

# NEWS ANALYSIS

## For Civil Services Exams

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# Lead Article

## Drug Price Control in India

The right to health is not mentioned in Indian Constitution but health remains a very important aspect of human life. The supreme court of India held in one of its decisions on the scope of article 21 which states "Right to life" covers "the Right to good health". In recent years, the government has taken steps to control the prices of drugs and medical tools in India so that the medical benefits could be provided to all at affordable prices.

Here, we have briefed the history of drug price control in India, the recent steps taken by the government for drug price reduction and its impacts on people and industry.

### Brief History of Drug Price Control in India

The Drug Price Control Order (DPCO) is issued under Section 3 of Essential Commodities Act, 1955. Its aim is to ensure that essential drugs are available to all at affordable prices. The first time, the Drug Price Control Order was put in place after the Sino-Indian war of 1962 because pharmaceutical companies started to profiteer and it became necessary in public interest to cap drug prices. Over the years, it has been modified five times.

The Drug Price Control Order (DPCO) 1995 was introduced in India which covered 74 bulk drugs and their formulations. The consequences were not quite as hoped because the producers of many drugs shifted their manufacturing to some other countries. The result was half the products were discontinued after their producers exited. Indian production of something as important as penicillin shifted to China.

In 1997, the government established National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) which was entrusted with the task of enforcement of provisions of DPCO, fixation/revision of prices of pharma products and monitoring of prices of controlled and decontrolled drugs.

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Policy-2012 was set up on 07.12.2012. The salient features of NPPP-2012 are the regulation of prices of drugs is on the basis of essentiality of drugs as specified under National List of Essential Medicines, (NLEM)-2011, regulating the prices of formulations only and fixing the ceiling price of formulations through Market-Based Pricing (MBP).

The new policy of DPCO was introduced in 2013. DPCO 2013 increased India's National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) from 74 to 799

formulations. Since its introduction, no new investments have been witnessed. There has been a shift towards non-controlled products. As a consequence, new introductions of drugs and the average number of incumbent brands and new introductions of drugs in the DPCO 2013 list has reduced compared to the non-DPCO 2013 list.

In 2015, the health ministry revised its National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM), 2011 to include 376 drugs in the new NLEM 2015 list. A total of 106 medicines were added, and 70 medicines have been deleted to finalize the new list.

### Recent steps taken by the government to control Drug Prices in India

#### 1. Reduction in the prices of medicines

In September 2016, drug price regulator National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) reduced the prices of around 33 essential medicines, which brought down their retail prices by 30-%. The medicines include antibiotics and drugs used to treat ulcerative colitis, anti-allergics used for common cold and cough, arthritis, gastro-esophageal reflux disease (Gerd), psoriasis, and tuberculosis.

The purpose of this move is to cut down the prices of commonly used drugs for critical diseases by expanding the span of price regulation to cover new drugs. Earlier (NPPA) issued a notification which said the ceiling prices of 18 more drugs in its 36th meeting held on 14th September 2016. Total drugs under price control now 467 in NLEM, 2015."

The government currently fixes the prices of essential drugs based on the simple average of all medicines in a particular therapeutic segment, having sales of more than 1 percent. NPPA released another notification which said NPPA has fixed/revised ceiling prices of 55 scheduled formulations of Schedule-I under Drugs (Price Control) Amendment Order, 2016 and retail price of 29 formulations under DPCO, 2013 in related Notification /order dated 23.12.2016.

The medicines which are not under price control, manufacturers are allowed to increase their maximum retail price by 10 per cent annually. The calculation for essential drugs is done on the basis of the simple average of all medicines in a particular therapeutic segment with sales of more than 1 percent. Despite getting pressure from domestic generic drug manufacturers, NPPA has been consistently working on lowering and revising prices of NLEM in a phased manner. So far, NPPA has revised prices of 330 out of 799 formulations.

#### 2. Reduction in the prices of coronary stents

In July 2016, the Ministry of Health and Family

Welfare entailed coronary stents in the National List of Essential Medicines, 2015 (NLEM, 2015). Afterward, on December 21, 2016, the Department of Pharmaceuticals included coronary stents at number 31 of Schedule I of the Drug Prices Control Order, 2013. This inclusion effectively gave it the status of a “scheduled formulation” as defined in the Drug Price Control Order 2013. On 13 February 2017, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) issued an order which capped the price of coronary stents up to 40 per cent lower than their existing market prices. It has ended a long-winded saga that started with the inclusion of these devices in the National List of Essential Medicines in July 2016.

The notification has categorized stents into two types. One is bare metal stents (BMS) and second is drug-eluting stents. A stent is a tube-shaped device. It is inserted into a blocked blood vessel, which helps in clearing the blockage, sometimes through physical means but often through the drugs, it gives out at a slow rate. The price cap for bare metal stents is Rs 7,260. And the price cap for a drug-eluting stent is Rs 29,600. This price cap amounts to 40 percent lower than the existing prices with the range currently at Rs 25,000-Rs 1,50,000. Industry sources say that 35 per cent of the stent products are available at the lower end of the spectrum.

The notification does not give any provision on whether a stent is branded or unbranded, manufactured locally or abroad. But the notification has made it clear that so long as it is being sold in the country, no stent can cost more than Rs 29,600 though there is room for the addition of VAT, local taxes etc. The notification clearly states the fact that a stent will have to be put in by a hospital set-up and the product is usually billed by institutions rather than the people selling them. The notification also says that institutions such as nursing homes, hospitals, and clinics performing cardiac procedures using coronary stents will have to comply with the price ceilings.

#### **Impacts on the Industry**

Industry estimates suggest that the total pharmaceutical market in India is worth \$50 billion. It is likely to grow many times in the future because of the huge burden of diabetes and hypertension in the Indian population. The core committee that analyzed the pros and cons of bringing coronary stents under price control in its report to the government last year mentioned the high incidence of coronary artery disease (CAD) in India describing it as a “major public health problem”. That is why stents were ruled to be “essential” for public health, a criterion that is key to the price

control

The industry has been unhappy with the inclusion of stents under the price cap. A lot of dire predictions claiming patient’s being deprived of the latest technological advancements have come out from the industry.

But many health activists have welcomed the move. Activists said we strongly support the use of Paragraph 19 of the DPCO to set right the balance in favor of the public interest.

#### **Impacts on People**

According to some research medical expenditure takes almost 60 percent of the income of an individual. This tells the sad story of health in India and why the people are people on a scale of health, food, and shelter. And India is relatively a poor country. So the reduction in the prices of life-saving drugs, and medical equipment would always be a welcome step among the people of India.

### *National news:*

#### *India’s first floating elementary school inaugurated on Manipur’s Loktak Lake*

India’s first floating elementary school named Loktak Elementary Floating School was inaugurated at Langolsabi Leikai of Champu Khangpok floating village on Loktak Lake in Manipur.

#### **Highlights of the Loktak Elementary Floating School**

- This first of its kind school was set up with an aim to provide education to drop outs students as well as illiterate adults.
- It will provide education to around 40 children from Class I-III by engaging two local teachers.
- It was built under the initiative undertaken by All Loktak Lake Fisherman’s Union with the support of an NGO People Resources Development Association (PRDA).

#### **Background**

- The school was established to control the sudden high dropout rate of children living in the Champu Khangpok floating villages who were rendered homeless due to the recent evacuation of phumdis.
- More than 700 floating huts were removed by Loktak Development Authority as part of clearing encroachment in the lake under the Loktak Lake (Protection) Act, 2006.
- It had resulted in displacement of the fishing community and their children who were forced to discontinue their education.

#### **About Loktak lake**

- Referred as the lifeline of Manipur, Loktak lake is the largest freshwater lake in northeast India.
- It is famous for the phumdis or phumshongs, the assorted heap of vegetation, soil and organic matter at various stages of decomposition floating over it.
- It serves as a source of water for irrigation, drinking water and hydropower generation for the local people.
- Keibul Lamjao National Park is one of Phumdis in the lake. It was designated as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention in 1990 and was also listed under the Montreux Record in 1993.

### ***Union Minister launched new service to provide employment to unemployed youth in rural areas***

Bandaru Dattatreya, the Union Labour and Employment Minister launched the National Career Service (NCS) and JeevanPraman facility to the EPFO pensioners through Post Offices in DakSadan, Hyderabad.

