

Abhimanu

Weekly current affairs Series

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Abhimanu's IAS Study Group
Chandigarh

NATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

The Reserve Bank has deferred the implementation of the Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS)

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) decided to defer implementation of Indian Accounting Standard (Ind AS) by one year for the banks.
- Scheduled commercial banks (SCBs), excluding regional rural banks (RRBs), were required to implement Ind AS from April 1, 2018.
- In a note in January, India Ratings estimates had pointed out that SCBs may need up to Rs 89,000 crore towards incremental provisioning for advances while transiting to the Ind AS 109 regimes.
- Of this, public sector Banks (PSBs) were required Rs 63,100 crore, which were equivalent to an equity write down of 1.10 per cent of the banks' risk weighted assets and 11.5 per cent of net worth at end-March 2017.

About Indian Accounting Standards:

- India is changing its accounting standards from generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) to Indian Accounting Standards (Ind-AS) from April 2016.
- Adoption of the new Indian Accounting Standards (IndAS) which bring in the concept of fair valuation and greater rigour on accounting for the substance of a transaction rather than its form.
- All listed companies (except those listed on the Small & Medium Enterprises Exchange) and unlisted companies with net worth exceeding R250 crore, including group companies, will be required to mandatorily adopt IndAS in a phased manner.
- These standards are set of accounting standards notified by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs which are converged with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).
- This standard is followed by all companies other than the insurance companies, banking companies and NBFCs.

A complete set of financial statements under Ind AS comprises:

- A balance sheet as at the end of the period.
- Statement of profit and loss.
- Statement of changes in equity.
- A statement of cash flows.
- Notes including summary of accounting policies and other explanatory information.

RBI tightens monitoring of outward remittances

- The Reserve Bank tightened reporting norms for the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) under which an individual can transfer up to USD 2,50,000 abroad in a year.
- The LRS transactions are currently permitted by banks based on the declaration made by the remitter.
- The monitoring of adherence to the limit is confined to obtaining such a declaration without independent verification, in the absence of a reliable source of information.

- In order to improve monitoring and also to ensure compliance with the LRS limits, it has been decided to put in place a daily reporting system by AD banks of transactions undertaken by individuals under LRS, which will be accessible to all the other ADs," the RBI said in a notification.
- Now banks will be required to upload daily transaction-wise information undertaken by them under LRS.

About LRS:

- Under LRS, all resident individuals can freely remit \$250,000 overseas every financial year for a permissible set of current or capital account transactions.
- Remittances are permitted for overseas education, travel, medical treatment and purchase of shares and property, apart from maintenance of relatives living abroad, gifting and donations. Individuals can also open, maintain and hold foreign currency accounts with overseas banks for carrying out transactions.
- However, the rules do not allow remittances for trading on the foreign exchange markets, margin or margin calls to overseas exchanges and counterparties and the purchase of Foreign Currency Convertible Bonds issued by Indian companies abroad.
- Sending money to certain countries and entities is also barred. Under LRS, people can't send money to countries identified as 'non cooperative' by the Financial Action Task Force. Remittances are also prohibited to entities identified as posing terrorist risks.

Analysis:

- The LRS represents India's baby steps towards dismantling controls on foreign exchange movements in and out of the country. It has allowed large numbers of Indians to study abroad and diversify their portfolios from purely desi stocks and property.
- Capital controls in any form have no place in a liberalised economy. But for India, which is heavily dependent on imports of critical goods and perpetually spends more foreign exchange than it earns, it is difficult to free up remittances because of the havoc this can wreak on exchange rates.

Economic freedom index

- The Heritage Foundation has released its Index of Economic Freedom report 2017. The Heritage Foundation is an American conservative public policy think-tank based in Washington.

Highlights:

- India has jumped 13 places in the last one year to be at 130th spot in the latest annual Index. In 2017, India with a score of 52.6 points was ranked at 143 among 180 countries, two spots below neighbour Pakistan.
- China has jumped one spot and Pakistan is now at 131 position.
- India's economic freedom score is 54.5, making its economy the 130th freest in the 2018. Its overall score has increased by 1.9 points, led by improvements in judicial effectiveness, business freedom, government integrity, and fiscal health. India is ranked 30th among 43 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and its overall score is below the regional and world averages.

