

Abhimanu

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NATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued guidelines prepaid instruments (PPI)

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued guidelines for interoperability among prepaid instruments (PPI) such as e-wallets. Inter-operability is technical compatibility that enables payment system to be used in conjunction with other payment systems.

Important highlights of guidelines:

- The guidelines are aimed at promoting money transfer between e-wallets and digital transactions. They also elaborate requirements for achieving interoperability for mobile wallets, cards and norms for customer protection and grievance redressal.
- The interoperability will be achieved in phased manner i.e. initially inter-operability of PPIs issued in form of wallets through UPI, and later between wallets and bank accounts through UPI, and interoperability for PPIs issued in form of cards through card networks.
- The interoperability between mobile wallets and between bank accounts and e-wallets will be enabled through Unified Payments Interface (UPI) system. It will be facilitated to all KYC-compliant PPI accounts and entire acceptance infrastructure.
- In case where PPIs are issued in form of cards, then cards will be affiliated to authorised card networks. PPI issuers must have board approved policy for achieving PPI inter-operability. This will allow PPI issuers, system providers and system participants in different systems to undertake, clear and settle payment transactions across systems without participating in multiple systems. Card networks are also allowed to onboard PPI issuers to join their network. Non-bank PPI issuers are permitted to participate as members/associate members of authorised card networks.

Analysis:

- UPI is a payments system launched by the National Payments Corporation of India in August 2016. It facilitates instant fund transfer between two bank accounts on the mobile platform, without having to provide any detail of the beneficiary's bank account. KYC is a process through which financial institutions verify information about customers.
- The interoperability of PPIs will allow transfer from one wallet to another through UPI. It will also allow transfer from wallets to bank also through UPI. Moreover, wallet companies can now issue cards and for this they don't need to partner with banks for UPI and card issuance. It will thus boost digital payments, improve financial penetration in long term.

India's first Bitcoin ATM kiosk set up in Bengaluru

- Unocoin Technologies Private Ltd has set up India's first ATM kiosk to trade in cryptocurrencies in Bengaluru.
- The automated teller machine, which has been installed at Kemp Fort Mall on Old Airport of Bengaluru, is the first-of-its-kind in the country.
- It will have both a trading and exchange platform, which will allow verified customers to use the device. It is expected to start operations soon.

Process:

- The kiosk is accessible only to the registered customers of Unocoin. Customers will be able to buy or sell up to 10 Bitcoins a day. However, all transactions will have to be made in Indian rupees only, after which they can be exchanged into a currency of the consumer's choice.
- The customers would need to register through their mobile number and enter a password. A verification process would be initiated where details such as PAN number, phone number, address and bank details will have to be furnished. Unocoin also uses an elaborate procedure for both deposits and withdrawals, with the withdrawals requiring a prior request and a 12-digit OTP.

About Bitcoins:

- It is a type of digital currency in which encryption techniques are used to regulate the generation of units of currency and verify the transfer of funds, operating independently of a central bank.
- or in other words, Bit coin is a form of digital currency, created and held electronically. No one controls it. Bit coins aren't printed, like dollars or euros – they're produced by people, and increasingly businesses, running computers all around the world, using software.
- Bit coin's most important characteristic that makes it different from conventional money, is that it is decentralized. No single institution controls the bitcoin network. This puts some people at ease, because it means that a large bank can't control their money.
- A software developer called Satoshi Nakamoto proposed bit coin.
- The idea was to produce a currency independent of any central authority, transferable electronically, more or less instantly, with very low transaction fees.

