

Abhimanu

Weekly current affairs Series

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NATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Centre approves 1.12 lakh more houses under PM's housing scheme

- The Centre has approved construction of nearly 1.12 lakh more affordable houses for urban poor in eight states under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna, with Andhra Pradesh bagging the largest share of over 37,000 housing units.
- The total number of houses being funded under the PMAY (Urban) is close to 55 lakh across the country so far.

About Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana :

- With a vision of 'Housing for All by 2022', Government has launched a flagship program 'Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Housing for All (Urban)' to meet the housing shortage among the urban poor.
- This scheme was launched on 25th June, 2015. PMAY envisages construction of 2 Crore houses with basic amenities.

Components of PMAY(U)

- Slum Rehabilitation: Slum rehabilitation grant of Rs. 1 lakh per house on an average for all eligible slum dwellers in all such project.
- Promotion of Affordable Housing through credit linked subsidy: The interest rate subvention at 6.5% for both EWS/LIG categories
- Affordable Housing in Partnership with Public & Private sectors: Central assistance at Rs. 1.5 Lakh per EWS house in projects where 35% of the houses are mandatorily for EWS
- Subsidy for beneficiary-led individual house construction or enhancement: Rs. 1.5 lakh per house for EWS category in slums or otherwise if States/cities make a project.

Coverage

- All Statutory Towns as per Census 2011 and towns notified subsequently

Purpose

- New construction, acquisition and addition of rooms, kitchen, toilet etc. to existing dwelling as incremental housing.

Beneficiaries

- Beneficiary family will comprise husband, wife and unmarried children.
- EWS Households having annual income up to Rs.3,00,000/-
- LIG Households having annual income between Rs.3,00,000/- and upto Rs.6,00,000/-
- Preference under the scheme, subject to beneficiaries being from EWS/LIG segments, should be given to Manual Scavengers, Women (with overriding preference to widows), persons belonging to Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes/ Other Backward Classes, Minorities, Persons with disabilities and Transgender.

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

- The United States and Mexico have agreed to overhaul the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), putting pressure on Canada to agree to new terms on auto trade and dispute settlement rules to remain part of the three-nation pact.

Highlights of the new deal:

- The deal would require 75% of auto content to be made in the NAFTA region, up from the current level of 62.5%.
- The deal improves labour provisions, in part by requiring 40% to 45% of auto content to be made by workers earning at least \$16 per hour. That measure could move some production back to the United States from Mexico and should lift Mexican wages.
- The United States relented on its demand for an automatic expiration for the deal, known as a “sunset clause.” Instead, the United States and Mexico agreed to a 16-year lifespan for the deal, with a review every six years that can extend the pact for 16 years.
- Mexico agreed to eliminate dispute settlement panels for certain anti-dumping cases, a move that could complicate talks with Canada, which had insisted on the panels.

About NAFTA:

- The North American Free Trade Agreement is a treaty between Canada, Mexico and the United States.
- NAFTA grants the most-favored-nation status to all co-signers. That means countries must give all parties equal treatment. That includes foreign direct investment. They cannot give better treatment to domestic investors than foreign ones. They can't offer a better deal to investors from non-NAFTA countries.
- Governments must also offer federal contracts to businesses in all three NAFTA countries.
- NAFTA eliminates tariffs on imports and exports between the three countries. Tariffs are taxes used to make foreign goods more expensive. NAFTA created specific rules to regulate trade in farm products, automobiles and clothing. These also apply to some services, such as telecommunications and finance.
- Exporters must get Certificates of Origin to waive tariffs. That means the export must originate in the United States, Canada or Mexico. A product made in Peru but shipped from Mexico will still pay a duty when it enters the United States or Canada.
- NAFTA establishes procedures to resolve trade disputes. Chapter 52 protects businesses from unfair practices. The NAFTA Secretariat facilitates an informal resolution between the parties. If this doesn't work, it establishes a panel to review the dispute. That helps all parties to avoid costly lawsuits in local courts. It helps the parties interpret NAFTA's complex rules and procedures. These trade dispute protections apply to investors as well.
- All NAFTA countries must respect patents, trademarks, and copyrights. At the same time, the agreement ensures that these intellectual property rights don't interfere with trade.

India Post Payments Bank launched

- India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) has been launched. It will focus on providing banking and financial services to people in rural areas, by leveraging the reach of 1.55 lakh post office branches.
- The government aims to link all the 1.55 lakh post offices to the India Post Payments Bank system by 31 December, 2018.
- In 2015, RBI had granted 'in-principle' approval to 11 entities, including Department of Posts, to set up payments banks and proposed to give such licences 'on tap' basis in future.