Analysis:

- Economic liberalisation measures, including industrial deregulation, privatisation of state-owned enterprises and reduced controls on foreign trade and investment, that began in the early 1990s, accelerated growth.
- More recently, the government reformed one of its more opaque operational practices to make the auctioning of rights to exploit state-owned resources more transparent.
- Corruption, underdeveloped infrastructure, a restrictive and burdensome regulatory environment, and poor financial and budget management continue to undermine overall development.
- India's diverse economy encompasses traditional village farming, modern agriculture, handicrafts, a wide range of modern industries, and a multitude of services.
- Although land titles in some urban and nearly all rural areas remain unclear, real property rights in large metropolitan areas are generally well enforced.
- The judiciary is independent, but the Indian courts are understaffed and lack the technology necessary to clear an enormous backlog. Although officials are often caught accepting bribes, a great deal of corruption goes unnoticed and unpunished.

- **About the index:** Economic freedom is measured based on 12 quantitative and qualitative factors, grouped into four broad categories, or pillars, of economic freedom:
- Rule of Law (property rights, government integrity, judicial effectiveness).
- Government Size (government spending, tax burden, fiscal health).
- Regulatory Efficiency (business freedom, labor freedom, monetary freedom).
- Open Markets (trade freedom, investment freedom, financial freedom).
- Each of the ten economic freedoms within these categories is graded on a scale of 0 to 100. A country's overall score is derived by averaging these ten economic freedoms, with equal weight being given to each.

e-FRRO scheme

- The government has launched the web-based application 'e-FRRO' (e-Foreigners Regional Registration Office) which aims to provide efficient visa related services online to foreigners visiting India.

About 'e-FRRO' scheme:

- FRRO scheme is aimed at building a centralized, transparent online platform for the foreigners to avail visa related services and to provide Faceless, Cashless and Paperless services to the foreigners with user friendly experience.
- The e-FRRO scheme would be a quantum jump in improving the ease of service delivery with respect to foreigners visiting and staying in India.
- In the new system, foreigners would be able to get as many as 27 Visa and Immigration related services in India from the comfort of their place of stay.
- Using the e-FRRO application, foreigners can apply online on the portal and obtain the service(s) through email/post without appearing in person at the FRO/FRRO office.
- It may be noted that the online services offered by E-FRRO scheme are not available even in some of the most advanced countries in North America and Europe.
- In 2017, more than one crore foreigners visited India and out of them approximately 3.6 lakhs had to visit FRRO offices spread across the country for various visa-related services. With the launch of the online e-FRRO scheme, their physical visit to the FRRO offices thus been obviated.
- The e-FRRO scheme has been implemented on the IVFRT platform with negligible extra expenditure, taking a cue from the already successfully running e-Visa scheme. It may be noted that the e-Visa scheme has earned revenue of more than Rs 1400 crores since its launch in Nov 2014.
- In the present system, foreigners staying in India on Visa duration of more than 180 days have to get themselves registered with their respective FROs/FRROs. Similarly, foreigners requiring different kind of visa related services such as Visa extension, Visa Conversion, Change of address, Change of Educational institutions, Exit permits etc are currently required to visit the FROs/FRROs office.
- Some of the salient features of the e-FRRO include online FRRO Service delivery mechanism without requirement of visiting FRRO/FRO Office barring exceptional cases. Using this application, foreigners are required to create their own User ID by registering themselves. Afterwards, they can apply online through registered User-ID for various Visa and Immigration related services in India viz. Registration, Visa Extension, Visa Conversion, Exit Permit etc.
- The necessary Immigration/Visa document e.g. Registration Permit/Certificate (RP/RC), Visa Extension Certificate etc will be sent by post on the address mentioned in the online application. It would also be electronically sent to the foreigner to his registered email ID. In case of exigency, the foreigner can visit the FRRO/FRO office directly for grant of service.
- e-FRRO has already been implemented and is running successfully as a pilot project in four FRROs (Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai) since February 12, 2018. Now it has been rolled out in the remaining eight FRROs, - namely Kolkata, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Cochin, Thiruvananthapuram, Calicut, Lucknow and Ahmedabad.

