

Abhimanu

Weekly current affairs Series

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Abhimanu's IAS Study Group

Chandigarh

NATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Draft bill on fugitive economic offenders

- The law ministry has given its concurrence to a draft bill that will give powers to the government to confiscate property of economic offenders and defaulters who flee India, albeit with a new provision.
- A Fugitive Economic Offender is a person who has an arrest warrant issued in respect of a scheduled offence and who leaves or has left India so as to avoid criminal prosecution, or refuses to return to India to face criminal prosecution.

Highlights of the Bill:

- It seeks to deter economic offenders from evading the process of Indian law by fleeing the country.
- The proposed law will be applicable in cases where the value of offences is over Rs 100 crore.
- The bill proposes to allow the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), the premier technical snoop wing under the finance ministry, to file an application for the declaration of fugitive economic offender for confiscation of their assets.
- The courts under PMLA would be entrusted with the responsibility to try the case.
- Also, the bill has provision for appointment of an administrator to dispose off the property to pay off the creditors. Besides, the provisions of the proposed law will override provisions of other existing laws.
- Also, the burden of proof for establishing that an individual is a fugitive economic offender will be on the authorities.

Analysis:

- There have been several instances of economic offenders fleeing the jurisdiction of Indian courts, anticipating the commencement, or during the pendency, of criminal proceedings.
- The absence of such offenders from Indian courts has several deleterious consequences— first, it hampers investigation in criminal cases; second, it wastes precious time of courts of law; third, it undermines the rule of law in India.

RBI to regulate peer-to-peer lending firms

- According to a recently released notification of government, All peer-to-peer lending (P2P) platforms will be regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- All P2P loan platforms will be treated as non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and will be brought under the ambit of the banking regulator.

What is P2P lending?

- P2P lending is a crowd-funding model (largely online) where people looking to invest their money with people who want to borrow can do so. The concept is centered around savers getting higher interest by lending their money instead of saving and borrowers get comparatively lower interest rates.
- Borrowers are either individuals or small businesses. But unlike a traditional savings account, one can lose money if the borrower defaults.

Operation model in India

- P2P lending platforms are largely tech companies registered under the Companies Act. Once the borrowers and lenders register themselves on the website, due diligence is carried out by the platform and those found acceptable are allowed to participate in lending/borrowing activity.
- The companies often follow a reverse auction model in which the lenders bid for a borrower's loan proposal and the borrower has the freedom to either accept or reject the offer.
- Some platforms provide several additional services like credit assessment, recovery etc. In most cases, the platform moderates the interaction between the borrower and the lender.

Analysis:

- Till April 2016, there were around 30 start-up P2P lending companies in India. Although nascent in India and not significant in value yet, the potential benefits that P2P lending promises to various stakeholders (to the borrowers, lenders, agencies etc.) and its associated risks to the financial system are too important to be ignored, according to RBI.
- Global cumulative lending through P2P platforms at the end of Q4 of 2015, had reached 4.4 billion GBP (approximately Rs 38,300 crore) from 2.2 million GBP (about Rs 19 crore) in 2012.
- At present, it is partially or fully regulated in Australia, Argentina, Canada (Ontario), New Zealand, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and USA while it is banned in Israel and Japan. China has the largest P2P market in the world, with hundreds of platforms offering diverse services, but the sector is not regulated currently.

TRAI issues draft recommendations on “Easing of Doing Business”

- Aiming to promote 'ease of doing business' TRAI has draft recommendations.

Important recommendations made:

- The regulator has proposed that the entire process involved in the installation of mobile towers and use of spectrum should be made online for quick and easy approvals.
- The regulator has suggested that DoT should adopt graded penalty system, in the range of Rs 1 lakh-Rs 10 crore that should be linked to the severity of the rule violation by telecom operators, instead of current practice of imposing Rs 50 crore penalty per circle even for minor violations.
- Trai has identified minimum net worth requirement as an unnecessary burden on existing telecom operator when the company opts for migration or renewal licence.
- The regulator has proposed that "for an existing service provider, for renewal of licence or migration of its licence to UL (Unified Licence), the condition of minimum net worth should not be applicable".
- A company offering full fledged telecom services across India is required to have minimum net worth of Rs 25 crore for obtaining telecom permit -- Unified Licence.
- In case of merger and acquisition (M&A) process, the regulator has proposed that the Department of Telecom should file any objection on the deal within 30 days from the date it is filed before the tribunal.
- DoT should spell out a definite time-line, not exceeding 30 days post NCLT approval, for providing written approval to transfer/merger of licences by the licensor and it should be made a part of the M&A guidelines.
- The regulator has proposed that the DoT should define a cap on the permissible market share of the merging entities taken together and beyond which merger proposal should not be accepted. It said that the current M&A guidelines do not define a red-line for the market share of the resultant entity in a service area.
- Trai has proposed to rationalise test fee charged for checking roll out of mobile networks across various district and block headquarters.
- A single mobile switching centre (MSC), from where calls are routed for completing communication, can handle multiple district and block headquarters but a telecom operator is required to pay fees for one MSC each time it is tested for a district or block.
- Trai has also proposed to issue import licence for telecom equipments within a defined time line and allow telecom operators to reinstall or deploy their mobile network equipment in any circle where they operate after giving prior intimation to wireless planning commission (WPC) preferably through the online portal.

Banks can classify priority loans as standard debt

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has said that the banks can classify priority loans given to defaulting companies as standard debt.
- The move is to ensure that firms that can be revived are able to raise the required resources.
- This, in turn, will help the entities meet strict deadline imposed by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).
- Priority loans are the loans that are repaid before other loans at the time of liquidation.
- However, the RBI has said that the classification will be allowed only if the repayment of the loan is done on a monthly basis, instead of being made later as bullet payments or after a few months.
- The finance companies are allowed to classify new priority loans to defaulting entities as standard debt, and can charge higher rates of interest compared to banks.
- Once the bankruptcy process begins against a company, the banks have to keep 50 percent of the dues unpaid in the form of provisions. In case of liquidation, this rises to 100 percent.

About Bankruptcy code:

- The new bankruptcy procedure, which lays down timeline to recover from defaulters unlike discretionary and opaque ways of the past, capping of bank loans to conglomerates, and the increasing realisation to minimise the asset-liability mismatch, is promising a new Indian banking landscape.
- To begin with any creditor including banks can start bankruptcy proceedings against defaulters by filing a petition with the National Company Law Tribunal.
- After that, an insolvency professional with significant powers is appointed to take control of the defaulting company and assist the process.
- A creditors committee is formed to represent the interest of lenders and any other party that have been affected due to the default by the company.
- The committee should come up with a resolution plan (which may include selling off defaulted loans or liquidate the company outright). The resolution would require a nod from 75% of the creditors on the committee.
- The insolvency professional gets 180 days to come up with a feasible solution on the default issue. The timeline can be extended by another 90 days. If no solution is found within 270 days, a liquidator is appointed. The company can also opt for voluntary liquidation by a special resolution in a general meeting.

NATIONAL POLITY

Gaon ki Ore campaign

- Steel Authority of India Ltd. (SAIL), is running a nation-wide campaign SAIL steel – Gaon ki ore which is aimed at boosting steel consumption in country.
- SAIL targets to sell 1 Million Tonnes steel through its dealer network this financial year and aims at doubling it in next three financial years.
- SAIL had identified the potential of rural markets for enhancing steel consumption which is currently around 10 kgs per capita per year as against around 150 Kg per capita consumption in Urban India.

About Gaon ki ore:

- The Gaon ki ore campaign is designed to familiarize end users at the Grass-root level, especially of rural areas, with innovative usage of SAIL steel and its applications and advantages in construction, household equipment, agriculture etc.
- Through engagement activities the audience are informed how using SAIL steel can increase durability, life, safety and longevity of any construction and product.
- SAIL's product basket has branded products like SAIL TMT, SAIL Jyoti GP/GC sheets, Salem stainless utensils products in its basket which fit the rural requirements well and has popular acceptance.
- Through this nation-wide campaign initiated at Nalbari, Assam, SAIL aims to cover more than 100 locations by the end of this year and within months of its inception around twenty workshops have already been conducted in various states.
- This new age marketing campaign strategically aims to develop a stronger link with consumers through direct engagement.
- All workshops of the campaign are designed to familiarize participants about SAIL's production process, product range, applications and advantages and the interactive sessions are conducted in local language for easier connect with audience.
- SAIL Earth-Quake Resistant (EQR) TMT Rebars received special attention of the audience who were keen to know regarding the bendability of the EQR and its higher resistance to earthquakes.