With the launch, India Post that has a large postal network comprising around 155000 post offices will now be doubling up as employment registration centres for the unemployed youth living in the rural areas through the NCS portal.

#### **Key Highlights**

- The NCS portal will help the rural unemployed youth to register for employment at their doorstep without much hassle and at a very nominal fee.
- It will also give them access to a rich storehouse of career content covering almost 3000 occupations across 52 sectors, updated on its database.
- The portal mainly aims to bridge the gap between the net connected urban areas and non-connected rural areas by creating equal opportunities for the rural unemployed youth.
- The facility was launched for 95 Head Post offices and will soon be extended to other post offices across India.
- The EPFO pensioners would also now be able to submit their digital life certificates (JeevanPramaan) through Head Post Offices.
- Besides this, the Centre has planned to provide employment to 5 Cr people over the next five years. The number of youth in the country is estimated to be around 80 Cr by the year 2020.

According to the officials of the Labour and Employment department, around 14 lakh employers and about 4 Cr job seekers have already registered themselves in the NCS portal.

### ***Supreme Court convicted Sasikala in disproportionate assets case***

The Supreme Court of India (SC) overruled a Karnataka High Court's judgment in a

disproportionate assets case related to Sasikala. The ruling of the SC renders Sasikala ineligible to contest Assembly elections.

#### **Details related to the judgment**

- The judgment was delivered by a bench of the apex court comprising Justices PC Ghose and Amitava Roy.
- The SC delivered the judgment on the basis of appeals filed by Karnataka government and others, including DMK leader K. Anbazhagan.
- The bench restored the trial court conviction of the accused in September 2014.
- The trial court's verdict was overruled by the Karanatak High Court in June 2015.
- The high court acquitted former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa and three co-accused, including Sasikala, in the disproportionate assets case.

### ***Indian Railways Dedicated Freight Corridor: First portion to be operational by 2018***

The Ministry of Railways announced that the first portion of the Indian Railways Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) between Ateli and Phulera will become operational by March 2018.

This will be a 190-km double track route with a total of 380 km track length which will be under the scrutiny of Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India (DFCCIL). The Ateli-Phulera section will take over the freight load from the Indian Railways. Additionally, around 500-600 km of additional track length will be operational by financial year 2018-19.

#### **Key Highlights**

- DFCCIL, a special purpose vehicle of the railways, owns the responsibility to develop six Dedicated Freight Corridors across the country.
- These DFCs will transfer a minimum of 70 per cent of the freight carried by the Indian Railways on tracks parallel to DFCs.
- One rack on the DFC will be able to carry 13000 tonnes of load compared with 5000 tonnes carried by racks on the existing railway tracks.
- Out of these six corridors, the Eastern DFC and the Western DFC were taken up on priority basis with funding assistance from World Bank and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).
- JICA sanctioned Rs 38722 crore loan while World Bank committed to provide USD 2.725 billion for the project.
- Eastern DFC will connect Mughalsarai to Ludhiana, while the Western DFC will run between Dadri and Jawahar Lal Nehru Port.
- The capital expenditure of the project is expected to reach around Rs 10000 crore in the current

financial year with the total investments till date reaching to Rs 29760 crore.

- The cost of operations on the DFCs is expected to go up by 40 per cent.
- The average speed in these tracks is also expected to rise threefold to 70-75 km per hour from the current 20-25 km per hour.

### ***Publications Division, Sasta Sahitya Mandal signed MoU for joint publication of books***

The Publications Division and Sasta Sahitya Mandal (SSM) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in New Delhi.

The MoU facilitates joint publication of books on heroes of the Indian freedom struggle, cultural leaders and other eminent personalities who worked towards nation development.

#### **Features of the MoU**

- The MoU is a joint initiative between the Publications Division and the SSM to sensitise the young generation about India's rich and diverse culture and history.
- The agreement would promote availability of good literature for the people on diverse topics.
- The MoU includes joint publication of a set of 20 books out of which 10 books will be selected through each other's catalogue.
- In addition, a set of 10 small new books would be finalized on topics such as the freedom struggle, Indian culture, ethics and values for joint publication.
- The agreement would also provide an opportunity for both the organizations to enhance their reach by displaying and offering on sale any of publications published by either of the organizations.

#### **About Publications Division**

- It is a media unit under the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- Publications Division is a repository of books and journals highlighting subjects of national importance and India's rich cultural heritage.
- The mandate of the organisation is to preserve national heritage and disseminate the same through the production and sale of quality reading material at affordable prices.
- It publishes books in Hindi, English and other regional languages and market them through its nationwide sales network.

#### **About Sasta Sahitya Mandal**

- SSM is a trust established by Mahatma Gandhi in 1925.
- Its mandate is to promote, develop and publish high class literature in Hindi and to make it available to the public at affordable prices.

- Since its inception, SSM has brought out more than 2500 titles on Indian culture, heritage, Indian epics, and stories.
- The trust has created a huge corpus of children's literature to infuse in them the values of life and love for the nation and humanity.

### ***FSSAI formed Scientific Panel on Food Fortification and Nutrition***

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) formed a scientific panel on food fortification and nutrition.

The scientific panel was mandated to identify critical nutritional gaps in the Indian diet in general as well as in specific target groups based on diet surveys and credible scientific evidence.

The panel includes 11 distinguished scientists and experts in the field of nutrition. Apart from these 11 experts, members of scientific panels dealing with fortification of food such as wheat flour, refined flour, rice, milk, edible oil and salt will also be a part of this panel.

In addition, **following agencies will be working with this panel.**

- Union Ministry of Women and Child Development
- Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- Department of Biotechnology
- Indian Council of Medical Research

#### **Terms of reference of the panel are -**

- To define strategies to address the nutritional needs of the general population and vulnerable groups in India
- To review the standards for all suitable food fortifying vehicles
- To suggest healthy dietary intake of fat, sugar and salt for Indians
- To address regulatory and technological issues related to nutrition
- To review proposals from industry using modern risk assessment methods
- To prescribe standard sampling and test methods for effective monitoring, surveillance and enforcement of the relevant regulations

#### **Background**

- Micronutrient malnutrition disorders are ubiquitously prevalent in all age groups of the population.
- As per the National Family Health Survey (2006-07) and the World Bank (2006), about 70 per cent preschool children suffer from iron deficiency and 57 per cent preschool children have sub-clinical Vitamin A deficiency.
- Further, as per the World Bank (2006), iodine deficiency is endemic in 85 per cent of districts in India.

- Folate deficiency, which leads to Neural Tube Defects (NTDS), is the most common congenital malformation in Indian context with an incidence that varies between 0.5/1000 births and 8/1000 births.

- Moreover, it is estimated that 50-70 per cent of these birth defects are preventable.

- Against this backdrop, the FSSAI has set up the scientific panel on food fortification and nutrition to strengthen the policy framework.

### ***Railway Ministry to approve an ambitious railway project in Andaman and Nicobar***

The Indian Railway ministry is all set to approve a 240 km-long railway link, first-ever railway route of Andaman and Nicobar Islands that will connect two of its major islands.

The ambitious project aims to link Andaman's capital city Port Blair, which is in the south, with Diglipur located in the north of the islands. It will involve building several bridges and stations along the sea coast.

#### **Key Details**

- According to Ministry's internal survey report, the entire project is expected to cost around Rs 2413.68 Cr.

- It is also estimated to receive a negative rate of return on investment of -9.64 per cent.

- While the railways only consider a line commercially viable when the rate of return on investment is at least 12 per cent positive, this project is estimated to receive a negative rate of return on investment of -9.64 per cent.

- The ministry is still planning to approve it, given its strategic importance, uniqueness and tourism potential.

- The Ministry's planning and Finance directorates cleared the project in the first week of February 2017.

- The Union territory's administration will be sharing 50 per cent of the project's operational cost or loss if any.

#### **Benefits of the Railway link**

- The rail link will make commuting much smoother and easier between the two islands.

- Currently, the islands are linked by a 14 hr long bus journey and 24 hour long ship journey. There is no air connectivity.

- The broad-gauge rail route, on the other hand, is expected to complete the journey in around 3 hours, cutting the usual time taken by a huge margin.

- Currently, the island has over 4.5 lakh visitors each year. The number is expected to go up to 6 lakh a year after the completion of the project.

