

Abhimanu

Weekly current affairs Series

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Abhimanu's IAS Study Group

Chandigarh

Graded Surveillance Measure

- SEBI introduced the measure to keep a tab on securities that witness an abnormal price rise that is not commensurate with financial health and fundamentals of the company such as earnings, book value, price to earnings ratio among others.
- The underlying principle behind the graded surveillance framework is to alert and protect investors trading in a security, which is seeing abnormal price movements.
- SEBI may put shares of companies under the measure for suspected price rigging or under the ambit of 'shell companies'.
- The measure would provide a heads up to market participants that they need to be extra cautious and diligent while dealing in such securities put under surveillance.

How the Graded Surveillance Measure works?

- Once a firm is identified for surveillance it goes through six stages with corresponding surveillance actions and the restrictions on trading in those securities gets higher progressively. In the first stage the securities are put in the trade-to-trade segment (meaning no speculative trading is allowed and delivery of shares and payment of consideration amount are mandatory). A maximum of 5% movement in share price is allowed.
- In the second stage, in addition to the trade-to-trade segment, the buyer of the security has to put 100% of trade value as additional surveillance deposit. The deposit would be retained by the exchanges for a period of five months and refunded in a phased manner.
- In the third stage, trading is permitted only once a week i.e. every Monday, apart from the buyer putting 100% of the trade value as additional surveillance deposit.
- In the fourth stage, trading would be allowed once a week and the surveillance deposit increases to 200% of the trade value.
- In the fifth stage, trading would be permitted only once a month (first Monday of the month) with additional deposit of 200%.
- In the sixth and final stage, there are maximum restrictions.
- Trading is permitted only once a month at this stage, with no upward movement allowed in price. Also, the additional surveillance deposit would be 200%.

What are the points small investors should keep in mind about the Graded Surveillance Measure?

- As and when a security is shifted to various levels of surveillance, it is publicly announced on a daily basis on BSE and NSE websites as well as through circulars to the stock brokers. Moreover, the exchanges can also appoint independent auditors to audit the books of accounts of these companies and do forensic audit, wherever needed.
- This indirectly may also be an indication that the sudden rise in either the volumes traded or the price increase are not commensurate with the fundamentals of the said companies and hence small / retail investors are protected from getting stuck in such stocks inadvertently on some wrong advice.
- The only challenge for the small investors is that these announcements are often made at very short notice and implemented from the next day itself thus giving those who have already entered the stock less than adequate time to exit it. Of course, there is also potentially another risk. For example, even if time is given, the stock might crash next day on the news, triggering the lower price circuit and leaving no exit.

Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) project

- Funds from a Japanese government loan will soon be utilised for the first time in the \$100 billion, Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) project. So far, the mega-project was being developed only with the Indian government's financial assistance.
- A soft loan (with concessional conditions) to the tune of \$4.5 billion to be extended by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), will shortly be utilised to develop two Mass Rapid Transit Systems (MRTS) — one each in Gujarat and Haryana — that will be part of the DMIC.

About DMIC:

- Delhi - Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) is India's most ambitious infrastructure programme aiming to develop new industrial cities as "Smart Cities" and converging next generation technologies across infrastructure sectors.
- Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor is a mega infra-structure project of USD 90 billion with the financial & technical aids from Japan, covering an overall length of 1483 KMs between the political capital and the business capital of India, i.e. Delhi and Mumbai. A MoU in this regard was signed in 2006.
- The project would include six mega investment regions of 200 square kilometres each and will run through six states Delhi, Western Uttar Pradesh, Southern Haryana, Eastern Rajasthan, Eastern Gujarat, and Western Maharashtra.
- The objective is to expand India's Manufacturing & Services base and develop DMIC as a "Global Manufacturing and Trading Hub".
- The programme will provide a major impetus to planned urbanization in India with manufacturing as the key driver.
- In addition to new Industrial Cities, the programme envisages development of infrastructure linkages like power plants, assured water supply, high capacity transportation and logistics facilities as well as softer interventions like skill development programme for employment of the local populace. In the first phase eight new industrial cities are being developed.
- The programme has been conceptualized in partnership and collaboration with Government of Japan.

Deendayal Hastkala Sankul

- The Prime Minister of India dedicated to the nation, the Deendayal Hastkala Sankul – a trade facilitation centre for handicrafts – at Varanasi.

About this Project

- The Finance Minister in the Budget 2014-15 had announced setting up of a Trade Facilitation Centre and a Crafts Museum to develop and promote handlooms, handicrafts and silk products of Varanasi and to provide necessary help to weavers, artisans and entrepreneurs of Varanasi in strengthening their marketing activities in domestic as well as international markets and in carrying forward the rich tradition of handlooms at Varanasi.
- A Trade Facilitation Centre is an indispensable step to help weavers/artisans of Varanasi to integrate into the global economy. There is a need for trade facilitation and advisory services to provide support for compliance with trade procedures, formalities and legal and regulatory requirements; this is needed to make entrepreneurs aware of new rules, regulations, thereby facilitating their import/export activities and enhancing their competitiveness. There is also a need to showcase the rich tradition of Varanasi through museum, live demonstration and audio visual medium to domestic and international tourists.
- The Sankul will facilitate the weavers/artisans/exporters in promotion of handlooms/handicrafts in both domestic and international markets. The Crafts Museum in the Sankul will preserve the traditional handloom/handicrafts products of Varanasi and showcase the handloom & handicraft products, which will be an inspiration for the new generation, scholars, designers and tourists.
- The project spans 7.93 acres, with a built-up area of 43,450 square metres. The approximate cost of the complex is 300 crore rupees.

