

Abhimanu

Weekly current affairs Series

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Abhimanu's IAS Study Group

Chandigarh

PM's crop insurance scheme

- Supreme Court has given the central government six months' time to demonstrate the gains of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana on the ground level.
- Expressing concern over the suicides, the SC had early this year asked the government to come up with a concrete road map to eliminate the reasons for the agrarian crisis.

About Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana:

- This crop insurance scheme will cover half of India's cropped area in the next three years, up from the present level of 23%. In the first year, the target is to insure 30% of the agriculture land, 40% in the second year and 50% in the third year.
- Towards this, the centre has substantially increased the budget for crop insurance from 2,823 crore in 2015-16 to 7,750 crore in 2018-19.
- Under this scheme, farmers have to pay just 2% of the premium for kharif crop and 1.5% for rabi while the same for horticulture will be fixed at 5%
- Under the previous crop insurance scheme, risks were only partially covered. The existing premium rates vary between 2.5% and 3.5% for kharif crops and 1.5% for rabi crops—but the coverage was capped, meaning farmers could, at best, recover a fraction of their losses. Also, the premium for commercial and horticulture crops was calculated on actuarial basis, meaning premiums could be as high as 25% depending on the risk factor involved.
- There is no cap on subsidy on premium, meaning the government will bear the cost even if the balance premium is as high as 90%. In previous schemes, due to a cap on premiums, farmers did not get the full sum during claim settlement.
- The government liability on premium subsidy will be shared equally by the centre and states.
- The new scheme will cover local-level calamities such as hail storms and landslides and even cover farmers if they cannot sow crops due to inclement weather. Also, the scheme will cover post-harvest losses due to cyclonic and unseasonal rains.
- While smartphones will be used to capture and upload data on crop cutting (to estimate loss in yield) to reduce delays in settling claims, remote sensing will be used to reduce the number of crop-cutting experiments.
- The agriculture ministry will divide all districts of India into clusters and give it to insurance companies in order to make the Prime Minister's Crop Insurance Scheme a success.
- Between 15-20 districts will be clubbed together and given to one insurance company for providing crop insurance to farmers.
- Selection of insurance companies would be done through an open bidding system and insurance companies may be allowed to serve a cluster for more than one crop season or one year.

Benefits

- Mitigation of risk against inclement weather and faster payout to farmers will be two key characteristics of the Prime Minister Crop insurance Scheme. This will take into account farmers' worries from sowing of seeds to post harvest.

- This scheme reduce delays and leakages in payment of compensation through direct transfers into the bank accounts of farmers.
- The farmer-friendly move comes at a time when the country is experiencing a protracted period of rural distress after below-average monsoon rainfall in 2014 and 2015.
- The decision implicitly acknowledges the structural makeover of Indian farming, which has entailed farmers taking on more risks by diversifying into horticulture and commercial crops without adequate safety nets.
- Low premium will drive penetration and enrolment and make the insurance scheme viable for insurers
- The move can be beneficial from three key points of view—similar geographies will lead to similar weather and thus an identical claim pattern, second, it will be easier to track and pay the sum assured to farmers of a cluster, and third, there may be fewer chances of fraud— either by the insurance company or a farmer.
- There will be economies of scale for companies as insured farmers will be in a concentrated area. This will help an insurance company focus all its resources in one particular area. Instances of discrepancy between crops insured and the crop sown area can also be addressed easily. Claims assessment will also be easier as weather conditions will be similar. One will have to wait and watch for more details to understand what kind of premiums will be available under the scheme.

New Programme launched by Indian Railways

- Railway ministry has launched various initiatives to bring entire Railway system on Integrated digital platform.

RailCloud

Cloud Computing is the emerging technology for faster and on demand commensurate deployment of Server resources which result in reduced cost. Accordingly, RailCloud Phase-I has been sanctioned at the cost of Rs. 53.55 Cr under PH-17, DF(3) in FY 17-18.

