is a unique vehicle in the context of South-South cooperation.

About the Fund:

The IBSA Fund for the Alleviation of Poverty and Hunger was set up in 2004 as one of the three pillars of cooperation under the IBSA Dialogue Forum. The other two pillars are consultation and coordination.
on global political issues and trilateral collaboration in concrete areas and projects.

- The IBSA countries contribute US$ 1 million each annually to the Fund.
- India on its part has contributed US$ 9.1 million so far to the Fund.
- The IBSA Fund undertakes development projects in third countries.
- The first project to be financed by the IBSA Fund was in support of agriculture and livestock development.
- The Fund was also conferred the South-South Partnership Award at the 2006 UN Day event held in New York in December 2006. This indicates the importance and recognition of the IBSA Fund in the context of South-South developmental cooperation.

The **IBSA Dialogue Forum** launched in June 2003, was conceived as a forum for cooperation among three vibrant democracies of the South that are recognized as having global relevance and impact. All three are developing nations with pluralistic, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious societies.

sources: pib.

**India and Bangladesh sign Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to operationalize agreement on coastal shipping**

India and Bangladesh recently signed the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to operationalize the “**Agreement on Coastal Shipping**” signed between the two countries in June, 2015.

About the SOP:
• The SOP has been framed as per the terms and conditions of the Agreement on Coastal Shipping and both India and Bangladesh have agreed to its provisions.
• It will pave the way to promote coastal shipping between India and Bangladesh and would enhance bilateral trade between the two countries by bringing down the cost of transportation of EXIM cargo.
• The SOP contains provisions which stipulate that India and Bangladesh shall render same treatment to the other country’s vessels as it would have done to its national vessels used in international sea transportation.

Advantages of the Agreement:

• The agreement will enable a huge saving in logistic costs of EXIM transport between the two countries.
• The opening of coastal shipping between India and Bangladesh would enable the movement of cargo to the North East through coastal shipping upto Chittagong and thereafter by road/inland waterways.
• The deep draft ports on the eastern coast of India can be ‘hub ports’ for the onward transportation of cargo to Bangladesh via the coastal mode through River sea Vessel (RSV) category of vessels.
• The Indian ports will attract enhanced cargo and also the overall transportation cost to Bangladesh will get reduced.
• The Indian ports serving as trans- shipment ports for Bangladesh cargo will derive benefits by way of enhanced throughput as a result of Indo-Bangladesh coastal trade.

sources: pib.

*Pak, China kick off ambitious USD 46 billion economic corridor project*
Pakistan and China recently kicked off their ambitious 46 billion US Dollar economic corridor project with China acquiring over 2,000 acres of land in restive Balochistan to develop the strategic Gwadar port.

- The two countries have signed a deal to acquire the usage rights to more than 2,000 acres of land for a Chinese company.

About the CPEC project:

- The 3,000-km corridor connecting Xinjiang with Pakistan’s Gwadar Port through PoK is stated to cost $46 billion.
- The project includes building of highways, railways as well as pipelines.
- This corridor is among the six economic corridors conceived under China’s Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road.

Significance of this project:

- This project will shorten the route for China’s energy imports from the Middle East by about 12,000 kms.
- The corridor would transform Pakistan into a regional hub and give China a shorter and cheaper route for trade with much of Asia, West Asia and Africa.
- The Corridor will link China’s underdeveloped far—western region to Pakistan’s Gwadar deep—sea port on the Arabian Sea.

India has already conveyed its objections to China as it passes through disputed territory. However, Chinese officials defend it as commercial project aimed at improving the lives of people.
Pakistan invites India for key Afghan meet

Pakistan has invited India’s External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj for a crucial regional conference on Afghanistan, called “Heart of Asia”. This move could provide an opportunity for both India and Pakistan to mend their frosty ties.

- The ‘Heart of Asia’ conference will be held in December, where representatives from Azerbaijan, China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and the UAE are expected to attend.
• The Afghan conference will discuss the current situation in Afghanistan with particular focus on helping the war-torn country's economy.

