

Abhimanu

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Abhimanu's IAS Study Group

Chandigarh

APY subscribers to touch 1 crore: Finance Ministry

- According to Finance ministry, subscriber base of Atal Pension Yojana (APY), a guaranteed pension scheme for unorganised sector, is expected to increase to 1 crore by March next year.
- Within three years, the scheme has been able to mobilise nearly 69 lakh accounts

About Atal Pension Yojana:

- Atal Pension Yojana (APY), a pension scheme for unorganised sector workers such as personal maids, drivers, gardeners etc, was launched in June 2015 by the government.
- This social security scheme was introduced as a replacement to previous government's Swavalamban Yojana which wasn't well accepted by people.
- APY aims to help these workers save money for their old age while they are working and guarantees returns post retirement.
- The scheme also promises a co-contribution by Central Government of 50% of the total prescribed contribution by a worker, up to Rs. 1000 per annum, but only to those who joined APY before 31.12.2015. Further, this co-contribution would be made only for 5 years, from FY 2015-16 to 2019-20 in the eligible cases subject to conditions mentioned below.

What is the monthly contribution and mode of payment?

- APY is a periodic contribution based pension plan and promises a fixed pension of Rs 1000/ Rs 2000/ Rs 3000/ Rs 4000 or Rs 5000.

Benefits under APY

- It provides guaranteed pension of Rs 1,000 to Rs 5,000 to the subscribers. The scheme also allows a subscriber to decrease or increase pension amount during the course of accumulation phase, once an year.
- In case of death of subscriber, the spouse of the subscriber shall be entitled for the same amount of pension till his or her death. And after the demise of both spouse and subscriber, the nominee will be entitled to receive the pension money that the subscriber had accumulated till 60 years of age.
- However if the subscriber dies before 60 years, the spouse will have the choice to either exit the scheme and claim the accumulated amount or continue maintaining the account under the subscriber's name for the remaining vested years. The spouse of the subscriber shall be entitled to receive the same pension amount as the subscriber until death of the spouse in the latter case.

First Investor of NIIF (National Investment and Infrastructure Fund)

- First Investor of NIIF (National Investment and Infrastructure Fund) is Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) which brings in \$1 bn.
- As part of the partnership agreement, ADIA will become the first institutional investor in NIIF's Master Fund and a shareholder in National Investment and Infrastructure Ltd, NIIF's investment management company.

About NIIF (National Investment and Infrastructure Fund):

- 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.

Coordinated Horticulture Assessment and Management using geoinformatics (CHAMAN)

- In a bid to develop India's horticulture sector and help states identify suitable areas and crop types, the agriculture ministry is working on a project which uses satellites and remote sensing technology. The project is known as CHAMAN.

About CHAMAN:

- Under the Mission of Integrated Horticulture Development (MIDH), the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare has initiated the project CHAMAN (Coordinated Horticulture Assessment and Management using geoinformatics) for assessment and development of Horticulture through Remote Sensing & geo-informatics.
- The project is being implemented by Mahalanobis National Crop Forecast Centre (MNCFC) in collaboration with ISRO Centres (SAC & NRSC) and 12 state horticulture departments, NHRDF, IMD, ICAR Centre and State Remote Sensing Centres.
- This programme envisages use of satellite remote sensing data for area and production estimation of 7 horticultural crops (Potato, Onion, Tomato, Chili, Mango, Banana and Citrus) in 12 major states in 180 districts.
- The programme also uses GIS (Geographical Information System) tools along with remote sensing data for generating action plans for horticultural development (site suitability, infrastructure development, crop intensification, orchard rejuvenation, aqua-horticulture, etc.).
- Another component of CHAMAN is to carry out research activities on horticultural crop condition studies, diseases assessment and precision farming.

Salient achievements of the project include:

- Potato Production Forecast at National/State Level and Final forecast (F2) at District Level for 5 states (Bihar, Gujarat, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal)
- Mango and Citrus Orchard mapping: Using LISS III and LISS IV and Cartosat dataset object based/Pixel-based classification was done for Fruit Crop Mapping (Mango and Citrus) in selected districts of Bihar, UP & Punjab.

- Post-harvest infrastructure planning by assessing the potential of cold storage capacity for fruits and vegetables in Bihar state.
- Aqua-horticulture: Remote sensing based assessment of wetlands for Makhana (Foxnut) cultivation in Darbhanga district of Bihar.
- Signature study of vegetable crops using hand-held spectro- radiometer.
- Phenology assessment of grapes using multi-date remote sensing data in collaboration with ICAR-NRC Grapes.

NATIONAL POLITY

Bureau of Indian standards (BIS) Act 2016

- A new Bureau of Indian standard (BIS) Act 2016 which was notified on 22nd March, 2016, has been brought into force with effect from 12th October, 2017. Parliament had in March 2016 passed the law to replace the BIS Act of 1986.