Health ministry bans over-the-counter sale of 14 steroid creams

- To prevent the indiscriminate sale of topical preparations containing steroids and antibiotics without prescription, the health ministry has banned over-the-counter sale of around 14 such creams.
- In a notification issued ministry has put 14 steroid-based creams and ointments under the Schedule H category by making amendments to certain Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945.
- The decision was taken following consultation with the Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB) which had recommended a ban on the sale of such creams without prescription and had also submitted their recommendations to the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation (CDSCO).
- The move come after dermatologists complained that pharmaceutical companies were selling steroid- based creams and ointments to patients who use them without medical guidance.
- The revised rules will apply to skin creams that contain steroids or other prescription drugs and not for ordinary face-cleansing and moisturisers.
- The creams which have been banned are alclometasone, beclomethasone, desonide, desoximetasone and flucinonide among others.

About CDSCO:

- Under the Drug and Cosmetics Act, the regulation of manufacture, sale and distribution of Drugs is primarily the concern of the State authorities while the Central Authorities are responsible for approval of New Drugs, Clinical Trials in the country, laying down the standards for Drugs, control over the quality of imported Drugs, coordination of the activities of State Drug Control Organisations and providing expert advice with a view of bring about the uniformity in the enforcement of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.
- Drug Controller General of India is responsible for approval of licenses of specified categories of Drugs such as blood and blood products, I. V. Fluids, Vaccine and Sera.
- Central Drugs Standard Control Organization functions under the Directorate General of Health Services.
- The Central Government have established four zonal offices of the Central Drug Standard Control Organisation at Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, and Ghaziabad.
- The Zonal Offices work in close collaboration with the State Drug Control Administration and assist them in securing uniform enforcement of the Drug Act and other connected legislations, on all India basis .

Gram Swaraj Abhiyan

- The 127th birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedkar was observed across the state as Samajik Nyaya Diwas (Social Justice Day) with the launch of the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (village self-governance campaign).

About Gram Swaraj Abhiyan:

- This plan will be implemented in 484 districts in 33 States and Union Territories. The maximum number of these villages are in Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Meghalaya. The objective of the scheme is to ensure total coverage, which is an ambitious goal for the government.
- The campaign is scheduled to be launched on Ambedkar Jayanti, i.e. 14th April under the name of “Sabka Sath, Sabka Gaon, Sabka Vikas”. It is in line with rural development schemes like “Antyodaya” – based on the principle of “convergence and saturation”.
- The current initiative will aim for 100% coverage under the schemes for eligible beneficiaries in the three-week window from April 14 to May 5.
- The seven schemes are – Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Saubhagya, Ujala scheme, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Mission Indradhanush.

- The objective of the 'Abhiyan' is to promote social harmony, reach out to poor rural households, obtain feedback on ongoing programmes, enrol in new initiatives, focus on doubling farmers' income, enhance livelihood opportunities and re-emphasise national priorities such as cleanliness and strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions, a press note said.
- This high-intensity drive is intended to deliver welfare to select villages which are seen to be in need of particular attention.

Swadhar Greh Scheme

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development is implementing the Swadhar Greh Scheme which targets the women victims of difficult circumstances who are in need of institutional support for rehabilitation so that they could lead their life with dignity.