- The link is also expected to benefit the island's defence forces, as it will facilitate a faster deployment of soldiers and resources during emergencies.

### ***Enemy property must go to government: Supreme Court***

The Supreme Court (SC) ruled that the enemy property should be handed over to the government and should not get transferred to the descendants of the erstwhile owners.

The ruling was made by a bench of Chief Justice J S Khehar and Justice N V Ramana. The bench refused to hear the writ petition of Congress Rajya Sabha MP Husain Dalwai.

Dalwai challenged the validity of the Union Government's decision to re-promulgate **Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation Act), 2016** ordinance for the fifth time, terming it a violation of constitution bench decision. However, the bench ruled that the petitioner should raise the issue in Parliament.

The ordinance amends a 50-year-old law to guard against claims of succession or transfer of properties left by people who migrated to Pakistan and China after the wars.

The case was presented by Senior advocate Anand Grover, who pleaded that re-promulgation of the enemy property ordinance was contrary to the law laid down by the SC. However, after finding it difficult to convince the bench, Grover withdrew the petition thereafter.

#### **Background**

The Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Ordinance, 2016 was promulgated by the President Pranab Mukherjee on 7 January 2016 to amend the Enemy Property Act, 1968 and the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971.

A bill on the same lines was passed in Lok Sabha in March 2016. However, when the bill was tabled in Rajya Sabha, it was referred to a select committee and then the Parliament Session was adjourned.

The ordinance was re-promulgated in April 2016. However, there was no legislative action. It was re-promulgated for the third time on 31 May 2016. The process continued and it was re-promulgated for the fifth time in December 2016.

The Union Government failed to pass the bill in Rajya Sabha during the Winter Session due to repeated adjournments over the Demonetisation issue.

### ***International news:***

***India joined UN's Network for Improving Quality of Care for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health***

India joined the United Nations Network for Improving Quality of Care for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health with an aim to reduce maternal and newborn deaths by half.

On this occasion, eight other countries, including Bangladesh, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda joined the multilateral initiative along with India.

### **About Network for Improving Quality of Care for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health**

- It is a multinational network for improving quality of care for maternal, newborn and child health.
- The network will bring together officials from ministries of health, health care professionals and bilateral and multilateral development partners.
- **The network has three goals. They are –**
  - i. Reduce maternal and newborn mortality in health facilities in the target country districts by 50 per cent over five years
  - ii. Reduce avoidable morbidity due to severe post-partum haemorrhage by 50 per cent
  - iii. Improve experience of healthcare
- **Functions of the network:** It empowers national leadership by strengthening national and district governance healthcare structures.
- It seeks to accelerate action by adapting and adopting WHO's eight standards for improving quality of maternal and newborn care in health facilities.
- It helps the governments in creating national packages of quality improvement interventions.
- It provides the necessary policy inputs to the government in developing, strengthening and sustaining clinical and managerial capabilities to support quality of care improvement.

### **Background**

- Every year, 3,03,000 women die during pregnancy and childbirth worldwide.
- Around 2.7 million babies die during the first 28 days of life and 2.6 million babies are stillborn. And, most of these deaths could be prevented with quality care during pregnancy and childbirth.
- Against this backdrop, the United Nations has launched the Network for Improving Quality of Care for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health to strengthen the policy framework related to health care.

### ***UK's House of Commons passed Brexit bill***

House of Commons, the lower house of British Parliament passed legislation, authorising Prime Minister Theresa May's government to initiate Brexit talks with the European Union. The historic legislation witnessed 494 Members of the Parliament voting in favour of Brexit and just

122 against. Among the MPs who voted against the bill, 52 were labour MPs, the leading opposition party, who went against their party leader Jeremy Corbyn's orders of backing the bill.

Few of the pro-European legislators even whistled European Union's anthem, Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' while the votes were being tallied.

### **Key highlights**

- Though the members of the lower house had already shown overwhelming support to the bill in its initial reading, the final votes were cast following a seven-hour debate on amendments.
- The bill was passed with no changes.
- It will now be sent to the second chamber of UK Parliament, House of Lords, also known as the upper house of the British Parliament.
- The House of Lords will be posed with two options:
  - Approve the bill after several readings and debates and pass it on for royal assent to be turned into a law.
  - Make amendments and send the bill back to the House of Commons for further debate and votes.
- At most, the upper house can force the lower house to reconsider their decision but it cannot prevent the bill from being passed.
- So, the bill is most likely to become a law within the coming few weeks, right as per the deadline set by Theresa May.

The British Prime Minister has vowed to set off Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, the legal method to start Britain's exit from the EU, by the end of March 2017.

According to David Davis, the Secretary of State for exiting the EU, the final legislation was preceded by a healthy and serious debate with contributions from MPs representing all parts of the UK. He further added that the Brexit decision was taken by the people of Britain and so, it is vital for everyone to now unite to make the task successful.

### ***3-day global conference on Nuclear Terrorism in New Delhi today***

The Implementation and Assessment Group (IAG) meeting of the GICNT partner countries was scheduled from 8-10 February 2017 in New Delhi, the capital city of India.

The 3-day meet hosted by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in coordination with the Department of Atomic Energy. It was attended by over 150 delegates, belonging to various partner countries and international organisations.

### **Key Details**

- The conference was inaugurated by the Foreign Secretary of India, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.

- The GICNT (Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism) was a voluntary international partnership of 86 nations and five international organisations.
- The main agenda of the meeting was to strengthen the global capacity to detect, prevent and respond to nuclear terrorism.
- Pakistan was one of the partner countries to attend the key nuclear meet in the capital. The country would be represented by its High Commission officials.
- The meeting highlights India's pledge towards global nuclear non-proliferation and peaceful use of nuclear energy.
- It was also an extension of India's overall engagement with the international community on issues related to nuclear security.

According to MEA, the possible misuse of weapons of mass destruction and related material by terrorists is not a hypothetical concern anymore, especially with the alarming increase in terror attacks in countries across the world.

Such a breach of nuclear security would have a deep global impact. The conference is hence, immensely significant, as it would help enhance the vigil of all the partner countries.

#### **About GICNT**

- It was launched in 2006 by Russia and the United States.
- The group works towards its goal of preventing nuclear terrorism by conducting multilateral activities that help strengthen the plans, policies and procedures of its partner nations.
- The group has its own set of nuclear security goals called the Statement of Principles (SOP) that include a range of deterrence, prevention, detection, and response objectives, which have been voluntarily taken up by all the partner nations.
- While the United States and Russia serve as Co-Chairs of the GICNT, the Netherlands leads the Implementation and Assessment Group under the guidance of the co-Chairs.
- Until recently, the group has conducted over 70 multilateral activities and nine senior-level meetings.

#### ***17th session of BIMSTEC senior officials' meeting held in Kathmandu***

The 17th session of senior officials' meeting of BIMSTEC held in Kathmandu. The Indian delegation at the session is being led by Secretary Preeti Saran.

#### **Key Highlights**

- The session will be chaired by Shanker Das Bairagi, the Foreign Secretary and Head of Nepal Delegation.

- The day-long meeting will include a review of the progress made by the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).
- It will also include a discussion over the future course of action on strengthening cooperation among the group's member countries.
- At the end of the session, a report on various activities of the group is expected to be adopted.
- The session is also expected to announce the date of the 4th BIMSTEC summit, which is to be held in Nepal later this year.

The significance of the group was brought to the front during the BRICS- BIMSTEC Outreach summit, which was held in Goa in October 2016. In fact, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself had expressed his desire to promote the regional group and had assured his full cooperation in the group's future actions.

#### **About BIMSTEC**

- Founded in 1997, The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization comprising seven Member States lying along the shore of the Bay of Bengal.
- The member states include India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Nepal.
- Initially, the bloc included just four member states and was called BIST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation).
- Myanmar was included later during a special Ministerial meeting in Bangkok and the group was renamed BIMST-EC.
- The name was changed to BIMSTEC with the admission of Nepal and Bhutan at the 6th Ministerial meeting in Thailand in February 2004.
- The group constitutes a bridge between South Asia and South East Asia.
- It has also created a platform for intra-regional cooperation between SAARC and ASEAN members.
- The main objective behind its creation was to harness a shared growth through cooperation in different areas of common interest.