Highlights of the act:

- **Ambit of the Bureau of Indian Standards:** Under the 1986 Act, standardization, marking and certification processes applied to certain articles and processes. The act includes goods, services and systems. A good, service, article, process and system have been defined in the Bill.
- **Establishment of the Bureau of Indian Standards:** The Bureau of Indian Standards will be a national body which will formulate, implement and certify certain standards of quality for goods, services, articles, processes and systems. The Bureau will constitute technical committees of experts for the purpose of formulating such standards. The act constitutes a Governing Council which would be responsible to look at the general superintendence, direction and management of the Bureau.
- **Certification of goods, services, articles, etc:** The Bureau would be a licensing authority for quality standards. A person may apply to the Bureau for a license to use a standard mark, or a certificate of conformity, depending on the good, article, process, etc. A license or certificate of conformity indicates that the item conforms to the Indian standard as set by the Bureau. The Bureau will establish and maintain testing laboratories for quality assurance and conformity assessment of goods, articles, services, etc.
- **Certification of precious metals:** A hallmark will be used to certify precious metal articles including silver, gold, platinum, and palladium or their alloys. A hallmark indicates a proportionate content of the precious metal in the article, as per the Indian standard. Such articles will be sold in certified sales outlets.
- **Mandatory certification of certain goods:** The act allows the central government to notify certain goods, articles, etc, which will need to compulsorily carry a standard mark. Such goods or articles will be notified by the government if it thinks them to be necessary for: (i) public interest or for the protection of human, animal or plant health, (ii) safety of the environment, (iii) prevention of unfair trade practices, or (iv) national security.
- **Recall of goods, services, articles etc:** The Bureau may recall a good or article which is already out for sale or supply. This will be done if the Bureau is convinced that the good or article does not conform to the requirement of a particular standard.
- **Penalties:** The penalty for improper use of the Indian standard mark will be a fine of up to five lakh rupees. The act also prescribes penalties for: (i) the improper use of the standard mark by testing and marking centres, and (ii) manufacturing or selling goods and articles which do not carry a standard mark and have

been mandated to do so, among others. The act provides for compounding of offences punishable with fine except when a person has committed such an offence for the second time or if such an offence committed by him has been compounded earlier.

- **Offences by companies:** When a company commits an offence under the act, the persons responsible for or in charge of the company will be presumed to be guilty irrespective of whether the offence was committed without their knowledge, consent or connivance.
- **Appeals:** An appeal against an order regarding the granting of a license or certificate of conformity, or compounding of offences, may be made to the Director General of the Bureau. A further appeal against the order of the Director General may then be made to the central government.

Sampoorna Bima Gram Yojana

- Government has launched Sampoorna Bima Gram (SBG) Yojana and expanded the coverage of Postal Life Insurance (PLI).
- With this, apart from government employees, PLI will now cover professionals also. The decision has been taken to enlarge the cover of social security and bring the maximum number of people under the protection of Postal Life Insurance (PLI).

About the Sampoorna Bima Gram (SBG) Yojana:

- Under the Sampoorna Bima Gram (SBG) Yojana, at least one village (having a minimum of 100 households) will be identified in each of the revenue districts of the country, wherein endeavour will be made to cover all households of that identified village with a minimum of one RPLI (Rural Postal Life Insurance) policy each.
- Coverage of all households in the identified Sampoorna Bima Gram village is the primary objective of this scheme.
- Rural Postal Life Insurance (RPLI), introduced on March 24, 1995 on the recommendations of the Malhotra Committee, provides insurance cover to people residing in rural areas, especially weaker sections and women living in rural areas.

Postal Life Insurance

- Postal Life Insurance (PLI) was introduced on 1st February 1884. In the beginning, the upper limit of life insurance was only Rs 4000, which has now increased to Rs 50 lakh.
- It covers employees of Central and state governments, Central and state public sector undertakings, universities, government-aided educational institutions, nationalized banks, local bodies, autonomous bodies, joint ventures having a minimum of 10% Govt./PSU stake, credit co-operative societies etc.
- PLI also extends the facility of insurance to the officers and staff of the Defence services and para-military forces.
- Apart from single insurance policies, Postal Life Insurance also manages a group insurance scheme for the extra departmental employees (Gramin Dak Sevaks) of the Department of Posts.

Supreme Court stopped deportation of Rohingya

- The Supreme Court said that no Rohingya refugee should be deported till the next hearing in the case.
- Hearing a petition challenging the Centre's decision to identify and deport Rohingya refugees to Myanmar, the court said the government needs to strike a balance between national security and protecting the human rights of the refugees.
- Earlier, the government had defended its intention to deport Rohingyas, claiming they were a threat to national security.

Illegal migrants in India

- A foreigner is considered to be an illegal migrant under two circumstances. One, if they come into India without valid travel documents, like a visa and passport, or two, having come in legally, they stay beyond the time period permitted to them under their travel documents. Illegal migrants may be imprisoned or deported. They and their children are ineligible for Indian citizenship under the Citizenship Act of 1955.

- However, certain benefits have been granted to some groups of illegal migrants. In September 2015 and July 2016, the central government exempted certain groups of illegal migrants from being imprisoned or deported. These are illegal migrants who came into India from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan on or before December 31, 2014, and belong to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian religious communities. Illegal migrants from this group cannot be imprisoned or deported for not having valid travel documents.

How many illegal migrants are there in the country?

- There are no official estimates — mainly because of the difficulty in tracking persons who have entered the country without the requisite papers. The only kind of data that is available is regarding the number of foreigners who, having entered India legally, have stayed back illegally. Official estimates put this number at 28,356 as of December 2014. The largest number among these illegal migrants are from Pakistan (15%), followed by Sri Lanka (14%), South Korea (6%) and Iraq (6%).

