

Abhimanu

Weekly current affairs Series

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Abhimanu's IAS Study Group
Chandigarh

NATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

NITI Aayog constitutes Himalayan State Regional Council

- NITI Aayog has constituted the 'Himalayan State Regional Council' to ensure sustainable development of the Indian Himalayan region.
- The Council has been constituted to review and implement identified action points based on the Reports of five Working Groups, which were established along thematic areas to prepare a roadmap for action.
- Recognizing the uniqueness of the Himalayas and the challenges for sustainable development, Five Working Groups were constituted by NITI Aayog on June 2, 2017.
- The Himalayan States Regional Council will be the nodal agency for the Sustainable development in the Himalayan Region which consists of the twelve States namely Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, two districts of Assam namely Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong and Darjeeling and Kalimpong in West Bengal.
- These Working Groups were tasked with preparing a roadmap for action across five thematic areas namely:
 - Inventory and Revival of Springs in Himalayas for Water Security,
 - Sustainable Tourism in Indian Himalayan Region,
 - Shifting Cultivation: Towards Transformation Approach,
 - Strengthening Skill & Entrepreneurship (E&S) Landscape in Himalayas, and
 - Data/Information for Informed Decision Making.

Term of reference:

- It shall monitor the implementation of action points for Central Ministries, Institutions and 12 Himalayan State Governments in Indian Himalayan Region which include river basin development
- Regional cooperation, spring mapping and revival across Himalayas in phased manner for water security; develop, implement and monitor tourism sector standards as well as bring policy coherence, strengthen skill & entrepreneurship with focus on identified priority sectors, among other action points.

Kerala to rein in trans-fat in eatery foods

- The Health Department and the Food Safety wing are joining hands to launch an initiative to enforce dietary guidelines, involving the reduction of trans fatty acids (TFAs), salt and sugar in commercially available foods in the State.
- The initiative, with technical support from the World Bank, WHO and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), is being launched as unhealthy diet is pushing up metabolic syndrome and premature deaths due to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) among Keralites.

About Metabolic Syndrome in Kerala:

- Metabolic syndrome (MS) is a cluster of metabolic abnormalities — high blood pressure, high blood sugar, abdominal obesity, abnormal cholesterol or triglyceride levels — that occur together, raising risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

Metabolic Syndrome in Kerala:

- Prevalence of metabolic syndrome (MS) in Kerala between 24-33%, indicating that one in three or four persons — predominantly women — have this condition.
- Kerala is the high level of hypertriglyceridemia (elevated triglycerides in blood), at 45%, indicative of a dietary pattern high in fats and carbohydrates. We require serious interventions in dietary changes to reduce our burden of NCDs.
- TFAs have “a unique cardio metabolic imprint that is linked to insulin-resistance and metabolic-syndrome pathways” and that consumption of even small amounts of TFAs is associated with an increase in the incidence of coronary heart disease.
- The high content of industrial TFAs and salt in baked goods, fried chicken, or banana chips joints in the State is contributing to this epidemic of MS in Kerala. Enforcing the current regulation on the content of industrial TFAs in can bring in significant benefits

About Trans Fatty Acid:

- Some meat and dairy products contain small amounts of naturally occurring trans fat. But most trans fat is formed through an industrial process that adds hydrogen to vegetable oil, which causes the oil to become solid at room temperature.
- This partially hydrogenated oil is less likely to spoil, so foods made with it have a longer shelf life. Some restaurants use partially hydrogenated vegetable oil in their deep fryers, because it doesn't have to be changed as often as do other oils.
- WHO recommends that trans fat intake be limited to less than 1% of total energy intake and has called for the total elimination of TFAs in global food supply by 2023. FSSAI has proposed to limit TFA limit in foods to 2% and eliminate trans fats from foods by 2022.