About the conference:

The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process presents a new vision of cooperation and confidence building for the region with Afghanistan at its centre.

• The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process articulates a set of principles, such as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and promoting cooperation in the areas of common challenges and shared interests in the region.
• It provides a platform for discussing key regional issues among participating states.
• Since its inception in 2011, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process has been lead by two co-chairs: Afghanistan as a permanent co-chair, and one of the Heart of Asia countries hosting the annual ministerial meeting as the co-chair.
• As permanent co-chair of this regional process, Afghanistan has been recognized as the main focal point/ coordinator of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process has three main elements:

• Political Consultation involving Afghanistan and its near and extended neighbours.
• A sustained incremental approach to implementation of the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) identified in the Istanbul Process document.
• Seeking to contribute and bring greater coherence to the work of various regional processes and organisations, particularly as they relate to Afghanistan.
UNESCO rejects Kosovo’s bid for membership

Members of the U.N. cultural agency have rejected Kosovo’s bid for membership. This is being seen as a victory for Serbia and Russia and a blow to Kosovo’s mission for global recognition as a state.

- Most nations that participated in the recent voting favoured Kosovo’s membership, with 92 “yes” votes and 50 “no” votes and 29 abstentions. But, according to UNESCO rules, Kosovo needed the support of two-thirds of those voting, or 94 “yes” votes.
- Russia, which backed Serbia in Kosovo’s 1998—99 war for independence, has used its U.N. Security Council veto to block Kosovo from becoming a full U.N. member.

About Kosovo:

- Kosovo is a self-declared independent country in the Balkans region of Europe.
- In 2010 the International Court of Justice ruled that Kosovo’s declaration of independence did not violate international law, but Serbia rejected that decision.
- Kosovo has been recognized by 111 countries since it declared independence from Serbia in 2008.
- Kosovo has won membership in the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Kosovo’s predominantly ethnic Albanian leadership had promised that if it became a UNESCO member, it would protect the cultural heritage of Serbs, despite tensions that have lingered since the war.
• Serbia had warned that allowing Kosovo into UNESCO would fuel those tensions and hurt an EU-brokered dialogue aimed at normalizing ties between the former foes.

sources: the hindu, Britannica.

**Indian Air Force (IAF) Exercise Livewire Concludes**

IAF’s annual exercise, Exercise Livewire, was recently concluded.

What is it?

It was a country-wide Air Force exercise conducted **to work up the full spectrum of IAF capability and undertake planned operations in response to likely future threats and operational contingencies.**

Other details:

• During the exercise, the IAF operated its latest acquisitions in a network centric environment, achieving very high levels of synergy with the Army and the Navy.
• During this exercise, hundreds of missions were flown with impeccable planning and execution.
• Some of the major types of missions flown include long range strikes, Air-to-Air Refueling, Air Defence in a net-centric environment, Counter Surface Force Operations and operations in varied kinds of terrain.
• The successful and seamless conduct of the exercise has brought great confidence among the operating crew in the capability of their equipment and aircraft.
• The exercise was based on a scenario that included rapid deployment across the country at all operational Air Force bases.
sources: pib.

**Indra 2015**

The seventh edition India-Russia Joint Military Exercise ‘**Indra-2015**’ has begun in Bikaner district of Rajasthan.

- The main focus of this exercise is on ‘**Counter-Terrorism Operations in Desert Terrain under a United Nations Mandate**’.
- The bilateral exercise would be held between Indian Army’s Infantry Battalion and Independent Russian Motorised Brigade.
- It would be conducted 2 phases, namely ‘Combat Conditioning & Tactical Training’ and ‘Validation’ phases.
- This joint exercise will also engage in variety of joint missions including joint planning, Search and Rescue, Cordon and Search operations, special arms skills and joint tactical drills.

The bilateral exercise seeks to further boost people to people as well as military to military ties between India and Russia.

sources: pib, et.

