

Abhimanu

Weekly current affairs Series

Week: I, June 2017

Abhimanu's IAS Study Group

Chandigarh

MIT'S Mega Food Park at Rayagada

- The first Mega Food Park in the state of Odisha was recently inaugurated at Rayagada.
- This is the 7th Mega Food Park operationalized in the last 3 years by the present government.

About Mega Food Parks Scheme (MFP):

- The Mega Food Park is an inclusive concept which is aimed at establishing direct linkages from the farm to processing and on to the consumer markets, through a network of collection centers and Processing Centers.
- The Mega Food Park have a Central Processing Centre (CPC) as the nuclei of all value addition activities facilitated by Primary Processing Centre (PPC), which will act as point of aggregation and primary handling to provide ready to use raw materials to be processed further in the units to be set up in the CPC.
- The PPCs fed by field Collection Centres which will be the first point of contact with growers
- The collection centres is managed by local entrepreneurs will serve as farm level aggregation points for adjoining areas within a radius of about 10 Kms. The collection centres, while serving as the primary nodes for the Mega Food Park network will also enhance farm level value realization by providing direct market access to the farmers. Also it is expected that the collection centres will in course of time emerge as centres of rural commerce thereby spurring economic activity in the area.
- The primary processing centres is located near natural aggregation points will serve a number of collection centres lying in close proximity. The primary processing centres provides facilities for storage, sorting grading cleaning etc. Some of the PPCs may also house facilities for carrying out primary processing like pulping and juicing. Each primary processing centre have transportation facilities like refrigerated vans, trucks etc for transportation of goods from the collection centres and to the central processing centre. Storage facilities include all weather warehouses and cold storage / modified temperature storages wherever required.
- The Central Processing facility is an industrial park spread over an area of about 50 acres and house a number of processing units owned by different business houses.

Analysis:

- Mega food park scheme help in providing better prices to farmers, reduce wastage of perishables, add value to agricultural produce and create huge opportunities for entrepreneurship and employment for the youth.
- This scheme is facing some issues during execution. Land acquisition is a major issue while establishing mega food parks. It is very difficult to get 50 acre of land anywhere, particularly in small and hilly states. The government needs to provide flexibility to this requirement.
- Most agri-business in our country happens through cooperatives, their integration into food parks is critical.
- This scheme gives a grant to the SPV, the SPV finds itself unable to attract the PPCs and CCs. Here, the National Mission on Food Processing could play a major role by providing the Rs. 50 Lakh grant under that mission to units within the MFPs. But that scheme is now delinked from central support and states may have to decide if they want to continue or not. State governments may look into these issues case-by-case basis and provide attractions to these units as well.

- MFP scheme provides maximum grant of Rs.50 crores for setting up a MFP in minimum 50 acres of contiguous land with 50 percent contribution to the total project cost from the SPV. This “one size fits all” approach has not been able to attract the investors having more or less requirements.
- Scheme has not attracted global companies because some of them would not work on basis of “grant” from a developing country. They would like to work on Joint Ventures.
- Current status of Mega Food Park: The Centre's ambitious scheme of Mega Food Parks (MFP) in India is stumbling with some missing deadlines while others not meeting the basic purpose of project. In most cases, before launching the scheme no study was done on global best practices or on similar successful international parks or clusters. All the schemes stress on enhancing domestic capabilities of the Indian (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)) and only some emphasise of increasing India's share in international trade. However, not much importance is given to linking India to the global value chain. The objective in schemes such as the MFP does not refer to increasing export or any form of global linkages. This is an area of concern especially since the Prime Minister has recently launched the 'Make in India' campaign, which focuses on attracting global investors to invest in India for domestic and global markets.
- Financial issues were found to be one of major reasons for incomplete projects. The most significant reason for delay is failure of MFPs in construction of Primary Processing Centres (PPCs). None of the operational MFPs had completely received the grant amount and most of them mentioned that this was because the PPCs and collection centres are yet to be operational. In order to create world class facilities, all the food parks have imported machineries from abroad which are expensive. Hence the rent or the lease amount for these facilities is also expected to be high. In some cases small and medium food processors said that they will not be able to afford these facilities. In case of PPCs, their economic viability also depends on the rental that they charge. Even if the PPC has a state of the art infrastructure the users may not be willing or may not have the ability to pay a high rental.
- Farmers usually opt for the facilities with lower rental. This, in turn, leads to the low usability of the PPC.