- The project is strategically located near the upcoming bypass between NH-29 (Varanasi - Gorakhpur Road) and NH-56 (Varanasi - Sultanpur Road) which shall reduce travel time to Sankul from Varanasi airport to 30 minutes and from Sarnath to Sankul to 20 minutes. The location of the site also allows its connectivity to all prominent locations within Varanasi and Sarnath. The location is expected to be the new growth corridor of development.
- The complex is equipped with automated Building Management Systems (BMS), central air conditioning and ventilation systems, power backup, fire protection and public address systems, lifts/escalators for ease of public movement on all levels and centrally monitored CCTV system for safety and security.
- The project consists of five blocks: Marts-cum-Office, Convention hall-cum-Exhibition, Food court-cum-Guest House, Shopping Arcade and Crafts Museum. It has double-basement parking facilities with parking capacity of around 370 cars and 430 two-wheelers.

SATH- Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital

- SATH- Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital, a joint initiative of Government of Assam and NITI Aayog, has been launched.
- The programme aims to provide structured support to Assam in identifying key health priorities and implement the solutions towards transforming the health and improving the well-being of people of Assam.

About SATH programme:

- Furthering the agenda for cooperative federalism, NITI Aayog has launched SATH, a program providing 'Sustainable Action for Transforming Human capital' with the State Governments. The vision of the program is to initiate transformation in the education and health sectors. The program addresses the need expressed by many states for technical support from NITI.
- SATH aims to identify and build three future 'role model' states for health systems.
- NITI will work in close collaboration with their state machinery to design a robust roadmap of intervention, develop a program governance structure, set up monitoring and tracking mechanisms, hand-hold state institutions through the execution stage and provide support on a range of institutional measures to achieve the end objectives.
- The program will be implemented by NITI along with McKinsey & Company and IPE Global consortium, who were selected through a competitive bidding process.

Inter-bank Local Currency Credit Line Agreement

- The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval to the signing of the (i) Interbank Local Currency Credit Line Agreement and (ii) Cooperation Memorandum Relating to Credit Ratings by Exim Bank with participating member banks under BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism.
- As both the Agreement and the MoU are umbrella pacts, and are non-binding in nature, the Board of Directors of Exim Bank has been authorized to negotiate and conclude any individual contracts and commitments within their framework.

About Interbank Local Currency Credit Line Agreement:

- The initial Master Agreement on Extending Credit Facility in Local Currency under the BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism had a validity of five years, which has expired in March 2017. It is understood that some of the member banks (like CDB and VEB; CDB and BNDES) have entered into bilateral agreements for local currency financing under the Master Agreement signed in 2012. Although the current conditions are not conducive to usage, it was useful to keep the same alive as an enabling feature in case a suitable opportunity materializes in future. Exim Bank raises resources in the off-shore market in diverse currencies and swaps to mitigate the risk. The umbrella Agreement would serve as an enabler to enter into bilateral agreements with member banks subject to national laws, regulations and internal policies of the signatories.

Cooperation Memorandum Relating to Credit Ratings

- It would enable sharing of credit ratings amongst the BRICS member banks, based on the request received from another bank. This would be an ideal mechanism to mitigate the credit risks associated with cross-border financing. In future, such a mechanism could also serve as pre-cursor to the proposal of having an alternate rating agency by BRICS nations.
- The Agreement and the MoU have also been highlighted in the BRICS Leaders Xiamen Declaration made in Xiamen, China on 4th September 2017.

Analysis:

- The Agreements will promote multilateral interaction within the area of mutual interest which will deepen political and economic relations with BRICS nations.
- Signing of the Agreement will position Exim Bank in the international platform along with large development finance institutions, like CDS, VEB and BNDES. At an appropriate time, Exim Bank, leveraging this umbrella agreement, could enter into bilateral agreement with any of these member institutions to raise resources for its business. As and when an opportunity arises for co-financing in commercial terms, by any two member institutions (say India and South Africa), lending in single currency by both the institutions would also be possible.
- Exim Bank finances, facilitates and promotes India's international trade. It provides competitive finance at various stages of the business cycle covering import of technology, export product development, export production and export credit at pre-shipment and post-shipment stages and investments overseas.