Rajasthan government's criminal laws amendment bill

- Rajasthan government's Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2017 seeks to replace the ordinance, which had drawn widespread criticism from several quarters.
- Last month, the Rajasthan government had promulgated the Criminal Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Ordinance, 2017 which seeks to protect serving and former judges, magistrates and public servants in the state from being investigated for on-duty action, without its prior sanction.
- The controversial bill also bars the media from reporting on such accusations till the sanction to proceed with the probe is given by the government.

Analysis:

- Apart from curtailing the media's freedom of expression by making the publication of corruption allegations a criminal act, the ordinance also seem to contravene Supreme Court rulings.
- Supreme Court's decision in 1997 in the Vineet Narain case, when it struck down what was known as the "single directive", which had placed limitations on inquiries by the Central Bureau of Investigation into allegations against certain categories of civil servants.
- In 2014, a Constitution bench of the Supreme Court struck down a similar provision in the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act. In 2003, Section 6-A was included in the Act, whereby investigations against officers of the rank of joint secretary and above would require the approval of the Central government. This was in essence a replication of the "single directive". The provision was necessitated to synchronise the DSPE Act with Section 26 (c) of the Central Vigilance Commission Act, which also undertook such a classification.
- In Subramaniam Swamy vs CBI, this provision was struck down as it violated Article 14 of the Constitution, which guarantees equality before law. In the judgement, the Supreme Court reasoned that the referred statutes created an artificial classification of officers that was arbitrary in nature.
- The ordinance also restricts the media's ability to pursue the public interest. Though it does not directly prohibit reporting on a scam, it says that publishing any material that could give away the identity of the public official would attract criminal proceedings. But cases like the 2G spectrum scandal have shown that media reporting on such allegations would be impossible without investigating the actions of individuals. Often, a corruption scam involves arbitrary decision making by a public authority. In the 2G case, it was the former Union Minister who was accused of enabling fraudulent allocations of the mobile spectrum for a bribe. How could a case like 2G be reported without any reference to the minister who is alleged to have abused his position?
- The ordinance also hurts the Opposition and inhibits it in its duty of keeping the government in check.

India's first Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK)

- India's first Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK) has been set up under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in collaboration with New Delhi Municipal Council.
- India's First Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra for Skilling in Smart Cities inaugurated at Mandir Marg, New Delhi.

Key Features of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY):

- **Standards-** Training will be done against standards (National Occupational Standards - NOS and Qualification Packs - QPs for specific job roles) formulated by industry-driven bodies, namely the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). Third party assessments for skill training will be done based on national (and often) global standards.
- **Direct Fund Transfer-** It will have complete transparent funding of skill training without any intermediaries with monetary rewards directly transferred to the trainees bank account. It will ensure financial inclusion with a provision of unique multi-wallet facility linked to debit card and accidental insurance. Aadhaar number will be used for unique identification of each candidate.
- **Demand-driven targets:** Based on assessment of skill demand and the Skill Gap Studies, target for skill training would be allocated to training providers by job-role and by district/city to the extent possible, by NSDC in consultation with the SSCs, States/UTs and the Central Ministries/Departments under the oversight of the Steering Committee of PMKVY.
- **Target aligned to national flagship programmes and regions:** Target for skill training would be aligned to the demand from the Central Governments flagship programmes, such as - Swachh Bharat, Make in India, Digital India, National Solar Mission and so on.
- **Supply side perspective in target fixation:** Skill training under PMKVY would essentially target drop out students after class 10 and class 12 and hence these numbers will be taken into consideration while deciding state / district wise targets. There will be special focus on youth in regions affected by left-wing extremists and from North Eastern States and J&K.
- **Recognition of prior learning (RPL):** Under PMKVY, trainees with prior experience or skills and competencies will be assessed and they will also be given monetary rewards for undergoing assessments. This will be an important step towards recognising the skills possessed by workers working in the informal sector and their inclusion. This will also facilitate the process of skill upgradation and re-skilling of the existing workforce. The focus of RPL would be on those job-roles/sectors in which it is most desired and it will be accompanied with a strong advocacy campaign to promote a paradigm shift in the labour market to make skill training to standards aspirational.
- **Variable amount of monetary reward:** Monetary reward for various job roles within a sector would also vary. This amount would be arrived at after taking various factors like cost of training, willingness of trainees for pay and other relevant factors into consideration. Higher incentives will be given to training in manufacturing, construction and plumbing sectors.
- **Robust regime for registration of training providers:** NSDC training partners undergo due diligence before being registered with NSDC. Government affiliated training centres and other training partners will be approved by the SSCs on the basis of guidelines issued by NSDC. Under PMKVY, even the government affiliated training providers will undergo due diligence as per the process manual. Each training partner would be responsible for its entire franchisee network and the infrastructure of training centers. The same will be part of the monitoring process. Only first level of franchising would be allowed but the same should be declared in advance and validated on the basis of random sampling as per guidelines in the process manual.
- **Focused awareness building and mobilisation activities:** Awareness building & mobilization activities would be carried out with the involvement of local State and district governments as well as involve Members of Parliament in the activities to ensure greater outreach and ownership.
- **Improved curricula, better pedagogy and trained instructors:** While, the thrust would be on outcomes in terms of third party assessment/certification, but support for improved curricula, better technology enabled pedagogy and upgrading the capacity of instructors would enable improving the overall ecosystem for high quality skill training in the country. All skill training would include soft skill training, personal grooming, behavioural change for cleanliness, and good work ethics as a part of the training curricula.