Potential benefits to Railways after implementation of RailCloud are:

- Faster and on-demand deployment of application- RailCloud will pave the way for swifter deployment of application (within 24 hrs as compared to conventional time running into weeks and months). At the same time the cloud hardware and environment will be available for rigorous testing of the new applications.
- Optimum use of Servers and storage- The technology enables maximising the usage of the available server and storage resulting in accommodation of bigger data and more applications within same server space.
- Utilization of existing infrastructure as part of Cloud- The existing resources available with railway will be subsumed in RailCloud thereby ensuring that expenditure is minimized in acquiring new resources.
- Rapid scalability and elasticity- Server and storage space will scale up and down as per the demand. This makes the system suitable to meet the higher demand at peak hours with less expenditure
- IT Security enhancement and Standardization: The cloud shall be equipped with security features as per the latest GOI guidelines, the security features can be updated in one go for all the applications hosted on the cloud, resulting in enhanced security and stability with less expenditure and effort.
- Cost reduction: The server and storage infrastructure will be deployed as per the requirement, resulting in substantial savings to railway as expenditure will be incurred as and when required instead of upfront shelling out money on procurement of expensive servers.
- Better User Experience: In Cloud, the server resources are constantly scaled up or down as per the no. of users logged on to the system. This ensures a better user experience to the customer.

NIVARAN-Grievance Portal

- ‘NIVARAN-Grievance Portal’ is the first IT application to be launched on the RailCloud. It is the platform for resolution of service related grievances of serving and former railway employees. The existing application was hosted on a conventional server; it has been made cloud-ready and being migrated as the first cloud application of Indian Railways. It will save significant revenue and at the same time user experience will also improve.

Cashless treatment Scheme in Emergency (CTSE)

- “Cashless treatment Scheme in Emergency’ (CTSE), in empanelled hospitals, for retired employees and their dependent family members.

- A web based system of communication between private hospitals and railway authorities has been developed wherein identity of the beneficiary shall be established using biometrics stored in Aadhar (UIDAI) server, eligibility shall be determined using Railway Data Base and emergency shall be verified by Railway Medical Officer based on private hospital's clinical report.
- The whole system is online and even the bill processing shall be online. This scheme shall provide help and succor to the retired railway employees at the time of need and at the same time will have a morale boosting effect on the serving employees.
- The Scheme fulfils both the avowed objectives of the GOI; utilizing IT tools to cut the red-tape and promoting cashless transactions.
- Rather than creating a separate time and resource consuming vertical the scheme has used the existing resources by bringing on board the UIDAI and ARPAN database. Railway has not incurred any capital expenditure on the scheme, M/s UTIITSL has developed the software in consultation with Railway and shall be paid on per bill processed basis. The online processing will ensure swifter disposal of bills in a transparent manner.
- At present the scheme has been rolled out in four metro cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai, based on the experience of this pilot the scheme may be extended to the whole of country.

National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF)

- The Department of Economic Affairs has signed an agreement with the NIIF for a ₹20,000 crore contribution to the Fund.

About NIIF:

- Infrastructure investments require long term patient capital, the Government announced the setting up of National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), as a quasi-sovereign wealth fund.
- The corpus of the Fund is proposed to be of the order of Rs.40,000 cr (US\$6 billion) wherein the Government of India would invest 49%, circa Rs.20,000 cr (US\$3 billion).
- NIIF is expected play the role of a catalyst for supporting investments in infrastructure with the objective of maximizing economic impact through investments in commercially viable projects, both greenfield and brownfield, including stalled projects.
- NIIF shall also consider other nationally important projects, if found commercially viable.
- NIIF will raise third party capital for the remaining Rs.20,000 crore (US\$ 3 billion), from long term international investors, such as a Sovereign Wealth Funds, Insurance and Pension Funds, endowments etc.
- National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) is formed as a trust (set up under the provisions of Indian Trusts Act 1882) created by the Government of India.
- NIIF is registered with Securities and Exchange Board of India ("SEBI") as a Category II Alternate Investment Fund ("AIF") under the SEBI (Alternative Investments Funds) Regulations, 2012 ("AIF Regulations").
- The fund has been set up as a fund of funds structure with an aim to generate risk adjusted returns for its investors alongside promoting infrastructure development and technology in the country by means of investments.
- National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Trustee Ltd. ("NIIF Trustee Ltd."), a 100% Government of India owned company is the trustee to NIIF.
- National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Ltd. ("NIIF Ltd.") is the investment manager to NIIF, in which 51% stake shall be offered to investors other than the Government of India, and balance 49% stake shall remain with Government of India. NIIF Ltd would be managed by an independent team of professionals sourced from the market with relevant experience.