About India Post Payment Bank:

- The India Post Payments Bank aims to become the most accessible bank in the world, riding on advanced banking and payments technology. Coupled with physical presence across 1.55 lakh post offices and the reach of the postman, the India Post Payments Bank plans to become a powerful and effective vehicle of real financial inclusion in the country.
- Payments bank allows mobile firms, supermarket chains, and others to cater to banking requirements of individuals and small businesses. It will be set up as a differentiated bank and will confine its activities to acceptance of demand deposits, remittance services, Internet banking and other specified services.
- IPPB will offer digitally-enabled payments, banking and remittance services of all kinds among entities and individuals as also provide access to insurance, mutual funds, pension and credit products in partnership with third-party financial service providers and banks.
- IPPB is being set up primarily to achieve the goal of full financial inclusion of the people in our country.

- Like other payments banks, IPPB will target financially excluded customers such as migrant workers, low-income households and tiny businesses. It will not lend money and, as a result, will be shielded from the risks that conventional banks are exposed to. And it will have a huge offline presence to complement its online one, for which the department of posts has already identified a core banking solution
- The department of posts was among the 11 entities that got an in-principle approval from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to start a payments bank. Three entities have surrendered their licence after they discovered the business is characterized by high volumes and low profit margins. For India Post, though, the business will be a natural extension.
- The India Post Payments Bank will be managed professionally and most of its Grade A employees will be hired from market.
- The bank's board will have representation from various other government departments, including the Department of Posts, Department of Expenditure, Department of Economic Services etc.
- Remuneration package for employees has been kept competitive to attract talent from public sector banks.

Analysis(on payment banks):

- The goal behind creating payment banks is to bring financial inclusion by making it easier for anyone to get a bank account.
- The payment bank licence will enable to offer a more comprehensive portfolio of banking and financial products and services, accelerating India's journey into a cashless economy.
- The new payment banks will also make people less dependent on cash, even for small sums, and since a mobile wallet could be a bank account soon, this move could, over time, have a big impact on m-commerce.
- But payment banks facing some challenges also. Even after launching payment banks, all those who got new license are not so enthusiastic about the future of these banks . Because, these entities can't undertake any lending businesses and the income stream is initially restricted to remittances. Eventually, they can cross-sell banking products through their reach and earn a fee. But neither of these two streams of revenue are high-margin businesses.
- RBI has put in place strict rules on how these banks can deploy the deposits they garner. 75% has to go into government securities. This limits their ability to earn from the deposit base as well. Garnering a strong deposit base in the first place will be a challenge as well. Besides, if these banks want to steal customers away from banks, they may have to offer more than the 4% interest rate that banks do. But to do that, payment banks need to be able to earn enough on deposits as well.
- These banks will make no money on the spread between deposit and investment. Indeed on the deposit side, they will need to pay consistently higher interest to attract deposits.
- So, these banks won't be allowed to lend, depriving them from of the main source of a bank's revenue.
- Over the last few years, large banks, including private lenders, have significantly expanded their networks in rural areas. This means that these markets are no longer wide open for new business with limited competition. Banks are offering most services that payments banks can and hence, for payments banks to offer a new and differentiated proposition will not be easy.

Odisha approves proposal for legislative council

- The Odisha government has approved a proposal for setting up a legislative council in the state. A resolution will be brought in the monsoon session of the Odisha legislative Assembly.
- The proposed legislative council will have 49 members. The members of the proposed council will get salary and allowance as given to the members of the legislative Assembly.

About Legislative Council:

Article 171 of the constitution of India defines the composition of the councils. The strength of any council shall not exceed 1/3rd of the strength of the state assembly. But for smaller states, the minimum strength of the council can be forty (40).

The members of the Legislative Councils comprise of people elected through five different constituencies.

- One third (1/3rd) of the members are elected by representatives of the Local Authorities (like Municipalities, Zilla Parishads, Block Parishads etc)
- One third (1/3rd) of the members are elected by members of the Legislative Assembly (the same person can't be a member of both the houses)
- One-twelfth (1/12th) of the members are elected by the Graduates in the state
- One-twelfth (1/12th) of the members are elected by the Teachers in the state
- The remaining members are nominated by the Governor. Those nominated by the Governor should have special knowledge or practical experience in Literature, science, art, co-operative movement and social service.

Analysis:

- A second House of legislature is considered important for two reasons: one, to act as a check on hasty actions by the popularly elected House and, two, to ensure that individuals who might not be cut out for the rough-and-tumble of direct elections too are able to contribute to the legislative process.
- Opposition to the idea of Legislative Councils is centred on three broad arguments. One, they can be used to park leaders who have not been able to win an election. Two, they can be used to delay progressive legislation. Three, they would strain state finances.
- Opinion in the Constituent Assembly was divided on the question of having a Legislative Council. The idea was backed on the above grounds; it was also suggested that having a second chamber would allow for more debate and sharing of work between the Houses.