- **Enhanced monitoring:** To monitor the training process, SSCs will be tasked with verifying and recording details of all training centres on the Skill Development Management System (SDMS), and ascertain quality of training locations and courses through certified assessors during the time of assessments. Possibility of putting in place a system of bio-metric attendance and sample video recording would be explored.
- **Mentorship support:** A mentorship programme will be created in order to support trainees who have successfully completed the training programme and are in the process of looking for employment opportunities. Training providers will be responsible for identifying mentors who will support and guide trainees in the post-training phase. These mentors will provide career guidance and counselling for trainees once they have completed training and will also help connect them to employment opportunities. This mentorship programme will also facilitate the tracking of trainees in the post training phase.
- **Evaluation:** Trainee feedback based on validated standard format obtained at the time of assessment will become the key element of the evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness and scale up of PMKVY in future.
- **Grievance redressal:** A proper grievance redressal mechanism would be put in place. Online Citizens Portal would be set up to disseminate information about PMKVY. This would also serve as a platform for redressal of grievances. The portal would also include a complete database of all available courses and training centres under PMKVY.

Analysis:

- Currently, only a very small proportion of India's workforce has any formal skill training. There are several sectors of the country's economy face shortage of skilled people and are mired with low productivity levels due to poor quality of workforce.
- At the same time, large sections of the country's youth are looking for economic and livelihood opportunities. In this context, skill development has become a key priority area for the country. This is not only essential for economic development, but would help to fulfil youth aspirations for good quality, better paid jobs and self-employment opportunities. This would also enable the country to take advantage of its favourable demographic profile.
- With a large pool of skilled people, India has an opportunity to become a skill provider for the world, particularly the ageing developed world.
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) scheme aims to enable and mobilize a large number of Indian youth to take up skill training and become employable and earn their livelihood. Under the scheme, monetary reward would be provided to trainees who are successfully trained, assessed and certified in skill courses run by affiliated training providers. This will boost the productivity of the country's workforce by enabling them to acquire high quality skill training across a range of sectors.
- It will also bring about a paradigm shift from input-based to outcome-based skill training in the country. It also seeks to significantly scale up skill training activities in the country and enable skill training to happen at a fast pace without compromising quality.

Supreme Court frames rules for itself, 24 High Courts

- The Supreme Court of India has laid down guidelines for itself and 24 High Courts to govern the exercise of designating lawyers as seniors and has ordered setting up of a permanent committee headed by the Chief Justice of India assisted by a secretariat. The direction came based on a petition challenging the designation process.
- A bench headed by Justice Ranjan Gogoi, however, rejected the plea that section 16 of the 1961 Advocates Act, which empowers the apex court or a High Court to designate senior advocates, should be held as unconstitutional.

Guidelines to effectively deal with the process of designating lawyers as seniors:

- All matters relating to designation of senior advocates in the Supreme Court and in all the High Courts of the country shall be dealt with by a Permanent Committee to be known as Committee for Designation of Senior Advocates
- The panel will be headed by the CJI and consist of two senior-most Judges of the apex court or "High Court(s), as may be," and the Attorney General or the Advocate General of a state in case of a High Court will be its member.
- Four Members of the Permanent Committee will nominate another Member of the Bar to be the fifth Member of the Permanent Committee.
- The committee shall have a permanent Secretariat, the composition of which will be decided by the CJI or "the Chief Justices of the High Courts, as may be, in consultation with the other Members of the Permanent Committee", it said.
- The pleas on designating a lawyer as senior would be sent to the secretariat which would compile relevant data and information with regard to "the reputation, conduct, integrity of the Advocate(s) concerned including his/her participation in pro-bono work; reported judgements in which the concerned Advocate(s) had appeared; the number of such judgements for the last five years.
- Secretariat would collect the data and their sources for perusal and decision by the CJI-led committee.
- The Secretariat will publish the proposal of designation of a particular Advocate in the official website of the concerned Court inviting the suggestions/views of other stakeholders in the proposed designation
- After compilation of data-base, the information may be sent to the permanent committee for scrutiny. The permanent committee will examine each case in the light of the data provided by the secretariat of the permanent committee; interview the concerned advocate; and make its overall assessment on the basis of a point-based format.
- The apex court said that 100 points would be awarded under different heads to the lawyers seeking consideration for being designated as seniors.
- Maximum of 20 points would be earmarked for the years spent in the legal profession, it said, adding that 40 points would be given for aspects such as judgements to which the lawyer has been a part, pro-bono litigations, domain of expertise in branches of law.
- Publications by the Applicant Advocate would be earmarked 15 points, while the test of personality and suitability on the basis of interview or interaction would have 25 points.
- All the names listed before the Permanent Committee or cleared by it, will go to the Full Court comprising all judges of concerned High Courts or the apex court for approval.
- Voting by secret ballot will not normally be resorted to by the Full Court, except when unavoidable. In the event of resort to secret ballot, decisions will be carried by a majority of the Judges who have chosen to exercise their preference/choice.
- If a lawyer, whose bid to become a senior has been rejected, can be considered for the same after expiry of two years of such rejection.
- If a senior lawyer is found to be guilty of misconduct, "the Full Court may review its decision to designate the concerned person and recall the same,".

Universal social security plan

- The government has drafted Rs 1.2 lakh crore plan to provide universal social security coverage for the poorest fifth of the country as part of a bigger scheme that's being planned for all individuals.