NATIONAL POLITY

Road safety programme

- The Central government has launched a road safety programme in a public-private-partnership (PPP) model in collaboration with Diageo India and the Institute of Road Traffic Education (IRTE).
- The initiative aims to bring a formal and structured training program for young, first-time drivers as they apply for a learner's license
- The Youth Road Safety Learners Licence programme is a step toward addressing this grave issue by improving road safety awareness amongst young adults by inculcating behavioural change and creating awareness about responsible driving habits. The programme is an immersive and interactive module led by senior faculty members of IRTE covering varied aspects of responsible driving including defensive driving, ill effects of driving under the influence of alcohol, speeding and wearing of helmets spread over two days."
- It is first-of-its-kind training programme in the country. It attempts to bring formal and structured training program for young, first-time drivers as they apply for learner's license. Its long-term objective is at improving road safety awareness amongst young adults by inculcating behavioural change and creating awareness about responsible driving habits.
- This programme will help Government to achieve its target of reducing road accidents by 50% by 2020. It will help to main-stream road safety in formal education system. The programme has immersive and interactive module led by senior faculty members of IRTE covering varied aspects of responsible driving including defensive driving, ill effects of driving under influence of alcohol, speeding and wearing of helmets spread over two days..

Analysis:

- Most of the world's fatalities happen in lower and middle-income countries. While collectively accounting for 82 per cent of the world's population, the number of road deaths in these countries is disproportionate to the levels of motorisation. The WHO estimates that these countries account for only 54 per cent of the world's registered vehicles.
- The biggest reason for the high rate of road fatalities is attributed to the blend of rapid motorisation, inadequate infrastructure and ineffective legislation and enforcement.
- WHO identifies some key areas of concern, this includes — laws on key behavioural risk factors which do not meet the best practices in most countries, speed management being notably poor, vehicles that are being sold do not meet safety standards and roads being built do not account for the needs of the most vulnerable road users (pedestrians, cyclists, etc.).
- The only area where India's laws meet the global standards is that pertaining to seat belts. Fellow BRICS members fare much better with Brazil meeting standards for drink driving, helmets, seat belts and child restraints, China meeting drink driving and seat belt standards and Russia having good legislation on helmets, seat belts and child restraints. Interestingly, even the United States does not meet the WHO's norms in terms of road safety legislation.
- The reason that India fails to meet WHO standards is because existing drinking laws do not differentiate between limits for the general population and young drivers and helmet laws which are set out in the Motor Vehicles Act 1988 do not specify the need for these helmets to be fastened. Additionally, Indian law does not mention child restraints.

Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)

- Central Warehouse of Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana has been set up at Bilaspur, Gurugram. It has been setup by the Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI).
- The hi-tech Central Warehouse would facilitate seamless distribution of Jan Aushadhi generic medicines to all PMBJP Kendra functional across the country.

About PMBJP:

- Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana' is a campaign launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Govt. Of India, to provide quality medicines at affordable prices to the masses through special kendra's known as Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra.
- Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra (PMBJK) has been set up to provide generic drugs, which are available at lesser prices but are equivalent in quality and efficacy as expensive branded drugs.

Objectives

- The objective of the scheme includes making quality medicines available at affordable prices for all, particularly the poor and disadvantaged, through exclusive outlets "Jan Aushadhi Medical Store", so as to reduce out of pocket expenses in healthcare.
- It also includes bringing down the healthcare budget of every citizen of India through providing Quality generic Medicines at Affordable Prices.

Mission

- Create awareness among public regarding generic medicines.
- Create demand for generic medicines through medical practioners.
- Create awareness through education and awareness program that high price need not be synonymous with high quality.
- Provide all the commonly used generic medicines covering all the therapeutic groups.
- Provide all the related health care products too under the scheme.

UP Cabinet approves changing name of Allahabad to 'Prayagraj'

- The Uttar Pradesh Cabinet has approved the proposal of the state government to rename the city of 'Allahabad' as 'Prayagraj'. The decision has been vehemently opposed by the opposition parties.