Objectives

- Under the Scheme, Swadhar Greh will be set up in every district with capacity of 30 women with the following objectives:
- To cater to the primary need of shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment and care of the women in distress and who are without any social and economic support.
- To enable them to regain their emotional strength that gets hampered due to their encounter with unfortunate circumstances.
- To provide them with legal aid and guidance to enable them to take steps for their readjustment in family/society.
- To rehabilitate them economically and emotionally
- To act as a support system that understands and meets various requirements of women in distress.
- To enable them to start their life afresh with dignity and conviction.
- For big cities and other districts having more than 40 lakh population or those districts where there is a need for additional support to the women, more than one Swadhar Greh could be established. The capacity of Swadhar Greh could be expanded up to 50 or 100 on the basis of need assessment and other important parameter

Components of the Scheme

- Construction grant for construction of the building will be admissible to State Governments, Municipal Corporations, Cantonment Boards and Panchayati Raj Institutions only. Land for this purpose is to be provided by the implementing agency free of cost. The grant shall be subject to a ceiling of Rs.1,33,000/- per resident.
- Rent for Swadhar Greh, if run in a rented building. The maximum rent admissible for a Swadhar Greh intended for 30 residents is Rs. 50,000/- per month in grade 'A' cities, Rs. 30,000/- per month in grade 'B' cities and Rs. 18,000/- at other places.
- Assistance for recurring and non recurring expenditure for management of Swadhar Greh
- Provision for food, shelter, clothing, medical care, pocket expense for residents and children
- Provision of counseling, legal aid, vocational training and guidance.

Government of India is implementing Mahila Shakti Kendra scheme to empower rural women through community participation.

- The scheme is envisaged to work at various levels, and at the National level (domain based knowledge support) and State level (State Resource Centre for Women) technical support to the respective governments on issues related to women is provided.

About Mahila Shakti Kendra:

- This scheme "Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra (PMMSK) is envisaged to work at various levels.

- The national level (domain based knowledge support) and state level (State Resource Centre for Women) structures will provide technical support to the respective governments on issues related to women.
- The district and block level centres will provide support to PMMSK and also give a foothold to Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme in 640 districts to be covered in a phased manner.
- The scheme will provide an interface for rural women to approach the government for availing their entitlements and for empowering them through training and capacity building.
- Community engagement through Student Volunteers is envisioned in 115 most backward districts as part of the PMMSK Block level initiatives.
- Student volunteers will play an instrumental role in awareness generation regarding various important government schemes/ programmes as well as social issues.
- More than 3 lakh student volunteers from local colleges are proposed to be engaged in this process, while association with NSS/NCC cadre students will also be an option.
- The outcome based activities of student volunteers will be monitored through web based system. On completion, certificates for community service, will be displayed on national portal for verification and can also be used as a resource for the participating students in future.
- This decision to involve student volunteers is aimed at building a spirit of voluntary community service and gender equality.

Van Dhan Vikas Kendra

- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has given its approval for the establishment of the first ever multipurpose 'Van Dhan Vikas Kendra' on pilot basis in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh for providing skill upgradation and capacity building training and setting up of primary processing and value addition facility.
- This first model Van Dhan Vikas Kendra is being implemented for the training of 300 beneficiaries with a total outlay of Rs. 43.38 lakhs for the purpose of training, providing equipments and tool for primary level processing and infrastructure and building for housing the Kendra.
- This Kendra will have processing facility for Tamarind brick making, Mahua flower storage facility and chironjee cleaning and packaging.
- TRIFED has assigned the work for establishment of the pilot project in Bijapur District of Chhattisgarh to CGMFP Federation and Collector; Bijapur would be the coordinating force.
- Under this scheme, Value addition assumes critical importance in ensuring remunerative prices to the tribal in this approach. Under the scheme, three stage value additions would be the corner stone for enhancing incomes of the tribal.
- The grass root level procurement is proposed to be undertaken through SHGs associated with implementing Agencies.

Analysis:

- Minor Forest Produce (MFP) is a major source of livelihood for tribals living in forest areas. The importance of MFPs for this section of the society can be gauged from the fact that around 100 million forest dwellers depend on MFPs for food, shelter, medicines and cash income. It provides them critical subsistence during the lean seasons, particularly for primitive tribal groups such as hunter gatherers, and the landless.
- Tribals derive 20-40% of their annual income from MFP on which they spend major portion of their time. This activity has strong linkage to women's financial empowerment as most of the MFPs are collected and used/sold by women. MFP sector has the potential to create about 10 million workdays annually in the country.
- Ministry of Tribal Affairs has taken a number of initiatives for socio economic development of tribals like introduction Forest rights Act, PESA Act and has been implementing schemes for development of MFP by providing financial support to State TDCCs and TRIFED for market development of MFPs.