Anti-Hijacking Law Comes

- India's new law that ramps up punishment for hijacking and prescribes death penalty for hijackers who cause loss of life in an aircraft or on ground has come into force.
- Parliament cleared the law in 2016 but it hadn't come into force so far because the government hadn't framed the rules.

Highlights of the new Anti- Hijacking law:

- This law seeks to repeal The Anti-Hijacking Act, 1982, and give effect to the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft, 1970 and its Protocol Supplementary, signed on September 10, 2010.
- **Definition of hijacking:** The act defines hijacking as seizing control of an aircraft in service, unlawfully and intentionally, by technological means or by exercising force, coercion, or any other form of intimidation. An aircraft is considered to be in service from the time it is being prepared for a specific flight by the crew or ground personnel until 24 hours after any landing.
- **Related offences:** The act includes several acts within the definition of hijacking including: (i) attempt and abetment of hijacking; (ii) making a credible threat to commit hijacking; (iii) organising or directing others to commit hijacking; (iv) agreeing with another to commit the offence, and acting on the agreement; etc.
- **Punishment for hijacking and related offences:** The act provides for: (i) death penalty, where the offence results in death of hostage or security personnel; (ii) life imprisonment in all other cases; and (iii) moveable and immovable property of the accused may be confiscated. For any acts of violence committed in connection with the hijacking, the accused shall be punished with the same punishment as provided under the laws in force.
- **Jurisdiction:** Indian courts can exercise jurisdiction on several grounds including where the offence is committed: (i) in India; (ii) against an aircraft registered in India; (iii) on board an aircraft which lands in India with the accused still on board; (iv) by or against an Indian citizen; (v) by a person who is present in India and is not extradited by the central government, etc.
- **Previous sanction for prosecution:** The act requires that sanction must be taken from the central government before prosecuting an accused for hijacking or related offences.
- **Investigation, arrest, bail, etc.:** The central government may confer powers of investigation, arrest and prosecution on any officer of the central government or the National Investigation Agency. An investigating officer can order seizure or attachment of property which is related to the offence, and is likely to be concealed or disposed of by the accused.
- Where an accused is forwarded to a Magistrate to authorise detention because investigation could not be completed within 24 hours, a Judicial Magistrate may authorise detention up to 30 days. An Executive Magistrate may authorise detention up to seven days.
- With regard to bail, an accused cannot be released on bail or bond unless: (i) the public prosecutor has had an opportunity to oppose the release; and (ii) if the release has been opposed, the designated court is satisfied that there is reason to believe the accused is innocent and is unlikely to commit any offence while on bail.
- **Trial by designated courts:** The accused person shall be tried by a Sessions Court which is notified to be a designated court by the concerned state government. In case the investigation is carried out by the National Investigation Agency, the designated court shall be a court set up under the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008. The designated court shall have the power to order for attachment of the accused person's properties.
- **Presumption of guilt:** The court will presume the accused to be guilty if the prosecution establishes either: (i) arms, ammunition or explosives were recovered from the accused and there is reason to believe that similar arms, etc. were used in the hijacking or (ii) there is evidence of use of intimidation against the crew or passengers in connection with the hijacking.

- **Extradition:** Hijacking and the related offences shall be extraditable. Extraditable offences are those offences for which one country may transfer the accused to another country's legal jurisdiction. No request for extradition shall be refused on the ground that hijacking is a political offence or is connected to a political offence.

No-detention policy to go from 2018

- The no-detention policy will be scrapped from the next academic year as the policy has negatively impacted affected quality of basic education in the country
- Many states have expressed worry over declining education quality due to the no-detention policy and supported to remove it.
- Eyeing this, a decision has been made where the Centre approved that the no-detention policy can be uprooted from the next academic year
- Under the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, no child admitted in a school will be held back in any class or expelled till the completion of elementary education covering classes 1 to 8.