India's first bullet train project

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe recently laid the foundation stone for India's first bullet train project in Ahmedabad.

About Mumbai–Ahmedabad high-speed rail(MAHSR) project:

- The Mumbai–Ahmedabad high-speed rail corridor is an approved high-speed rail corridor in India connecting the cities of Mumbai and Ahmedabad. If built, it will be India's first high speed rail line.
- To fund the ambitious Rs 1,10,000-crore project, a loan of Rs 88,000 crore will be taken from Japan. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) will fund it at a low rate of interest of 0.1% per annum. This loan has to be repaid to Japan in 50 years, with 15 years grace period.
- The train will have a top speeds of 320-350 km per hour and it is expected to reduce travel time between the two cities to around 2 hours from the existing 7-8 hours.
- According to initial estimates, around 1.6 crore people are expected to travel by the bullet train annually. By 2050, around 1.6 lakh commuters should travel by the high-speed train on a daily basis.
- Indian Railways run the corridor for an initial five years, after which private operators could be allowed.

Why India prefers Japan over China for bullet train project:

- Low-cost funding up to 80 per cent of the cost proposed by Japan International Cooperation Agency at .1 per cent interest rate (50-year repayment).
- Japan is committed for technology transfer.
- Japan will help in local manufacturing for a specified period.
- Japan's shinkansen technology has seen zero accident-related passenger deaths or injuries. That's in contrast to China whose high-speed rail systems have all had fatal accidents that took the lives of anywhere.

Khelo India programme

- The Union Cabinet has approved the revamped Khelo India programme at a cost of Rs.1,756 crore for the period 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- This marks a watershed moment in the history of Indian sports, as the Programme aims at mainstreaming sport as a tool for individual development, community development, economic development and national development.

Some of the salient features of the Programme include:

- An unprecedented Pan Indian Sports Scholarship scheme, which would cover 1,000 most talented young athletes each year across select sports disciplines.
- Each athlete selected under the scheme shall receive an annual scholarship worth Rs. 5.00 lakh for 8 consecutive years.
- This is the first time ever that a long-term athlete development pathway would be made available to gifted and talented youngsters to excel in competitive sports and will create a pool of highly competitive athletes who can compete to win at the world stage.
- The Programme aims to promote 20 universities across the country as hubs of sporting excellence, which would enable talented sports persons to pursue the dual pathway of education and competitive sports.
- The Programme also aims at creating an active population with healthy life-style.
- The Programme would cover about 200 million children in the age group of 10-18 under a massive national physical fitness drive, which will not only measure the physical fitness of all children in the age group, but also support their fitness related activities.

Analysis:

- The power of sport in promoting gender equity and social inclusiveness is also fully recognized and special measures are provided for to achieve these objectives.
- The programme also aims at engaging youth living in disturbed and deprived areas, in sporting activities, to wean them away from unproductive and disruptive activities and mainstream them in the nation-building process.
- The programme strives to raise the standards of competition, both at school and college level, to have maximum access to organized sports competitions.
- It also includes the use of latest user-friendly technology in all aspects of sports promotion such as, use of mobile apps for dissemination of sports training; National Sports Talent Search portal for talent identification; interactive website for indigenous sports; GIS based information system for locating and using sports infrastructure, etc.
- This programme strives to promote "Sports for All" as well as "Sports for Excellence."

Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS)

- Border Security Force (BSF) has started installation of a unique, indigenously designed virtual fencing system — Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) — at two places in Jammu. The system is expected to go operational by March 2018.

About CIBMS:

- CIBMS is expected to counter infiltration and cross-border terror attacks. The system employs latest technology which would detect infiltration via land, underwater, air and tunnels.
- The concept of CIBMS is the integration of manpower, sensors and command and control to improve situational awareness and facilitate quick response to emerging situations. Among major components of CIBMS is the 'virtual fence'. The second component is the command and control, which will help in optimum use of resources for border management. Another component is power management to keep CIBMS running.