India is no longer the fastest-growing economy

- According to data released by CSO, India's economy grew 6.1% in the three months through March from a year earlier – slowing from a provisional 7.0% in the previous quarter.
- While gross domestic product (GDP) growth was 6.1%, gross value added (GVA) growth – a metric that more economists now favour as it excludes indirect tax collection – slowed even more sharply in the fourth quarter to 5.6%, compared to 6.7% in the third quarter.
- Growth for FY 2016-17 came in at 7.1% – despite the fact that all data released today captures the impact of the revised WPI and IIP series, which was widely expected to boost the growth numbers.
- Two key aspects of economic health – gross fixed capital formation and private consumption (as a percentage of GDP) – also slowed down marginally to 28.5% and 57.3% respectively in the fourth quarter when compared to the third quarter.
- GVA growth for the manufacturing and construction sectors, in specific, took a beating in the fourth quarter on a sequential basis. While manufacturing posted 8.2% GVA growth in the third, demonetisation quarter (October-December, 2016), it slumped to 5.3% in the fourth quarter (January – March, 2017).
- Similarly, the construction sector, which many analysts thought would do better as the effects of demonetisation receded, registered negative GVA growth in the fourth quarter (-3.7%).
- India lost its fastest-growing major economy tag in the fourth quarter of 2016-17, with GDP growth coming in at 6.1% compared with China's 6.9% in the same period.

Analysis:

- There are two main reasons for this situation. The first factor was the impact from demonetisation both on the supply and demand side. The effect on the construction sector was the direct impact coming from real estate.
- The second reason for the slump in some sectors, such as financial services, is the impact of the new WPI series. This is why when the GVA growth for sectors – such as “financial and professional services” is looked at “current prices”, the slowdown doesn't appear to be that sharp.

- The most significant imbalance in India's growth story is the paucity of job creation. The demographic 'dividend' is slowly turning into a 'tax' as more young people enter the workforce, while the pace of job creation is meagre. It is critical that policy makers focus on a more equitable distribution of growth for the long-term socio-political stability of the country

Mega Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in Bangladesh

- India's plan to step up investments in Bangladesh by setting up three mega Special Economic Zones (SEZ) exclusively for Indian companies in the latter's territory has hit a major hurdle.
- Indian companies have cited various constraints including inadequate infrastructure and lack of uninterrupted power supply" at Mongla, Bheramara and Mirsarai – the sites in Bangladesh for the proposed Indian SEZs. For better connectivity and business prospects, they sought alternative sites close to the Chittagong Port and the capital city of Dhaka – similar to those been allocated by Bangladesh for Chinese SEZs.
- India and Bangladesh had inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in June 2015 – during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh – for cooperation on establishing Indian SEZs in Bangladesh.
- The plan was to develop Indian SEZs at Mirsarai (1,005 acres), Bheramara (about 480 acres) and Mongla (200 acres). The construction of these SEZs and Indian investment in the zones were to be facilitated through concessional Line of Credit extended by India to Bangladesh.

SEZ:

India was one of the first in Asia to recognize the effectiveness of the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) model in promoting exports, with Asia's first EPZ set up in Kandla in 1965. With a view to overcome the shortcomings experienced on account of the multiplicity of controls and clearances; absence of world-class infrastructure, and an unstable fiscal regime and with a view to attract larger foreign investments in India, the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) Policy was announced in April 2000.

This policy intended to make SEZs an engine for economic growth supported by quality infrastructure complemented by an attractive fiscal package, both at the Centre and the State level, with the minimum possible regulations. SEZs in India functioned from 1.11.2000 to 09.02.2006 under the provisions of the Foreign Trade Policy and fiscal incentives were made effective through the provisions of relevant statutes. After extensive consultations, the SEZ Act, 2005, supported by SEZ Rules, came into effect on 10th February, 2006, providing for drastic simplification of procedures and for single window clearance on matters relating to central as well as state governments.

The main objectives of the SEZ Act are:

- Generation of additional economic activity
- Promotion of exports of goods and services;
- Promotion of investment from domestic and foreign sources;
- Creation of employment opportunities;
- Development of infrastructure facilities;

It is expected that this will trigger a large flow of foreign and domestic investment in SEZs, in infrastructure and productive capacity, leading to generation of additional economic activity and creation of employment opportunities.

The SEZ Act 2005 envisages key role for the State Governments in Export Promotion and creation of related infrastructure. A Single Window SEZ approval mechanism has been provided through a 19 member inter-ministerial SEZ Board of Approval (BoA). The applications duly recommended by the respective State Governments/UT Administration are considered by this BoA periodically. All decisions of the Board of approvals \ Are with consensus.

The SEZ Rules provide for different minimum land requirement for different class of SEZs. Every SEZ is divided into a processing area where alone the SEZ units would come up and the non-processing area where the supporting infrastructure is to be created.