TK Viswanathan on Internet Hate Speech

- The Home Ministry is examining a report given by a high-level committee formed to propose new laws or amendments to deal with hate speech on the internet.
- The committee, headed by TK Viswanathan, has submitted a report on this to the Home Ministry recently.
- The committee was formed after the Supreme Court struck down section 66A of the Information Technology Act. Section 66A defines the punishment for sending “offensive” messages through a computer or any other communication device like a mobile phone or a tablet. A conviction can fetch a maximum of three years in jail and a fine.
- Considering the growing menace of hate speech and abuse on the internet in the absence of the provision, the committee was reportedly set up to propose new laws and amendments in existing laws.

Suggestions made by the committee:

- Committee has recommended appointment of cybercrime coordinators in every state as well as setting up of cybercrime cells in each district.
- They will deal with those fomenting trouble or spreading hate against anybody on the grounds of religion, race, caste or community, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, place of birth or residence, language, disability, or tribe through any means of communication.
- The punishment under the amended clause dealing with prohibiting incitement to hatred has been recommended to be two years imprisonment or a fine of Rs 5,000 or both.
- The committee has suggested that offences under the amended Section 505A be punishable with imprisonment of up to one year or fine or Rs 5,000 or both.
- The amended Section would also deal with instances of anybody “causing fear, alarm or provocation of violence” on grounds of religion, etc.
- The committee suggested that the state cybercrime coordinator should be an officer not below the rank of Inspector General of Police.
- It also suggested that the district cybercrime cell should be headed by an officer not below the rank of sub-inspector of police.
- Section 78 of the IT Act needs to be substituted and Section 153 and 505A of the Indian Penal Code need to be amended.

- Section 78 primarily dealt with capacity building and needs to be relooked at with a view to sensitise law enforcement agency officers. Under it, a police officer of the rank of inspector or above was empowered to investigate offences.

NATIONAL POLITY

Bharat ke Kaushalzaade and Kaushal Panjee

- Rural Skills Division, Ministry of Rural Development has organized 'Bharat ke Kaushalzaade', an event honouring beneficiaries of its key skilling programmes, on the eve of Antyodaya Diwas 2017.
- The event aims to celebrate and honour beneficiaries from both of MoRD's flagship skill development programmes i.e. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) and Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETI).

Kaushal Panjee'

- It aims to be citizen centric end-to-end solution to aid mobilization of candidates for RSETIs and DDU-GKY.
- It facilitates mobilization of candidates through Self Help Group members, Gram Panchayat Functionaries, Block Officials, CSCs and directly by the candidate.
- RSETIs and DDU-GKY Partners can access the Kaushal Panjee to connect with the mobilized rural youth.
- Kaushal Panjee is connected to the Social Economic Caste Census (SECC 2011) which will help the States plan and target their mobilizations based on the socio-economic profile of households in their State.

About Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY):

- Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) announced the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) Antyodaya Diwas, on 25th September 2014.
- DDU-GKY is a part of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), tasked with the dual objectives of adding diversity to the incomes of rural poor families and cater to the career aspirations of rural youth.
- DDU-GKY is uniquely focused on rural youth between the ages of 15 and 35 years from poor families.
- As a part of the Skill India campaign, it plays an instrumental role in supporting the social and economic programs of the government like the Make In India, Digital India, Smart Cities and Start-Up India, Stand-Up India campaigns.
- Over 180 million or 69% of the country's youth population between the ages of 18 and 34 years, live in its rural areas.
- Of these, the bottom of the pyramid youth from poor families with no or marginal employment number about 55 million.
- The National Policy for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship 2015 has identified a skills gap of 109.73 million in 24 key sectors by the year 2022.
- This number cannot be achieved without addressing the BoP 55 million from rural India. Also, a FICCI and Ernst – Young study published in 2013 identified a shortage of over 47 million skilled workers across the globe by 2020.
- This presents an unprecedented opportunity for India to train its BoP youth population and place them in jobs across the world and realize its demographic dividend.

- DDU-GKY is present in 21 States and UTs, across 568 districts, impacting youth from over 6,215 blocks. It currently has over 690 projects being implemented by over 300 partners, in more than 330 trades from 82 industry sectors. Over 2.7 Lakh candidates have been trained and over 1.34 Lakh candidates have been placed in jobs so in the course of the last financial year. From 2012, DDU-GKY has so far committed an investment of more than INR 5,600 Crores, impacting rural youth pan-India.

Modernisation of Police Forces

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for implementation of umbrella scheme of "Modernisation of Police Forces (MPF)" for years 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- The financial outlay for the scheme over the three year's period is Rs.25,060 crore, out of which the Central Government share will be Rs.18,636 crore and the States' share will be Rs.6,424 crore.