Analysis:

- Allahabad is located at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical, unseen Saraswati.
- Mughal emperor Akbar is credited with the building of the modern Allahabad city in the 16th century, when he constructed a fort that overlooked the sangam, which then had immense strategic value.
- It is this Mughal connection that seems to be driving the revanchists who wants to wipe out all references to Mughal history.
- Akbar is said to have chosen the name Ilahabad for the city to press his syncretic religious idea espoused in the Din-i Ilahi; Ilahabad is the city of gods, its pluralistic heritage includes not just Hindu and Islamic traditions but also a Christian lineage derived from its colonial inheritance.
- According to state government, Prayag is where Lord Brahma performed the first yagna. The confluence of two rivers is a 'prayag', and in Allahabad three rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati meet. Hence, it is the king of 'prayags'.

Two time zones for India

- Scientists at the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research's National Physical Laboratory (CSIR-NPL), which maintains Indian Standard Time, have published a research article describing the necessity of two time zones, with the new one an hour ahead of the existing time zone.

Suggestions of research paper:

- The research paper proposes to call the two time zones IST-I (UTC + 5.30 h) and IST-II (UTC + 6.30 h). The proposed line of demarcation is at 89°52'E, the narrow border between Assam and West Bengal.
- States west of the line would continue to follow IST (to be called IST-I). States east of the line — Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Andaman & Nicobar Islands — would follow IST-II.

Analysis:

- If lines of longitude are drawn exactly a degree apart, they will divide the Earth into 360 zones. Because the Earth spins 360° in 24 hours, a longitudinal distance of 15° represents a time separation of 1 hour, and 1° represents 4 minutes.
- Theoretically, the time zone followed by any place should relate to its longitudinal distance from any other place. Political boundaries, however, mean that time zones are often demarcated by bent lines rather than straight lines of longitude. This is "legal time", as defined by a country's law.
- The geographic "zero line" runs through Greenwich, London. It identifies GMT, now known as Universal Coordinated Time (UTC), which is maintained by the Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM) in France.
- Indian Standard Time, maintained by CSIR-NPL, is based on a line of longitude that runs through Mirzapur in UP. At 82°33'E, the line is 82.5° east of Greenwich, or 5.5 hours (5 hours 30 minutes) ahead of UCT. While India follows one IST, the United States follows several time zones across its breadth.
- India extends from 68°7'E to 97°25'E, with the spread of 29° representing almost two hours from the geographic perspective. This has led to the argument that early sunrise in the easternmost parts — the Northeast — causes the loss of many daylight hours by the time offices or educational institutions open, and that early sunset, for its part, leads to higher consumption of electricity.
- The researchers estimated energy savings at 20 million kWh a year based on a formula explained in the article. They also analysed the importance of synchronising office hours — as well as biological activities — to sunrise and sunset timings.

Supreme Court on vacancies in lower courts

- Supreme court has sought the response of the state governments and the high court by describing existence of 5,133 vacancies unacceptable.
- There is also a mismatch in the number of vacancies, the number of posts for which recruitment process is underway and those still pending.
- The court also sought information whether “infrastructure and manpower available in the different states is adequate if all the posts that are borne in the cadre are to be filled up.

Analysis:

- The backlog results in the dilution of the right to access timely justice and an erosion of the rule of law. This eventually affects peoples' faith in the judicial system. Delay will result in additional piling up of the cases which will further enlarge the cost of maintenance.
- In absence of immediate and quick remedy, litigants in order to avoid mental and monetary harassment approach the informal courts instead of the courts established by law. This has allowed mushrooming of khap panchayats.
- Lack of Standardisation in data classification and poor management systems can misplace the records which can prove to be a gross miscarriage of justice.
- In order to solve this problem, government need to improve the infrastructure of judicial system and increase the human resources at the disposal of judiciary. Information technology can be used to regularise the data of all the pending cases.
- The total strength of judges should be increased along with increase in retiring age of Supreme court judges.
- Also, setting up of special courts like property courts, commercial courts and e-courts for speedy disposal of cases;
- The Centre and the judiciary should collaborate on finding practical solutions like appointing more judges based on periodic needs assessments, increasing their retirement age, and deploying judicial resources efficiently.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit

- The 12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit was held in Brussels, Belgium.
- The theme of summit was ‘Global Partners for Global Challenges’. It was chaired by European Council President Donald Tusk.
- The summit was attended by heads of state of 51 European and Asian countries, representatives of European Union and Secretary General of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). India was represented by Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu.
- This edition of summit has prioritised issues related to trade and investment, connectivity, sustainable development, climate change, terrorism, migration, maritime security and cyberspace.