Supreme Court adjourns hearing on fresh plea against Article 35A

- The Supreme Court today adjourned its hearing on a fresh plea challenging the constitutional validity of Article 35-A, which empowers the Jammu and Kashmir assembly to define "permanent residents" for bestowing special rights and privileges to them.

About Article 35 A:

- Article 35A, which was added to the Constitution by a Presidential Order in 1954, accords special rights and privileges to the citizens of J&K.
- The Article empowers the Jammu and Kashmir state's legislature to define "permanent residents" of the state and provides special rights and privileges to those permanent residents. The State Subject Law 'confers rights to the citizens of the state in respect of their exclusive claim to the acquisition, sale, lease, mortgage of immovable property, claims for service and scholarships, allotments of housing plots, adult suffrage, membership of the local bodies and eligibility for the benefits under self-employment.'

Analysis:

- Presidential order was not made a law by the Parliament and amounts to amendment to the Constitution by the President which he has no power to do so.
- In *Puranlal Lakhanpal v. President of India*, a five-judge Constitution bench of the SC had ruled that the power of the President under Article 370 to efface certain provisions of the Constitution in application to J&K also includes power to amend a particular provision in application the state of J&K.
- Article 35A is doing nothing but giving effect to the legislative history of the constitutional status of J&K which must be held valid. Further, it has been alleged that Article 35A violates the right to equality as enshrined in Article 14 of our Constitution.
- However, it must be noted that Article 14 permits reasonable classification, provided that it is based on 'intelligible differentia', and such 'intelligible differentia' must have a rational nexus with the object sought to be achieved. In the given case, object sought to be achieved is special protection to the permanent citizens of the J&K and such classification special citizenship is permissible within the constitutional scheme.
- We need this article because Federalism is a device by which plural qualities of a society are articulated and protected. It is devised to secure both regional autonomy and national unity. It is a product of historical forces in plural societies. If the forces of national unity are very strong in such society, the central government shall have more powers. The strength of these regional and national forces changes from time to time, in keeping with changing social, economic and political conditions and compulsions.
- Thus, federalism has been reflecting these changing historical conditions and compulsions. Federation is the existence of dual polity.

National Nutrition Mission

- The NNM, as an apex body, will monitor, supervise, fix targets and guide the nutrition related interventions across the Ministries.
- The programme through the targets will strive to reduce the level of stunting, under-nutrition, anemia and low birth weight babies. It will create synergy, ensure better monitoring, issue alerts for timely action, and encourage States/UTs to perform, guide and supervise the line Ministries and States/UTs to achieve the targeted goals.
- More than 10 crore people will be benefitted by this programme. All the States and districts will be covered in a phased manner i.e. 315 districts in 2017-18, 235 districts in 2018-19 and remaining districts in 2019-20.
- Implementation strategy would be based on intense monitoring and Convergence Action Plan right upto the grass root level. NNM will be rolled out in three phases from 2017-18 to 2019-20. NNM targets to reduce stunting, undernutrition, anemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls) and reduce low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively. Although the target to reduce Stunting is atleast 2% p.a., Mission would strive to achieve reduction in Stunting from 38.4% (NFHS-4) to 25% by 2022 (Mission 25 by 2022).

The proposal consists of

- mapping of various Schemes contributing towards addressing malnutrition
- introducing a very robust convergence mechanism
- ICT based Real Time Monitoring system
- incentivizing States/UTs for meeting the targets
- incentivizing Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) for using IT based tools
- eliminating registers used by AWWs
- introducing measurement of height of children at the Anganwadi Centres (AWCs)
- Social Audits
- setting-up Nutrition Resource Centres, involving masses through Jan Andolan for their participation on nutrition through various activities, among others.

Analysis:

- There are a number of schemes directly/indirectly affecting the nutritional status of children (0-6 years age) and pregnant women and lactating mothers. In spite of these, level of malnutrition and related problems in the country is high.
- There is no dearth of schemes but lack of creating synergy and linking the schemes with each other to achieve common goal.
- NNM through robust convergence mechanism and other components would strive to create the synergy.

National Logistics Portal

- A committee of secretaries has approved a proposal by department of commerce (DoC) to setup a National Logistics Portal (NLP) to ease transportation of goods across the country and those meant for export.

About National Logistic Portal:

- Stakeholders like traders, manufacturers, logistics service providers, infrastructure providers, financial services, government departments and groups and associations will all be on one platform, once the portal is created.
- There are four main components of the portal which include a logistics e-market place, a logistics certification platform, an integrated regulatory platform and a banking and financial services platform.
- The logistics e-market place will allow a trader or exporter to plan end to end shipment route, check availability, enquire the rates make bookings for a wide range of services such as freight forward, ocean freight, truck, warehouse, air freight, ICD services and packaging services, exchange e-contract, generate invoice, pay electronically, and monitor physical flow of goods.