Salient Features:

- Special provision has been made under the Scheme for internal security, law and order, women security, availability of modern weapons, mobility of police forces, logistics support, hiring of helicopters, upgradation of police wireless, National Satellite Network, CCTNS project, E-prison project etc.
- Under the umbrella scheme, central budget outlay of Rs.10,132 crore has been earmarked for internal security related expenditure for Jammu & Kashmir, North Eastern States and left wing extremism affected States.
- Scheme of Special Central Assistance (SCA) for 35 worst LWE affected districts has been introduced with an outlay of Rs.3,000 crore to tackle the issue of underdevelopment in these district.
- An outlay of Rs.100 crore has been earmarked in the North Eastern States for police infrastructure upgradation, training institutes, investigation facilities etc.
- New initiatives are being introduced to provide assistance to States for upgradation of police infrastructure, forensic science laboratories, institutions and the equipment available with them to plug critical gaps in the criminal justice system. Police Stations will be integrated to set up a national data base of crime and criminals' records. It will be linked with other pillars of criminal justice system such as 'prisons, forensic science laboratories and prosecution offices.
- The umbrella scheme also provides for setting up of a State-of Art forensic science laboratory in Amravati, Andhra Pradesh and upgradation of Sardar Patel Global Centre for Security, Counter Terrorism and Anti Insurgency in Jaipur and Gujarat Forensic Science University in Gandhi Nagar.

Analysis:

- It is expected that the umbrella scheme, "Modernisation of Police Forces (MPF)" will go a long way to boost the capability and efficiency of Central and State Police Forces by modernizing them.
- Implementation of this scheme would bolster the Government's ability to address challenges faced in different theatres such as areas affected by LWE, Jammu and Kashmir and North East effectively and undertake development interventions which will catalyze in improving the quality of life in these areas and help combat these challenges effectively at the same time.

India's infant mortality rate has declined 8%

- India notched up an 8% decline in the infant mortality rate (IMR) in 2016 from a year ago.
- This improvement aided by a higher number of institutional deliveries and campaigns to promote breastfeeding and immunization.

Main highlights:

- According to the Sample Registration System (SRS) bulletin, released by the Office of the Registrar General, IMR declined to 34 per 1,000 live births last year from 37 per 1,000 live births in 2015,.
- The birth cohort—babies born during the year—had come down to below 25 million for the first time.
- India has registered 90,000 fewer infant deaths in 2016 as compared to 2015.
- Total number of estimated infant deaths had declined to 840,000 in 2016 from 930,000 in 2015.

- IMR declined in 29 states and Union territories, was stable in two states and increased in five states and Union territories.
- The highest decline of 7 points was reported by Chandigarh and the highest increase of 6 points was reported by Arunachal Pradesh.
- A major reason for this achievement is the increase in number of institutional deliveries. In 2005, only 38% deliveries were taking place in hospitals; but now, more than 79.8% are institutional deliveries.
- IMR increased by 4 points in Tripura and Uttarakhand; 2 points in Manipur and 1 point in Daman and Diu.
- Among the so-called empowered action group (EAG) states, which lag behind in the demographic transition and have the highest IMRs, Bihar reported a decline of 4 points; Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand 3 points; and Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Rajasthan 2 points.
- The gender difference between female and male IMR has also reduced to less than 10 points. Earlier it used to be above 20 points. There has been a gradual change in social systems such as delayed marriages, thereby lesser adolescent pregnancies, and economic status of people with time that has also contributed to progress in health systems
- The government identified and targeted 184 districts with the worst IMR to bring about an improvement.
- The highest IMR in 2016 was reported in Madhya Pradesh (47) followed by Assam and Odisha (44), Uttar Pradesh (43) and Rajasthan (41).
- The lowest IMR was reported by Goa (8) followed by Kerala and Puducherry (10). Rural IMR (38) was 15 points higher than the urban IMR (23).
- In comparison to 2015, the rural-urban difference narrowed by one point (16 to 15). The rural IMR declined by 3 points (41 to 38).

About IMR:

- The infant mortality rate is the number of deaths under one year of age occurring among the live births in a given geographical area during a given year, per 1,000 live births occurring among the population of the given geographical area during the same year.

Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyay Vigyan Gram Sankul Pariyojana

- The government has launched “Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyay Vigyan Gram Sankul Pariyojana” which will experiment and endeavour to formulate and implement appropriate S&T Interventions for Sustainable Development through cluster approach in Uttarakhand.

About Scheme:

- Department of Science and Technology has conceived to adopt a few clusters of villages in Uttarakhand and transform them to become self-sustainable in a time bound manner through the tools of Science and Technology (S&T).
- The key deliverable in this approach is to utilise local resources and locally available skill sets and convert them in a manner using science and technology, that substantial value addition takes place in their local produce and services which can sustain the rural population locally.
- Further, the local communities are not compelled to migrate from their native places in search of jobs and livelihoods. Once this concept is validated in the few selected clusters, it can be replicated across large number of village clusters in the country.
- Areas of interventions in these selected clusters would be processing and value addition of milk, honey, mushroom, herbal tea, forest produce, horticulture and local crops, medicinal & aromatic plants and traditional craft and handloom of Uttarakhand. Post-harvest processing of Kiwi, Strawberry, Cherry, Tulsi, Adrak, Badi Elaichi through solar drying technology, extraction of apricot oil using cold press technology. Stringent product and process control interventions for energy and water conservation would also be ensured through this project.