About the scheme:

- This programme envisages three categories — the poorest 20%, who will get a government payout; those who subscribe on their own and formal sector workers who will need to set aside a fixed proportion of income toward the scheme.
- The annual cost of coverage to the poorest has been pegged at Rs 1.2 lakh crore. They are categorised as SECC(Socio Economic and Caste Census) 4 and are conservatively estimated at 20% of the population.

- People under SECC 3 category — another 20% of population and mostly self-employed— will pay a lump sum to avail the benefits while the wage-employed class will pay as per the existing system.
- The scheme will have two tiers. The first of these comprises mandatory pension, insurance (both death and disability) and maternity coverage and the second, optional medical, sickness and unemployment coverage.
- Funds collected under the universal social security scheme will be divided into sub-schemes and be ringfenced, meaning the benefits and the contribution will be commensurate.

Analysis:

- India's total workforce currently stands at 450 million, of which a little over 10% are in the organised sector and getting social security of some sort.
- Every year, more than 10 million people are added to the workforce but most don't get even the minimum wage and lack any kind of social security coverage, being mostly in the unorganised sector.
- Under the existing system, in the organised sector, around 25% of the basic salary, including employee and employer contributions, goes toward the provident fund of the employee and another 6% for insurance, taking the total contribution to more than 30%.

Assam Groups Protest Centre's Citizenship Rights Bill

- Several groups in Assam, including the All Assam Students' Union and Asom Gana Parishad, have been protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, which seeks to make foreign illegal migrants from some minority communities eligible for Indian citizenship.
- According to the Assam Accord of 1985, illegal migrants who had entered Assam from Bangladesh after March 25, 1971, were to be detected and deported. The protesting groups argue that the Bill contradicts the terms of the Accord.

About Bill:

- At present, a person can apply for Indian citizenship on grounds including being born in India, or to an Indian parent, or having resided in India over a certain period of time. However, an illegal migrant is prohibited from becoming an Indian citizen.
- The amendment Bill provides that illegal migrants belonging to the specified six minority communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan will not be treated as illegal migrants and will, therefore, be eligible for Indian citizenship.
- The Bill also relaxes the eligibility criteria for citizenship for persons from these six minority communities of the three neighbouring countries.
- As of now, a person must have resided in India for 12 of the 15 years preceding the date of application; the Bill relaxes the 12-year requirement to 7 years for this particular group of individuals.
- The Bill does not cover illegal migrants who are Muslim, or who belong to other minority communities such as Jews and Bahais from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.
- This provision will have to be evaluated against the standard of equality guaranteed to all citizens and foreigners under Article 14 of the Constitution. Article 14 only allows laws to treat groups of people differently if there is a reasonable rationale for doing so.
- The government has not provided any clear rationale for making illegal migrants belonging to only some minority communities eligible for citizenship.
- The Bill also affects Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders. OCI cardholders are foreigners who are persons of Indian origin. For example, they may have been former Indian citizens, or children of current Indian citizens. An OCI enjoys benefits compared to other foreigners, such as the right to travel to India without a visa, or to work and study here.
- At present, the government may cancel a person's OCI registration on various grounds. In case of a cancellation, an OCI residing in India may be required to leave the country. The Bill seeks to add another ground for cancelling OCI registration — violation of any law in force in the country. This provides wide

discretion to the government to cancel OCI registrations for both major offences like murder, as well as minor offences like parking in a no-parking zone or jumping a red light.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

India tops list of pollution-related deaths in world

- According to a study published by medical journal The Lancet, India has topped the list of countries with pollution-related deaths in 2015, with 2.51 million people dying prematurely in the country that year due to diseases linked to air, water and other forms of pollution.

Important highlights of study:

- India accounted for about 28 per cent of an estimated 9 million pollution-linked deaths worldwide in 2015. It also topped the list of deaths linked to polluted air (1.81 million) and water (0.64 million).
- Most of the pollution-related deaths — 92 per cent — were reported in low and middle income countries, and in rapidly industrialising nations such as India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Madagascar and Kenya.
- China, with 1.8 million pollution-linked deaths in 2015, followed India. Most of these deaths were due to non-communicable diseases caused by pollution, such as heart disease, stroke, lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
- Air pollution was the biggest contributor, linked to 6.5 million deaths in 2015, ahead of water pollution (1.8 million) and workplace-related pollution (0.8 million).
- Of the 2.51 million deaths in India, 1.81 were related to air pollution, 0.64 million to water pollution, 0.17 million to occupational exposure and 95,000 linked to lead pollution, according to the study.
- China (1.58 million) was placed after India in deaths linked to air-pollution, followed by Pakistan (0.22 million), Bangladesh (0.21 million) and Russia (0.14 million). In deaths linked to water pollution, Nigeria (0.16 million) and Pakistan (74,000) were placed after India.
- Now pollution is now the largest environmental cause of disease and death in the world today — three times more those from HIV-AIDS, TB and malaria put together.
- With 9 million deaths in 2015, diseases caused by all forms of pollution were responsible for more deaths than a high-sodium diet (4.1 million), obesity (4 million), alcohol (2.3 million), road accidents (1.4 million), and child and maternal malnutrition (1.4 million).

Analysis:

- The aim of the Lancet Commission is to raise global awareness on pollution, end neglect of pollution-related diseases, and mobilise resources and political will to effectively confront pollution.
- Pollution from outdoor and indoor air, water and soil contamination, and chemical pollutants is one of the largest risk factors leading to premature death.