Analysis:

- India's logistics sector is very complex with more than 20 government agencies, 40 partnering government agencies, 37 export promotion councils, 500 certifications, 10,000 commodities, \$160 billion market size.
- It also involves 12 million employment base, 200 shipping agencies, 36 logistic services, 129 ICDs, 168 CFSs, 50 IT ecosystems and banks & insurance agencies.
- According to the Economic Survey 2017-18, the logistics sector provides livelihood to more than 22 million people and improving the sector will facilitate 10 per cent decrease in indirect logistics cost leading to the growth of 5-8 per cent in exports. The survey estimates that the worth of Indian logistics market would be around \$215 billion in the next two years compared to about \$160 billion now.
- The portal will be implemented in phases and will fulfil the commitment of the Government of India to enhance trade competitiveness, create jobs, boost India's performance in global rankings and pave the way for India to become a logistics hub.

Sustainable Development in Indian Himalayan Region

- NITI Aayog has launched 5 Thematic Reports on Sustainable Development in Indian Himalayan Region
- The themes include: Inventory and Revival of Springs in Himalayas for Water Security, Sustainable Tourism in Indian Himalayan Region, Transformative Approach to Shifting Cultivation, Strengthening Skill & Entrepreneurship Landscape in Himalayas and Data/Information for Informed Decision Making.

Important highlights of the Report:

- Nearly 30% of springs crucial to water security of people are drying and 50% have reported reduced discharge.
- Himalayan Tourism growing annually at 6.8% has created huge challenge related to solid waste, water, traffic, loss of bio-cultural diversity etc.
- In the north eastern States, thousands of the households continue to practice slash and burn (shifting cultivation) that need to be addressed in view of ecological, food and nutritional security.
- Predominantly unskilled workforce remains a challenge for the mountains as well that need high priority to address migration of youths.

- Also challenges related to data availability, data authenticity, compatibility, data quality, validation, user charges for Himalayan States need addressal for informed decision making at different levels of governance.
- The key messages from reports include: Spring Mapping and Revival, using 8 steps protocol be taken up across Himalayan States in phased manner. Apply carrying capacity concept to all major tourist destinations; implement and monitor tourism sector Standards and apply performance based incentives for States faring well on the standards.
- Assessment of nature & extent of Shifting Cultivation area, improved policy coherence, strengthened tenurial security & improved access to related programs/schemes are key recommendations to transform shifting cultivation.
- Strengthening of skill & entrepreneurship will require focus on identified priority sectors where mountains have advantage, investment in trainers, assessors and training centers in industry partnership.
- Having a Central Data Management Agency for Himalayas to provide data with high fidelity scenario while addressing data sharing, access, authenticity and comparability issues will go a long way in addressing data related issues.
- The call for actions include setting up of a Himalayan Authority for coordinated and holistic development of entire Himalayan region and launching of "Himalaya Calling": An Awareness to Action Campaign as people's movement.

Government announces Regulations for Drones

- The government has announced the Drone Regulations 1.0. These regulations will enable the safe, commercial usage of drones starting December 1, 2018.
- They are intended to enable visual line-of-sight daytime-only and a maximum of 400 ft altitude operations.
- Drones are a technology platform which has wide-ranging applications from photography to agriculture, from infrastructure asset maintenance to insurance. Drones range in size from very small and those that can carry multiple kilograms of payload.

About Drone Regulations 1.0:

- These regulations will enable the safe, commercial usage of drones starting December 1, 2018. Drone Regulations 1.0 are intended to enable visual line-of-sight daytime-only and a maximum of 400 ft altitude operations.
- Air space has been partitioned into Red Zone (flying not permitted), Yellow Zone (controlled airspace), and Green Zone (automatic permission).

Key features of Drone Regulations 1.0:

- As per the regulation, there are 5 categories of RPAS (Remotely Piloted Aircraft System or drones) categorized by weight, namely nano, micro, small, medium and large.
- All RPAS except nano and those owned by NTRO, ARC and Central Intelligence Agencies are to be registered and issued with Unique Identification Number (UIN).
- Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit (UAOP) shall be required for RPA operators except for nano RPAS operating below 50 ft., micro RPAS operating below 200 ft., and those owned by NTRO, ARC and Central Intelligence Agencies.
- The mandatory equipment required for operation of RPAS except nano category are (a) GNSS (GPS), (b) Return-To-Home (RTH), (c) Anti-collision light, (d) ID-Plate, (e) Flight controller with flight data logging capability, and (f) RF ID and SIM/ No-Permission No Take off (NPNT).
- As of now, RPAS to operate within visual line of sight (VLoS), during day time only, and upto maximum 400 ft. altitude.
- For flying in controlled Airspace, filing of flight plan and obtaining Air Defence Clearance (ADC) /Flight Information Centre (FIC) number shall be necessary.