#### ***Desert state Qatar recorded the lowest temperature ever in country's history***

Qatar, the desert gulf state recorded the lowest temperature in its history- 1.5 degrees Celsius- The early morning temperature was recorded by a weather station in the southwest part of the country, Abu Samra, according to Qatar News Agency (QNA).

#### **Key Highlights**

- The new temperature has even beaten the previously recorded lowest reading of 3.8 degrees that was taken in January 1964.
- The Qatar Met Department has stated that due to an area of high pressure, temperatures have been relatively low for the past several days in the Gulf state.
- Qatar is usually known for its unbearably hot weather. The temperature in the desert state regularly touches 50 degrees Celsius.
- Qatar's summer heat is such that labourers have been banned from working for several hours during the day when summer is at its peak.
- In fact, the governing body of football, the Federation Internationale de Football Association controversially switched the dates of 2022 FIFA to be held in Qatar to November and December to avoid the country's fierce heat.
- In December, the organisers of FIFA also announced that thousands of World Cup 2022 labourers would be given "cooling" hard hats to reduce their body temperature as they build football stadiums in the scorching desert heat.

### ***UAE Aims to Launch Its First Ever Mars Mission in 2020***

The United Arab Emirates is planning to launch its first-ever mission to Mars in 2020, an unmanned orbiter called 'Hope' from Japan's space centre.

According to Yuichi Yamaura, Vice President of Japan's Aerospace Exploration Agency, the expected launching date of the orbiter would be sometime in July 2020 when the Earth and Mars will be aligned at their closest point. It would be the first-ever Mars Mission from an Arab country.

Yamaura further added that they are delighted to launch the UAE Mars explorer from Japanese vehicle H-IIA at the Tanegashima Space Center in Japan. Yamaura is confident that they along with Mitsubishi Heavy Industries will be able to fulfil their responsibility.

#### **Key Highlights**

- The unmanned orbiter programme mainly aims to add more detail to the knowledge available about Martian climate and atmosphere.
- According to the plan, around 150 engineers and scientists will be working on the project.
- The Preliminary Design Review (PDR) for the mission has already been completed, according to Omran Sharaf, the mission's project manager.
- The project is being supported and financed by Shaikh Hamdan Bin Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Crown Prince of Dubai.
- The Prince is also the Chairman of the Mohammad Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC), the organiser of the project.

- The Hope spacecraft is expected to enter the Martian orbit by early 2021, which is also the year when UAE celebrates its 50th independence anniversary.
- By 2018, the KhalifaSat satellite, which has been designed entirely by UAE engineers, will also be launched from Japan using the same model of carrier rocket.

#### **About Hope Spacecraft**

- It will be a compact, hexagonal-section spacecraft.
- It will be built from aluminium in a stiff but lightweight honeycomb structure with its surface made with a strong composite face-sheet.
- Its overall size and weight will be similar to a small car and it will weigh around it will weigh around 1,500 kg including fuel.
- The spacecraft's brain will be equipped with advanced software that will be capable of guiding it into the Mars orbit without the need of any human assistance from the Earth.
- The spacecraft will be carrying three scientific instruments for its mission to study the Martian atmosphere:

**An Imager:** It is a digital camera that will send back high-resolution colour images.

**An Infra-Red Spectrometer:** It will examine temperature patterns, ice, water vapour and dust present in the atmosphere.

**An Ultraviolet Spectrometer:** It will study the upper atmosphere and traces of oxygen and hydrogen further out into space.

## ***Economy***

### ***India ranked at 43rd position in 5th Annual International IP Index of USCC***

India ranked at 43rd position out of 45 countries in the 5th Annual International Intellectual Property (IP) Index of the US Chamber of Commerce (USCC). The 2017 International IP Index, named as 'The Roots of Innovation', was released on 8 February 2017.

India was ranked just above Pakistan and Venezuela. The United States continued to be on the top of the index. The top four positions of the index were fetched by the United States, United Kingdom, Japan and the European Union. According to the report, the 45 countries, analysed in the index, represent nearly 90 per cent of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

In 2016, India was placed at 37th position out of 38 countries.

#### **What factors led to low ranking of India in the 2017 International IP Index?**

- The National IP policy cleared by the Union cabinet in May 2016 was considered as a positive measure for the index. However, the policy failed to

address the fundamental weaknesses in India's IP framework.

- IP-intensive industries faced challenges on the patentability of computer-related inventions and Section 3(d) of India's Patent Act, 1970 which relates to restrictions on patenting incremental changes.
- A Delhi high court ruling that permitted photocopying of copyrighted material for educational purposes also featured among the factors that went against India.

#### **About International IP Index**

- The USCC's IP Index ranks countries on the basis of the points received on various aspects of patents, copyrights, trademarks, trade secrets and market access, enforcement and ratification of international treaties.
- The Global Intellectual Property Centre of the USCC works around the world to examine the Intellectual Property (IP) rights and their role in creating jobs, saving lives, advancing global economic growth, etc.
- The fifth edition of the index included seven new countries – Egypt, Hungary, Kenya, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia and Spain.

#### ***Union Cabinet approved Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan***

The Union Cabinet approved the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA). The programme aims at making 6 crore rural households digitally literate.

The outlay for the project is Rs 2351.38 crore. It targets ushering in digital literacy in rural India by March 2019.

The project is in line with the announcement made by Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in the Union Budget 2016-17.

#### **Key highlights of PMGDISHA**

- The Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan is expected to be one of the largest digital literacy programmes in the world.
- It is being initiated under Digital India Programme.
- Under the programme, 25 lakh candidates will be trained in the Fiscal Year 2016-17; 275 lakh in the Fiscal Year 2017-18; and 300 lakh in the Fiscal Year 2018-19.
- In addition, each of the 250000 Gram Panchayats would be expected to register an average of 200-300 candidates.
- The scheme will be implemented under the overall supervision of Ministry of Electronics and IT in active collaboration with States/UTs through their

designated State Implementing Agencies, District e-Governance Society (DeGS), and so on.

#### **Background**

The 71st NSSO Survey on Education 2014 indicates that only 6 per cent of rural households have a computer. This indicates that more than 15 crore rural households do not have computers. Moreover, a significant number of these households are likely to be digitally illiterate.

The PMGDISHA would cover 6 crore households in rural areas to make them digitally literate. This, in turn, would empower the citizens by providing them access to information, knowledge and skills for operating computers/digital access devices.

#### ***Lok Sabha passed Payment of Wages (Amendment) Bill, 2017***

The Lok Sabha passed the Payment of Wages (Amendment) Bill, 2017. The Bill seeks to enable employers to pay wages to workers through cheque or directly crediting to their accounts.

The Bill was moved by Labour and Employment Minister Bandaru Dattatreya in the House.

The Bill will replace the Ordinance promulgated by the President on 28 December 2016.

#### **About Payment of Wages (Amendment) Bill, 2017**

- The Payment of Wages (Amendment) Bill, 2017 amends the Payment of Wages Act, 1936.
- It replaces the Payment of Wages Ordinance, 2016, which was promulgated on 28 December 2016.
- Under the 1936 Act, all wages must be paid either in coin or currency notes, or both. However, the employer may pay his employee's wages either by cheque or by crediting it into his bank account, after obtaining his written authorisation.
- The Bill amends the 1936 Act to permit the employer to pay an employee's wages: (i) in coin or currency notes; or (ii) by cheque; or (iii) by crediting them into his bank account.
- The Bill eliminates the requirement of obtaining written authorisation for payment of wages by cheque or through a bank account.
- However, the relevant central or state government may specify certain industrial or other establishments where the employer should pay his employees only by: (i) cheque; or (ii) crediting the wages in his bank account.

#### ***NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant launched India Innovation Index***

NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant launched the India Innovation Index in New Delhi. It is India's first online innovation index portal. It will capture data on innovation from all Indian states and regularly update it in real time.

### **Features of India Innovation Index**

- The primary objective of the India Innovation Index is to rank Indian states as per their innovation prowess and provide impetus to them to build their respective innovation ecosystems.
- It is a joint initiative of the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).
- Multilateral agencies such as the World Economic Forum, the World Intellectual Property Organization, Cornell University, OECD, UNIDO, ILO, UNESCO and ITU will help the NITI Aayog in developing the index.
- The India Innovation Index Framework is based on the best practices followed during the preparing of Global Innovation Index (GII).
- India-centric parameters will be added to the framework so that it will reflect the Indian innovation ecosystem.
- This initiative will be the point of reference for all international agencies to collect India's up to date data points for global indices and analytic.
- This will be a one-stop data warehouse and will track progress on each indicator at the National level and the State level on real-time basis.
- The access to this portal will be hosted on the NITI Aayog website and NITI Aayog will update this data periodically.