Rajasthan leads in child marriages

- National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has released data on incidences of child marriage in India.

Highlights of the report:

- Rajasthan has reported the highest incidence of child marriages in India.
- The study, based on the 2011 Census, states that 2.5% of marriages of minor girls were reported in Rajasthan, which is followed by 15 States, including Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Nagaland, Assam, Maharashtra, Tripura, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Karnataka.
- Rajasthan also topped in the percentage (4.69%) of boys marrying below the legal age of 21 years. Thirteen other States reported a higher percentage of child marriages among boys when compared with the national average.
- This study is released by Justice A.K. Sikri of the Supreme Court.
- According to the Census study, 12.9% of girls got married in the age of 10-17 years and 43.6% between 18-20 years. However, only 4.9% of boys got married in the 10-17 years age group and 11.2 % in the 18-below 21 age group.
- The study shows a minor decline of 0.1% in the marriage of minor girls. The decline in rural India, between 2001 and 2011 Census was marginally higher than in the whole of the country.

India, Russia ink nuclear plant pact

- India and Russia concluded a pact for setting up the last two units of the Kudankulam nuclear power plant.
- The reactors will be built by India's Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) and Russia's Atomstroyexport Company, a subsidiary of Rosatom, the regulatory body of the Russian nuclear complex.
- Each of the two units will have a capacity to produce 1,000 MW of power.

About kundankulam nuclear power plant:

- The KKNPP was the outcome of an inter-governmental agreement between the erstwhile Soviet Union and India in 1988. It is the single largest nuclear power station in India.
- The power station was envisaged to have six units with total capacity to generate 6,000 MW of electricity (1,000 MW each).
- Construction on the plant began on March 31, 2002 and Unit 1 was synchronised with the southern power grid in October 2013. The second unit started generating electricity in August last year. The original cost of the two units was Rs 13,171 crore, but it was later revised to Rs 17,270 crore.
- Russia advanced a credit of Rs 6,416 crore for construction of the two units.
- Construction of plant's third and fourth units was launched last year and will cost Rs 39,747 crore. While the cost of generating power from first two units is reported at Rs 4.29 per unit, the cost from 3 and 4 is likely to be significantly higher than that.
- Units 3 and 4 of the Kudankulam plant are expected to be commissioned by 2022-23.

- The Russian built Water-Water Energetic Reactor (VVER) reactor Kudankulam unit 1 and 2 are the largest power generating stations in the country. After all the units (1-6) of the plant are commissioned, the nuclear park will have the power generating capacity of 6,000 MW, boosting significantly the country's nuclear power generation.
- The current nuclear power generation capacity of all 22 nuclear power reactors in India is 6780 MW.

Analysis:

- Future of Indian-Russian cooperation holds great promise across a wide spectrum covering nuclear power, nuclear fuel cycle and nuclear science and technology.
- Cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy has emerged as one of the hallmarks of the strategic partnership between the two countries, contributing to India's energy security and energising broader scientific and technological cooperation
- The growing partnership in the nuclear power sector between India and Russia has opened opportunities for developing advanced nuclear manufacturing capabilities in India in line with India's "Make In India" initiative.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao

- Ministry of Women & Child Development (MWCD) has issued a clarification note stating that the BBBP scheme has no provision for individual CASH TRANSFER COMPONENT by Government of India.
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme focuses on challenging mindsets and deep rooted patriarchy in the societal system, strict enforcement of PC&PNDT Act, advancing education of the girl child: focus is on issues of women empowerment on a life cycle continuum. It is not a DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer) scheme.

About BBBP(Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign):

- Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Andolan is a programme aimed at generating awareness and improving the efficiency of delivery of welfare services meant for women. It is set up with an initial corpus of Rs 100 crore.
- The adverse and declining child sex ratio (CSR) across the States is a major cause of concern as it has fallen from 927 in 2001 to 918 in 2011. The BBBP seeks to arrest the trend and over time to reverse it.
- A 100 critical low CSR districts in all States and UTs have been identified for focused and convergent action by the Ministries.
- The Ministry of WCD(Women and Child Development) is the nodal Ministry for this initiative and will carry out training to stakeholders, community mobilization and sensitization. It will also embark upon a range of advocacy measures and activities, not limited to the 100 low CSR districts but all across the country.
- All forms of media and social media platforms would be used for this.
- There is special focus on increasing access to education as a means to empower the girl child. It emphasizes the significance of education in making available better avenues of employment, skill development and turning girls themselves into agent of social change in their lives. Thus, the scheme has marked targets such as increasing enrolment at secondary level from 73 to 76%, reducing drop-out rates at upper primary and secondary level, and reinvigorating School Management Committee to enhance girls' access to education