- Minimum manufacturing standards and training requirements of Remote Pilots of small and above categories of RPAS have been specified in the regulation.

No Drone Zones:

- The regulation defines “No Drone Zones” around airports; near international border, Vijay Chowk in Delhi; State Secretariat Complex in State Capitals, strategic locations/vital and military installations; etc.

Operations through Digital Platform:

- Operations of RPAS to be enabled through Digital Sky Platform. The RPAS operations will be based on NPNT (No Permission, No Take off). The details including links for the digital sky platform shall be available in DGCA website from 1st December, 2018. There will be different colour zones visible to the applicant while applying in the digital sky platform, viz, Red Zone: flying not permitted, Yellow Zone (controlled airspace): permission required before flying, and Green Zone (uncontrolled airspace): automatic permission.

Enforcement Actions:

- The enforcement actions are, (a) suspension/ cancellation of UIN/ UAOP in case of violation of regulatory provisions, (b) actions as per relevant Sections of the Aircraft Act 1934, or Aircraft Rules, or any statutory provisions, and (c) penalties as per applicable IPCs (such as 287, 336, 337, 338, or any relevant section of IPC).

Law Commission on Family Law Reform

- The Law Commission of India has suggested certain changes in marriage and divorce laws that should be uniformly accepted in the personal laws of all religions, while holding that the uniform civil code “is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage” in the country.

Important points mentioned by Law Commission:

- The best way forward was to preserve diversity of personal laws even while ensuring they did not contradict fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution.
- Cultural diversity cannot be compromised to the extent that our urge for uniformity itself becomes a reason for threat to the territorial integrity of the nation.
- Suggesting amendments in marriage and divorce in personal laws of all religions, the commission advocated making adultery a ground for divorce for men and women and to simplify divorce procedure.
- While all family laws include adultery as a ground for divorce it is important to ensure that the provision is accessible to both spouses.
- The Commission said the filing of Section 498A IPC (dowry harassment) cases was actually done by women wanting a quick exit from a difficult marriage.
- It suggested that ‘Nikahnamas’ should make it clear that “polygamy is a criminal offence” and this should apply to “all communities”.
- This is not recommended owing to merely a moral position on bigamy, or to glorify monogamy, but emanates from the fact that only a man is permitted multiple wives, which is unfair.
- It favoured fixing the marriageable age for boys and girls at 18 years so that they marry as equals, and said that the insistence on recognising different ages of marriage between consenting adults must be “abolished”.
- If a universal age for majority is recognised, and that grants all citizens the right to choose their governments, surely, they must then be also considered capable of choosing their spouses.
- For equality in the true sense, the insistence on recognising different age of marriage between consenting adults must be abolished.
- The age of majority must be recognised uniformly as the legal age for marriage for men and women alike, as is determined by the Indian Majority Act, 1875, i.e. eighteen years of age.
- The difference in age for husband and wife has no basis in law as spouses entering into a marriage are by all means equals and their partnership must also be of that between equals.
- The Commission suggested that Parliament should enact a law to address the issue of legitimisation of children born of live-in relationships that fail to reach the threshold of a deemed marriage.
- Further, such children should be entitled to inherit the self acquired property of their parents.

About Law Commission:

- Law Commission of India is neither a constitutional body nor a statutory body. It is truly an ad hoc and advisory body whose work is to do research and make recommendations for law reforms such as amendments and updations of prevalent and inherited laws. None of these recommendations is binding upon the Government.

First review meeting of Department of Official Language

- The Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh recently chaired first review meeting of the Department of Official Language of MHA to discuss the functioning and issues related to implementation of Hindi language in official work.

About Department of Official Language:

- With a view to ensuring compliance of the constitutional and legal provisions regarding official language and to promote the use of Hindi for the official purposes of the Union, the Department of Official Language was set up in June 1975 as an independent Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Since then, this Department has been making efforts for accelerating the progressive use of Hindi for the official purposes of the Union.

Functions of Department Official Language:

- Implementing the provisions of the Constitution relating to the Official Language and the provisions of the Official Languages Act, 1963 (19 of 1963), except to the extent such implementation has been assigned to any other Department.
- Nodal responsibility for all matters relating to the progressive use of Hindi as the Official Language of the Union including Hindi Teaching Scheme for Central Government Employees and publication of magazines, journals & other literature related thereto.
- Co-ordination in all matters relating to the progressive use of Hindi as the Official Language of the Union, including administrative terminology, syllabi, textbooks, training courses and equipment (with standardised script) required therefor.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Remembering the Haitian revolution

- The United Nations' International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition is observed every year on August 23 to remind people of the tragedy of the transatlantic slave trade, the largest deportation in history.
- The day is commemorated to pay tribute to all those who fought for freedom and worked hard to abolish the slave trade and slavery throughout the world.
- This commitment and the actions used to fight against the system of slavery had an impact on the human rights movement.