NATIONAL POLITY

New fast track courts to be set up under Nirbhaya fund

- The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development has decided to use Nirbhaya Fund to set up 1,023 fast track courts to dispose off pending cases of rape of children and women.
- Recently, the Ministry of Law and Justice had proposed setting up over 1,000 'fast track special courts' across the country, as part of a new scheme to try cases related to rape of children and women.
- The project has a total financial implication of Rs 767.25 crore. In the first phase, 777 FTSCs may be set up in nine states, and in the second phase, 246 FTSCs will be set up.
- The second proposal is of procurement of forensic kits for sexual assault cases so that these kits are used in states and Union Territories through Training of Trainers (TOTs).

About Nirbhaya Fund:

- Nirbhaya Fund was announced in 2013 Union Budget to support initiatives by the government and NGOs working towards protecting the dignity and ensuring safety of women in India. The fund was started with a corpus of Rs 1,000 crore. The Fund is administered by Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) of the finance ministry.
- The Nirbhaya fund as of now has a total corpus of Rs 3,000 crore. Rs 1,000 crore each was allocated to the fund since its initiation in 2014-15 and 2015-16 in addition to its initial corpus of Rs 1,000 crore.

- Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal Ministry to appraise schemes under the Nirbhaya Fund.
- One Stop Centre which are are popularly known as Sakhi Centres. The scheme began to function across India from April 2015. The scheme aims to establish centres to facilitate women who are victims of violence. The Centres provide first aid, medical aid, police assistance, legal aid and counselling support. About 186 centres will be made operational by July, 2017.
- The Department of Telecommunication has allocated the number 181 for Women Helpline. As of now, Women Helplines are already operational in 18 States/UTs. These helpline numbers will link the One Stop Centres being established under the Nirbhaya Fund.
- Mahila Police Volunteers (MPVs) is envisaged to act as a link between police and community and help women in distress. Haryana has become the first state to start this scheme in December, 2016. Other States are expected to follow suit.

Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2018

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2018 for regulation and standardisation of education and services by allied and healthcare professionals.
- The Bill provides for setting up of an Allied and Healthcare Council of India and corresponding State Allied and Healthcare Councils which will play the role of a standard-setter and facilitator for professions of Allied and Healthcare.

Important highlights:

- Establishment of a Central and corresponding State Allied and Healthcare Councils; 15 major professional categories including 53 professions in Allied and Healthcare streams.
- The Bill provides for Structure, Constitution, Composition and Functions of the Central Council and State Councils, e.g. Framing policies and standards, Regulation of professional conduct, Creation and maintenance of live Registers, provisions for common entry and exit examinations, etc.
- The Central Council will comprise 47 members, of which 14 members shall be ex-officio representing diverse and related roles and functions and remaining 33 shall be non-ex-officio members who mainly represent the 15 professional categories.
- The State Councils are also envisioned to mirror the Central Council, comprising 7 ex-officio and 21 non-ex-officio members and Chairperson to be elected from amongst the non-ex-officio members.
- Professional Advisory Bodies under Central and State Councils will examine issues independently and provide recommendations relating to specific recognised categories.
- The Bill will also have an overriding effect on any other existing law for any of the covered professions.
- The State Council will undertake recognition of allied and healthcare institutions.
- Offences and Penalties clause have been included in the Bill to check mal-practices.
- The Bill also empowers the Central and State Governments to make rules.
- Central Govt. also has the power to issue directions to the Council, to make regulations and to add or amend the schedule.

Targets:

- An Interim Council will be constituted within 6 months of passing of the Act holding charge for a period of two years until the establishment of the Central Council.
- The Council at the Centre and the States are to be established as body corporate with a provision to receive funds from various sources.
- Councils will also be supported by Central and State Governments respectively through Grant-in-aid as needed. However, if the State Government expresses inability, the Central Government may release some grant for initial years to the State Council.