**Trans Pacific trade pact text triggers fresh debate in U.S.**

The recent release of the text of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement in the US has triggered a fresh round of domestic debate on how it would impact the country.
• Now, getting Congressional approval for the pact has become a challenge for Barack Obama.
• According to President Obama, the TPP is the highest standard trade agreement in history. It eliminates 18,000 taxes that various countries put on American goods and will boost Made-in-America exports abroad while supporting higher-paying jobs right here at home.

Why this pact is being opposed?

• Many US citizens and dozens of lawmakers are sceptical about the new pact. This pact, according to some, is just for CEOs of big companies.
• Opponents see the pact as mostly a giveaway to business, encouraging further export of manufacturing jobs to low-wage nations while limiting competition and encouraging higher prices for pharmaceuticals and other high-value products by spreading American standards for patent protections to other countries.
• A provision allowing multinational corporations to challenge regulations and court rulings before special tribunals is also drawing intense opposition.

About the Trans-Pacific Partnership:

• The Trans-Pacific Partnership is headed by the US and includes Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam.
• The agreement covers 40% of the world’s economy.
• It would set new terms for trade and business investment among the United States and 11 other Pacific Rim nations.
• It would phase out thousands of import tariffs as well as other barriers to international trade. It also would establish uniform rules on corporations’ intellectual property, open the Internet even in
communist Vietnam and crack down on wildlife trafficking and environmental abuses.

**MoU between India and Belgium for Energy**

The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved a Memorandum of Understanding which has been signed between Indian and Belgian government authorities at the Federal and regional level for energy.

**Objectives of this memorandum:**

- To establish the basis for a cooperative institutional relationship.
- To encourage and promote technical bilateral cooperation on new and renewable energy issues on the basis of mutual benefit, equality and reciprocity.
Details:

- The MoU will focus on development of new and renewable energy technologies in the field of Wind energy, Biomass, Solar (thermal and photovoltaic), Smart grids, Geothermal energy, Marine energy, contribution of renewables to diversification of supply and energy security, and any other mutually agreed areas.
- The Memorandum of Understanding will help in strengthening bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

sources: pib.

*India’s APEC membership not on the agenda, says U.S.*

The U.S. has said that India’s desire for membership is not on the agenda of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum meeting which will be held in Manila in Philippines this month.

- During his recent visit to India, the US president Obama had supported India’s desire for membership. However, officials of the APEC say that President Obama had so far only welcomed India’s interest in joining the APEC.
- India has been an observer at the forum since 2011.

APEC:

- The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a regional economic forum established in 1989 to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific. APEC has 21 members.
Aim: to create greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and secure growth and by accelerating regional economic integration.

Functions:

- APEC works to help all residents of the Asia-Pacific participate in the growing economy.
- APEC projects provide digital skills training for rural communities and help indigenous women export their products abroad.
- Recognizing the impacts of climate change, APEC members also implement initiatives to increase energy efficiency and promote sustainable management of forest and marine resources.
- The forum adapts to allow members to deal with important new challenges to the region’s economic well-being. This includes ensuring disaster resilience, planning for pandemics, and addressing terrorism.

Members:

- APEC’s 21 member economies are Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; People’s Republic of China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; The Philippines; The Russian Federation; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; United States of America; Viet Nam.
- APEC Members account for approximately 40% of the world’s population, approximately 54% of the world’s gross domestic product and about 44% of world trade.

In APEC, all economies have an equal say and decision-making is reached by consensus. There are no binding commitments or treaty obligations. Commitments are undertaken on a voluntary basis and capacity building
projects help members implement APEC initiatives. The APEC process is supported by a permanent secretariat based in Singapore.

sources: the hindu, apec.

**Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.**

**UNHCR to get 2015 Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace**

The Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2015 will be awarded to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

- The decision was taken by the *international jury of the prize, headed by Vice President* Hamid Ansari.

Why UNHRC?

The prestigious award is being given to the office of UNHCR in recognition of its immense contributions in assisting millions of refugees and for working under difficult circumstances to bring about changes to reduce the flow of refugees.