- Novel strategies for sustainable development in this ecologically fragile state are important. Practice of agriculture, agro-based cottage industries and animal husbandry in an eco-friendly manner will be emphasized during the implementation of the project.
- Sustainable employment and livelihood options within the clusters such as eco-tourism, naturopathy and yoga, are also planned to be promoted.
- These clusters would act as model production cum training and demonstration centres. There is a possibility of replicating this pilot phase initiative in other hill states of the country once it is established and stabilized.
- Department of Science and Technology (DST) has committed Rs 6.3 crore support for a period of three years for this project.

Analysis:

- About a lakh of people would benefit directly or indirectly through this project in four identified clusters of 60 villages in Uttarakhand for pilot phase which are located at different altitudes (up to 3000 meters).
- As the living conditions and resources available at different altitude is relatively different, the adopted strategy would help in creating models that are appropriate for different altitudes and could then be replicated in other hill states as well.
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Pradhan Mantri LPG Panchayat

- The Central government has launched a country-wide LPG Panchayat as a backup to the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana to distribute LPG connections among the rural areas where conventional fuel is used for domestic purposes.
- The LPG Panchayat is an interactive communication platform aimed at educating rural LPG users about proper safety precautions to be taken while using LPG, its benefit to the environment, its effect on women empowerment and health.
- With this, the government aims to reach the doorsteps of poor and under-privileged women to educate them about the safety and efficiency, health benefits, positive impact on environment, economic development and empowerment on usage of LPG connections.
- One lakh LPG Panchayats would be activated across the country under the scheme during the next one and a half years. The idea of this platform is to trigger a discussion through sharing of personal experiences on the benefits of use of clean fuel compared to traditional fuels like cowdung.
- The agenda would also include safe practices, quality of service provided by distributors and availability of refill cylinders.

About the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:

- Under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Rs.8,000 crore has been earmarked for providing 50 million LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to poor households.
- The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- Financial support of 1600 rupees for each LPG connection will be provided to the BPL households.
- The identification of eligible BPL families will be made in consultation with the State Governments and the Union Territories.
- It will be implemented over three years' time frame namely in the FY 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19.

Analysis:

- There are serious health hazards associated with cooking based on fossil fuels. According to WHO estimates, about 5 lakh deaths in India alone due to unclean cooking fuels. Most of these premature deaths were due to non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung

cancer. Indoor air pollution is also responsible for a significant number of acute respiratory illnesses in young children. Having an open fire in the kitchen is like burning 400 cigarettes an hour.

- So, Providing LPG connections to BPL households will ensure universal coverage of cooking gas in the country along with empowering women and protect their health. It will reduce drudgery and the time spent on cooking. It will also provide employment for rural youth in the supply chain of cooking gas.
- In order to make this scheme a success, the distribution system needs to be strengthened to be able to meet the expected increase in demand, particularly in rural areas, as non-availability of fuel could push people back towards using solid fuels.
- Ensuring reliable, sustained, last-mile supply would require multiple steps. It requires a large extension of distribution networks, especially in rural areas, since each rural distribution agency typically caters to fewer customers than urban agencies.
- Implementation of direct benefit transfer schemes must be made more robust. Effective monitoring and grievance redressal systems are equally important to ensure that problems in the scheme are highlighted and addressed early.
- The scheme should be accompanied by a focussed public relations campaign to build awareness and create a demand pull, not only for clean cooking but also for good service.
- This scheme targets only BPL households. But, In India definition and execution of BPL line is faulty. So, this scheme should also be extended to non-BPL households who may also not be able to afford LPG connections.

Essential Services Maintenance Act

- The Karnataka government has invoked the Essential Services Maintenance Act against garbage contractors and sanitation workers employed under them following complaints that they were not discharging their duties. The law has been invoked for a year to ensure that waste is removed from the city.

About ESMA:

- The Essential Services Maintenance Act (Esma) was enacted in 1968, to maintain “certain essential services and the normal life of the community.”
- The Act includes a long list of “essential services” in its charter -- ranging from post and telegraph, through railway, airport and port operations -- and it prohibits the key employees in these services from striking.
- But the Act also allows states to choose the essential services on which to enforce Esma. (Jammu and Kashmir, incidentally, is exempt from Esma.) So for instance, only some days ago, Andhra Pradesh decreed that its IT industry was an essential service. This thrilled bodies like National Association of Software & Service Companies (Nasscom) because, as one industry representative put it:
- Under this employees cannot resort to strikes. Also, they cannot cite bandhs or a curfew as an excuse not to report to work. Moreover, companies which depend heavily on outside transport providers had to bear the brunt as the transport services were hit during a bandh or a curfew.
- Any person who commences a strike...or otherwise takes part in...any such strike shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months, or with fine which may extend to two hundred rupees, or with both,” the Act reads.
- Any person who instigates a strike which is illegal under this Act shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine which may extend to one thousand rupees, or with both.

VVPAT to be used in Gujarat polls

- The Election Commission of India will use Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) gadgets with Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) in all 50,128 voting booths in Gujarat, which goes to the Assembly polls at the end of this year.
- This is the first time an entire assembly poll will be conducted using EVMs equipped with VVPAT.