Analysis:

- In the current state of healthcare system, there exist many allied and healthcare professionals, who remain unidentified, unregulated and underutilised. Our system is highly focused on efforts towards strengthening limited categories of professionals such as doctors, nurses and frontline workers (like Accredited Social Health Activist or ASHAs, Auxiliary Nurse Midwife or ANMs). However, numerous others have been identified over the years, whose potential can be utilised to improve and increase the access to quality driven services in the rural and hard to reach areas.
- Allied and Healthcare Professionals (A&HPs) constitute an important element of the health human resource network, and the skilled and efficient Allied and Healthcare Professionals (A&HPs) can reduce the cost of care and dramatically improve the accessibility to quality driven healthcare services.
- Globally, Allied and Healthcare Professionals typically attend undergraduate degree programme of a minimum of three to four years to begin with and may attain up to PhD level qualification in their respective streams. However, most of Indian institutions offering such courses lack standardisation.
- Majority of the countries worldwide, have a statutory licensing or regulatory body that is authorised to license and certify the qualifications and competence of such professionals, particularly those involved in direct patient care (such as physiotherapist, nutritionist etc.) or those whose occupation impact patient care directly (such as lab technologists, dosimetrists etc.).
- Though such professionals have existed in the Indian healthcare system for many decades, a considerable gap in the allied and healthcare space is because of a lack of a comprehensive regulatory framework and absence of standards for education and training of A&HPs.
- The Bill thus seeks to establish a robust regulatory framework which will play the role of a standard-setter and regulator for Allied and Healthcare professions.

OBC sub-categorisation panel gets 4th extension

- The Cabinet has approved the extension of the term of Commission headed by G Rohini to examine the issue of Sub-categorization of Other Backward Classes in the Central List for six months beyond 30th November 2018 and till 31st May 2019.
- **Terms of references of the Commission are as follows:**
- To examine the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among the castes/ communities included in the broad category of OBCs, with reference to the OBCs included in the Central list.
- To work out the mechanism, criteria, norms and parameters, in a scientific approach, for sub-categorization within such OBCs.
- To take up the exercise of identifying the respective castes/communities/ sub-castes/ synonyms in the Central List of OBCs and classifying them into their respective sub-categories.

About Sub Categorisation

- Sub-categorisation will divide the OBCs into two groups: the more affluent ones and the less affluent ones.
- Currently, the more affluent OBC communities are better placed at taking advantage of the 27% reservation for OBCs in central government jobs and educational institutions.
- Dividing this 27% into two will mean that the less affluent OBC communities will be able to get somewhat more seats in jobs and colleges. It will also mean that the number of seats taken by the more affluent communities will reduce.

Analysis:

- Sub-categorisation of OBCs aims to ensure more equitable distribution of reservations in government jobs and educational institutions so that dominant groups among OBCs do not corner all benefits. The exercise will involve sub-categorisation of 5,000 castes in central OBC list.
- The Supreme Court in Indra Sawhney and others vs. Union of India case (1992) had observed that there is no constitutional or legal bar on states for categorizing OBCs as backward or more backward.
- It had also observed that it is not impermissible in law if state chooses to do sub-categorization. So far, 9 states/UTs viz. Karnataka, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Puducherry, Telangana, West Bengal, Bihar,

Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have carried out sub-categorization of OBCs. So far there was no sub-categorisation in central list of OBCs.

- The present move by the government to rethink OBC quota could potentially be used to ensure that we have better data on caste-based disadvantages for future discourse.

Witness protection scheme

- The Supreme Court said that it would direct all the states to implement the draft witness protection scheme framed by the Centre in consultation with the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).
- In November 2017, the Supreme Court had asked the Centre as to why a draft scheme cannot be formulated for witness protection in the country when specific provisions in this regard were already there in the National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act.
- In April 2018, the Centre had informed the top court that it had framed a draft witness protection scheme and it was circulated among the states and Union Territories administration for comments.

Objective of Witness Protection Scheme 2018:

- To enable a witness to give testimony in a judicial setting or to cooperate with law enforcement and investigations without fear of intimidation or reprisal.
- To ensure that the investigation, prosecution and trial of criminal offences is not prejudiced because witnesses are intimidated or frightened to give evidence without protection from violent or other criminal recrimination.
- To promote law enforcement by facilitating the protection of persons who are involved directly or indirectly in providing assistance to criminal law enforcement agencies and the overall administration of Justice.
- To give witnesses the confidence to come forward to assist law enforcement and Judicial Authorities with full assurance of safety.
- To identify a series of measures that may be adopted to safeguard witnesses and their family members from intimidation and threats against their lives, reputation and property.