Analysis:

- The provision had attracted criticism with several states and schools complaining that it compromised on academic rigour and learning levels and quality at schools.
- The TSR Subramanian committee for formulation of the National Policy on Education has also suggested that 'no detention' policy should be discontinued after Class V. It had recommended restoration of detention provision, remedial coaching and two extra chances to each student such to move to a higher class.
- A sub-committee of the Central Advisory Board of Education also studied the issue closely and recommended a provisional detention clause at Classes V and VIII. In 2013, a parliamentary panel had also asked the ministry to 'rethink' on its "policy of automatic promotion up to Class VIII".

Joint Interpretative Notes (JIN)

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the Joint Interpretative Notes (JIN) on the Agreement between India and Bangladesh for the Promotion and Protection of Investments.

About JIN:

- The JIN would impart clarity to the interpretation of the existing Agreement between India and Bangladesh for the Promotion and Protection of Investments (BIPA).
- The JIN includes interpretative notes to be jointly adopted for many clauses, including, the definition of investor, definition of investment, exclusion of taxation measures, Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET), National Treatment (NT) and Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment, expropriation, essential security interests and Settlement of Disputes between an Investor-and a Contracting Party.

Analysis:

- Joint Interpretative Statements in general play an important supplementary role in strengthening the investment treaty regime.
- With increasing Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) disputes, issuance of such statements is likely to have strong persuasive value before tribunals. Such pro-active approach by States can foster a more predictable and coherent reading of treaty terms by arbitration tribunals.

SC stays cattle sale rules across nation

- The Supreme Court has stayed centre's notification banning the sale of cattle in livestock markets for slaughter and religious sacrifices.
- The order came after the centre accepted that public outcry and objections from the states about the law's impact on livelihoods made it realise that the rules need tweaking.

- The court was taking up a bunch of petitions challenging the amendments to the rules framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

Main highlights of the guidelines:

- Under the new rules — which have been added to the national prevention of animal cruelty law, those seeking to either sell or buy cattle must provide documentation proving that they are “agriculturalists” and that they own farmland.
- They must also attest to government officials that the animals are not being traded for the purposes of slaughter, but will be used for agricultural purposes.
- According to the notification, a member secretary of an animal market committee will have to ensure that no person brings a young animal to the market.
- The notification banned holding of an animal market within 25 km of any state border and 50 km of any international border to stop smuggling of cattle.
- Under the rules, the district animal market monitoring committee will have to ensure that the market has adequate housing, shade, feeding troughs, water tanks with multiple taps and buckets, lighting, ramps at the appropriate height of vehicles, separate enclosures for sick and infirm animals, among other provisions.
- The notification has described the “animal market” as a place or sale-yard where animals are brought from other places and exposed for sale or auction and includes lair age adjoining a market or a slaughterhouse.

e-Education

- President Pranab Mukherjee on the occasion of Guru Purnima launched four major digital initiatives in to push e-education.
- They are Swayam, Swayam Prabha, National Academic Depository and National Digital Library.
- All these digital initiatives are operational under Union Ministry of Human Resource and Development.

About Swayam:

- With the launch of SWAYAM, India has become one of the few countries in the World which has its own online interactive learning platform that provides, not only video lectures, reading material but also assignments/quizzes that could end up in securing credits after completing the assessment system.
- More than 400 Courses are available on SWAYAM covering all the engineering and non-engineering subjects at undergraduate and post-graduate levels.
- The UGC has already issued Regulation that allows transfer of credits earned through the courses done through SWAYAM into the academic record of the students.
- It is now possible for the students and others to take courses of the prestigious IITs or IIMs without formally studying there.
- The platform has been constructed by Microsoft with totally indigenous efforts.

Swayam Prabha: The main features of SWAYAM Prabha would be as under:-

- Curriculum based course contents covering diverse disciplines such as arts, science, commerce, performing arts, social sciences and humanities subjects, engineering, technology, law, medicine, agriculture etc.
- Covers all level of education: School education, undergraduate, postgraduate, engineering, out of school children, vocational courses and teacher training.
- The 32 channels are proposed to be launched before September 2016. Initially the programmes will be in English but with the passage of time the programmes will be launched in regional languages also.