Analysis:

- The continued decline in CSR from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001 and further to 918 in 2011 is a major indicator of women disempowerment and lack of value attached to her. Successive governments introduced several cash incentive schemes, based on assumption that arrival of money on the birth of girl would increase her value and bring down practice of female foeticide. But such initiatives have failed to improve CSR because they do not deal with deep rooted socio-economic causes of declining CSR such as patriarchal attitudes, practice of dowry, and preference for male child due to their ability to economically support parents in old age
- BBBP is a step in the right direction, bringing much needed focus on issue of girl child and declining CSR. The initiative sets itself aside from others as it has direct support of the Prime Minister giving it much needed

political impetus to function. However, it is important to understand that steps to improve their quality of life through education needs intervention beyond targeted goals of enrolment.

- The high drop-out rates of girls is a result of socio-economic issues at play outside the school. And, they can be tackled only when deep-rooted and everyday silent exclusion of marginalized families and parents in community participation is addressed so that community can be gradually made aware of the value of education for the girl child.
- Although the initiative is a union government led programme, its objective of increasing educational opportunities for the girl child for improved quality of life is significantly dependent on participation of the state governments. Therefore, if the scheme has to succeed, it needs engage at a more in-depth and sustainable level to effectively tackle the blind spots responsible for low value of girl child in our community.

Mission Innovation Ministerial and Clean Energy Ministerial

- Second Mission Innovation Ministerial and 8th Clean Energy Ministerial is going in Beijing, China.
- An Indian delegation led by Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Minister for Science & Technology, Earth Sciences and Environment, Forest & Climate Change are participating in the conferences.

The vision for the ministerial is to:

- Demonstrate and celebrate the 'Revolution Now' of rapidly decreasing costs and increasing deployment of clean energy technologies and the national and global value propositions of economic opportunity, health and welfare, and energy security of the transition to modern, clean, and efficient energy.
- Deepen and broaden government participation and leadership in the CEM forum to drive greater progress in the global clean energy transformation.
- Strengthen action-oriented partnerships and collaborations with international organizations, business and industry, foundations, and others with aligned interests to raise the overall impact of all efforts.
- Launch new, high-impact CEM campaigns that tap into globally relevant and timely clean energy areas and that encourage concrete commitments from all CEM member governments, the private sector, and other partners.

Mission Innovation:

- Mission Innovation (MI) is a global initiative of 22 countries and the European Union to dramatically accelerate global clean energy innovation. As part of the initiative, participating countries have committed to double their governments' clean energy research and development (R&D) investments over five years, while encouraging greater levels of private sector investment in transformative clean energy technologies. These additional resources will dramatically accelerate the availability of the advanced technologies that will define a future global energy mix that is clean, affordable, and reliable.
- Mission Innovation was announced on November 30, 2015, as world leaders came together in Paris to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change.
- India is Founding Member of the Steering Committee and also a Member of the two sub-groups: Joint research and Capacity Building and Private Sector Engagement.

Clean Energy Ministerial Forum:

- The Clean Energy Ministerial (CEM) is a high-level global forum to promote policies and programs that advance clean energy technology, to share lessons learned and best practices, and to encourage the transition to a global clean energy economy.
- Initiatives are based on areas of common interest among participating governments and other stakeholders.
- The Framework for the Clean Energy Ministerial adopted at the seventh Clean Energy Ministerial in 2016, defines the CEM governance structure and outlines the mission statement, objectives, membership, and guiding principles.

MoU signed between Central Industrial Security Force & National Skill Development Corporation

- The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Ministry of Home Affairs and the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) & National Skill Development Fund (NSDF), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).
- The MoU provides that CISF, NSDC and NSDF shall work together at CISF units all across the country where Family Welfare Centres are functional and other CISF locations with an objective to impart skill development programs under the Skill India Mission for the purpose of implementation of CISF Multi Skill Development Institute Projects.
- The MoU aims at assisting retiring/retired, serving low medical category (LMC) CISF personnel to acquire additional skills and facilitate their resettlement through a second career. It will also provide welfare to wards, family members of serving CISF personnel, retired personnel and personnel killed in action.
- The MoU shall remain in effect for a period of 5 years (starting from 5th June, 2017 till 5th June, 2022), subject to a mid-term review after 3 years.