Analysis:

- In previous judgement, the Supreme Court held that it is the salutary duty of every witness who has the knowledge of the commission of the crime, to assist the State in giving evidence.
- If the witnesses get threatened or are forced to give false evidence, it would not result in a fair trial.
- Due to witnesses turning hostile, the conviction rate in murder and rape in India is just around 10 to 12 per cent.
- Supreme Court advised so because organised crime has seen a huge jump in recent years and is becoming stronger and more diverse.
- In the investigation and prosecution of crime, particularly the more serious and complex forms of organised crime, it is essential that witnesses, the cornerstones for successful investigation and prosecution, have trust in the criminal justice system.
- Witnesses need to have the confidence to come forward to assist law enforcement and prosecutorial authorities. They need to be assured that they will receive support and protection from intimidation and the harm that criminal groups may seek to inflict upon them in attempts to discourage or punish them from cooperating.

President rule may be imposed in Jammu and Kashmir

- If the state assembly is not dissolved in two months, Jammu and Kashmir may come under President's rule in January.

- Since J&K has a separate Constitution, Governor's rule is imposed under Section 92 for six months after an approval by the President. In case the Assembly is not dissolved within six months, President's rule under Article 356 is extended to the State. Governor's rule expires in the State on January 19.

About Governor rule in Jammu and Kashmir:

- The imposition of governor's rule in J&K is slightly different than that in other states. In other states, the president's rule is imposed under the Article 356 of Constitution of India. In J&K, governor's rule is mentioned under Article 370 section 92 – 'Provisions in case of failure of constitutional machinery in the State.'

Provisions for Governor's rule and the dispensation of duties under Article 370 section 92:

- If at any time, the *Governor is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the Government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution, the *Governor may by Proclamation- (a) assume to himself all or any of the functions of the Government of the State and all or any of the powers vested in or exercisable by anybody or authority in the State; (b) make such incidental and consequential provisions as appear to the Governor to be necessary or desirable for giving effect to the objects of the Proclamation, including provisions for suspending in whole or in part the operation of any provision of this Constitution relating to anybody or authority in the State:
- Provided that nothing in this section shall authorise the *Governor to assume to himself any of the powers vested in or exercisable by the High Court or to suspend in whole or in part the operation of any provision of this Constitution relating to the High Court.
- Any such Proclamation may be revoked or varied by a subsequent Proclamation.
- Any such Proclamation whether varied under subsection (2) or not, shall except where it is a Proclamation revoking a previous Proclamation, cease to operate on the expiration of six months from the date on which it was first issued.
- If the Government or by a Proclamation under his section assumes, to himself any, of the powers of the Legislature to make his laws, any law made by him in the exercise of that power shall, subject to, the terms there of continue to have effect until two years have elapsed from the date on which the proclamation ceases to have effect, unless sooner

No Proclamation under this section shall, except where it is a Proclamation revoking a previous Proclamation, be laid before each House of the Legislature as soon as it is convened.

Kartarpur Corridor

- India has announced its decision to build the Kartarpur corridor, a day before the celebrations of Guru Nanak's birth anniversary.
- The approval for the corridor came through in the cabinet meeting where detailed discussions took place to plan celebrations in the country and Indian missions abroad to celebrate the 550th birth anniversary of the Sikh guru.

About Gurudwara:

- The Kartarpur Sahib gurudwara is a historic Sikh pilgrimage, 120 km from Lahore, in Pakistan's Punjab province.
- The present-day gurudwara was built at the site where Guru Nanak died on September 22, 1539. It was at this place that Guru Nanak settled and assembled members of the Sikh community after his missionary visits.
- The gurudwara is visible from the Indian side of the border. Pakistani authorities often cut elephant grass, which otherwise obstruct view from India.