IBSA Trust Fund agreement

- India, Brazil and South Africa have signed the IBSA Trust Fund Agreement that seeks to fight poverty in developing countries. The agreement was signed at the 8th IBSA trilateral Ministerial Commission Meeting in Durban.
- The IBSA Trust Fund brings together the three emerging economies of India, Brazil and South Africa to combat poverty in other developing countries. Each country contributes USD 1 million annually to this fund which is managed by the UN Development Programmes (UNDP) Special Unit for South-South Cooperation.

About IBSA:

- Established in June 2003, IBSA is a coordinating mechanism amongst three emerging countries, three multi ethnic and multicultural democracies, which are determined to: a) Contribute to the construction of a new international architecture; b) Bring their voice together on global issues; c) Deepen their ties in various areas
- IBSA also opens itself to concrete projects of cooperation and partnership with less developed countries.
- The establishment of IBSA was formalised by the Brasilia Declaration of 6 June 2003, which mentions India, Brazil and South Africa's democratic credentials, their condition as developing nations and their capacity of acting on a global scale as the main reasons for the three countries to come together.
- Their status as middle powers, their common need to address social inequalities within their borders and the existence of consolidated industrial areas in the three countries are often mentioned as additional elements that bring convergence among the members of the Forum.
- The principles, norms and values underpinning the IBSA Dialogue Forum are participatory democracy, respect for human rights and the Rule of Law. The strength of IBSA is the shared vision of the three countries that democracy and development are mutually reinforcing and key to sustainable peace and stability.
- IBSA keeps an open and flexible structure. IBSA does not have a headquarters or a permanent executive secretariat. At the highest level, it counts on the Summits of Heads of State and Government. Numerous Summits have been held with IBSA having concluded its first round of Summits of Heads of State and Government Summits in 2008. In 2013, the second round of Summits will be completed.

INDRA Exercise

- India and Russia have begun their first mega tri-services war game- Indra involving their armies, navies and air forces with an aim to boost their operational coordination.
- The Indian contingent includes nearly 450 personnel while the Russian side is being represented by around 1,000 troops in the 10-day exercise Indra.
- Exercise INDRA in its previous nine avatars has been conducted as a single service exercise alternately between the two countries.

Analysis:

- In the domain of international relations, military diplomacy has, in recent years, emerged as a major tool to further diplomatic interests of nations. Participation in international level military exercises is an indication of the highest level of trust and confidence between the member nations.
- It is a key confidence building measure (CBM) and an indication of the faith reposed by India on another nation or a group of member nations.
- On the operational side, military exercises enable militaries to understand each other's drills and procedures, overcome language barriers, and facilitate familiarisation with equipment capabilities.
- It also facilitates understanding and familiarisation with new technologies that other countries may be utilising and enables on-the-job training of each other's crews.
- This is particularly useful in the event of joint operations whether in war or in operations other than war (OOTW) - humanitarian aid, disaster relief, anti-piracy, etc – when nations come together for a common cause.
- A fine example was the aid assistance provided by a host of nations during the tsunami in South East Asia where a massive land, air and sea rescue effort was successfully executed to provide relief to the affected countries.
- Perhaps, the most important advantage of joint military exercises is 'strategic signalling'.
- A joint exercise with one or more nations serves the purpose of signalling to a third country of the influence we have in the region and a demonstration of our resolve to further our diplomatic objectives.
- On the intangible side, military exercises promote brotherhood and camaraderie between soldiers and militaries.

- Besides goodwill, it is a tool for projection of a nation's soft power – culture, language, customs, beliefs, food habits and lifestyle.
- Soldiers all over the world have almost similar rank and organisational structures, which helps establish a unique spirit of bonding and friendship between their communities irrespective of the country of origin.
- This joint tri-service exercise will be a demonstration of the increasing commitment of both nations to address common challenges across the full spectrum of operations.
- With the rich operational experience of Russian and Indian armies in counter insurgency operations, both sides will gain immensely from each other to further develop their capabilities. The exercise will further strengthen the relationship between the two defence forces.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Animal tuberculosis

- The first-ever road map to combat animal tuberculosis (bovine TB) and its transmission to humans, referred to as zoonotic TB, was recently launched at the 48th Union World Conference on Lung Health in Guadalajara, Mexico.
- The roadmap has been built on a 'One Health Approach', addressing health risks across sectors for the animal tuberculosis known as bovine TB and its transmission to humans.
- New data released by the WHO estimates that over 140,000 people fall ill and more than 12,000 people lose their lives each year to zoonotic TB – mostly in the African and the South-East Asian regions.
- In India, consumption of raw milk and living in close proximity to cattle has been attributed to high incidence rates of bovine TB in the central Indian populations.
- There is no cure for bovine TB and it threatens animal welfare and those with livelihoods based on livestock.

About Bovine Tuberculosis:

- Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease of cattle. It is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium bovis* (*M. bovis*) which can also infect and cause disease in many other mammals including humans, deer, goats, pigs, cats, dogs and badgers. In cattle, it is mainly a respiratory disease but clinical signs are rare. TB in humans can be caused by both *Mycobacterium bovis* and the human form, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*.
- Tuberculosis in cattle is a chronic disease that usually takes many months to a year before the development of clinically evident infections. There is a high prevalence of latent and hidden cases as well. Most infected cattle only become clinically infected at advanced age.
- Adult cattle are usually infected by inhaling invisible droplets containing the bacteria into their lungs while calves are more often infected by drinking contaminated milk. It is the mode of infection that determines the clinical signs of the disease.