About ASEM:

- ASEM was officially established in March 1996 at the first summit in Bangkok, Thailand.

- Currently ASEM comprises 53 members, including 31 European representatives (28 EU members, Norway, Switzerland and the European Commission) and 22 Asian representatives (10 ASEAN members, Australia, Bangladesh, China, India, Japan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Russia, South Korea and the ASEAN Secretariat).
- Russia joined ASEM at the 8th summit in October 2010 in Brussels.
- ASEM is an open and informal interregional dialogue for countries to cooperate in politics and security, financial, economic, social and cultural affairs.
- The biennial meetings of the heads of state and government are held alternately in Asian and European countries.
- ASEM represents around 62.3% of the world's population, 57.2% of the global GDP and almost 60% of the world's trade. Throughout its evolution, ASEM has maintained a consistent edge as a forum for political dialogue between member countries with diverse and complementing capacities. The 2nd ASEM expansion in 2006 saw India join the Forum w.e.f. 1 January 2007.
- ASEM Summit Level meetings are held biennially. 11 ASEM Summits have been held so far. India's first Summit level participation was at the 7th Summit held in Beijing in 2008.
- The 8th ASEM Summit was held in Brussels on 4-5 October 2010 where Vice President, Shri Hamid Ansari led the Indian delegation.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on Pakistan

- After an on-site assessment of the steps taken by Pakistan to curb terror financing and money laundering, a visiting Financial Action Task Force (FATF) team has finalised a report with 40 recommendations for de-listing Islamabad from its grey list from September next year.
- Currently placed on the FATF's "grey list", Pakistan has been scrambling in recent months to avoid being added to a list of countries deemed non-compliant with anti-money laundering and terrorist financing regulations by the Paris-based FATF, a measure that officials fear could further hurt its economy.

About FATF:

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 by the Ministers of its Member jurisdictions. The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system. The FATF is therefore a "policy-making body" which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in these areas.
- The FATF has developed a series of Recommendations that are recognised as the international standard for combating of money laundering and the financing of terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. They form the basis for a co-ordinated response to these threats to the integrity of the financial system and help ensure a level playing field. First issued in 1990, the FATF Recommendations were revised in 1996, 2001, 2003 and most recently in 2012 to ensure that they remain up to date and relevant, and they are intended to be of universal application.
- The FATF monitors the progress of its members in implementing necessary measures, reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures, and promotes the adoption and implementation of appropriate measures globally. In collaboration with other international stakeholders, the FATF works to identify national-level vulnerabilities with the aim of protecting the international financial system from misuse.
- The FATF's decision making body, the FATF Plenary, meets three times per year.

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

- U.S. President has announced that he would "terminate" the INF Treaty in response to a long-running dispute over Russian noncompliance with the treaty.

About the Intermediate- Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty:

- The treaty resolved a crisis of the 1980s when the Soviet Union deployed a missile in Europe called the SS-20, capable of carrying three nuclear warheads. The United States responded with cruise and Pershing II missiles.
- By the time President Reagan and Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the Soviet leader at the time, cut the deal to ban the weapons in 1987, the intermediate-range missiles had come to be seen as a hair trigger for nuclear war because of their short flight times — as little as 10 minutes.
- This was particularly troubling to the Soviet command, which could be wiped out before it could order a retaliatory attack. Partly in response to this shortcoming, Moscow developed a “dead hand” trigger to fire its arsenal at the United States without an order from the leadership, based on computers interpreting radiation and seismic sensors.
- In 2014, during the Ukraine crisis, a government newspaper published an article saying this system using “artificial intelligence” to order nuclear war was still operative, though not switched on in peacetime.
- The treaty prohibited land-based cruise or ballistic missiles with ranges between 311 miles and 3,420 miles. It did not cover air- or sea-launched weapons, such as the American Tomahawk and Russian Kalibr cruise missiles that are fired from ships, submarines or airplanes, and easily fly similar distances.