Analysis:

- Pilgrimages between India and Pakistan are governed by the 1974 Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines, which includes a list of shrines in Pakistan and India open for visitors from the other country, and for which visas are required.
- The Kartarpur Corridor, which will provide visa-free access from India to the shrine located 2 km inside Pakistan in Narowal when it becomes ready on both sides within a few months, may need a separate treaty.

- For now, it is too early to say if the Kartarpur Corridor will lead to an all-round thaw in relations for the two countries to take up other issues through a dialogue, especially in an election year for India. But some ripples from the move are likely to be felt, especially by the people on both sides of Punjab, and may lead to the demand for other people-to-people initiatives.
- This corridor was first proposed in 1999 when the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took a bus ride to Lahore. The Sikhs had been demanding that the two countries should revoke restrictions on movement of pilgrims to the holy shrine.
- Currently, there is no restriction on an Indian pilgrim going to Pakistan on a regular visa. So, anyone can visit Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib without requiring any special permission from Pakistani authorities.
- Sikh jathas are known to visit Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib on four occasions every year -- Guru Nanak's birth anniversary, Baisakhi, Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom day and Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death anniversary.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

- The 2018 APEC summit was held recently held in Papua New Guinea. It ended with no joint statement from the leaders – a first in APEC history – and with the fight for dominance in the Pacific region between Australia, the US and Japan on one side and China on the other, coming out into the open.

About APEC:

- The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a regional economic forum established in 1989 to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific. APEC has 21 members.
- APEC's 21 member economies are Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; People's Republic of China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; The Philippines; The Russian Federation; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; United States of America; Viet Nam.
- It aims to create greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and secure growth and by accelerating regional economic integration.
- Its main functions are economy, skill training, climate change, disaster and terrorism specific.

Analysis:

- APEC Members account for approximately 40% of the world's population, approximately 54% of the world's gross domestic product and about 44% of world trade.
- In APEC, all economies have an equal say and decision-making is reached by consensus. There are no binding commitments or treaty obligations. Commitments are undertaken on a voluntary basis and capacity building projects help members implement APEC initiatives. The APEC process is supported by a permanent secretariat based in Singapore.
- APEC has grown to become a dynamic engine of economic growth and one of the most important regional forums in the Asia-Pacific.

- As a result of APEC's work, growth has soared in the region, with real GDP increasing from USD 19 trillion in 1989 to USD 42 trillion in 2015. Meanwhile, residents of the Asia-Pacific saw their per capita income rise by 74 per cent, lifting millions out of poverty and creating a growing middle class in just over two decades.
- Bringing the region closer together, reducing trade barriers, and smoothing out differences in regulations have boosted trade which, in turn, has led to this dramatic increase in prosperity. Average tariffs fell from 17 per cent in 1989 to 5.2 per cent in 2012. During that same time period, the APEC region's total trade increased over seven times—outpacing the rest of the world with two-thirds of this trade occurring between member economies.
- APEC implements a wide variety of initiatives to help integrate the region's economies and promote trade while addressing sustainability and social equity.
- APEC is working to connect the region through improving physical infrastructure linkages, people mobility and institutional ties across the Asia-Pacific. APEC's Connectivity Blueprint maps out initiatives from improving information technology and transportation infrastructure to making it easier for students, business people, and tourists to travel around the region.

UN migration pact

- The Australian Government has announced that it would not sign the UN Global Compact for Migration saying that the agreement would undermine its existing immigration policies.
- Australia argues that the Compact is inconsistent with its well-established policies and not in Australia's interest.
- Australia believes that its immigration policy already promotes safe, orderly and regular migration. Hence, adopting the pact would risk encouraging illegal entry to Australia and reverse the hard-won successes in combating the people-smuggling trade.