### **About Global Innovation Index (GII)**

- The Global Innovation Index is co-published by the World-Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Cornell University and INSEAD with CII as a knowledge partner.
- Since its inception in 2007, the index has been ranking world economies, including India, according to their innovation capabilities and outcomes.
- The Global Innovation Index uses 82 indicators among a host of other important parameters.
- The Global innovation Index (GII) 2016 placed India at the 66th position among the 128 countries surveyed.

## ***Schemes, committees and programmes***

### ***Railways Ministry launched first phase of Station Redevelopment Program***

Railways Minister Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu launched the first phase of the Station Redevelopment Program comprising 23 major railway stations on Indian Railways network.

Some of these 23 stations will be Chennai Central, Ranchi, Udaipur City, Indore, Yesvantpur, Bangalore Cantonment, Visakhapatnam, Howrah,

Kamakhya, Faridabad, Jammu Tawi, Secunderabad, Vijayawada, Kozhikode and Bhopal.

The Railways Ministry will collaborate with the Union Ministry of Urban Development to develop these smart stations.

### **Highlights of the Station Redevelopment Program**

- The re-development of 400 A1 and A Category Stations is a non-fare revenue generating programme which will be done on Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model through a fair bidding system.
- In the first phase, 23 stations will be selected and redeveloped for the fullest use where passengers can enjoy so many facilities at one place.
- These stations will be selected after a detailed feasibility study by the strategic advisor The Boston Consulting Group.
- After the first phase, 100+ stations are expected to be launched in Phase 2 and the remaining A1 and A stations will be launched in Phase 3 of this program.
- These railway stations will be redeveloped using the surplus revenue generated from commercial development of spare railway land.
- Indian Railways will provide approximately 140 acres of encroachment free land at these stations to the developers on a 45 year lease.
- There will be nodal officers in each zone to ensure smooth interactions with the developers.
- The redeveloped stations will improve passenger experience by providing amenities like elevators, self ticketing counters, executive lounges, luggage screening machines, walkways, distinctive roofing and flooring, free and paid Wi-Fi, etc.
- The program will benefit more than 100 cities and 16 million passengers per day across the country.
- With an overall investment of Rs 1 lakh crore, this program is one of the largest PPP program undertaken in the country.

### ***Union Government launched measles-rubella vaccination drive***

The Union Health Ministry launched the measles-rubella (MR) vaccination campaign in Bengaluru.

The crusade against the two diseases will start from five states/UTs Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Goa and Lakshadweep covering nearly 3.6 crore children.

Subsequently, the measles-rubella vaccine campaign will be introduced in routine immunisation, replacing the currently given two doses of measles vaccine, at 9-12 months and 16-24 months of age.

### **About MR vaccination campaign**

- The campaign targets around 41 crore children across India, the largest ever in any such campaign.

- Under the campaign, children aged between 9 months and less than 15 years will be given a single shot of Measles-Rubella vaccination irrespective of their previous measles/rubella vaccination status or measles/rubella disease status.
- The vaccine, which will be free-of-cost, will be administered across the states from session sites at schools, health facilities and outreach session sites.
- At present, measles vaccine is provided under Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP). However, rubella vaccine will be a new addition.

#### **About measles**

- Measles is a highly contagious infection caused by the measles virus.
- It is an airborne disease. It spreads easily through the coughs and sneezes of those infected.
- The measles vaccination has resulted in a 75 per cent decrease in deaths from measles between 2000 and 2013. At present, around 85 per cent of children are being currently vaccinated globally.
- As a result of widespread vaccination, the disease was eliminated from the Americas by 2016.

#### **About rubella**

- Rubella is an infection caused by the rubella virus.
- It is also known as German measles or three-day measles.
- The disease is usually spread through the air via coughs of people who are infected.
- It is preventable with the rubella vaccine with a single dose being more than 95 per cent effective.

## **Defence**

### ***Military Exercise Cobra Gold 2017 concluded in Thailand***

The Cobra Gold 2017 concluded in Thailand. Cobra Gold is an annual multilateral military exercise co-sponsored by Thailand and the USA.

#### **Highlights of Cobra Gold 2017**

- The Cobra Gold 2017 was the 36th edition of the multinational military exercise.
- Around 30 nations took part in the exercise that continued till 24 February 2017.
- Cobra Gold included a staff exercise with a senior leader seminar, a field training exercise and humanitarian civic assistance projects.
- Approximately 3,600 soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines of the USA were involved in these activities.
- The exercise included an amphibious assault demonstration, noncombatant evacuation operation and combined arms live fire exercise.
- The emphasis of the Cobra Gold 2017 was on coordination of civic actions such as humanitarian assistance.

- The exercise was a part of the USA's efforts to expand regional cooperation and collaboration in vital areas such as disaster relief.

#### **About Cobra Gold**

- It is considered as the largest military exercise in the Asia-Pacific region. Thailand hosts the exercise every year.
- It is also among the largest multinational military exercise in which the USA participates.
- Cobra Gold has three distinct activities - the Combined Arms Live Fire Exercise (CALFEX), Command Post Exercise (CPX) and activity related to assisting the local Thai population.
- It was first held in 1982 to improve coordination between the armed forces of the USA and Thailand in both hostile military and humanitarian efforts.
- Some of the key participants in the exercise are Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea.
- China participated in the exercise for the first time in 2015. India participated in the exercise in 2016.
- The exercise has proven its effectiveness in improving coordinated military response to natural disasters, including the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2011 Tohoku tsunami.

## **Awards**

### ***Director Damien Chazelle's musical 'La La Land' dominates BAFTA 2017***

The American musical-drama film '*La La Land*' swept the top five awards at the 70th British Academy Film Awards, **BAFTA**. The film directed by Damien Chazelle had **Ryan Gosling** and **Emma Stone** as the lead characters.

The film clinched the award for best film, best director, best actress, best cinematography and best original music, surpassing the strong competition it faced from other great films including '*I, Daniel Blake*', '*Arrival*', '*Lion*' and '*Manchester by the Sea*'. Other major awards included Best actor, which went to **Casey Affleck** for his role in '*Manchester by the Sea*', Best Original Screenplay, which again went to the director of '*Manchester by the Sea*', **Kenneth Lonergan** and the Outstanding British Film award that went to the popular state-drama '*I, Daniel Blake*' directed by veteran director **Ken Loach**.

Furthermore, the award for best-supporting actor male went to the British-Indian actor **Dev Patel** for his performance in '*Lion*' and the award for best-supporting actress female was given to **Viola Davis** for her role in the film, '*Fences*'.

The winning streak displayed by the film '*La La Land*' up until BAFTA is expected to continue further, especially since it has 14, a record number of nominations at the upcoming *89th Academy*

*Awards ceremony* (Oscars) that is scheduled to be held on 26 February 2017.

**Full list of winners**

**Outstanding British film**

I, Daniel Blake

**Best film**

La La Land

**Best director**

Damien Chazelle -La La Land

**Best actor**

Casey Affleck - Manchester by the Sea

**Best actress**

Emma Stone -La La Land

**EE Rising Star award**

Tom Holland

**Best original music**

La La Land

**Best supporting actor**

Dev Patel -Lion

**Best supporting actress**

Viola Davis –Fences

**Best original screenplay**

Manchester by the Sea

**Best cinematography**

La La Land - Linus Sandgren

**Best make up & hair**

Florence Foster Jenkins - J. Roy Helland and Daniel Phillips

**Best costume design**

Jackie - Madeline Fontaine

**Best sound**

Arrival - Sylvain Bellemare, Claude La Haye, and Bernard Gariépy Strobl

**Best British short animation**

A Love Story- Khaled Gad, Anushka Kishani Naanayakkara, and Elena Ruscombe-King

**Best British short film**

Home- Shpat Deda, Afolabi Kuti, Daniel Mulloy, and Scott O'Donnell

**Best editing**

Hacksaw Ridge- John Gilbert

**Best production design**

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them - Stuart Craig and Anna Pinnock

**Best documentary**

13th- Ava DuVernay

**Best film not in the English language**

Son of Saul - László Nemes and Gábor Sipos

**Best adapted screenplay**

Lion - Luke Davies

**Best animated film**

Kubo and the Two Strings - Travis Knight

**Best special visual effects**

The Jungle Book - Robert Legato, Dan Lemmon, Andrew R. Jones, and Adam Valdez

**Best debut by a British writer, director or producer**

Under the Shadow – Babak Anvari (writer/director), Emily Leo, Oliver Roskill, Lucan Toh (producers)

**Outstanding British contribution to cinema**

Curzon Cinemas

**Bafta fellowship**

Mel Brooks

***Adele sweep top prizes at 2017 Grammy Awards***

The queen of pop, Adele dominated the 59th annual Grammy Awards by picking up all the top awards including Album of the year, Record of the year, Song of the year, Best Pop Solo performance and Best Pop Vocal album.