POCSO e-Box

- To equip the children with the information regarding the possible modes of protection/complaints, the National Council Of Educational Research And Training (NCERT) has published the information regarding Childline (1098) 24x7 Helpline for children and POCSO e-box on the back side of the front cover of all course books from Class 6 to Class 12.
- Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO), e-Box, is an online complaint management system for easy and direct reporting of sexual offences against children and timely action against the offenders under the POCSO Act, 2012. E-Box is very simple to operate and will help to maintain the confidentiality of the complaint.

About POCSO Act:

- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 deals with sexual offences against persons below 18 years of age, who are deemed as children.
- The Act for the first time, defines “penetrative sexual assault”, “sexual assault” and “sexual harassment”.
- The offence is considered graver if it is committed by a police officer, public servant, any member of the staff at a remand home, protection or observation home, jail, hospital or educational institution, or by a member of the armed or security forces.
- The Act is a comprehensive law to provide for the protection of children from the offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography, while safeguarding the interests of the child at every stage of the judicial process by incorporating child-friendly mechanisms for reporting, recording of evidence, investigation and speedy trial of offences through appointment of Special Public Prosecutors and designated Special Courts.
- The Act incorporates child friendly procedures for reporting, recording, investigation and trial offences.
- The Act provides for stringent punishments which have been graded as per the gravity of offence.
- Section 39 of the POCSO Act requires the State Governments to prepare guidelines for use of NGOs, professional and experts or persons to be associated with the pre-trial and trial stage to assist the child.
- section 44 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 empowers the NCPDR and State Commission for Protection of Child Rights for monitoring the implementation of the provisions of this Act in such manner as may be prescribed

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

India to host the 16th International Energy Forum Ministerial

- India will host the 16th International Energy Forum Ministerial (IEF—16).
- The ministerial comes in the backdrop of a supply cut by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and Russia that has led to a rally in global oil price. This has resulted in the cost of Indian basket of crude, which averaged \$47.56 a barrel in 2016-2017, touching \$63.80 (average price) in March 2018. The Indian basket represents the average of Oman, Dubai and Brent crude.

Current Scenario:

- The ministerial hosted by India assumes significance given that the country’s energy needs are primarily met through imports, with India importing 214 million tonnes of crude oil in 2016-17.

- India, the world's fourth-largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) importer, has been trying to leverage the glut in global LNG supplies to renegotiate its contracts. Indian firms have been exploring strategies such as time swap of volumes, destination swaps and contract on free on board basis to reduce the final fuel price. India imported 19 million metric tonnes of LNG in 2016-17.
- Also, India has been recalibrating its crude sourcing strategy and sourcing heavy crude from Latin America as part of its strategy to become a preferred refining hub. It also sourced crude oil from US last year.
- As a major consumer, India is trying to leverage its position to seek reasonable rates. India is also reworking its import strategy by stepping up the share of short-term contracts whenever the market is favourable and exploring long-term supply deals at discounted prices as its new energy architecture evolves.

About International Energy Forum Ministerial(IEF):

- The IEF aims to foster greater mutual understanding and awareness of common energy interests among its 75 member countries.
- Covering all six continents and accounting for around 90% of global supply and demand for oil and gas, the IEF is unique in that it comprises not only consuming and producing countries of the IEA and OPEC, but also Transit States and major players outside of their memberships, including Argentina, China, India, Mexico, Oman, Russia and South Africa.
- Recognising their interdependence in the field of energy, the member countries of the IEF co-operate under the neutral framework of the Forum to foster greater mutual understanding and awareness of common energy interests in order to ensure global energy security. T
- he Forum's biennial Ministerial Meetings are widely considered to be the world's largest gathering of Energy Ministers.
- The magnitude and diversity of this engagement is a testament to the position of the IEF as a neutral facilitator and honest broker of solutions in the common interest.
- The IEF and the global energy dialogue are promoted by a permanent Secretariat of international staff based in the Diplomatic Quarter of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme.