About Global Compact on Migration:

- The Global Compact for Migration is the first-ever UN global agreement on a common approach to international migration in all its dimensions.
- The global compact is non-legally binding. It is grounded in values of state sovereignty, responsibility-sharing, non-discrimination, and human rights, and recognizes that a cooperative approach is needed to optimize the overall benefits of migration, while addressing its risks and challenges for individuals and communities in countries of origin, transit and destination.
- The global compact comprises 23 objectives for better managing migration at local, national, regional and global levels. The compact:
 - aims to mitigate the adverse drivers and structural factors that hinder people from building and maintaining sustainable livelihoods in their countries of origin;
 - intends to reduce the risks and vulnerabilities migrants face at different stages of migration by respecting, protecting and fulfilling their human rights and providing them with care and assistance;
 - seeks to address the legitimate concerns of states and communities, while recognizing that societies are undergoing demographic, economic, social and environmental changes at different scales that may have implications for and result from migration;
 - strives to create conducive conditions that enable all migrants to enrich our societies through their human, economic and social capacities, and thus facilitate their contributions to sustainable development at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Analysis:

- Today, there are over 258 million migrants around the world living outside their country of birth.
- This figure is expected to grow for a number of reasons including population growth, increasing connectivity, trade, rising inequality, demographic imbalances and climate change.
- Migration provides immense opportunity and benefits – for the migrants, host communities and communities of origin.

- However, when poorly regulated it can create significant challenges. These challenges include overwhelming social infrastructures with the unexpected arrival of large numbers of people and the deaths of migrants undertaking dangerous journeys.

Indo-US joint military exercise 'Vajra Prahar'

- The 12-day long joint military exercise between India and the United States known as 'Vajra Prahar' commenced in Jaipur.
- A contingent of the United States Pacific Commander arrived at Mahajan Field Firing Ranges for undertaking Joint training with the Indian Special Forces.
- The US contingent comprises of one officer and 10 other ranks from the Special Forces Group, informed Rajasthan Defence PRO Lt Col Sombhit Ghosh. The United States Special Forces will carry out rigorous joint training in semi-desert and rural terrain to enhance the interoperability of the two armed forces and further the military to military co-operation.
- The contingents will train on different aspects including hostage rescue, building intervention, desert survival, medical aid and combat firing. Lastly, the Special Forces will undertake a three-day outdoor exercise to validate their practices.

Analysis:

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

On the intangible side, military exercises promote brotherhood and camaraderie between soldiers and militaries. Besides goodwill, it is a tool for projection of a nation's soft power – culture, language, customs, beliefs, food habits and lifestyle. Soldiers all over the world have almost similar rank and organisational structures, which helps establish a unique spirit of bonding and friendship between their communities irrespective of the country of origin.

California Wildfire

- California is suffering the aftermath of the most devastating wildfire in its history. The fire has destroyed thousands of homes across 55,000 hectares.
- In mid-July to August 2018, a series of large wildfires erupted across California, mostly in the northern part of the state. On August 4, 2018, a national disaster was declared in Northern California, due to the extensive wildfires burning there
- In November 2018, foehn winds caused another round of large, destructive fires to erupt across the state.

Analysis:

- California has always been prone to wildfires every dry season. In California there is increase in dry and overgrown forests, which it described as effectively being large-scale tinderboxes.
- According to US Forest Service report, federal and state restrictions have caused timber harvesting in California to decline more than 70% between the late 1980s and 2012.
- Climate change has also been an important factor in this case. In recent years there has been record-breaking temperatures, earlier springs and less reliable rainfall.
- California has two fire seasons. One, from June to September, is driven by warmer, drier weather in Western California. The other, from October to April, is driven by strong gusts called the Santa Ana winds in Southern California; these spread three times faster and burn closer to urban areas.
- Moist, forested areas are the most likely to face greater threats from wildfires as conditions in those areas become drier and hotter

SCIENCE AFFAIRS

GSAT-29

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has launched its latest communication satellite, GSAT-29, from its second developmental flight GSLV-MkII D2.