About CISF:

- The CISF came into existence in 1969 with a modest beginning, having three battalions, to provide integrated security cover to the Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) which, in those years, occupied the “commanding heights” of the economy.
- In a span of four decades, the Force has grown several folds to reach one lakh forty one thousand seven hundred and thirty five personnel.
- With globalization and liberalization of the economy, CISF is no longer a PSU-centric organization. Instead, it has become a premier multi-skilled security agency of the country, mandated to provide security to major critical infrastructure installations of the country in diverse areas.
- CISF is currently providing security cover to nuclear installations, space establishments, airports, seaports, power plants, sensitive Government buildings and ever heritage monuments.
- Among the important responsibilities recently entrusted to the CISF are the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, VIP Security, Disaster Management and establishment of a Formed Police Unit (FPU) of the UN at Haiti.
- After the Mumbai terrorist attack on November 2008, the mandate of the force has been broadened to provide direct security cover to private sector also.

About NSDC:

- The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) is a one-of-its-kind, Public Private Partnership (PPP) model in India, under the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE).
- It aims to promote skill development by catalyzing creation of large, quality and for-profit vocational institutions.
- A not-for-profit company set up by the Ministry of Finance, under Section 25 of the Companies Act, it has an equity base of Rs.10 crore, of which the Government of India holds for 49%, while the private sector has the balance 51%.
- NSDC provides funding to build scalable and profitable vocational training initiatives. Its mandate is also to enable support system which focuses on quality assurance, information systems and train the trainer academies either directly or through partnerships.
- NSDC acts as a catalyst in skill development by providing funding to enterprises, companies and organisations that provide skill training.
- It will also develop appropriate models to enhance, support and coordinate private sector initiatives.
- The differentiated focus on 21 sectors under NSDC’s purview and its understanding of their viability will make every sector attractive to private investment.

Street Light National Programme

- Government of India, through the Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) under the Ministry of Power, would be retrofitting 10 lakh conventional street lights with LED lights in Gram Panchayats of 7 districts in Andhra Pradesh.
- This is the first project for rural LED street lighting in the country under the Government of India's Street Lighting National Project (SLNP).
- This replacement drive in rural areas will help the gram panchayats to cumulatively save approximately 147 million units of electricity annually and lead to reduction of 12 crore tonnes of CO₂.
- The entire upfront capital cost of this project is being funded by French Development Agency Agence Française de Développement (AFD).
- As part of the project, EESL would be carrying out the entire annual maintenance and warranty replacement in these gram panchayats for a period of 10 years.
- Nationally, over 23 lakh conventional street lights have been replaced by LED street lights in 21 States of India.

About Street Light National Programme:

- Indian Prime minister has launched this programme on 5th January to convert conventional street and domestic lights with energy efficient LED lights.
- Under Street Light National Programme (SLNP), replacement of 3.5 crore conventional street light will result in saving of 9,000 million units annually. Total cost savings of municipalities every year will be Rs 5,500 crore.
- Keeping future generations in mind, the revolutionary step is taken to conserve as much energy as possible.
- Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) has been designated as the implementing agency. The initiative is part of the Government's efforts to spread the message of energy efficiency in the country.

Objective of SLNP Programme

- The main objective is to promote efficient lighting, enhance awareness on using efficient equipment which reduce electricity bills and help preserve environment.
- EESL replaces the conventional street lights with LEDs at its own costs and consequent reduction in energy and maintenance cost of the municipality is used to repay EESL over a period of time.
- The contracts that EESL enters into with Municipalities are typically of 7 years duration where it not only guarantees a minimum energy saving but also provides free replacements and maintenance of lights at no additional costs to the municipalities.
- The service model enables the municipalities to go in for the state of the art street light with no upfront capital cost and repayments to EESL are within the present level of expenditure. Thus there is no additional revenue expenditure required to be incurred by the municipality for change over to smart and energy efficient LED street lights.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

US exit from Paris climate deal

- The United States will be withdrawing from the Paris climate agreement.
- According to US President, this move was aimed at protecting American and its citizens. The US is the second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, right behind China.

- The withdrawal process takes four years. But when it's complete, the United States will join a lonely club. Just two other countries — Syria and Nicaragua — have rejected the nonbinding agreement.