India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway

- India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (TH) is likely to be operational by December 2019.
- Work on the 1,000 km-long India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway officially started with the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) signing an agreement with a joint-venture (JV) between Punj Lloyd and Varaha Infra to upgrade the Yagyi-Kalewa section of the India-Myanmar Friendship Road in Myanmar.
- This is NHAI's first international project agreement. The project has been funded by Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India and would be executed on EPC mode at a cost of Rs.1177 crores.

About Project:

- The 120-km-long road section is estimated to cost ₹1,177 crore. India has already built the 132-km section, referred to as Friendship Highway, from the border town of Tamu to Kalewa. A separate contract is underway for upgradation of 69 bridges along the Tamu-Kalewa stretch.
- A detailed project report (DPR) is underway to build the Rih-Tedim road that will help connect the Trilateral Highway through Zokhawthar-Rih border in Mizoram, where India has already committed huge sums for widening the highway. Currently, Myanmar is connected by road only through Moreh in Manipur.
- Meanwhile, India plans to extend road connectivity to the entire CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) region. A preliminary survey has also been initiated for rail connectivity parallel to the Trilateral Highway. Japan is interested in funding and collaborating with India in the trilateral rail project.
- While the trilateral highway is fully financed by India, Delhi is contemplating a sizable line of credit for future connectivity projects with ASEAN countries.
- Parallel to overseas connectivity projects, the Narendra Modi government has rolled out multi-billion dollar projects to improve both road and rail connectivity to the North-Eastern States. As part of the project, a DPR is launched to build a new road-cum-rail bridge at Dhubri near the Bengal-Assam border.

- The proposed 15-km long Dhubri-Fulbari bridge will pave way for easy connectivity to the Garo Hills in Meghalaya and the neighbouring Northern Bangladeshi districts.
- India recently completed building a 9-km long Dholasadia bridge at the Assam-Arunachal border. Another 5-km long bridge at Bogibeel over Brahmaputra is nearing completion.

UN launches road safety trust fund

- UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed has launched a trust fund aimed at spurring action to help save lives in road accidents.

About Trust fund:

- According to the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Organisation's development arm in the continent, which is also the secretariat for the trust fund, every USD 1,500 contributed to the fund could save one life; prevent 10 serious injuries; and leverage USD 51,000 towards investments in road safety.
- The Road Safety Trust Fund will serve as a catalyst for much-needed progress towards the road safety targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Dealing specifically with road safety, two Sustainable Development Goals targets aim to halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents and to provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems as well as improve road safety for all, respectively.
- Trust fund has the potential to galvanise our global efforts to address the road safety situation, building on the progress made and experience gained over the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020
- The trust fund will support efforts along the five pillars of the Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety, which include strengthened road safety management capacities; improved safety of road infrastructure and broader transport networks; enhanced safety of vehicles; improved behaviour of road users; and improved post-crash care.

Analysis:

- Traffic accidents are the number one cause of death of young people and are responsible for keeping millions of people in poverty each year.
- Road traffic deaths and injuries have become a serious and urgent global concern. Around 1.3 million drivers, passengers and pedestrians die each year, and up to 50 million are injured on the world's roads
- The United Nations took a major step to address the tragedy of road accidents by launching the UN Road Safety Trust Fund to spur action that could save lives and prevent the loss of opportunity associated with road accidents.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Hubble Uncovers the Farthest Star Ever Seen

- Recently, Hubble telescope of NASA has uncovered the farthest star ever seen named as Icarus.
- This star is so far away that its light has taken 9 billion years to reach Earth.
- The scientists took advantage of a phenomenon called "gravitational lensing" to spot the star. It involves the bending of light by massive galaxy clusters in the line of sight, which magnifies more distant celestial objects. This makes dim, faraway objects that otherwise would be undetectable, like an individual star, visible.