The Haitian revolution

- The Haitian Revolution has often been described as the largest and most successful slave rebellion in the Western Hemisphere.

- Slaves initiated the rebellion in 1791 and by 1803 they had succeeded in ending not just slavery but French control over the colony.
- These revolutions were influenced by the French Revolution of 1789, which would come to represent a new concept of human rights, universal citizenship, and participation in government.
- In the 18th century, Saint Dominigue, as Haiti was then known, became France's wealthiest overseas colony, largely because of its production of sugar, coffee, indigo, and cotton generated by an enslaved labor force.
- When the French Revolution broke out in 1789 there were five distinct sets of interest groups in the colony. There were white planters—who owned the plantations and the slaves—and petit blancs, who were artisans, shop keepers and teachers. Some of them also owned a few slaves. Together they numbered 40,000 of the colony's residents.
- Many of the whites on Saint Dominigue began to support an independence movement that began when France imposed steep tariffs on the items imported into the colony.
- The planters were extremely disenchanted with France because they were forbidden to trade with any other nation.
- Furthermore, the white population of Saint-Dominique did not have any representation in France. Despite their calls for independence, both the planters and petit blancs remained committed to the institution of slavery.
- The three remaining groups were of African descent: those who were free, those who were slaves, and those who had run away. There were about 30,000 free black people in 1789. Half of them were mulatto and often they were wealthier than the petit blancs. The slave population was close to 500,000. The runaway slaves were called maroons; they had retreated deep into the mountains of Saint Dominigue and lived off subsistence farming. Haiti had a history of slave rebellions; the slaves were never willing to submit to their status and with their strength in numbers (10 to 1) colonial officials and planters did all that was possible to control them.
- Despite the harshness and cruelty of Saint Dominigue slavery, there were slave rebellions before 1791. One plot involved the poisoning of masters.
- Inspired by events in France, a number of Haitian-born revolutionary movements emerged simultaneously.
- They used as their inspiration the French Revolution's "Declaration of the Rights of Man."
- The General Assembly in Paris responded by enacting legislation which gave the various colonies some autonomy at the local level. The legislation, which called for "all local proprietors...to be active citizens," was both ambiguous and radical.
- It was interpreted in Saint Dominigue as applying only to the planter class and thus excluded petit blancs from government. Yet it allowed free citizens of color who were substantial property owners to participate.
- This legislation, promulgated in Paris to keep Saint Dominigue in the colonial empire, instead generated a three-sided civil war between the planters, free blacks and the petit blancs. However, all three groups would be challenged by the enslaved black majority which was also influenced and inspired by events in France.
- Despite reinforcements from France, the area of the colony held by the rebels grew as did the violence on both sides.
- In 1803, at the Battle of Vertieres the French forces were defeated. On January 1, 1804, Dessalines declared the nation independent and renamed it Haiti. France became the first nation to recognize its independence. Haiti thus emerged as the first black republic in the world, and the second nation in the western hemisphere (after the United States) to win its independence from a European power.

China may scrap limit on number of children

- China is planning to scrap the limit on the number of children couples can have. A draft civil code that would end decades of controversial family planning policies has been prepared.

About Proposed draft code:

- Draft code omitted any reference to "family planning" – the current policy which limits couples to having no more than two children.

- The report did not indicate whether the new policy would raise the limit or allow an unlimited number of children.
- The draft code also includes “clear rules” to tackle the “intense problem of sexual harassment” reflected throughout society.

Analysis:

- The Communist party began enforcing a one-child policy in 1979 to slow population growth. The limit was raised to two children in 2016 as the nation scrambled to rejuvenate its ageing population of 1.4 billion.
- Chinese government faces a colossal demographic cliff, as the working population shrinks and the ageing population rapidly expands. It also lacks a social insurance program that can adequately support its ageing population.
- There is a main concern that Chinese government could “intervene as aggressively in pro-natalist policies as it did in anti-natalist policies. This could have very negative effects on the position of women in the labor market, in society, and in the family.
- Childbirths have not increased as much as forecast since the two-child policy came into force, and there has been rising speculation the government will further ease restrictions.

G20 Digital Economy Ministerial Meeting

- In the framework of the Argentinian presidency of G20, the 2018 edition of Digital Economy ministerial meeting is being held in Salta, Argentina.
- The ministerial meeting was preceded by the second meeting of the G20 Digital Economy Task Force.
- Theme: ‘Building consensus for fair and sustainable development,’.

Important Highlights:

- The G20 member nations agreed to promote policies that will contribute to bridging all forms of digital divide, with special attention to the digital gender divide.
- The countries agreed to promote digital government and digital infrastructure, strengthen the digital skills of the workforce, deepen the analysis towards digital economy measurement, and to share experiences and lesson learned”.
- The G20 Ministerial meeting allowed India to showcase the inclusive use of digital technology by the Government to empower the people. It also allowed India to articulate its views on global issues relating to cyber security, data protection and innovation for growth.