Analysis:

- Withdrawal is likely to be controversial with U.S. allies in NATO, further splitting the alliance at a difficult time for transatlantic relations. Many Western European NATO states favor retaining the INF, in conjunction with previous U.S. policy designed to push Moscow back into compliance. This raises concerns that divisions within NATO may worsen when the United States officially withdraws from the INF.
- Withdrawal will probably not lead to a new INF deal. Given its heavy investment in intermediate-range systems, China will not take up Trump’s offer of talks with the United States and Russia. Moscow seems to be in no mood for negotiations.
- The INF Treaty’s demise will undercut New START by reopening questions on the relationship between intermediate and strategic systems that have been resolved for 30 years by the elimination of ground-based, intermediate-range missiles.

Government-appointed panel suggests UN model law for Cross-Border Insolvency

- The Insolvency Law Committee (ILC) submitted its 2nd Report on Cross Border Insolvency to Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs.
- The ILC was constituted by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to recommend amendments to Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code of India, 2016.
- The ILC recommended the adoption of the UNCITRAL Model Law of Cross Border Insolvency, 1997 as it provides for a comprehensive framework to deal with cross border insolvency issues. The Committee also recommended a few steps to ensure that there is no inconsistency between the domestic insolvency framework and the proposed Cross Border Insolvency Framework.

About UNCITRAL Model Law of Cross Border Insolvency:

The Model Law focuses on four elements identified as key to the conduct of cross-border insolvency cases: access, recognition, relief (assistance) and cooperation.

- Access: These provisions give representatives of foreign insolvency proceedings and creditors a right of access to the courts of an enacting State to seek assistance and authorize representatives of local proceedings being conducted in the enacting State to seek assistance elsewhere.
- Recognition: One of the key objectives of the Model Law is to establish simplified procedures for recognition of qualifying foreign proceedings in order to avoid time-consuming legalization or other processes that often apply and to provide certainty with respect to the decision to recognize.

- Relief: A basic principle of the Model Law is that the relief considered necessary for the orderly and fair conduct of cross-border insolvencies should be available to assist foreign proceedings.
- Cooperation and coordination: These provisions address cooperation among the courts of States where the debtor's assets are located and coordination of concurrent proceedings concerning that debtor.

Analysis:

- As the size of the Indian economy grows, business and trade have adopted an increasingly international character. Creditors and corporates frequently transact business in more than one jurisdiction. Foreign banks and creditors finance Indian companies and Indian banks have foreign exposure. Also, as part of its Ease of Doing Business and Make in India policies, India seeks to attract foreign companies to set up manufacturing facilities in India.
- Besides, global experience demonstrates that cross-border investment decisions and their outcomes, are considerably affected by the insolvency laws in force in a country. Towards this end, even though the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 has resulted in significant improvement in India's insolvency regime, there is a need to include cross-border insolvency in the Code to provide a comprehensive insolvency framework.
- Inclusion of cross-border insolvency framework will further enhance ease of doing business, provide a mechanism of cooperation between India and other countries in the area of insolvency resolution, and protect creditors in the global scenario.
- Also, it will make India an attractive investment destination for foreign creditors given the increased predictability and certainty of the insolvency framework.

Controversy on Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016

- The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill is gaining momentum yet again as the Assam Government has refused the proposed rally of organisations from West Bengal in support of the Bill.

What is the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016?