About Paris Pact:

- Despite the strong objection by developed countries, the UNFCCC principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities incorporated into the Paris Agreement to provide developing countries a cushion.
- The agreement binds together pledges by individual nations to cut or limit emissions from fossil-fuel burning, within a framework of rules that provide for monitoring and verification as well as financial and technical assistance for developing countries
- The main goal is to bring down pollution levels so that the rise in global temperatures is limited to no more than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial averages.
- This agreement also expressed an ambition to restrict the temperature increase even further, to 1.5 degrees C, if possible.
- The deal also requires developed nations to continue to provide funding to help poorer countries cut their carbon emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change – but does not set a legally binding level of money.
- This non-binding agreement requires developed countries to continue a goal of “mobilizing” \$100 billion of public and private finance for developing countries each year after 2020. It also calls on them to pledge a higher sum by 2025.
- Financing had been a stumbling block throughout the talks. Developing nations had demanded legally binding commitments for developed nations to give more cash. Earlier drafts had proposed such a deal but this was scrapped after the US made clear it would never ratify such an agreement.
- In 2018, nations will hold a “facilitative conference” to revisit some of the emissions reductions ideas. If it is ratified by more than 55 percent of nations or nations that cause 55 percent of global emissions, Paris will enter into force two years later, in 2020.
- Then, in 2023, the world will meet again for a “global stock take,” where countries are supposed to announce new and improved emission-reduction plans. Rich countries may also announce more monetary help for poor ones at these events. And every five years after that, indefinitely, the world will meet again to discuss its renewed plans to decarbonize.
- These are the two milestones in the international climate agenda: 2018 and 2023. In between now and then, the economic trends of investment and divestment and fossil-fuel burning and solar printing will churn and fluctuate, but the international community will observe them most at those two sessions

Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) on multidimensional Poor

- About 31% of the world's “multidimensionally poor” children live in India, according to a new report by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). OPHI is an economic research centre at the Oxford University and the study is based on a survey conducted among 103 countries.

What makes a child multidimensionally poor?

- A “multidimensionally poor” child is one who lacks at least one-third of ten indicators, grouped into three dimensions of poverty: health, education and standard of living. The health dimension comprises indicators such as nutrition, child mortality, and education. Under standard of living are indicators such as access to cooking fuel, improved sanitation, safe drinking water, electricity, flooring, and asset ownership.

Highlights of the report:

- In terms of countries, fully 31% of the 689 million poor children live in India, followed by Nigeria (8%), Ethiopia (7%) and Pakistan (6%).

- In terms of the number of multidimensionally poor children as a proportion of the total population, India stood 37th among 103 countries. Out of India's 217 million (21.7 crore) children, 49.9% were multidimensionally poor.
- In terms of absolute numbers, India accounts for both the highest and a staggering number of multi-dimensionally poor people. More than 528 million (52.8 crore) Indians are poor, which is more people than all the poor people living in Sub-Saharan Africa combined.
- Nearly 50% of the children in 103 countries were multidimensionally poor. Of the 1.45 billion (145 crore) people (from the 103 countries) who are multidimensionally poor; 48% are children. That is a total of 689 million (68.9 crore) children who live in multidimensional poverty.
- 87% of the multidimensionally poor children lived in South Asia (44%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (43%). In Ethiopia, Niger, and South Sudan, over 90 % of the children are MPI poor.
- As for the intensity of poverty, the average percentage of deprivation in terms of the 10 MPI categories was highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, where multidimensionally poor children were "simultaneously deprived" in 58% of the indicators. Sub-Saharan Africa was followed by the region described as the Arab States (53%). South Asia occupied the third spot, with children deprived in 49% of the MPI indicators.

Qatar diplomatic crisis

- Qatar has been cut off and isolated by some of the Arab world's most powerful countries, which have accused it of supporting terrorist groups.
- Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Egypt withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar. Yemen, the Maldives and Libya's eastern-based government all later followed suit.
- Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain have given all Qatari nationals two weeks to leave their territory. The three countries have also banned their citizens from travelling to Qatar.

Analysis

- Qatar has allegedly practising an ambitious foreign policy with different priorities to its neighbours. Qatar's support for regional Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, which is designated a terrorist group by some Gulf countries. Also, its relations with Shia-led Iran have resulted into this situation.
- Oil prices are always sensitive to geopolitical tensions and the prospect of any disruption to production.
- Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar are all members of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec). Saudi Arabia is the de facto leader of the group as the largest oil producer in the world, while Qatar is one of Opec's smallest oil producers. The group recently agreed to cut oil production to help prop up prices; some investors are concerned that the dispute with Qatar could affect that deal. That plan to boost prices has also been undermined by rising oil output in the US.
- Indians are the largest expatriate community in Qatar, the same way they are in Saudi Arabia and the UAE — the two key countries that are in the opposite camp. And, the immediate worry is the trouble Indians would face as measures to isolate Qatar would hit them there in terms of their travel.
- India also has robust defence and energy ties with Qatar. India is the third largest export destination for Qatar (behind Japan and South Korea) and ranks at 10th position for Qatar's imports.
- The Gulf Arab state is the largest supplier of LNG to India, accounting for over 65% of India's global import and 15% of Qatar's export of LNG with an annual import of 7.5 million metric tons (MMT) of liquefied natural gas (LNG) under a long-term contract between Petronet LNG of India and RasGas Co Ltd of Qatar, and some spot purchases by Indian companies from time to time.
- India also imports ethylene, propylene, ammonia, urea and polyethylene from Qatar. Therefore, the balance of trade continues to be heavily in Qatar's favour.