The legendary singer similarly took away the album, record and song of the year categories in 2012. However, her victory was even more special this year, as she was up against phenomenal pieces of work including Beyonce's album 'Lemonade'. Adele is the first singer to take all the top three awards twice.

**Key Highlights**

- Adele broke her Grammy for 'Album of the Year' in half stating that it belonged to Beyonce for her monumental album- **Lemonade**.
- Beyonce's 'Lemonade' won the award for Best Urban Contemporary album and her song 'Formation' won the Best Music video award.
- Another legendary star who swept up key awards was the late singer, David Bowie.
- While his song Blackstar won the categories of Best Rock song and Best Rock performance, his album by the same name picked up awards for the Best Alternative music album, Best Recording package and Best Engineered album.
- Chance the Rapper also got recognised with the award of Best Rap album for his 'Coloring Book' and other awards including Best Rap artist and Best Rap performance.
- Sandeep Das, an Indian tabla player who was a part of a group – Silk Road Ensemble, also won a Grammy for Best Global Music.
- Indian sitar player, Anoushka Shankar who was also nominated under the same category lost out for the sixth time.

This year's Grammy Awards were clouded by deaths of several music legends including pop megastar Prince, rocker Rick Parfitt, legendary poet and songwriter Leonard Cohen, pop icon George Michael and one of the founding fathers of progressive rock Greg Lake.

While Adele performed a tribute to George Michael, rock band 'The Time' and Bruno Mars paid homage to Prince.

**Full List of Winners**

**Record of the year**

Hello - Adele

**Album of the year**

25 - Adele

**Song of the year**

Hello - Adele

**Best new artist**

Chance the Rapper

**Best rap album**

Chance the Rapper - Coloring Book

**Best urban contemporary album**

Beyonce - Lemonade

**Best pop vocal album**

Adele - 25

**Best pop solo performance**

Hello - Adele

**Best Traditional Pop Vocal Album**

Summertime-Willie Nelson

**Best rap performance**

Chance The Rapper featuring Lil Wayne & 2

Chainz - No Problem

**Best rap/sung performance**

Drake - Hotline Bling

**Best rap song**

Drake - Hotline Bling

**Best rock performance**

David Bowie - Blackstar

**Best metal performance**

Megadeth - Dystopia

**Best rock song**

Blackstar - David Bowie

**Best Rock Album**

Tell Me I'm Pretty — Cage The Elephant

**Best Alternative Music Album**

Blackstar — David Bowie

**Best R&B performance**

Solange - Cranes In the Sky

**Best R&B song**

Maxwell - Lake By the Ocean

**Best R&B album**

Lalah Hathaway - Lalah Hathaway Live

**Best Traditional R&B Performance**

Angel — Lalah Hathaway

**Best pop duo/group performance**

Stressed Out - Twenty One Pilots

**Best Country Song**

Humble and Kind— Lori McKenna, songwriter

Tim McGraw

**Best country solo performance**

My Church - Maren Morris

**Best country duo/group performance**

Pentatonix Featuring Dolly Parton - Jolene

**Best dance recording**

The Chainsmokers - Don't Let Me Down

**Best dance/electronic album**

Skin - Flume

**Best Contemporary Instrumental Album**

Culcha Vulcha — Snarky Puppy

**Best New Age Album**

White Sun II — White Sun

**Best music video**

Beyonce - Formation

**Best World Music Album**

Sing Me Home — Yo-Yo Ma & The Silk Road

Ensemble

**Best Children's Album**

Infinity Plus One — Secret Agent 23 Skidoo

***Indian tabla player Sandeep Das won 2017 Grammy Award for Best Global Music***

Indian tabla player Sandeep Das won the 59th annual Grammy Award for the Best Global Music category. He won the award for Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble 'Sing Me Home'. Yo-Yo Ma's 'Sing Me Home' features tunes composed by different artists at global level.

The album 'Sing Me Home' was released as a part of the documentary on Ma's project titled 'The Music of Strangers: Yo-Yo Ma and The Silk Road Ensemble'.

Apart from Sandeep Das and Yo-Yo Ma, there were other musicians as well who contributed to the album including the New York-based Syrian clarinet player Kinan Azmeh.

Azmeh was recently stranded overseas when US President Donald Trump imposed a ban on travellers from seven Muslim-majority countries.

**About Sandeep Das**

- Born and brought up in India, Das started playing at the age of 16.
- He learned the intricacies of the instrument from Kishan Maharaj in Banaras and made his debut with Pandit Ravi Shankar.
- In 1990, he moved to Delhi and played in the Indian Classical circuit with Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Pt Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Pt Shiv Kumar Sharma and Dr L Subramaniam.
- However, he earned fame when he returned to the United States in 1990s.

***Indian-origin UK sculptor awarded Israel's Genesis Prize***

Britain-based Indian-origin artist, Anish Kapoor was honoured with Israel's 'Genesis prize', popularly known as the Jewish Nobel for his commitment to Jewish values.

The award includes a prize money of \$1 million. Kapoor has already announced his decision of using the amount to assist the Syrian refugees and alleviate the refugee crisis.

### **Key Highlights**

- The conferring of the Genesis Prize 2017 to Kapoor coincides with the celebration of 25 years of diplomatic relations between India and Israel.
- Kapoor's win is a reaffirmation of the bilateral warmth shared by both India and Israel.
- In fact, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel in June or July 2017 is one of the most anticipated visits for both the sides.
- The prize committee, chaired by Natan Sharansky, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency, acknowledged Kapoor as one of the most influential artists of his generation.

In his acceptance speech, Kapoor spoke out strongly against the abhorrent policies adopted by several governments to deal with the refugee crisis and the largely growing sentiment of indifference for the suffering of others. He also spoke about the recurring conditions of indifference, persecution and Holocaust in Jewish history and how the Jews have had to re-identify their communities repeatedly.

### **About Anish Kapoor**

- Kapoor, born to an Indian father and Iraqi-Jew mother, studied in Doon School in India before moving to the UK.
- He is best known for his artistic contributions to the world.
- However, he is also deeply committed to social justice and social activism.
- He created Holocaust Memorial for Liberal Jewish Synagogue in London.
- He was also the artist behind the candle design for the '70 candles for 70 years project' for Holocaust Memorial Day 2015 that marked the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

### **About Genesis Prize**

- Established in 2012, the annual prize is awarded jointly by the Genesis Prize Foundation, Israeli Prime Minister's office and the Jewish Agency for Israel.
- The prize recognises individuals who have attained excellence and received international recognition in their fields and whose actions and achievements express full commitment to Jewish values, as well as to the Jewish community and the State of Israel.
- Some of the prize's notable winners include actor-director Michael Douglas, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Israeli-American violinist Itzhak Perlman.

### **Rajasthan and Telangana won eGov awards**

The 'Winners of Excellence' under the state category of the eGovernance Awards for the year 2017 are Rajasthan and Telangana.

The awards, instituted by Computer Society of India's (CSI) Special Interest Group in sponsorship with Nihilent Technologies, are aimed to recognise the efforts of eGovernance practitioners spread across state and central departments, projects as well as in district administrative units.

### **Key Facts**

- The eGovernance Award of Recognition was given to Odisha and Nagaland.
- This year, the awards drew a greater response due to Centre's heavy focus on promoting Digital India.
- Under the Project's category, around 34 projects belonged to government departments and organisations from across the country. The projects were chosen for their innovative and inclusive eGovernance initiatives.
- Overall, there were over 180 nominations for projects.