Analysis:

- India’s digital story is a story of hope and growth; of opportunities and profits. But above all it is a story of digital inclusion and empowerment.
- Digital India is a mass movement today touching the lives of a billion people.
- India’s digital infrastructure has included 1.21 billion mobile phones, of which 450 million are smartphones, nearly 500 million internet subscriber and an ever-increasing broadband availability being supported by optical fibre connectivity in 250,000 village clusters
- Digital India programme lay in the conscious efforts to bridge the digital divide and promote digital inclusion, based upon technology which is low cost, affordable, developmental and which fosters empowerment and inclusion.
- India’s home-grown technologies has helped in promoting digital payment, including importance on interoperable open-source technologies so that these platforms can be used by others to develop more innovative structures as well as leading to new norms of digital identity-based authentication which are a generation ahead.
- All this is in addition to the stellar role played by India’s IT companies, which have left their mark in 200 cities of 80 countries, enabling India to emerge as a profound digital power, with India’s digital economy likely to become 1 trillion \$ economy in the next 3-5 years.

BIMSTEC summit

- Fourth BIMSTEC summit was recently held in Nepal. The member states have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the establishment of a Bimstec Grid Interconnection to enhance energy cooperation among the member states.
- The Fourth BIMSTEC Summit concluded with an 18-point Kathmandu Declaration. The declaration is expected to enhance the effectiveness of BIMSTEC Secretariat by engaging it in various technical and economic activities in the region.

Important points of Kathmandu Declaration:

- Heads of State or Government have expressed their strong determination to deepen regional integration for peace, stability and prosperity in South Asia by intensifying cooperation in trade, investment, finance, energy, security, infrastructure, connectivity and culture.
- Emphasis has also been laid to implement the projects, programmes and activities in a prioritized, result-oriented and time-bound manner.
- Commitment to enhance support to the Least Developed and Landlocked Member States in their development efforts, with a view to ensuring equitable benefits of free trade arrangements.
- Reiterated their strong commitment to free South Asia from poverty and directed the Ministerial and Secretary-level mechanisms on poverty alleviation to review the progress and revisit the SAARC Plan of Action and its effective implementation, also taking into account the Post-2015 Development Agenda.
- To eliminate the threshold criteria from the SAARC Food Bank Agreement so as to enable the Member States to avail food grains, during both emergency and normal time food difficulty.
- Early ratification of the SAARC Seed Bank Agreement, the leaders also directed the relevant SAARC bodies to finalize the establishment of Regional Vaccine Bank and Regional Livestock Gene Bank.
- To arrive at legal instrument, or an agreed outcome with legal force applicable to all by the end of 2015, based on the principles of the Common but Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR), Respective Capabilities and Equity under the UNFCCC.
- Acknowledged the special needs of the elderly, women, children, differently-abled persons, unemployed persons, and persons working at hazardous sites and agreed to develop and strengthen social protection for them and to share best practices in this regard.
- Urged public and private media to share responsibility in the efforts towards promoting understanding and cohesiveness of the SAARC Member States and their peoples.
- Need for effective cooperation among the Member States to combat terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations, they directed respective authorities to ensure full and effective implementation of the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and its additional Protocol, including through enacting necessary legislations at the national level to root out terrorism.
- To establish a cyber crime monitoring desk, and to take effective measures to combat illicit trafficking of narcotics and psychotropic substances, arms smuggling, money laundering, counterfeit currency and other transnational crimes.
- Expressing satisfaction over steady progress in democratization in South Asia, the Leaders committed to further promote and institutionalize peace, stability, democracy and development as the common aspirations of the peoples of South Asia.

SCO Peace Mission Exercise

- The 2018 SCO Peace Mission Exercise is being held in Russia. As part of the SCO initiatives, the SCO Peace Mission Exercise is conducted biennially for the SCO member states
- The exercise will involve tactical level operations in an international counter insurgency or counter-terrorism environment under the SCO Charter.
- At least 3,000 soldiers from China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, India and Pakistan are participating in the drill.

What is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)?

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is a Eurasian political, economic, and military organisation which was founded in Shanghai by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- The SCO's objectives are centred around cooperation between member nations on security-related concerns, military cooperation, intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism. It is mainly aimed at military cooperation between the members and involves intelligence-sharing, counter-terrorism operations in Central Asia.
- The presence of China and India, the world's most populous countries, would make the SCO the organisation with the largest population coverage.

Who are the permanent members of the SCO?

- The SCO was founded by leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan in 2001. Uzbekistan joined the group later. India and Pakistan became members of SCO in 2016.