How will CIBMS function?

- Thermal imager indicates body heat signatures of any living being that moves towards Indian boundaries in the dark of the night at a distance of 3 km.
- NVD, long-range radars, battlefield surveillance radars, etc catch slightest of vibrations at shorter distances.
- Indigenously-developed infra-red intruder alarm, not visible through naked eye, alerts the BSF personnel. Anyone crossing the invisible infra-red wall within 700-metre range will get caught.
- Analytical tools identify suspicious movements and distinguish between man and animal from the shadow.
- Finally, based on inputs received, intruders (infiltrators or terrorists) will be eliminated.

- Motion sensors have been included in CIBMS to save power and reduce electricity bill of Rs 90-100 crore (due to flood lights on borders).

Analysis:

- India's long coastline presents a variety of security challenges including illegal landing of arms and explosives at isolated spots on the coast, infiltration/ex-filtration of anti-national elements, use of the sea and off shore islands for criminal activities, smuggling of consumer and intermediate goods through sea routes etc. Absence of physical barriers on the coast and presence of vital industrial and defence installations near the coast also enhance the vulnerability of the coasts to illegal cross border activities.
- Smart borders on one hand should allow seamless movement of authorized people and goods, while on the other, minimise cross-border security challenges using innovation and technology enablement. Over the long term, smart border management will also have to incorporate systems that digitally monitor patterns of activity through and around border areas to root out organised crime and anti-national events.
- There is also a need to revisit the policies on border management to ensure that the frontier regions grow in step with the rest of the country.

Cabinet approves Extension of time period of Udaan

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the proposal of the Ministry of Home Affairs for extension of time period of the Scheme "Special Industry Initiative for J&K" (SII J&K)- Udaan till 31st December, 2018 . Initially the time period of Udaan was upto 2016-17.

About Udaan:

- Udaan is a Special Industry Initiative for Jammu & Kashmir in the nature of partnership between the corporates of India and Ministry of Home Affairs and implemented by National Skill Development Corporation.
- The programme aims to provide skills training and enhance the employability of unemployed youth of J&K. The Scheme covers graduates, post graduates and three year engineering diploma holders.

It has two objectives:

- To provide an exposure to the unemployed graduates to the best of Corporate India;
- To provide Corporate India, an exposure to the rich talent pool available in the State.

Analysis:

- Udaan provides exposure to the youth of J&K to the best of corporate India and corporate India to the rich talent pool available in the State. S
- o far, 109 leading Corporate have partnered with National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) under UDAAN with a commitment to train youth from the State covering Organized Retail, Banking, Financial Services, IT, ITES, Infrastructure, Hospitality etc. So far, 34,587 candidates have been selected of whom 31,903 candidates have joined, 22,237 candidates have completed the training, 7,649 are undergoing training and 14,694 have been offered jobs.
- In spite of four months of unrest, the scheme has gained a good momentum and pace of implementation has been the best during FY 2016-17 since its inception.
- More than 12,000 candidates had joined training and nearly 10,000 candidates were offered jobs. 140 mega selection drives were held so far covering all districts of the State.

Zero hunger program

- Three districts – Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, Koraput in Odisha and Thane in Maharashtra – will initiate India's ambitious 'Zero Hunger' programme through interventions in farm sector on October 16 (World Food Day).

About this programme:

- The Programme will be initiated by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) in association with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation and the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC).
- The concerned state governments will also be involved in the programme which consists of organisations of farming system for nutrition, setting up genetic gardens for biofortified plants/crops and initiation of a 'Zero Hunger' training.
- The programme will ensure suitable methods of measuring the impact of intervention. There will be intensive training programme in order to identify the nutritional maladies in each district and the appropriate agricultural/horticultural and animal husbandry remedies.
- This programme will be launched in addition to what the government has planned to deal with the issue of malnutrition through various other initiatives under its goal to make India malnutrition free by 2022.