About NAD(National Academic Depository):

- Academic institutions would be responsible for the authenticity of data digitally uploaded by them into the system. The depositories will ensure the integrity of the data in the NAD. The NAD will register educational institutions/boards/eligibility assessment bodies, students and other users/verifying entities like banks, employer companies, government agencies and academic institutions.
- It will provide digital or a printed copy of the academic award with security features to the students or other authorized users. NAD will verify academic awards online on the same day of request initiated by any authorized user.

- Requests for access to academic awards, for example, from potential employers, and academic institutions would be only on the basis of consent of the student.
- NAD shall maintain the authenticity, integrity and confidentiality of its database. It will also train and facilitate academic institutions/boards/ eligibility assessment bodies to efficiently lodge academic awards in the database.

National digital library:

- The NDL will ensure “uniform high standards” of e-content free of cost on a single platform.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

G 20 Summit

- The two-day G-20 summit 2017 was held in Hamburg, Germany.

Highlights of the summit:

- There was no consensus with the USA regarding climate protection: a dissent with communalities in the deployment of renewable energy was formulated. The other 19 participants agreed to stick with the Paris agreement, to view it as irreversible and to swiftly put it into practice
- The G20 final communique placed a new emphasis on the need for trade deals to be reciprocal and non-discriminatory towards developing countries, reducing the previous emphasis on the primacy of liberalization and the promotion of free market economics across the board
- All countries agreed to continue regulating financial markets and to combat financing terrorism and tax evasion.
- The leaders pledged to progress towards their joint objective in the G20, which is strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth. They resolved to tackle common challenges to the global community, including terrorism, displacement, poverty, hunger and health threats, job creation, climate change, energy security, and inequality including gender inequality, as a basis for sustainable development and stability.
- In order to improving sustainable livelihoods, the G-20 leaders collectively committed to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions through, among others, increased innovation on sustainable and clean energies and energy efficiency, and work towards low greenhouse-gas emission energy systems.
- The G-20 leaders also called for safeguarding against health crises and strengthening health systems. The leaders called on the United Nations to keep global health high on the political agenda and strive for cooperative action to strengthen health systems worldwide, including through developing the health workforce.
- The leaders also stressed on combatting Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR), which is a growing threat to public health and economic growth.

About G 20:

- The Group of Twenty (G20) is an international forum that brings together the world's 20 leading industrialised and emerging economies. The group accounts for 85 per cent of world GDP and two-thirds of its population.
- Initially attendance at G20 summits was limited to the finance ministers and central bank governors of members when it was established 17 years ago.

- But since an inaugural meeting between G20 leaders in Washington DC following the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, summits between G20 leaders themselves have become an annual event.
- The first G20 summit occurred in Berlin, in December 1999, and was hosted by the German and Canadian finance ministers.
- Since then there have been 20 G20 meetings between finance ministers and central bank governors, and 11 summits between heads of state or government of G20 economies.

Sustainable development goals (SDGs) Index 2017

- India has ranked at 116 out of 157 nations on a global index that assesses the performance of countries towards achieving the ambitious sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Highlights of the index:

- India is ranked 116th on the index with a score of 58.1, behind countries such as Nepal, Iran, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and China. Pakistan is ranked 122.
- Sweden leads the list, followed by Denmark and Finland. Among the G7 countries, only Germany and France can be found among the top ten performers. The United States ranks 42nd on the Index, while Russia and China rank 62nd and 71st respectively.
- Countries which are closest to fulfilling the goals are not the biggest economies but comparably small, developed countries.
- One of the greatest obstacles to achieving the global goals for high-income countries is poor performances regarding sustainable consumption and production. All countries that score lowest on electronic-waste generation, for example, are high-income countries.
- SDG Index and Dashboards highlight the need for urgent action on the part of G20 countries in making sustainable development a reality both within and beyond their borders. If the world is to achieve the SDGs, all countries must take up the goals as part of their national development strategies, and ensure that they take responsibility for their impact on the rest of the world.
- World leaders need to strengthen their joint efforts to realise the 17 global goals. Not only does a rising trend of nationalism and protectionism impede the implementation of the goals, but as the report shows, industrialised countries are not serving as role models.
- Richest countries in the world are nowhere near achieving the global policy objectives but also deteriorate the implementation process for poorer countries because of negative spill over effects.