About the award:

- The prize is accorded *annually to individuals or organisations* in recognition of creative efforts toward promoting international peace, development and a new international economic order, ensuring that scientific discoveries are used for the larger good of humanity, and enlarging the scope of freedom.
- The prize carries a cash award of Rs.25 lakhs and a citation.
• It was first awarded in 1986.

UNHCR:

• The UN General Assembly established the UNHCR on 14 December, 1950, initially to help people displaced by the World War II.
• In the decades that followed, it became the principal agency that has helped displaced people throughout the world.
• UNHCR’S mission is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees and seek lasting solutions to their plight.

sources: the hindu.

**UN confers Shri Kiren Rijiju with Disaster Risk Reduction Asia Champion honour**

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Shri Kiren Rijiju, has been designated as the **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Champion for the Asia Region** by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR).

• The honour was conferred at the recently held inaugural session of the Asia Leaders’ Meeting towards Implementation of the Sendai Framework for DRR in Asia.
• Shri Rijiju is the **first regional champion for DRR after the Sendai Agreement**. He is also the first Indian to be conferred with this honour.

About Sendai Framework:
• The “Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030” was adopted during the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in Sendai, Japan in March, 2015.
• It is the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda, with **seven targets** and **four priorities for action**.
• It was endorsed by the UN General Assembly following the 2015 Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR).
• The Framework is for 15-year. It is a voluntary and non-binding agreement which recognizes that the State has the primary role to reduce disaster risk but that responsibility should be shared with other stakeholders including local government, the private sector and other stakeholders.
• The new Framework is the successor instrument to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters.
• The implementation of the Sendai Framework involves adopting integrated and inclusive institutional measures so as to work towards preventing vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response and recovery and strengthen resilience.

The Seven Global Targets:

1. Substantially reduce global disaster mortality by 2030, aiming to lower average per 100,000 global mortality rate in the decade 2020-2030 compared to the period 2005-2015.
2. Substantially reduce the number of affected people globally by 2030, aiming to lower average global figure per 100,000 in the decade 2020-2030 compared to the period 2005-2015.
3. Reduce direct disaster economic loss in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2030.
4. Substantially reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, among them health and educational facilities, including through developing their resilience by 2030.
5. Substantially increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020.
6. Substantially enhance international cooperation to developing countries through adequate and sustainable support to complement their national actions for implementation of this Framework by 2030.
7. Substantially increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments to the people by 2030.

The Four Priorities for Action under the Framework:

1. Understanding disaster risk
2. Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk
3. Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience
4. Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction

sources: pib, unisdr.

**Syed Akbaruddin is India’s next Permanent Representative to UN**

Senior diplomat and former high-profile spokesperson of the External Affairs Ministry Syed Akbaruddin has been appointed as India’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, succeeding Asoke Mukerji.

- Mr. Akbaruddin is a 1985 batch IFS officer. He is currently serving as an Additional Secretary in MEA.
- As India’s Permanent Representative to the UN, Mr. Akbaruddin’s main task would be to push for India’s bid to gain permanent membership of the UN Security Council as well as to strongly advocate its position on key issues.
The Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations is the India's foremost diplomatic representative to the United Nations. The permanent Representative (UN ambassador) is the head of a diplomatic mission to the United Nations (UN).

sources: the hindu.

**Gokarn appointed IMF Executive Director**

Subir Gokarn, former deputy governor of the Reserve Bank of India (2009-12) has been appointed **executive director at the International Monetary Fund (IMF)**.

- Gokarn will represent the **Indian constituency which comprises India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka**.
- He replaces **Rakesh Mohan** whose term ended on October 31, 2015.
- Gokarn is also a member of the expenditure management commission, headed by Bimal Jalan, former RBI governor.
- His appointment comes at time when emerging economies are strongly pushing for implementation of IMF’s 2010 quota reform, which aims to give emerging economies such as India a greater say in its functioning.