Analysis:

- Every day too many men and women across the globe struggle to feed their children a nutritious meal. In a world where we produce enough food to feed everyone, 815 million people – one in nine – still go to bed on an empty stomach each night. Even more – one in three – suffer from some form of malnutrition.
- Eradicating hunger and malnutrition is one of the great challenges of our time. Not only do the consequences of not enough – or the wrong – food cause suffering and poor health, they also slow progress in many other areas of development like education and employment.
- In 2015 the global community adopted the 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development to improve people's lives by 2030. Goal 2 – Zero Hunger – pledges to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture, and is the priority of the World Food Programme.
- The world has made great progress in reducing hunger: There are 216 million fewer hungry people than in 1990-92, despite a 1.9 billion increase in the world's population. But there is still a long way to go.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise- 2017

- The First 'BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise- 2017' (BIMSTEC DMEx-2017) will be conducted by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR).
- About Exercise:
- This Exercise will be a platform for sharing Best Practices on all aspects of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), strengthening regional response and coordination for Disaster Management among the BIMSTEC member countries.
- At the 17th BIMSTEC Senior Officials Meeting held in Kathmandu, it was decided that India would organize the first annual Disaster Management Exercise for the region.
- The main focus of the BIMSTEC DMEx-2017 will be on testing the region's preparedness and resilience towards effective activation of inter-Governmental interaction for immediate deployment of regional resources for disaster response.
- It will help create synergy and synchronize efforts to institutionalize regional cooperation among the member countries.

- The exercise will help strengthen the effective utilization of the Search & Rescue Teams for Disaster Relief & Emergency Response, including Emergency Rapid Assessment Teams and Management of mass casualties especially in situations involving breakdown of infrastructure and communication.

About BIMSTEC:

- Though BIMSTEC is a Bay of Bengal camp, two land-locked states -- Nepal and Bhutan -- are also part of the seven member-group. Five of them are from South Asia -- India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka -- and two from South East Asia -- Myanmar and Thailand.

What this grouping means in numbers

- The BIMSTEC region is home to around 1.5 billion people which constitute around 22% of the global population. The region has a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of \$2.7 trillion. In the last five years, BIMSTEC member states have been able to sustain an average 6.5% economic growth trajectory despite global financial meltdown.

UN nuclear ban treaty

- In a new attempt towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons, the United Nations has introduced a new treaty banning the use, development, testing or storing of nuclear weapons under any circumstances.
- The agreement was signed in New York by more than 50 UN member states, but several nuclear powers, including the US, UK and France, boycotted the signing ceremony.
- Officially known as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the agreement was adopted in July 2017 at a UN conference in New York.
- A total of 122 countries had voted in favour of adopting the treaty, while the Netherlands was the only country that voted against it - Singapore abstained.
- Fifty countries recently signed a treaty to ban nuclear weapons, a pact that the world's nuclear powers spurned but supporters hailed as a historic agreement nonetheless.
- In July 2017, the United Nations adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which bans and makes it illegal to possess, use, produce, transfer, acquire, stockpile or deploy nuclear weapons.
- This was the culmination of 10 years of preparation by many national and international organizations.

About the treaty:

- The treaty prohibits a full range of nuclear-weapon related activities, such as undertaking to develop, test, produce, manufacture, acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, as well as the use or threat of use of these weapons.
- Under its terms, non-nuclear nations agreed not to pursue nukes in exchange for a commitment by the five original nuclear powers the U.S., Russia, Britain, France and China to move toward nuclear disarmament and to guarantee other states' access to peaceful nuclear technology for producing energy.
- This is the most significant multilateral development on nuclear arms control since the adoption of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968. It has to be ratified by 50 countries to come into force.

Analysis:

- Rather than ban nuclear weapons and risk vulnerability to a North Korean attack, the U.S., Britain, and France hope to strengthen the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which provides nations other than the five original nuclear powers—the U.S., Russia, Britain, France, and China—from pursuing nuclear programs.
- In exchange, the five powers have pledged to make steps toward nuclear disarmament and give non-nuclear states access to nuclear technology for producing energy.
- But many nations have criticized the NPT for failing to elicit a speedy disarmament. At the very least, Friday's treaty introduces the concept of a nuclear-free world, and could even put pressure on nuclear powers to adopt a new set of standards.