About SDG index:

- The SDG Index and Dashboards Report produced by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Bertelsmann Stiftung shows that world leaders need to strengthen their joint efforts to realise the 17 global goals.
- The SDG Index and Dashboard collect available data for 157 countries to assess where each country stands in 2017 with regard to achieving the SDGs.
- The SDG Index ranks countries based on their performance across the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

United Nations Partnership Fund

- India has contributed an additional million dollars to a UN partnership fund launched to support sustainable development projects across the developing world.
- India had made an initial contribution of a million dollars when the fund was created and the amount was allocated for the implementation of a project benefiting seven Small Island Developing States in the South Pacific.

India-UN Development Partnership Fund:

- The India-UN Development Partnership Fund was set up last month as a partnership between India and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC).

- Managed by UNOSSC, the fund will support Southern-owned and led, demand-driven, and transformational sustainable development projects across the developing world.
- Focusing on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States, United Nations agencies will implement the Fund's projects in close collaboration with partnering governments.
- The first project under the fund was formulated by India and UNDP in consultation with the Governments of the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, the Solomon Islands and the Kingdom of Tonga.
- It will increase resilience to natural disasters in these seven Pacific island countries and contribute toward a Sustainable Development Goal of climate action.
- The India-UN Development Partnership Fund has been launched in New York to help the poorest countries achieve the world organisation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to reduce poverty and raise the quality of life in order "to meet the challenges of our times".
- The project was developed jointly by India and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) for seven countries -- the Cook Islands, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, the Solomon Islands and Tonga.

About UNOSSC

- The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) was established to promote, coordinate and support South-South and triangular cooperation globally and within the United Nations system.
- UNOSSC, hosted by UNDP since 1974, was established by the UN General Assembly with a mandate to advocate for and coordinate South-South and triangular cooperation on a global and UN system-wide basis. UNOSSC receives policy directives and guidance from the General Assembly and through its subsidiary body, the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation. UNOSSC submits its strategic planning frameworks to the UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS Executive Board for approval and funding. The Director reports to the UNDP Administrator and has also been appointed Envoy of the Secretary-General on South-South Cooperation.

Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) 2017

- India is ranked a high 23rd out of 165 nations in a global index that measures the commitment of nations across the world to cybersecurity.

Highlights:

- Half of all countries have a cybersecurity strategy or are in the process of developing one and urged more countries to consider national policies to protect against cybercrime.
- India is ranked 23rd on the index with a score of 0.683 and has been listed in the "maturing" category, which refers to 77 countries that have developed complex commitments to cybersecurity and engage in cybersecurity programmes and initiatives.
- The index has been topped by Singapore with a 0.925 score.
- About 38 per cent of countries have a published cybersecurity strategy and an additional 12 per cent of governments are in the process of developing one.
- More effort is needed in this critical area, particularly since it conveys that governments consider digital risks high priority.
- Cybersecurity is an ecosystem where laws, organisations, skills, cooperation and technical implementation need to be in harmony to be most effective.
- The top 10 most committed countries to cybersecurity are Singapore, United States, Malaysia, Oman, Estonia, Mauritius, Australia, Georgia, France and Canada. Russia is ranked 11th.
- In addition to showing the overall cybersecurity commitment of ITU's 193 member-states, the Index also shows the improvement and strengthening of the five pillars of the ITU Global Cybersecurity Agenda: legal, technical, organisational, capacity building and international cooperation.

- The threat is particularly worrying as in 2016, nearly one per cent of all emails sent were essentially malicious attacks, the highest rate in recent years.

About Global Cybersecurity index

- The Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) is a multi-stakeholder initiative to measure the commitment of countries to cybersecurity.
- Cybersecurity has a wide field of application that cuts across many industries and sectors.
- Each country's level of development will therefore be analyzed within five categories: Legal Measures, Technical Measures, Organizational Measures, Capacity Building and Cooperation.

Global treaty banning nuclear weapons

- A treaty was endorsed by 122 countries at the United Nations headquarters in New York to ban on nuclear weapons.