Prithvi-II missile

- India has successfully test-fired its indigenously developed nuclear-capable Prithvi-II missile from a test range in Odisha as part of a user trial by the Army.

About the Missile:

- Prithvi-II is indigenously developed and is nuclear-capable surface-to-surface.
- The missile is capable of carrying warheads weighing 500 kg to 1,000 kg.
- With a strike range of 350 km, Prithvi-II is powered by twin-engines which use liquid propulsion.
- It also uses advanced inertial guidance system with manoeuvring trajectory to hit its target.
- Prithvi is India's first indigenously-built ballistic missile. It is one of the five missiles being developed under the country's Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme.

Other variant of Prithvi:

Prithvi-I

- The Prithvi-I is a short-range, road-mobile, liquid propellant ballistic missile.
- India began developing the missile in 1983. In its current configuration, the missile is 8.56 m long, 1.1 m in diameter, and weighs 4000 kg.
- It uses a single-stage, liquid propellant engine, which is essentially two liquid propellant motors side-by-side that provide aerodynamic control as well as thrust vectoring.
- This engine control allows the missile to stop climbing when it reaches an altitude of 30 km, travel horizontally at this altitude, and dive on its target at an 80° angle. The missile has a minimum range of 40 km and a maximum of 150 km.
- The Prithvi-I's first test flight was in 1988 and it officially entered service in 1994.

Prithvi-II

- The Prithvi-II is a short-range, road-mobile, liquid-propellant ballistic missile. Similar to the Prithvi-I in many ways, it trades a smaller warhead for a longer range.
- India first tested the variant in 1996. The missile is 9.0 m long, 1.1 m in diameter, and weighs either 4,000 or 4,600 kg.
- It uses a single-stage, liquid propellant engine, giving it a maximum range of 250 km with an accuracy of 50 m CEP.
- In 2011, the Prithvi-II was tested to 350 km.
- Its payload consists of a single warhead weighing 500 or 1000 kg.

ISRO launches India's heaviest rocket

- The Indian Space Organisation (ISRO) has launched one of its heaviest communication satellites, the GSAT-19.
- The launch vehicle, GSLV MK III-D1, became the heaviest rocket to be used till date.

About rocket:

- The three-stage vehicle was propelled by an indigenously designed and developed cryogenic engine -- CE-20 -- in its upper stage (C25 stage) before it ejected the satellite into its orbit.
- GSAT-19's propulsion system will be later used for the satellite to reach its geostationary orbital home.
- The launch is also the first flight for CE-20 engine+, which was under development since 2002.
- The engine, which runs on a less complex technology compared to its Russian design predecessors, has undergone more than 200 tests in the last few years.

- The GSAT-19 carried transponders and a geostationary radiation spectrometer. The instrument will monitor and study the nature of charged particles and the influence of space radiation on satellites and their electronic components.
- In December 2014, a miniature version of GSLV Mk III+ carried a 3,775kg experimental crew module. The vehicle did not have the cryogenic engine as it was only to demonstrate the design.
- For the first time, GSAT-19 is going to be powered with indigenously-made Lithium-ion batteries.
- Besides Ka/Ku-band high throughput communication transponders, GSAT-19 carries a Geostationary Radiation Spectrometer (GRASP) payload to monitor and study the nature of charged particles and the influence of space radiation on satellites and their electronic components.
- GSAT-19 also features certain advanced spacecraft technologies including miniaturised heat pipe, fibre optic gyro, Micro Electro-Mechanical Systems (MEMS) accelerometer, Ku-band TTC transponder.
- Till date, India had to depend on foreign launchers for communication satellites weighing more than 2,300 kg.

India's biodiversity riches grow by 499 species

- As per the latest reports by ZSI and BSI, 499 new species have been discovered in last one year in the country.