About GSAT-29:

- GSAT-29 is a multibeam, multiband communication satellite, launched by ISRO on Wednesday.
- The satellite, weighing 3423 kg, was put into earth's orbit by India's heavy-lift rocket Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV-Mk III).
- The satellite, designed for a mission life of 10 years, has been stationed at 55 degrees East longitude.
- It was launched into an elliptical Geo Transfer Orbit (GTO) with a 190 km perigee, the point in the orbit of the moon or a satellite at which it is nearest to the earth, and 35,975 km apogee, the farthest or highest point, with an inclination of 21.5 degrees.
- The spacecraft has been located at 55 degrees East longitude and designed for a mission life of 10 years.
- The GSAT-29 satellite carries communication transponders that will provide communication links in remote areas of India.
- The satellite will provide communication services to the Northeast region and Jammu and Kashmir to facilitate execution of Digital India initiatives, the ISRO has stated.
- The GSAT-29 satellite carries Ka/Ku-band high throughput communication transponders intended to meet the communication requirements of users including those in remote areas. In addition, several new technologies such as Q/V-band payload, data transmission through optical communication link will be demonstrated. This will help in realising future advanced satellites.

Russian Igla-S missile system

- Indian Army has picked Russia's Igla-S missile system as choice for its multibillion-dollar contract for man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS).
- Russian Igla-S system has been confirmed as the lowest bidder for a mega deal to procure shoulder fired anti-aircraft missiles for the Indian Army.

- The process to procure Very Short-Range Air Defence (VSHROAD) missiles was initiated in 2010 under the previous government and went through several rounds of trails before the Igla-S qualified in January, along with two other competitors.

About Igla-S missile System:

- It is latest model of Russian MANPADS (Man-portable air-defense system) technology. It offers superior performance over earlier supplied SA-18 missiles to India.
- It is designed for use against visible aerial targets at short range such as tactical aircraft, helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicle (UAVs), cruise missile, head-on or receding, in presence of natural (background) clutter and countermeasures.
- As per requirements of Indian Army, it will have maximum range of 6km, altitude of 3km along with all-weather capability. Igla-S missile system will replace the existing Igla in service which is in urgent need of replacement.

About VSHORAD Programme:

- VSHORAD programme was initiated in 2010 to replace Russian Igla-M systems that have been used by Army since the 1980s is considered critical for defence against incoming helicopters, UAVs and ground attack aircraft.
- Under this programme, Indian Army had issued Request for Proposal (RFP) for 5,175 missiles and associated equipment, out of which around 2,300 missiles will be bought in fully formed condition, 260 will be in semi-knocked down (SKD) condition and 1,000 missiles will be completely knocked down (CKD) and 600 missiles will be produced in India under Make in India initiative.

“Atmosphere & Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems & Services (ACROSS)” scheme

- The Cabinet Committee has approved continuation of the nine sub-schemes of the umbrella scheme “Atmosphere & Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems & Services (ACROSS)” during 2017-2020.

About ACROSS Scheme:

- ACROSS scheme pertains to the atmospheric science programs of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).
- It addresses different aspects of weather and climate services, which includes warnings for cyclone, storm surges, heat waves, thunderstorms etc.
- Each of these aspects is incorporated as nine sub-schemes under the umbrella scheme “ACROSS” and is implemented in an integrated.
- The ACROSS scheme consists of nine sub-programmes which are multi disciplinary and multi institutional in nature and will be implemented in an integrated manner.
- As the objective of the ACROSS scheme is to provide a reliable weather and climate forecast for betterment of society, the scheme will aim at improving skill of weather and climate forecast through sustained observations, intensive R & D.

Analysis:

- The scheme will provide improved weather, climate and ocean forecast and services, thereby ensuring transfer of commensurate benefits to the various services like Public weather service, disaster management, Agro-meteorological Services, Aviation services, Environmental monitoring services, Hydro-meteorological services, climate services, tourism, pilgrimage, power generation, water management, Sports & adventure etc.
- A sizable number of scientific and technical staff along with requisite administrative support, thereby generating employment.
- To ensure last-mile connectivity of the weather based services to the end -user, a large number of agencies like the Krishi Vigyana Kendras of Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Universities and local municipalities are roped in thus generating employment opportunities to many people.