Main highlights of the treaty:

- Under the new treaty, signatory states must agree not to develop, test, manufacture or possess nuclear weapons, or threaten to use them, or allow any nuclear arms to be stationed on their territory.
- The treaty prohibits a full range of nuclear-weapon related activities, such as undertaking to develop, test, produce, manufacture, acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, as well as the use or threat of use of these weapons.
- None of the nine countries that possess nuclear weapons — the United States, Russia, Britain, China, France, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel — took part in the negotiations or the vote.
- All of the countries that bear nuclear arms and many others that either come under their protection or host weapons on their soil boycotted the negotiations.
- The most vocal critic of the discussions, the US, pointed to the escalation of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programme as one reason to retain its nuclear capability.
- This treaty was opposed because nuclear powers argue their arsenals serve as a deterrent against a nuclear attack and say they remain committed to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). They said a purported ban on nuclear weapons that does not address the security concerns which continue to make nuclear deterrence necessary cannot result in the elimination of a single nuclear weapon and will not enhance any country's security, nor international peace and security.
- This treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons will be open for signatures from any UN member state on 20 September during the annual general assembly. While countries that possess nuclear weapons are not expected to sign up any time soon, supporters of the treaty believe it marks an important step towards a nuclear-free world by banning the weapons under international law.

Bottom-trawling

- A new law in Sri Lanka that outlaws bottom trawling has angered fishermen in India, who have organized a strike to protest the move.
- The law makes it illegal to fish from, operate, or own a boat engaged in bottom trawling. It creates a penalty of a LKR 50,000 (USD 325, EUR 285) fine and up to two years of imprisonment for the offense.
- Foreign fishing vessels found to be engaged in bottom trawling or in importing equipment used in the practice in Sri Lankan waters face fines ranging from LKR 1 million to 100 million (USD 6,500 to 650,500, EUR 5,700 to 570,600), the Columbo Page reported.

What is bottom trawling?

- Bottom trawling is an industrial fishing method where a large net with heavy weights is dragged across the seafloor, scooping up everything in its path – from the targeted fish to the incidentally caught centuries-old corals.
- Bottom trawls are used in catching marine life that live on the seafloor, such as shrimp, cod, sole and flounder.

Why is it a problem?

- Bottom trawling is unselective and severely damaging to seafloor ecosystems. The net indiscriminately catches every life and object it encounters. Thus, many creatures end up mistakenly caught and thrown overboard dead or dying, including endangered fish and even vulnerable deep-sea corals which can live for several hundred years.
- This collateral damage, called bycatch, can amount to 90% of a trawl's total catch. In addition, the weight and width of a bottom trawl can destroy large areas of seafloor habitats that give marine species food and shelter. Such habitat destructions can leave the marine ecosystem permanently damaged.

Malabar Exercise 2017

- Navies of India, US and the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force have begun Malabar naval exercise 2017, aimed at achieving deeper military ties between the three nations. It is the 21st edition of the Malabar exercise.
- It is the fourth consecutive year Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF) has taken part in the Malabar Exercise, conducted annually by the US and India in the Bay of Bengal since 1992.
- The exercise, conducted ashore and at-sea, would include professional exchanges on carrier strike group operations, maritime patrol and reconnaissance operations, surface and anti-submarine warfare. Medical operations, damage control, explosive ordinance disposal, helicopter operations and anti-submarine warfare would also take place.

Analysis:

- China's increasing closeness with Pakistan and Sri Lanka are also a cause of worry for India. Thus, Malabar 2017 will prove to be a concrete step towards increasing India's presence in the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal. Dozens of sea vessels, submarines and warships will work together to bring the three powerful navies together for possible joint patrolling and naval missions in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.
- The exercise marked a continuation of the larger US project in the Asia-Pacific region, which includes sending out signals to China on issues of freedom of navigation in international waters. The US reportedly plans to sail warships within 12 nautical miles of Chinese-claimed features in the South China Sea, as part of Freedom of Navigation (FON) operations.
- Japan has been aggressively voicing its concerns about the South China Sea in view of increased Chinese activities and the dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands.

South Asian Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Road Connectivity Investment Program

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for upgradation and widening of 65 kms of Imphal-Moreh Section of NH-39 in Manipur.
- The project is being developed with ADB's loan assistance under the South Asian Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Road Connectivity Investment Program.
- The project corridor is also a part of the Asian Highway No. 01 (AH01) and acts as India's Gateway to the East. Thus trade, commerce and tourism in the region will get a boost.