Main highlights of the report:

- Out of 499 species, 313 species are animal species and 186 are plants species. Of the new animal species, 258 are invertebrates and 55 vertebrates. As many as 97 species of insects, 27 of fish, 12 species of amphibians, 10 of Platyhelminthes, nine of Crustacea and six of reptiles have been discovered and described by the scientists.
- There are 61 species of moths and butterflies (order Lepidoptera) and 38 of beetles (Coleoptera).
- Most of the new species were from the four biological hotspots of the country — the Himalayas, the northeast, the Western Ghats and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- For the first time, the number of animal species in the country, including protozoa, has crossed one lakh — 1,00,693 is the exact count. India is one of the 17 megadiversity countries and it has about 6.42% of the global fauna.
- The geographical distribution of the new plant species reveals that most discoveries were made in the Western Ghats (17%), followed by the Eastern Himalayas (15%), the Western Himalayas (13%), the Eastern Ghats (12%) and the west coast (8%).
- Among the interesting discoveries of the year are eight new species of wild balsams, five species of wild ginger and one species of wild amla [Indian gooseberry]. Also, 39 varieties of mushrooms have been discovered. These new species will have use in horticulture and have medicinal value too.

Why is Biodiversity Important?

- Maintaining balance of the ecosystem: Recycling and storage of nutrients, combating pollution, and stabilizing climate, protecting water resources, forming and protecting soil and maintaining ecobalance.
- Provision of biological resources: Provision of medicines and pharmaceuticals, food for the human population and animals, ornamental plants, wood products, breeding stock and diversity of species, ecosystems and genes.
- Social benefits: Recreation and tourism, cultural value and education and research.
- The role of biodiversity in the following areas will help make clear the importance of biodiversity in human life:
 - Biodiversity and food: 80% of human food supply comes from 20 kinds of plants. But humans use 40,000 species for food, clothing and shelter. Biodiversity provides for variety of foods for the planet.
 - Biodiversity and human health: The shortage of drinking water is expected to create a major global crisis. Biodiversity also plays an important role in drug discovery and medicinal resources. Medicines from nature account for usage by 80% of the world's population.
 - Biodiversity and industry: Biological sources provide many industrial materials. These include fiber, oil, dyes, rubber, water, timber, paper and food.

- Biodiversity and culture: Biodiversity enhances recreational activities like bird watching, fishing, trekking etc. It inspires musicians and artists.

Orang tiger reserve

- According to a survey, Orang tiger reserve in Assam, have the highest density nationally (28 big cats).
- The count was revealed during phase IV of the all-India tiger estimation programme of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

Orang tiger reserve:

- The name of the Protected Area is Rajiv Gandhi Orang National Park.
- The Park is located in the districts of Darrang and Sonitpur.
- The total area of the Park is 79.28 km² including the proposed first addition measuring 0.47 km². Around 70% of the area is located in Darrang district while the remaining 30% of it lies in Sonitpur district.
- The present Park area was inhabited by people till the year 1900 after which a water-borne epidemic forced the people to abandon the area.
- In 1915, an area comprised of 80.54 km² was declared as a Game Reserve and formed part of Mazbat Range under Darrang Forest Division, Tezpur. Subsequently, softwood plantations were raised in the area under various Plans.
- After enactment of the Wildlife (Protection) Act by the Government of India in 1972; the area was handed over to the Wildlife Wing and it was managed as an Auxiliary Area for Project Tiger.
- The State Government declared its intention to constitute the area as a Wildlife Sanctuary on 1998.
- The Sanctuary was further upgraded and declared as a National Park with the same area in 1999.
- The southern boundary is formed by Brahmaputra River which, due to its meandering course, creates small islands (chapories) almost every year. As a result, the southern boundary is not well defined. This occasionally leads to dispute with civil areas located on the left side of the river and the char areas located inside it.
- The Park is connected to ecologically similar habitats, Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary located downstream on the southern bank of Brahmaputra River, Laokhowa-Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary and Kaziranga National Park located upstream on the southern bank of the River. The river connection is virtually a theoretical one-way connection.
- The rhinos find it difficult to go upstream in the mighty Brahmaputra River. The Park is totally fragmented terrestrially i.e. it does not have any contiguous forest. The erstwhile Un-classed State Forests on the northern side have been totally degraded over a period of time. As a result, there is hardly any scope of addition to the Park except the Brahmaputra River.

QUICK FACTS

- World Milk Day is observed on- **1 June**
- 70th World Health Assembly held in - **Geneva**
- According to Global Peace Index, Country which ranked first is - **Iceland**
- Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in 2017 is held in - **Astana**
- In IMD's World Competitiveness list, India ranked at - **45th**
- World Environment Day is observed on - **5 June**

- Country which become the 29th and newest NATO member - **Montenegro**
- India's first public bicycle sharing project launched in - **Mysuru**
- New President of Slovakia - **Miroslav Lajcak**
- New PM of Ireland -**Leo Varadkar**
- Winner of 2017 PEN/Malamud Award - **Jhumpa Lahiri**