Operation Insaaniyat

- The government of India has launched operation Insaaniyat to assist Bangladesh in Rohingyas crisis by sending relief material.
- The Indian Air Force was tasked to airlift the relief material from India to Bangladesh.
- One C-17 Globemaster strategic heavy lift cargo aircraft was positioned at short notice at Delhi on 13 Sep 17 to airlift 55 Tons of relief material to Chittagong, Bangladesh.
- This aircraft was loaded overnight with relief material consisting of critical daily necessities viz., rice, pulses, sugar, salt, cooking oil, ready to eat meals, mosquito nets etc.
- Bangladesh is currently hosting over 400,000 Myanmar nationals from the Rakhine state, who left their country in the past due to communal violence and repeated military operations.

Who are the 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.

Hague child custody pact

- Indian government is planning to join the Hague abduction convention. The government had in November 2016 announced that it would not sign the convention.
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development has reservations about the treaty because they believe it could trample on women's rights.
- However, America says India should sign this convention to create a more effective response to deal with abduction cases and prevent inter-country parental child abduction.

About Hague Abduction Convention:

- The 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction is a multilateral treaty which seeks to protect children from the harmful effects of abduction or retention across international boundaries by providing a procedure to bring about their prompt return to their home.
- The Hague Convention is not concerned with the merits of a custody case. Criticisms or complaints about the custodial parent, or the terms of a custody award, are matters to be dealt with by the jurisdiction of the child's habitual residence. Save in exceptional circumstances, the Convention is based on the assumption that it is in the child's best interests to be returned quickly. This ensures that the abducting parent cannot profit from the abduction or retention by choosing one jurisdiction over another in the hope of reversing previous custody decisions. The Convention also seeks to secure protection for rights of access.
- The Hague Convention was first concluded in October 1980 and it came into force in 1986. Today, over 70 countries are members of the Convention. The Permanent Bureau in The Hague oversees the activities of the Convention but it has no regulatory powers over individual countries. It cannot assist you or interfere in your

case. The date on which the Convention came into force between your country and the country to which your child has been taken is important, as the Convention will not apply if your child was taken before that date.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Snow leopard

- The conservation status of snow leopard has been improved from “endangered” to “vulnerable”. The decision was announced by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) – the global standard for assessing extinction risk.
- The status change followed a three-year assessment process by five international experts
- To be considered ‘endangered,’ there must be fewer than 2,500 mature snow leopards and they must be experiencing a high rate of decline.
- Being classed as “vulnerable” means a species has under 10,000 breeding animals left, with a population decline of at least 10% over three generations.

About Snow leopard

- Snow leopards are found at altitudes between 9,800 and 17,000 feet in the high, rugged mountains of Central Asia. Their range spans from Afghanistan to Kazakstan and Russia in the north to India and China in the east.
- China contains about 60% of snow leopard habitat. They have already disappeared from certain parts of Mongolia, which is part of their historic range.
- Snow leopards prefer to inhabit steep cliff areas, rocky outcrops and ravines. Such habitats provide them with the camouflage they need to ambush unsuspecting prey. They stalk their prey and usually spring from a distance of 20 - 50 feet. Their long and powerful hind limbs help snow leopards leap up to 30 feet, which is six times their body length.
- Mostly active at dawn and dusk, snow leopards are rarely seen in the wild. Unlike other big cats, snow leopards are unable to roar. Solitary in nature, they pair only during the breeding season.
- Mostly feed on wild animals, but will also prey on livestock.
- Their spotted coats change with the seasons – from a thick, white fur to keep them warm and camouflaged in winter, to a fine yellow-grey coat in summer.

QUICK FACTS

- International Day of Democracy - **15 September**
- International Day of Peace - **21 September**
- World Alzheimer’s Day - **21 September**
- India's first centre for Animal Law opens in - **Hyderabad**
- Yudh Abhyas – 2017 is the joint military exercise between India and - **USA**
- International Yoga Festival starts in - **Kashmir**

Current *Affairs*

- 13th Inter-Governmental Commission meeting at - **Astana, Kazakhstan**
- Winner of Balzan Prize - **Bina Agarwal**