About SASEC:

- The South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) program brings together Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka in a project-based partnership that aims to promote regional prosperity, improve economic opportunities, and build a better quality of life for the people of the subregion.
- SASEC countries share a common vision of boosting intraregional trade and cooperation in South Asia, while also developing connectivity and trade with Southeast Asia through Myanmar, to the People's Republic of China, and the global market.
- SASEC seeks to strengthen multimodal cross-border transport networks that boost intraregional trade and open up trade opportunities with East and Southeast Asia.

- The program helps build modern and effective customs administration that speeds up the time and reduces the costs of moving goods, vehicles, and people across borders.
- Better connectivity will help unleash the tremendous potential for mutually beneficial trade between the seven SASEC countries, which remain some of the least economically integrated in the world.
- SASEC also assists member countries in improving energy security by developing infrastructure and promoting intraregional power trade to reduce costs and import dependence.
- In 2016, the SASEC countries approved the SASEC Operational Plan 2016-2025, a 10-year strategic roadmap, which introduced Economic Corridor Development as a fourth sectoral area of focus, to promote synergies and linkages between economic corridors across SASEC countries. This will help optimize development gains in the subregion, including industrial growth and competitiveness, the creation of high-quality jobs, increased productivity, and strengthening existing value chains.
- SASEC members gather regularly to discuss and address shared interests, creating support and ownership for the program at the policy level as well as practical collaboration at the technical working level. Over a decade of successful cooperation has built confidence and mutual trust through various discussion platforms that decide on coordinated actions for the benefit of all. ADB serves as the SASEC Secretariat.
- Since 2001, SASEC countries have implemented 46 regional projects worth more than \$9 billion in the energy, economic corridor development, transport, trade facilitation, and information and communications technology sectors.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

NGT to impose Rs50,000 fine for dumping waste in Ganga river

- National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned all construction within 100 metres of the river's edge from Haridwar in Uttarakhand to Unnao in Uttar Pradesh.
- This ban will remain in place until authorities complete the demarcation of the Ganga's floodplains and identify all permissible and non-permissible activities.

Highlights of the order:

- After spending Rs7, 304.64 crore up to March 2017 by the central government, state government and local authorities of the state of UP" the status of the Ganga has "not improved in terms of quality or otherwise and it continues to be a serious environmental issue".
- The bench ordered the concerned authorities to start constructing all sewage treatment plants or installation of any other anti-pollution devices within four months and complete the work within two years.
- Any government agency, public authority, industry or person who violates any of the directions contained in this judgment and more particularly in relation to storage, transportation of spent chrome liquor, dumping of any kind of waste in river Ganga and its tributaries or on the banks of the same shall be liable to pay environmental compensation of Rs50,000 for each breach or default
- The tribunal also ordered a complete prohibition on disposing of municipal solid waste, electronic-waste or bio-medical waste on the floodplain or into the Ganga or its tributaries.
- There shall be no dumping or landfill sites for any kind of waste irrespective of any technology for waste processing, within 500 metres from the edge of the river Ganga and/or its tributaries.
- NGT also directed the authorities to ensure that, "there are no encroachments, unauthorized illegal constructions on the banks/flood plain of the major drains, river Ganga and its tributaries".

- The tribunal held that no industrial unit falling in the catchment area of Ganga and its tributaries should be permitted to indiscriminately extract ground water and asked the Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) to carry out a study and notify areas falling between Haridwar and Unnao as over-exploited, critical, semi-critical and safe zones.

About the National Green Tribunal (NGT):

- NGT has been established under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.
- The tribunal deals with matters relating to the enforcement of any legal right relating to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property.
- The Tribunal is not bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, but shall be guided by principles of natural justice.
- The Tribunal's dedicated jurisdiction in environmental matters shall provide speedy environmental justice and help reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts.
- The Tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing of the same.

QUICK FACTS

- Rank of India in Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) 2017 - **23**
- 12th G20 Summit was held in - **Hamburg, Germany**
- 22nd World Petroleum Congress was held in - **Istanbul**
- State to top in Soil health cards is - **Chhattisgarh**
- India's first university for Dalit students opened in - **Hyderabad**
- International center for research on rice varieties was opened in - **Varanasi**
- New Chief of GST intelligence agency - **John Joseph**