### **About CSI -Nihilent e-Governance AWARDS**

The awards were initiated in the year 2004 with three main objectives:

- To become an independent focal point for the assessment of e-Governance initiatives in the country
- To take charge in recording appreciation of the effort put in by government officials at different levels to implement e-Governance initiatives, going against all the odds.
- To provide a channel to those Indians who have mastered e-Governance techniques to share their knowledge with interested shareholders in the country as well as abroad.

Over the years, the awards have received thousands of nominations under its various categories, a large number from which have been reported as case studies that have shared their experiences globally through inclusion in the Annual Compendium released by CSI SIG e-Gov.

## **Sports**

### **Adam Voges retired from international Cricket**

Australian Cricketer Adam Voges announced his retirement from international cricket. Voges, who will lead the Prime Minister's XI against the visiting Sri Lankans in Canberra, said that this will be his last game against the international team.

He will continue to play for Middle sex. He had not played a single Test match since November 2016, when he suffered a concussion during Western Australia's Sheffield Shield match against Tasmania.

The 37-year-old will end his cricket career with the second highest Test average (61.87 from 31 innings) of all time behind Australian great Sir Donald Bradman. Bradman's career average is 99.94 from 52 Tests.

### **About Adam Voges**

Adam Charles Voges has played for the Australian national team at Test, One Day International (ODI), and Twenty20 International (T20I) level. At present, he captains Western Australia and Perth Scorchers in domestic cricket.

Earlier in 2016, he was included in the 2016 ICC Test Match Team of the Year.

### **Details of his Cricket career**

- Test: Batted in 31 innings of 20 matches and scored 1485 runs of which 269 not out was his highest score. He also bowled in 6 innings.
- ODI: Batted in 28 innings of 31 matches and scored 870 runs of which unbeaten 112 was his highest score. He bowled in 15 innings and took 6 wickets.
- T20Is: Batted in 5 of 7 matches and scored 139 runs of which 51 was his highest score. He also bowled in 1 innings and took 2 wickets.

### ***Olympic Champion Bolt won Laureus 'Sportsman of the Year' award***

Usain Bolt and Simone Biles, the 2016 Rio Olympic champions won top awards of 'Sportsman of the Year' and 'Sportswoman of the Year' at the Laureus World Sports Awards 2017, held in Monaco.

Bolt was conferred with the top honour for the fourth time, equalling the record set by tennis legends Roger Federer and Serena Williams and surfer Kelly Slater, who are all four-time Laureus winners. He received his award from one of the world's greatest sprinters, Michael Johnson.

### **Key Highlights**

- Many-times Olympic champion Michael Phelps received the award for 'Comeback of the Year' from Boris Becker, former world number one in Tennis. Phelps who had retired after 2012 London Olympics came back to win 5 gold medals at Rio Olympics.
- The Laureus award for 'Breakthrough of the Year' was conferred to Formula One World champion Nico Rosberg. Rosberg who was a runner-up in both 2014 and 2015, finally won the title in 2016, after which he announced his retirement from the sport.
- The only quadruple amputee in international wheelchair fencing, Beatrice Vio was honoured with "Sportsman of the Year with a disability" trophy.

- In other categories, professional racing cyclist Rachel Laura Atherton won the 'Action Sportsman of the Year' award, the American baseball team Chicago Cubs won the Laureus 'Team of the Year' award and the popular football club Leicester City was awarded 'Spirit of Sport' award.

- Further, while Waves for Change- a South African charity was recognised for their outstanding community work with the 'Sport for Good' award, the 'Sport Inspiration' award was given to Refugee Olympic Team.

- Also for the first time, sports fans were given a chance to voice their choice in a brand new category – 'Best Sporting Moment of the Year' award, which was conferred to Barcelona's under -12 team.

- The ceremony was hosted by popular actor Hugh Grant.

### **About Laureus Awards**

- The awards known as 'Oscar for Sports' are held annually to celebrate the most remarkable sportspersons and their achievements from the previous calendar year.

- The nominees for each award are selected by a nomination panel comprising some of the world's leading sports editors, writers and broadcasters who vote to create a shortlist of six nominations in five categories.

- The nomination shortlists for two categories – the Action Sportsman of the Year and the Sportsperson of the Year with a Disability, is created by Specialist Panels.

- The final winners in all seven categories are decided on the basis of a secret ballot vote by the members of the Laureus World Sports Academy.

### ***India beat Pakistan by 9 wickets to win T20 Blind World Cup 2017***

India on 12 February 2017 won the ICC T20 Blind World Cup. In the final clash played at Bengaluru's M Chinnaswamy stadium, India defeated Pakistan by 9-wickets.

Successfully defending their title in the T20 Blind World Cup, India achieved the victory target of 198-runs in the 18th over in the final of the tournament.

Pakistan had scored 197 for 8 in their 20 overs. The team had won the previous edition by defeating the same rivals in the final in 2012.

India made to the finals with eight victories of the nine games. It lost its only match against Pakistan in the group stages at Feroz Shah Kotla in Delhi. On the other hand, Pakistan remained unbeaten throughout the tournament.

**Important fact:** Pakistan also ended as runners-up to India in the 2012 edition of the game. In 2012, which was the inaugural session of the tournament, India defeated Pakistan by 29 runs.

**Brief scores:**

- Pakistan scored 197 for 8 in 20 overs. The main scorer was Badar Muni (57)
- India scored 200/1 in 17.4 overs. Main scorers were Prakasha Jayaramaiah (99 not out), Ajay Kumar Reddy (43)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has congratulated the Indian blind cricket team for winning the Twenty20 World Cup. Congratulating them Prime Minister Modi tweeted, India is proud of their accomplishment.

On the other hand, Sports Minister Vijay Goel also congratulated the Team for lifting T20 World Cup for Blind Cricketers. In a message to the team, he said, after the success of Para Athletes at Rio Paralympics in 2016, Indian team for Blind Cricket has added another chapter of glory in the history of country's sports.

***Official Mascot unveiled for FIFA U-17 World Cup India 2017***

The Official Mascot of the FIFA U-17 World Cup India 2017 was unveiled on 10 February 2017 at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi.

The Official Mascot is a clouded leopard called **Kheleo**. The clouded leopard is a vulnerable wild cat whose habitat extends from the Himalayan foothills to mainland Southeast Asia.

Kheleo will participate in several activities in the run-up to the first FIFA tournament to be hosted by India. The tournament will be played from 6 to 28 October 2017.

**About 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup**

- The 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup will be the 17th edition of the FIFA U-17 World Cup.
- The FIFA U-17 World Cup is a biennial international men's youth football championship contested by the U17 national teams of the member associations of FIFA.
- The most recent tournament was hosted by Chile and won by Nigeria. However, Nigeria will not be able to defend their title in the 17th edition of the tournament as they failed to reach the final round of the CAF qualifying tournament. In doing so, Nigeria became the first incumbent title holder since Switzerland in 2009 to fail to qualify for the subsequent tournament.
- In September 2016, the Local Organising Committee (LOC) of the FIFA U-17 World Cup India 2017 had unveiled the **Official Emblem** for the event. The emblem of the first-ever FIFA tournament in India was designed as a celebration

of the country's richness and diversity of cultures. The logo includes elements of the Indian Ocean, the banyan tree, the kite and the starburst, which is an interpretation of the Ashoka Chakra, an integral part of the national identity.

***India to host 2017 FIBA Women's Asia Cup***

The Basketball Federation of India (BFI) announced that India will host the FIBA Women's Asia Cup basketball tournament in July 2017.

The BFI has been allotted to host two international events in 2017, the FIBA Women's Asia Cup and FIBA U-16 Women's Asian Championship.

This will be the first time since 2009 that India will be hosting a major International Basketball Federation (FIBA) event.

The FIBA Women's Asia Cup will be held from 23 July to 29 July 2017 in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

The FIBA U-16 Women's Asian Championship will be held from 22 to 28 October 2017 in Hyderabad, Telangana.

**About FIBA Women's Asia Cup**

- The FIBA Women's Asia Cup has been conducted regularly since 1965.
- It was previously referred to as the FIBA Asia Championship for Women.
- The competition is held once in two years. It is held on odd years (2011, 2013, 2015, and so on).
- The 2015 FIBA Women's Asia Cup was held in Wuhan, China. Japan was the winner of the tournament.