Clinical signs of Tuberculosis in cattle

- In adult cows the lesions are seen in the lungs leading to pulmonary tuberculosis. The bacteria enter the lungs and begin to multiply and generally spread to the lymph nodes near the lungs. If the cattle has a good immune system the infection may remain limited to the lungs and could continue to be undetected for the productive life of the cow.
- Once the infection overcomes the immune system other organs are affected. This includes kidneys, liver, spleen and the lymph nodes associated with these organs. Calves which ingest the bacteria in milk commonly

develop lesions in the lymph nodes at the junction of the neck and head near their throats. They have swollen lymph nodes along the intestinal tract as well.

Graded plan to combat air pollution

- The Graded Response Action Plan, Delhi-NCR's answer to combat air pollution that assumes apocalyptic proportions during this time of the year, came into force for the first time from October 17th.
- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) is responsible for monitoring air quality from various stations located across Delhi-NCR. Daily reports will be sent to the Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA), the implementing authority of the plan, which will take a decision on the future course of action.
- If data of any station shows a sudden spike in pollution level, a team will rush to the spot and try to analyse the reason. Accordingly, action would be taken and instructions issued.
- The CPCB has directed all state pollution control boards of NCR states to form teams that will fan out and flag violations. The CPCB has formed around 40 teams that are visiting various parts of Delhi alone.
- The chief secretaries of NCR states have been designated as nodal officers.

About this plan:

- Under the plan, the air quality has been divided into four categories — moderate to poor, very poor, severe and emergency — and specific actions have been prescribed for each situation.
- The Centre termed levels of pollution when particulate matter (PM) 2.5 levels are above 250 micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) or PM 10 levels are above 430 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in the ambient air as severe, and immediate steps need to be taken at such a point, including a ban on construction and implementation of odd-even scheme.
- The graded response, takes into account the seasonality of pollution in Delhi.
- The proposal has been framed keeping in view the key pollution sources in Delhi-NCR. While major sources of pollution, including vehicles, road dust, biomass burning, construction, power plants and industries, remain continuous throughout all seasons, the episodic pollution from stubble burning, increase in biomass burning, etc varies across seasons.
- The actions are to be implemented in the entire NCR, except the action related to stubble burning, which is to be implemented in the states of Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
- A task force of officials from the central and state pollution control boards, health experts and India Meteorological Department officials will also be set up. This body will work on forecasting and review of pollution levels.

Expert group for suggestions on artificial intelligence policy

- The Union ministry of electronics and information technology has set up an internal committee to advise the government on a policy on artificial intelligence (AI).
- This expert committee will advise the IT ministry on the most apt technologies for India. The government's main focus is to reduce cyber-attacks with AI.
- The government has recently drawn up a seven-point strategy that would form the framework for India's strategic plan to use AI.
- The strategy includes developing methods for human machine interactions; ensuring safety and security of AI systems; creating a competent workforce in line with AI and R&D needs, understanding and addressing the ethical, legal and societal implications of AI, measuring and evaluating AI technologies through standards and benchmarks, among others.

About Artificial Intelligence:

- Back in 1956, scholars gathered at Dartmouth College to begin considering how to build computers that could improve themselves and take on problems that only humans could handle. That's still a workable definition of artificial intelligence.

- In 2012, a team led by Geoffrey Hinton at the University of Toronto proved that a system using a brain-like neural network could “learn” to recognize images. That same year, a team at Google led by Andrew Ng taught a computer system to recognize cats in YouTube videos without ever being taught what a cat was.
- Since then, computers have made enormous strides in vision, speech and complex game analysis. One AI system recently beat the world’s top player of the ancient board game Go.

Analysis:

- AI is also widely seen as a major challenge in generation of employment as many companies are likely to depend more on it to cut down on human resources.
- The artificial intelligence market is estimated to touch \$153 billion in 2020 and expected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate of 45.4% from 2016 to 2022.
- AI can benefit various government agencies in their functioning. But at the same time we have to ensure that an indigenous workforce to develop AI is created.
- Globally too, there is a growing interest in AI. In 2016, the White House initiated work on Preparing for the future of artificial intelligence; in the UK, the House of Commons committee on S&T looked at robotics and artificial intelligence while in 2017, the State Council of China started work on the next generation artificial intelligence development plan.

New Delhi after Diwali

- The online indicators of the pollution monitoring stations in Delhi glowed red, indicating a ‘very poor’ air quality as the volume of ultra-fine particulates PM2.5 and PM10.
- The pollutants had violated the corresponding 24-hour safe limits of 60 and 100 respectively by up to 10 times.
- According to the SAFAR (System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research), the 24-hour rolling average of PM2.5 and PM10 were 154 and 256 micrograms per cubic metre respectively at around 11 pm.

About SAFAR:

- SAFAR was introduced by Union Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) for greater metropolitan cities of India to provide location specific information on air quality in near real time.
- It was developed by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune along with India Meteorological Department (IMD) and Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF).
- The main objective of SAFAR project is to increase awareness among general public regarding the air quality.
- The purpose awareness for general public is to take appropriate mitigation measures and systematic action for betterment of air quality and related health issues.