- The Citizenship Amendment Bill was proposed in Lok Sabha on July 19, amending the Citizenship Act of 1955.
- If this Bill is passed in Parliament, illegal migrants from certain minority communities coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan will then be eligible for Indian citizenship.
- In short, illegal migrants belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian religious communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan would not be imprisoned or deported.
- Moreover, these citizens gain permanent citizenship after six years of residency in India instead of 11 years -- as mentioned in the Citizenship Act (1955).
- The registration of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders may get cancelled if they violate any law.

Analysis:

- The Bill makes illegal migrants eligible for citizenship on the basis of religion. This may violate Article 14 of the Constitution which guarantees right to equality.
- The Bill allows cancellation of OCI registration for violation of any law. This is a wide ground that may cover a range of violations, including minor offences (eg. parking in a no parking zone).

Bihar's 'Shahi Litchi' Gets Geographical Indication Tag

- After Katrani rice, Jardalu mango and Magahi paan (betel vine), Bihar's Shahi litchi has got the Geographical Indication (GI) tag and has become an exclusive brand in the national and international market.

About Shahi litchi:

- The famous Shahi litchi, which is famous for its sweet, juicy, unique flavour and aroma, is mostly grown in Muzaffarpur and neighbouring districts including East Champaran, Vaishali, Samastipur and Begusarai.
- It has officially become an exclusive brand with the GI tag. We were informed about this positive development on Tuesday. It was a much awaited news for Bihar's Shahi litchi.
- The GI registration was done in the name of Litchi Growers Association of Bihar, which had applied for the tag.
- The GI tag for the fruit will help and benefit thousands of litchi growers who will gain access to more markets and get better price in the country and abroad.
- Bihar produces 40 per cent of the litchi grown in the country on 38 per cent of the area.

About Geographical indicators:

- GI(Geographical Indications) are signs used on goods that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that place of origin.
- Agricultural products typically have qualities that derive from their place of production and are influenced by specific local factors, such as climate and soil. They may also highlight specific qualities of a product, which are due to human factors that can be found in the place of origin of the products, such as specific manufacturing skills and traditions.
- A geographical indication points to a specific place or region of production that determines the characteristic qualities of the product that originates therein. It is important that the product derives its qualities and reputation from that place.
- Place of origin may be a village or town, a region or a country. It is an exclusive right given to a particular community hence the benefits of its registration are shared by the all members of the community.
- Keeping in view the large diversity of traditional products spread all over the country, the registration under GI will be very important in future growth of the tribes / communities / skilled artisans associated in developing such products.

Mission to mercury

- European Space Agency (ESA) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) successfully sent two probes on a joint mission to Mercury, the closest planet to the Sun.
- An Ariane 5 rocket, launched from French Guyana, lifted an unmanned spacecraft, BepiColombo, which is carrying the two probes. The spacecraft separated and went into orbit for the 7-year trip to Mercury.

About mission:

- It is the first European mission to Mercury, and the first to send two spacecraft to make complementary measurements of the planet and its environment at the same time.
- The orbiters are ESA's Mercury Planetary Orbiter (MPO) and JAXA's Mercury Magnetospheric Orbiter (MMO, or 'Mio').
- The ESA-built Mercury Transfer Module (MTM) will carry the orbiters to Mercury using a combination of solar electric propulsion and gravity assist flybys, with one flyby of Earth, two at Venus, and six at Mercury, before entering orbit at Mercury in late 2025.