What is VVPAT system?

- Voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) is a method of providing feedback to voters using a ballot less voting system. VVPAT is intended as an independent verification system for electronic voting machines that allows voters to verify that their votes are cast as intended and can serve as an additional barrier to changing or destroying votes.
- Under VVPAT, a printer-like apparatus is linked to Electronic Voting Machine (EVM). When a vote is cast, a receipt is generated showing the serial number, name and symbol of the candidate. It confirms the vote and the voter can verify the details. The receipt, once viewed, goes inside a container linked to the EVM and can only be accessed by the election officers in rarest of rare cases.
- The system allows a voter to challenge his or her vote on basis of the paper receipt for the first time. As per a new rule, the booth presiding officer will have to record the dissent of the voter, which would have to be taken into account at time of counting.
- The VVPAT system was not manufactured due to doubts on the EVM, but was part of the up gradation of the system.

Analysis:

- Bringing transparency in electoral process and preventing malpractices is one of the formidable challenges that India has been trying to tackle for years. Even after the transformation from ballot paper system to electronic voting machines, not much headway could be made to rule out manipulation of poll results. Many started raising concerns about the vulnerability of EVMs, the government felt the need to further delve into the issue and introduce a more viable option.
- The Election Commission has been planning to introduce VVPAT system since 2011 when it started exploring the possibility of conducting first field trials. Although the system was first experimented during the Nagaland by-elections in 2013, Mizoram was the first state to introduce VVPAT on a large scale. It was used in 10 assembly constituencies of Aizawl district.
- On a national level, the system was introduced in 8 of 543 parliamentary constituencies during the 2014 general elections. It was used in 516 polling stations across eight states.

Karnataka anti-superstition Bill

- The Karnataka Cabinet has cleared Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Bill, 2017, popularly known as the anti-superstition Bill.
- This bill is expected to put an end to various inhuman practices such as black magic, witchcraft, or any act in the name of religion that causes harm to humans and animals. However, acts such as Kesh Lochan (plucking of hair), vastu and astrology have not been barred.

What is not banned:

- The form of the worship such as Pradakshina, Yatra, Parikrama performed at religious places
- Harikata, Keerthana, Pravachana, Bhajana, teaching of ancient and traditional learning and arts, practice, propagation and circulation
- Miracles of the deceased saints propagation, publicity and circulation of the same and the propagation, publicity and distribution of literature about miracles of the religious preachers which do not cause physical injury
- Performance of prayers, upasana and religious rituals at home, temple, darghas, gurdwara, pagoda, church, and other religious places which do not cause physical injury
- All religious celebrations, festivals, prayers, procession and other act relating other rituals
- Piercing of ears and nose of children in accordance with rituals and performance of religious ritual such as Kesh Lochan by the Jains
- Advice in regard to vastu shashtra, and advice by jyothishya and other astrologers

What is banned:

- Facilitating any person or persons roll over (uruli seve) on the leaves of left over food by other persons in any public or religious places or similar practices that violate human dignity, also known as made snana
- Cercing any person to perform fire-walk at the time of jatras/religious festivals, causing physical injury

- Practice of piercing from rods from one side of jaw to another side of the jaw and including the tongue (baibiga practice)
- Pelting stones in the name of banamathi, mata-mantra and mata-mantra on the residential houses during night or day
- Prohibiting and preventing a person from taking medical treatment in the case of dog, snake, or scorpion bite, and instead giving him 'treatment' like mata-mantra, gandra-dora of such other things
- Forcing person to carry on evil practices such as killing of an animal by biting its neck (gaavu), that cause harm to public health nuisance
- Performing any inhuman, evil act and black magic in search of precious things, bounty and hidden treasure in the name of banamathi, mata-mantra, assaulting any person, parading naked or put a ban on his daily activities or instigate advise or encourage committing such inhuman acts
- To create an impression by declaring that a power inapprehensible by senses has influenced one's body or that a person has possessed such power thereby create fear in the minds of people or to threaten others of evil consequences for not following the advice of such person or deceive defraud and deter them
- Under the pretext of expelling the ghost, assaulting by tying the person with rope or chain, beating by stick or whip to make the person drink footwear soaked water, causing pain by way of touching heated object to organs or body of a person, forcing a person to perform sexual act in the open, practice inhuman acts, putting urine or human excreta forcibly in the mouth of a person or practice any such acts
- Creating panic in the minds of public in general by way of invoking ghost or mantras
- Preventing person taking medical treatment and diverting him or her to practice inhuman evil and aghory acts
- Claiming to perform surgery by fingers or claiming to change the sex of a foetus in womb of a woman
- Persuading, propagating or facilitating rituals that involve self-inflicted injuries such as hanging from a hook: inserted into the body (sidi) or pulling a chariot by hook inserted into the body
- Persuading, propagating or facilitating rituals involving harm inflicted on children in the name of curing them, such as throwing them on thorns or from heights and branding them with heated objects
- Practising evil practices against women by forcing isolation, prohibiting re-entry into the village or facilitating segregation of menstruating, or pregnant women; and subjecting women to inhuman and humiliating practices such as parading them naked in the name of worship, or "betthale seve"
- The Bill was earlier named the Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifices and other Inhuman Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Bill, 2017, it has since been renamed the Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Bill, 2017.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Five-point peace plan

- Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has floated a five-point proposal at the United Nations to find a permanent solution to the Rohingya crisis.
- She also called for immediate steps to end the 'cleansing' of the ethnic Rohingya minority.