Analysis:

- All fireworks contain carbon and sulphur — which are necessary for burning — apart from a wide range of chemical compounds.
- Adults exposed to high levels of ambient air pollution have shown increased prevalence of chronic cough, phlegm, and breathlessness and are, therefore, at an increased risk of developing respiratory symptoms, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, allergic rhinitis, lower respiratory tract infections, and lung cancers.
- Children were susceptible in particular, since their defences against particulate matter and other gaseous air pollutants were weaker. Also, children engaged in greater physical activity, increasing the intake of polluted air into their lungs.

CarbFix Project

- This project integrates the world’s first direct air capture plant to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in minerals.

About Carbfix project – from gas to rock

- CarbFix is a collaborative research project between Reykjavik Energy, the University of Iceland, Columbia University and CNRS that aims at developing safe, simple and economical methods and technology for permanent CO₂ mineral storage in basalts.
- The CarbFix team had demonstrated that over 95% of CO₂ captured and injected at Hellisheidi geothermal Power Plant in Iceland was mineralized within two years.
- This contrasts the previous common view that mineralization in CCS projects takes hundreds to thousands of years.
- Industrial scale capture and injection have been ongoing at the power plant since 2012.
- This project has evoked reactions worldwide as global warming is dangerously approaching 2°C which is seen as having catastrophically consequences.

Why Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS)?

- According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), global warming of more than 2°C would have serious consequences, such as an increase in the number of extreme climate events.
- The Paris agreement from the Paris climate conference (COP21) in December 2015 sets out a global action plan to limit global warming to below 2°C. The agreement is the first ever universal, legally binding global climate deal.
- To reach this target, climate experts estimate that global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions need to be reduced by 40-70% by 2050 and that carbon neutrality (zero emissions) needs to be reached by the end of the century at the latest. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has furthermore estimated that carbon capture and storage is vital if the world is to limit global temperature increase to 2°C.

Analysis:

- Reducing industrial CO₂ emissions is considered one of the main challenges of this century. By capturing CO₂ from variable sources and injecting it into suitable deep rock formations, the carbon released is returned back where it was extracted instead of freeing it to the atmosphere. This technology might help to mitigate climate change as injecting CO₂ at carefully selected geological sites with large potential storage capacity can be a long lasting and environmentally benign storage solution.

GSTN unveils offline option for GSTR-3B returns filing

- The Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) has released an offline facility that will allow taxpayers to finalise their GSTR-3B forms on their own computers before uploading it onto the portal.
- The deadline for the filing of the GSTR-3B form for September was October 20. Taxpayers have to file the summary GSTR-3B forms each month till January.
- This facility will provide an opportunity to the taxpayer to verify the details of GSTR 3B before filing and minimise chances of error.
- To make the process of filing returns simpler, an Excel based offline utility has been introduced for filing the GSTR-3B on the GST Portal.
- The offline utility is designed to help taxpayers to prepare their GSTR-3B return on their computer system.
- The taxpayer can download the offline utility from the GST Portal under the Download Section.
- Taxpayers can open the GSTR-3B offline utility in their computer system, fill data and then create json file for uploading the same on GST Portal.
- The offline functionality comes against the background of the GST portal crashing repeatedly during the previous filing deadlines due to taxpayers logging on to the portal at the last minute to upload their final returns.

About GSTR-3B:

- GSTR 3B is a simple return form introduced by the CBEC for July to December. You must file a separate GSTR-3B for each GSTIN you have.

- Do note that you do not have to provide invoice level information in this form. Only total values for each field have to be provided.
- The tax liability of GSTR-3B must be paid by the last date of filing for that month.

About GSTN:

- GSTN, a not-for-profit private limited company, has 51 per cent equity of five private institutions -- HDFC Bank Ltd (10 per cent), HDFC Ltd (10 per cent), ICICI Bank Ltd (10 per cent), NSE Strategic Investment Corporation Ltd (10 per cent) and LIC Housing Finance Limited (11 per cent)
- The GST System Project is a unique and complex IT initiative. It is unique as it seeks, for the first time to establish a uniform interface for the tax payer and a common and shared IT infrastructure between the Centre and States.
- Currently, the Centre and State indirect tax administrations work under different laws, regulations, procedures and formats and consequently the IT systems work as independent sites.
- Integrating them for GST implementation would be complex since it would involve integrating the entire indirect tax ecosystem so as to bring all the tax administrations (Centre, State and Union Territories) to the same level of IT maturity with uniform formats and interfaces for taxpayers and other external stakeholders.
- Besides, GST being a destination based tax, the inter- state trade of goods and services (IGST) would need a robust settlement mechanism amongst the States and the Centre. This is possible only when there is a strong IT Infrastructure and Service back bone which enables capture, processing and exchange of information amongst the stakeholders (including taxpayers, States and Central Government, Bank and RBI).
- This is possible only when there is a strong IT Infrastructure and Service back bone which enables capture, processing and exchange of information amongst the stakeholders (including tax payers, States and Central Governments, Accounting Offices, Banks and RBI).

QUICK FACTS

- World Food Day is observed on: **16 October**
- International Day for the Eradication of Poverty is observed on: **October 17**
- 23rd district of Arunachal Pradesh is : **Kamle**
- New Chair of World Business Council for Sustainable Development : **Sunny Verghese**
- Next Prime minister of New Zealand:**Jacinda Ardern**
- Indira Gandhi National Integration Award conferred to:**T.M. Krishna**
- Winner of 2017 Man Booker Prize: **George Saunders**