About the IMF Board of Governors:

- The Board of Governors consists of **one governor and one alternate governor for each member country**.
- Each **member country appoints its two governors**.
- The Board normally meets once a year and is **responsible for electing or appointing executive directors to the Executive Board**.
• While the Board of Governors is officially responsible for approving quota increases, Special Drawing Right allocations, the admittance of new members, compulsory withdrawal of members, and amendments to the Articles of Agreement and By-Laws, in practice it has delegated most of its powers to the IMF's Executive Board.

Executive Board:

• 24 Executive Directors make up Executive Board.
• The Executive Directors represent all 188 member countries in a geographically based roster.
• Countries with large economies have their own Executive Director, but most countries are grouped in constituencies representing four or more countries.
• Following the 2008 Amendment on Voice and Participation which came into effect in March 2011, eight countries each appoint an Executive Director: the United States, Japan, Germany, France, the UK, China, the Russian Federation, and Saudi Arabia.
• The remaining 16 Directors represent constituencies consisting of 4 to 22 countries.

sources: bs, wiki, imf.

**BIS elects Raghuram Rajan as its vice-chairman**

Raghuram Rajan, Governor of Reserve Bank of India (RBI), has been elected **vice-chairman of the Bank of International Settlement (BIS).**

• He will have a three-year term as vice-chairman of the BIS.
• Mr. Rajan is the **first Indian central bank Governor** to become the vice-chairman of BIS.
About Bank of International Settlement (BIS):

- The Bank for International Settlements (BIS) is the world's oldest international financial organization. It was established in May 1930.
- It is based in Basel, Switzerland, with representative offices in Hong Kong and Mexico City.
- It has 60 member central banks, representing countries from around the world that together make up about 95% of world GDP.
- The BIS carries out its work through subcommittees, the secretariats it hosts and through an annual general meeting of all member banks.
- The mission of the BIS is to serve central banks in their pursuit of monetary and financial stability, to foster international cooperation in those areas and to act as a bank for central banks.

The board of BIS:

- The board of BIS is responsible for determining the strategic and policy direction of the BIS, supervising BIS management, and fulfilling the specific tasks given to it by the bank's statutes.
- The BIS board meets at least six times a year.
- The board of directors elects a chairman and a vice-chairman from among its members each for a three-year term.
- The board may have up to 21 members, including six ex-officio directors, comprising the central bank governors of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- Each ex-officio member may appoint another member of the same nationality.
- Nine governors of other member central banks may be elected to the board.

sources: bs, bis.
Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Yuan ticks IMF boxes for reserve currency

International Monetary Fund representatives have given China strong signals that the yuan is likely to soon join IMF’s basket of reserve currencies, known as Special Drawing Rights.

- China has ticked most of the boxes set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to grant the yuan reserve-currency status.
- For a currency to be included, it must assume an important role in global trade and needs to be “freely usable.”

Background:

- China has been seeking to join the Special Drawing Rights basket as part of a campaign to play a larger role in the postwar global economic order dominated by the U.S. and Europe.
- Membership of the IMF club would be a crowning achievement after three decades of breakneck growth that saw the Chinese economy take its place as the world’s second-largest after the U.S.

Why should the yuan be included?

- Global use of the yuan has surged since the IMF rejected SDR inclusion in the last review in 2010.
- Now, the currency has become the fourth most-used in global payments with a 2.79% share, surpassing the yen.
About SDR:

- IMF created the SDR in 1969 to boost global liquidity as the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates unraveled.
- **SDR is not technically a currency.** It gives IMF member countries the right to obtain any of the currencies in the basket -- currently the dollar, euro, yen and pound -- to meet balance-of-payments needs.
- Holders of SDRs can obtain the above mentioned currencies in exchange for their SDRs in two ways: first, through the arrangement of voluntary exchanges between members; and second, by the IMF designating members with strong external positions to purchase SDRs from members with weak external positions.
- In addition to its role as a supplementary reserve asset, the SDR serves as the unit of account of the IMF and some other international organizations.

Review:

- The basket composition is reviewed every five years by the Executive Board of the IMF, or earlier if the IMF finds changed circumstances warrant an earlier review, to ensure that it reflects the relative importance of currencies in the world’s trading and financial systems.

sources: et, imf, wiki.