**About FIBA U-16 Women's Asian Championship**

- The 2017 FIBA U-16 Women's Asian Championship will be the 6th competition for the U-16 Girls category.
- It will be hosted under the aegis of FIBA / FIBA Asia.
- The tournament was previously referred to as the FIBA Asia U-16 Championship for Girls.
- The competition is every other year on odd years.
- The 2015 FIBA U-16 Women's Asian Championship was held in Medan, Indonesia where China won the Gold and Japan grabbed the Silver.

***Miscellaneous***

***Sand Artist Sudarsan's new sand castle created Guinness World Record***

Sand artist Sudarsan Pattnaik created a Guinness World Record by sculpting a 48.8 feet tall sand castle at Odisha's Puri beach.

The world's tallest sand castle carries a message of world peace and features sculptures of legendary leaders and preachers of peace such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Gautama Buddha.

### **Key Highlights**

- Patnaik achieved the huge feat in just four days.
- He along with his 45 students started work on the sculpture on 7 February. They worked for nearly 12 hours a day.
- The artwork would be exhibited on the Puri beach for two more days.
- The official announcement about Patnaik's feat was made by Guinness authorities in the presence of the state's chief secretary Aditya Padhi and other senior officers.
- American artist Ted Siebert was the previous record holder. He had built a 13.97 metre high (45 .10 feet) sand castle at Miami Beach, USA in 2015 in seven days.

### **About Sudarsan Pattnaik**

- The 39-year-old Odisha-born sand artist is a Padma Shri awardee. He was conferred the prestigious award on 2014.
- He started sculpting images on the sand at an early age of seven years and has designed hundreds of sand art pieces since then.
- Previously, he has created 23 world records, all of which are registered in the Limca Book of Records.
- He has represented India in 50 international Sand Sculpture championships and festivals and has won 27 among them.
- He won the World champion title at USF World Sand Sculpture championship at Berlin in 2008.
- Apart from this, he is a 5-times winner of People's choice award at Berlin.
- He also established the Golden Sand Art Institute, the first-ever sand institute in India
- One of his sand sculptures titled, the Black Taj Mahal, received accolades from around the world.

### ***Jean-Pierre Lacroix appointed as new UN peacekeeping Chief***

France's Jean-Pierre Lacroix has been appointed as the Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations' Peacekeeping Operations. He has been appointed for the period of one year beginning 1 April 2017.

The announcement was made by the United Nations' new Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who took over from Ban Ki-moon on 1 January 2017.

Besides this, Guterres also announced the extension of the term of three other officials including Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant-Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support and Atul Khare, Under-Secretary-General for Field Support until 1 April 2018.

### **Key Highlights**

- The two Under-Secretary-General positions are among the most high-profile posts at the United Nations.
- In his new position, Jean-Pierre Lacroix will be replacing Herve Ladsous, who will step down in March 2017 after six years of service.
- Hervé Ladsous had informed UN chief that he would be unavailable for an extension at the end of his current term.
- Lacroix will be taking over the role at a time when UN peacekeeping is struggling to overcome a scandal over increasing number of sexual abuse cases by troops serving in peacekeeping missions.
- Apart from this, Guterres also announced that he will be setting up an internal review team to look into the international body's peace and security strategy, functioning, and architecture.

### **About Jean-Pierre Lacroix**

- Born on 2 May 1960, Lacroix holds a bachelor's degree in law and master's degree in political science.
- He was a technical advisor to the French Prime Minister from 1993 to 1995.
- He is currently serving as the Director of United Nations and International Organizations (NUOI).
- In total, he has over 25 years of political and diplomatic experience.
- He has handled several multilateral organisations, UN activities and programmes.

### ***Slovakian Curators have discovered world's earliest emoji***

Curators from the National Archives in Trencin, Slovakia have found what they believe is the world's oldest emoji in a 382-year-old account book.

The discovery- a small circle with two dots and a line- was made in a legal document dating back to 1635. The document reportedly belonged to a 17th century Slovakian lawyer.

### **Key Highlights**

- The findings suggest that the drawing, which is recognised today as the smiley face emoji, was signed by the lawyer as his go-ahead.
- He was reviewing municipal account documents in a village, situated next to Slovakia's Strazov mountain range.
- The discovery makes it the world's oldest known emoji.
- The previously known oldest smiley face was discovered in a 1648 poem titled 'To Fortune', which was written by Robert Herrick from England in 1648 itself.
- The new discovery beats the old one by 13 years. According to Peter Brindza, the head of the National Archives in Slovakia, it is not certain

whether the newly discovered smiley is indeed the world's oldest but it is definitely one of the oldest in the Trencin region.

Though there is a chance that the drawing could be interpreted as a straight face expression instead of a smiley, the picture follows a passage that indicates that the lawyer seemed to have had no problems with the accounts.

Besides this, the curators also discovered a drawing featuring a pointing clown's hand within the documents but they haven't yet been able to establish its context.

### ***National Deworming Day 2017 observed in India***

The National Deworming Day was observed on 10 February 2017 in India with an aim to tackle worm infections in children.

This year, the National Deworming Day initiative was aimed at reaching approximately 34 crore children in the age group of 1-19 years in government-aided schools, anganwadis, and private schools in 34 states of the country.

The day is generally marked by events and awareness programmes that are conducted by Department of School Education and Literacy under Union Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Union Ministry of Women and Child Development and Union Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.

Moreover, a coordinated effort is also rolled out across the country with tablets and communication material. Reporting forms are also delivered to every school and anganwadi for the deworming program.

#### **Background**

- India owns the highest burden of worm infections in the world with the WHO estimating in 2014 that over 22 crore Indian children aged 1-14 years are at risk.
- Intestinal worm infections act as a deterrent to children's growth and development, and can adversely impact performance in school, and livelihood potential later in life.
- In such cases, deworming with the safe and beneficial Albendazole 400 mg tablet is an effective solution to controlling worm infections.
- Deworming may have very few side effects and some children might experience nausea, mild abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea and fatigue.
- Apart from being dewormed, maintaining healthy and hygienic practices help children and communities to remain safe from worm infections.

### ***International Day of Women and Girls in Science observed***

The International Day of Women and Girls in Science was observed across the globe on 11 February 2017. The day comes as an opportunity for all to take a stand for girls and women in science.

Science and gender equality are vital for the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In 2016, the UNESCO launched a Manifesto 'For Women in Science' with the L'Oréal Foundation. The manifesto aims at engaging Governments and stakeholders in promoting the full participation of girls and women in science. It looks forward to inspire girls and young women by offering mentoring opportunities to young women scientists to assist in their career development.

A study conducted in 14 countries shows the probability for female students of graduating with a Bachelor's degree, Master's degree and Doctor's degree in science-related field are 18 per cent, 8 per cent and 2 per cent respectively, while the percentages of male students are 37 per cent, 18 per cent and 6 per cent respectively.

#### **About International Day of Women and Girls in Science**

The United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/70/212 declaring 11 February as the International Day of Women and Girls in Science.

It was done to achieve full and equal access to and participation in science for women and girls, and further attain gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

#### ***World Radio Day observed with theme Radio is You***

##### **13 February: World Radio Day**

World Radio Day was celebrated across the world on 13 February 2017. The day is observed every year to celebrate radio as the medium of entertainment, the mode of communication and information.

Themed '**Radio is You**', this year the day calls for a greater participation of both the audiences and communities in the policy and planning of radio broadcasting.

Speaking on the occasion, Irina Bokova, the Director General of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), said that at such a time when turbulence is high in the society, radio provides an ideal platform to bring communities together.

She further added by saying that radio, as a popular communication medium, is a force for human rights

and dignity and also a powerful enabler of solutions to the challenges faced by the society.

**Background**

- World Radio Day was celebrated for the first time in 2012, following its establishment during the UNESCO General Conference in the same year.
- It was later adopted by the United Nations General Assembly as an International Day.
- Every year, UNESCO commemorates the day by planning activities with organisations, broadcasters and communities from around the world.

- The day gives an opportunity to honour the role radio plays in bringing communities together and promoting a positive dialogue for change.
- The medium’s role is especially enhanced at the time of a disaster such as an earthquake, as it plays a significant part in disseminating information and bringing communities together.

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