- These observations by astronomers from NASA provide a rare and detailed look at how stars evolve, especially the most luminous stars. Detecting the amplification of a single and pinpoint background star has provided a unique opportunity to test the nature of dark matter in the cluster.

About the Hubble Space Telescope:

- The Hubble is a joint project between NASA and the European Space Agency. Here are some basic facts about the telescope and the mission, courtesy the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI), which operates Hubble for NASA:
- Since its launch in 1990, the Hubble Space Telescope (HST) has provided a dazzling array of images that have awed and inspired the public. More than just pretty pictures, the dozens of terabytes of data collected has provided insight into the universe, from objects as close as the moon to the most remote galaxies, with incredible photos of supernovas and nebulas in between.
- The telescope initially launched with a flaw in its mirror that hampered its ability to do observations. But following a successful shuttle repair mission in 1993, the reputation of Hubble recovered and today it is one of the most famous telescopes ever.

WHO directives call for support for breastfeeding

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have issued a new 10-step guidance to increase support for breastfeeding in health facilities that provide maternity and newborn services, which provide the immediate health system platform to help mothers initiate breastfeeding within the first hour and breastfeed exclusively for six months.
- The guidelines describe how hospitals should have a written breastfeeding policy in place, required staff competencies, and antenatal and post-birth care, including breastfeeding support for mothers.
- It also recommends limited use of breast milk substitutes, rooming-in, responsive feeding, educating parents on the use of bottles and pacifiers, and support when mothers and babies are discharged from hospital.

The Ten Steps for health facilities to take towards ensuring successful breastfeeding are as follows:

- Have a written breastfeeding policy that is routinely communicated to all health care staff.
- Train all health care staff in the skills necessary to implement this policy.
- Inform all pregnant women about the benefits and management of breastfeeding.
- Help mothers initiate breastfeeding within half an hour of birth.
- Show mothers how to breastfeed and how to maintain lactation even if they should be separated from their infants.
- Give newborn infants no food or drink other than breast milk unless medically indicated.
- Practise "rooming in" – allowing mothers and infants to remain together – 24 hours a day.
- Encourage breastfeeding on demand – whenever the baby is hungry.
- Give no artificial teats or pacifiers (also called dummies or soothers) to breastfeeding infants.
- Foster the establishment of breastfeeding support groups and refer mothers to them on discharge from the hospital or clinic.

Analysis:

- Breast milk is the ideal food for newborns and infants. It is safe, gives babies the nutrients they need for healthy development and contains antibodies that help protect infants from common childhood illnesses.
- While exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life is on the rise in many countries, further improvement of breastfeeding rates is critical to improve the nutrition and the health of infants and children.
- It is estimated that around 35% of infants aged 0 to 6 months are exclusively breastfed in the world today. But if all babies and young children were breastfed exclusively for their first six months of life and then given nutritious complementary food with continued breastfeeding up to two years of age, the lives of an additional 1.5 million children under five would be saved every year.
- Malnutrition is responsible for one-third of the 8.8 million deaths annually among children under five. It can be a direct cause of death but is also the most important single risk factor for disease in young children. Over

two thirds of these deaths, which are often associated with inappropriate feeding practices such as bottle-feeding or untimely and inadequate complementary foods, occur during the first months of life.

- Increasing breastfeeding rates is a key component of the plan to improve infant and young child nutrition.

QUICK FACTS

- World Health Day is observed on: **7 April**
- World Homoeopathy Day is observed on: **10 April**
- In Economic Freedom Index 2018, rank of India is: **130**
- Country which ended the reservation in government jobs: **Bangladesh**
- First Meeting of the 'NITI Forum for North East' held in : **Agartala**
- World's largest solar park to come up in Gujarat
- Third India-Russia Military Industrial Conference was held in: **Thiruvandanthai, Kancheepuram district**
- New CISF chief: **Rajesh Ranjan**