Hasina's five-point proposal says:

- Myanmar should stop the practice of violence and ethnic cleansing in their the Rakhine State unconditionally and forever;
- United Nations Secretary-General should immediately send a mission to find Myanmar a fact;
- All citizens, regardless of religion and caste, should be protected in Myanmar; For this, under the UN supervision, a 'safe zone' can be made within Myanmar;
- The sustainable return of the forced displaced Rohingya to their homes should be ensured in Myanmar in Bangladesh;
- The recommendations of the Kofi Annan Commission report should be implemented immediately, unconditionally and completely.

Rohingyas:

- Rohingya are often said to be the world's most persecuted minority. They are an ethnic Muslim group in the majority Buddhist country and make up around one million of the total 50 million population.
- They hail from the country's northwest and speak a Bengali dialect. Almost all live in Rakhine, one of the poorest states, with a population of three million.
- About 140,000 Rohingya in the Rakhine state live in ghetto-like camps that they can't leave without government permission.
- They are not regarded as one of the country's 135 official ethnic groups and are denied citizenship under Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law, which effectively renders them stateless.
- To get citizenship, they need to prove they have lived in Myanmar for 60 years, but paperwork is often unavailable or denied to them. As a result, their rights to study, work, travel, marry, practise their religion and access health services are restricted.
- Myanmar views its Rohingya population as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants.
- Since 2012, the UNHCR estimates that more than 110,000 people, mostly Rohingya, left on flimsy boats to countries such as Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

4th gravitational wave detected by LIGO

- A fourth gravitational wave has been detected — this time with help from Italy-based equipment — after two black holes collided, sending ripples through the fabric of space and time.
- The newly produced spinning black hole has about 53 times the mass of our Sun. While this new event is of astrophysical relevance, its detection comes with an additional asset: this is the first significant gravitational wave signal recorded by the Virgo detector.

About Virgo detector:

- The Virgo collaboration includes more than 280 physicists and engineers belonging to 20 different European research groups.
- The Virgo detector — an underground L-shaped instrument that tracks gravitational waves using the physics of laser light and space — recently underwent an upgrade, and while still less sensitive than its U.S. counterparts, it was able to confirm the same signal.
- Known as interferometers, these high-tech underground stations do not rely on light in the sky like a telescope does, but instead sense vibrations in space and can pick up the “chirp” created by a gravitational wave.

About Gravitational waves:

- It comes a century after Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity held that acceleration of massive bodies should produce gravitational waves, which travel through the universe at the speed of light. The gravitational waves detected, and announced to the world, were produced more than a billion years ago by a cataclysmic collision of two black holes, one of them with a mass 36 times that of the Sun and the other slightly smaller at 29 times, into one black hole. The gravitational waves give scientists insights into the final moments before the merger. Gravitational waves are disturbances in the fabric of spacetime. If you drag your hand through a still pool of water, you'll notice that waves follow in its path, and spread outward through the pool. According to Albert Einstein, the same thing happens when heavy objects move through spacetime. But how can space ripple? According to Einstein's general theory of relativity, spacetime isn't a void, but rather a four-dimensional "fabric," which can be pushed or pulled as objects move through it. These distortions are the real cause of gravitational attraction.

India's contribution:

- This giant step for science is the result of truly global cooperation, but Indian Scientist contributed immensely toward this project. About 60 researchers from more than a dozen institutions in India were part of the over-1,000-strong army of scientists in the collaboration.
- Nearly 35 Indian scientists are co-authors of the landmark scientific paper that describes the results. The way to find the signal buried in the noise came from an Indian scientist. Similarly, the oscillation of cosmic bodies after a collision was predicted by an Indian scientist back in 1971.
- Several observatories widely separated from one another will help in determining the direction of any event with greater accuracy and also confirm the genuineness of the signal.
- Now, Government of India approved to construct the proposed Rs.1,260-crore gravitational wave observatory in India which could help obtain unique information about the universe; unlike light, gravitational waves can pass through the universe unobstructed and hence carry otherwise unobtainable information. The facility would also provide a much-needed technological boost and immensely benefit researchers based in India. There will be then possibility to hear "chirp" sound of gravitational wave.

Centre notifies wetland rules

- In a major decision, the union environment ministry notified the new Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules 2017 which prohibit a range of activities in wetlands like setting up and expansion of industries, waste dumping and discharge of effluents.
- The new rules will replace the 2010 version of the rules. The draft of the Wetland Rules was first presented by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) in April 2016. But they were severely criticized by conservationists who had alleged that the draft rules don't mention anything about a national regulator and don't list specific activities prohibited in these ecologically sensitive areas.