Importance of SCO to India:

- Cooperation on counter-terrorism is expected to emerge as a major point of India's exchange with SCO.
- India is expected to have a greater say in pushing for effective action in combating terrorism and on issues relating to security when it becomes a full member of the SCO, seen as a counterweight to NATO.
- India, one of the largest energy consuming countries in the world, is also likely to get greater access to major gas and oil exploration projects in Central Asia once it becomes part of the SCO.

Aeolus Satellite

- The European Space Agency (ESA) has successfully launched Aeolus satellite that will measure winds around the globe and help improve weather forecasting.
- The Earth Explorer Aeolus satellite was launched into polar orbit on a Vega rocket from Europe's Spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana.

About Aeolus Satellite:

- The Aeolus spacecraft will get its data by firing a powerful laser down into the atmosphere to trace the movement of air particles.
- The satellite should begin a programme of testing once it is safely at an altitude of 320km. Team members hope that routine forecasting should be incorporating the laser's information within the year.

How to measure the wind from space

- Aeolus will fire an ultraviolet laser through the atmosphere and measure the return signal using a large telescope
- The light beam gets scattered back off air molecules and small particles moving in the wind at different altitudes

- Meteorologists will adjust their numerical models to match the information gathered by the satellite, improving accuracy
- The biggest impacts are expected on medium-range forecasts - those that look at weather conditions a few days hence
- Aeolus is only a demonstration mission but it should blaze the trail for future operational weather satellites that use lasers

Why does this space mission matter?

- Currently, there are multiple ways to measure the wind, from whirling anemometers and weather balloons to the satellites that infer wind behaviour by tracking clouds in the sky. But these are all limited indications that tell us what is happening in particular places or at particular heights.
- Aeolus on the other hand will gather wind data across the entire Earth, from the ground to the stratosphere (30km).
- The biggest benefits should come to forecasts that look a few days ahead.
- Bad storms in Europe, for example, will sometimes have their origin in the tropics, and when meteorologists fail to anticipate their severity it's often because the initial-state conditions given to computer models contained inaccurate wind information.

How big an improvement will Aeolus bring?

- The tropics are the key region where the Sun dumps its energy into the Earth system. It is this solar input that triggers the large-scale patterns of circulation in the atmosphere.
- These patterns then propagate both north and south and influence the variability at the mid-latitudes, and, in particular for medium-range forecasts, this influence is very important.
- If we don't get the tropics right in the initial state for the forecasting, we can't then get the mid-latitudes right in the medium range."
- Simulations of the forthcoming data suggest Aeolus's impact will be like doubling the number of weather balloons available to meteorologists.
- Forecast quality is anticipated to increase by 2-4% outside of the tropics and by up to 15% in the tropics themselves.

Cheetah reintroduction project

- The Madhya Pradesh forest department has written to the National Tiger Conservation Authority to revive the plan to reintroduce cheetahs in the State's Nauradehi sanctuary.
- The ambitious project, conceived in 2009, had hit a roadblock for want of funds.
- The country's last spotted feline died in Chhattisgarh in 1947. Later, the cheetah — which is the fastest land animal — was declared extinct in India in 1952.
- The M.P. forest department would need finances from the Centre for the project, adding that the NTCA, a statutory body under the Union Environment Ministry, had committed ₹50 crore to the State for it in 2011.

About Cheetah reintroduction programme in India:

- The Wildlife Institute of India at Dehradun had prepared a ₹260-crore cheetah re-introduction project six years ago.
- It was estimated that an amount of ₹25 crore to ₹30 crore would be needed to build an enclosure in an area of 150 sq km for the cheetahs in Nauradehi.
- The proposal was to put the felines in the enclosure with huge boundary walls before being released in the wild.
- Nauradehi was found to be the most suitable area for the cheetahs as its forests are not very dense to restrict the fast movement of the spotted cat. Besides, the prey base for cheetahs is also in abundance at the sanctuary.
- According to the earlier action plan, around 20 cheetahs were to be translocated to Nauradehi from Namibia in Africa. The Namibia Cheetah Conservation Fund had then showed its willingness to donate the felines to India. However, the State was not ready to finance the plan contending that it was the Centre's project.

Analysis:

- The reasons for extinction can all be traced to man's interference. Problems like human-wildlife conflict, loss of habitat and loss of prey, and illegal trafficking, have decimated their numbers.
- The advent of climate change and growing human populations have only made these problems worse. With less available land for wildlife, species that require vast home range like the cheetah are placed in competition with other animals and humans, all fighting over less space.
- The reintroduction of cheetahs will help restore India's open forests and grassland ecosystems, which have been suffering. Having cheetahs will result in greater biodiversity, and biodiversity is the hallmark of healthy ecosystems. India is also home to the world's largest free-roaming populations of livestock. Bringing back the cheetah will focus attention on pastoralism, and in doing so, help restore India's natural heritage.