- The two orbiters will be able to operate some of their instruments during the cruise phase, to try and collect data at Venus.
- Moreover, some of the instruments designed to study Mercury in a particular way can be used in a completely different way at Venus, which has a thicker atmosphere.
- A few months before reaching Mercury, the transfer module will be jettisoned, leaving the two science orbiters to be captured by Mercury's gravity. MPO will separate and descend to its own orbit. Together the orbiters will make measurements (see graphic).
- The Sun's enormous gravity makes it difficult to place a spacecraft into a stable orbit around Mercury. The mission will have to ensure a controlled fall. The spacecraft has been specially designed for extreme temperatures. —European Science Agency

Green Good Deed

- Environment Ministry has launched Harit Diwali, Swasth Diwali campaign. This campaign was initiated in 2017-18 wherein large number of school children participated and took pledge to minimize bursting of crackers.
- The Ministry has initiated the campaign on the similar lines but extended to a pan-India.
- The Harit Diwali-Swasth Diwali campaign is now merged with "Green Good Deed" movement that has been initiated as a social mobilization for conservation and protection of environment. The Ministry is encouraging all schools and colleges to be part of this campaign.
- The HARit Diwali – Swasth Diwali campaign was initiated in 2017-18 to enlighten children about harmful fire crackers and motivate them to celebrate Diwali in environment-friendly manner and not to buy fire crackers, instead buy gift, food items, or sweets for poor and underprivileged children living in their locality.

Analysis:

- Air pollution is serious health issue in the country especially in northern parts during winter seasons.
- The air pollution in northern region is mainly due to dust, burning of kharif crop residue on large scale in certain states, burning of garbage, construction activities and prevailing climatic conditions.
- This air pollution has serious impacts on health of children aged people and people suffering from respiratory ailments.
- Diwali festival also falls during same period and as matter of traditional practice people have been celebrating this festival by bursting crackers.
- Crackers contains combustible chemicals that include potassium chlorate powdered magnesium, aluminum, salts of barium, copper, sodium, lithium, strontium etc. and emits hazardous smoke of these chemicals along with sound.
- This smoke and sound has health impacts on children, aged people and also animal and birds.
- Apart from hazardous smoke, large amount of waste is also generated after bursting of crackers. Thus, keeping in view the above detrimental effects and and importance of the festival, MoEFCC had initiated a Harit–Diwali campaign.

International Conference on Status and Protection of Coral Reefs (STAPCOR – 2018)

- The International Conference on Status and Protection of Coral Reefs (STAPCOR – 2018) is being held at Bangaram coral Island of Territory of Lakshadweep.
- It was jointly organized by Department of Environment and Forest, Union Territory of Lakshadweep Administration with the technical support of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) and in association with Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Environmental Information System (ENVIS) in consonance with declaration of year 2018 as 3rd decadal International year of Reefs.

About STAPOR:

Current Affairs

- The effect of climate change and global warming along with El-Nino on the corals has led to heavy bleaching internationally during the year 1998. This led to the foundation of STAPCOR with a decision to have an international conference in every 10 years to review the status and progress of coral reefs all over the world.

Analysis:

- Coral reefs provide protection and shelter for many species of fish and sea life. From the smallest shrimp to the largest predator, sea creatures find both food and protection on coral reefs. Without these important habitats in which to thrive, fish and sea life will cease to exist.
- Coral reefs slow down the flow of water. And interestingly coral reefs are most likely to have formed where an ocean's currents and waves are the most powerful. Reefs in places such as the Florida Keys help prevent beach erosion. Without coral reefs many of the world's most fragile, coastal ecosystems would be unable to thrive.
- Reefs can not exist in murky or polluted waters. Many individual corals and sponges consume particles found in the ocean. In turn, this enhances the clarity and quality of the ocean's waters. Clean and clear water makes our beaches more beautiful and also allows coral reefs to continue to thrive.
- Coral's limestone shell is formed by the ocean's processing of carbon dioxide. Without coral the amount of carbon dioxide in the ocean rises, which in turn, affects all living things on Earth.
- As long as there have been humans, fish have been consumed as a source of protein. The abundance of edible sea life in healthy coral reefs, therefore make them important to human nutrition. Fisheries both large and small depend the coral reef either directly or indirectly, as a source of their livelihood.
- Coral reefs are vital to the tourism industries, creating and protecting many of the world's most beautiful beaches. Without clear waters and opportunities for recreational exploring through diving and snorkeling, tourist dependent economies collapse.