Main highlights of the rule:

- The new rules stipulate setting up of a State Wetlands Authority in each State and union territories that will be headed by the State's environment minister and include a range of government officials. They will also include one expert each in the fields of wetland ecology, hydrology, fisheries, landscape planning and socioeconomics to be nominated by the state government.
- These authorities will need to develop a comprehensive list of activities to be regulated and permitted within the notified wetlands and their zone of influence, recommend additional prohibited activities for specific wetlands, define strategies for conservation and wise use of wetlands, and undertake measures for enhancing awareness within stakeholders and local communities on values and functions of wetlands. Wise use is defined as the principle of sustainable uses that is compatible with conservation.
- The State authorities will also need to prepare a list of all wetlands of the State or union territory within three months, a list of wetlands to be notified within six months, a comprehensive digital inventory of all wetlands within one year which will be updated every ten years.

- The rules prohibit activities like conversion of wetland for non-wetland uses including encroachment of any kind, setting up of any industry and expansion of existing industries, manufacture or handling or storage or disposal of hazardous substances and construction and demolition waste, solid waste dumping, discharge of untreated wastes and effluents from industries, cities, towns, villages and other human settlements.
- To oversee the work carried out by States, the rules stipulates for setting up of National Wetlands Committee, which will be headed by the MoEFCC Secretary, to monitor implementation of these rules.
- The Committee will also advise the Central Government on appropriate policies and action programmes for conservation and wise use of wetlands, recommend designation of wetlands of international importance under Ramsar Convention, advise on collaboration with international agencies on issues related to wetlands etc.

Analysis:

- Wetlands can be defined as lands transitional between terrestrial and aquatic eco-systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface or the land is covered by shallow water. They support rich biodiversity and provide wide range of ecosystem services such as water storage, water purification, flood mitigation, erosion control, aquifer recharge and others.
- But they are threatened by reclamation and degradation due to activities like drainage and landfill, pollution, hydrological alteration (water withdrawal and changes in inflow and outflow), over-exploitation resulting in loss of biodiversity and disruption in ecosystem services provided by them.
- There are at least 115 wetlands that are officially identified by the central government and of those 26 are identified as wetlands of international importance under Ramsar Convention which is an international intergovernmental treaty for conservation of wetlands. India is a party to the treaty.
- Environmental experts, however, are not happy. They pointed out that provisions like “central government may consider proposals from the state government or union territory administration for omitting any of the (prohibited) activities on the recommendation of the authority” in the new rules can be misused.
- They also stated that as per the 2010 version of the rules, there was a Central Wetlands Regulatory Authority (CWRA) which will now be replaced by a national committee. Another major objection is about the process of appeal against the decisions of wetland authorities. According to the 2010 rules, anyone aggrieved with the CWRA’s decisions could have filed an appeal with the National Green Tribunal, but the new 2017 rules are silent on the appeal process.
- However, under the new rules, the powers have been given to the State governments so that protection and conservation work can be done at the local level. Central government has mainly retained powers regarding monitoring.

Aquatic Rhabdops

- A new species of non-venomous aquatic snake - Aquatic Rhabdops, which was misidentified since 1863, has finally been described and identified as a new species from the northern Western Ghats.

About Aquatic Rhabdops:

- The snakes belonging to the genus Rhabdops, are endemic to India and two species namely the Olive Forest Snake and bi-coloured Forest Snake were previously known.
- While the Olive Forest snake is endemic to the Western Ghats, the bi-coloured Forest Snake is known to a few localities in the northeastern parts of India.
- The Olive forest snake was being reported very commonly from several areas in Maharashtra including Koyna, Amboli and others and while carrying out our regular surveys, we believed that there was some difference in the snake that we were seeing and what was described as olive forest snake in 1863 based on specimens collected from Mananthavady in Wayand District Kerala.
- This new species- Aquatic Rhabdops was previously considered as Olive Forest Snake owing to its similarities in some characters and distribution but we have been able to establish that the Aquatic Rhabdops snake are found in the North western ghats including Maharashtra, Goa and northern parts of North Karnataka while the olive forest snake is restricted to Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

- This has been decided to name this new species of medium sized snake after its aquatic nature. The adults are mostly associated with fresh water streams in the forest and juveniles are mostly seen in water logged conditions, mostly on rocky plateaus. This species is nocturnal, chiefly aquatic and seen foraging underwater like other water snakes. Interestingly the juveniles and adults are differently coloured and this ontogenic colour variation may be due to their habitat preference as juveniles and adults.

QUICK FACTS

- 7th ASEM(Asia- Europe) Economic Ministers' Meeting held in : **Seoul**
- World Tourism Day is observed on : **27 September**
- Rank of India in Global Competitiveness Index 2017-18 : **40**
- The World Maritime Day is observed on : **28 September**
- World Rabies Day is observed on : **28 September**
- 14th India-EU Summit to be held in : **New Delhi**
- New CMD of SIDBI: **Mohammad Mustafa**