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**Current affairs
16-31 JULY 2017**

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**CURRENT AFFAIRS
(JULY 16-30)**

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I. GEOGRAPHY, BIODIVERSITY, ENVIRONMENT

1. Eco-bridges for the movement of tigers

Telangana State is planning to construct eco-friendly bridges over a canal cutting across the **tiger corridor linking the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) in the Chandrapur district of Maharashtra with the forests in Telangana's Kumram Bheem Asifabad district.**

The Telangana Irrigation Department has given its consent for the construction of the eco-bridges. Recommendations on the size and locations of the bridges are awaited from the National Board of Wildlife.

The 'eco-bridges' will be constructed at key spots along the 72 km-long, and at some places over a kilometre wide. The plan involves laying of fertile soil to grow grass and plants over the structure, so that fragmentation of the reserve forest is camouflaged.

The concept emerged after visits by experts from the Wildlife Board of India and the Wildlife Institute of India. They were concerned about the large-scale destruction of pristine forest along the corridor, which would result in cutting off tiger movement between TATR and Bejjur.

2. Mekedatu dispute and CWC

The Karnataka State government has replied to clarifications sought by the Central Water Commission (CWC) on its proposal to build a balancing reservoir across the Cauvery at Mekedatu at a cost of Rs. 5,912 crore.

Karnataka had sought the CWC's permission to start work on Mekedatu project, which has been opposed by Tamil Nadu alleging that it violates the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal order. The State had submitted the Detailed Project Report on Mekedatu to the chief engineer of CWC in June, 2017. After this, the CWC had sought a few clarifications on the DPR, including whether the project violates the final award of Tribunal and whether the construction of a balancing reservoir would affect flow of water to Tamil Nadu.

About Mekedatu dispute :

Karnataka intends to build a reservoir across river Cauvery near Mekedatu in Kanakapurataluk. It was first proposed along with Shivanasamudra hydro power project at Shimsa in 2003 with an intention to use the water for a hydro power station and supply drinking water to Bengaluru city.

However, Tamil Nadu objected saying Karnataka had not sought prior permission for the project. Its argument was that the project would affect the flow of Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu.

Central Water Commission CWC:

It is a premier Technical Organization of India in the field of Water Resources and is presently functioning **as an attached office of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Government of India.**

The Commission is entrusted with *the general responsibilities of initiating, coordinating and furthering in consultation of the State Governments concerned, schemes for control, conservation and utilization of water resources throughout the country, for purpose of Flood Control, Irrigation, Navigation, Drinking Water Supply and Water Power Development.*

Central Water Commission CWC is headed by **a Chairman, with the status of Ex-Officio Secretary to the Government of India.**

II. POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

3. SEDITION LAW

The sedition law has been misused in recent times to suppress even minor dissent.

It was introduced in the 1870s, originally to deal with increasing Wahabi activities that posed a challenge to the colonial government.

Section 124a in The Indian Penal Code made words or any visible representation that brings hatred or contempt, or excite disaffection towards the government punishable by law.

Most of the penal code was retained intact after 1947.

Despite demands to scrap it, the law of sedition remains enshrined in our statute book till today.

Figures of the National Crime Records Bureau reveal that in the two years preceding the JNU case, there were a total of 77 sedition cases, of which only one resulted in conviction.

But it is not rates of conviction but **the criminalisation of dissent** that makes the law draconian.

Legal process itself becomes the punishment.

So the slapping of sedition charges can be considered as an attempt to strong arm the protesters into submission.e.gAn entire village in Kudankulam had sedition cases slapped against it for resisting a nuclear power project.

It leads way to a totalitarian regime. It only serve to give a legal facade to the government's persecution of voices. It casts many legitimate protesters as anti-national.

4. Report of a joint task force on social audit

The recent report of a joint task force on social audit has made unanimous recommendations that have opened the possibilities of social audit becoming a vibrant, independent and citizen-based monitoring system. The Supreme Court too in an ongoing PIL has taken a note of these recommendations and is exploring strengthening social audit as a systemic solution in law.

What are social audits?

Social audits refer to *a legally mandated process where potential and existing beneficiaries evaluate the implementation of a programme by comparing official records with ground realities.* The public hearings that social audits conclude with remain its soul. The proceedings cannot be scripted, and the entire social audit is often a dramatic process of redistribution of power based on evidence and fact. **These audits were first made statutory in a 2005 Rural Employment Act.**

Objectives of Social Audit:

- Accurate identification of requirements.
- Prioritization of developmental activities as per requirements.
- Proper utilization of funds.
- Conformity of the developmental activity with the stated goals.
- Quality of service.

Benefits of Social Audit:

- Involvement of people in developmental activities ensures that money is spent where it is actually needed.
- Reduction of wastages.
- Reduction in corruption.
- Awareness among people.
- Promotes integrity and a sense of community among people.
- Improves the standard of governance.

Need for social audits:

In the course of a social audit, **individuals and communities get empowered and politicised** in a way that they experience the practical potential of participatory democracy.

Since more than 50% of the government's budget goes towards welfare schemes, it's important to track how, and how much, money is diverted away from intended recipients. **Social audits serve as a better monitoring tool for these schemes.**

The impact of continuous cycles of social audit in deterring potential corruption is beyond quantification. **They serve as an important tool to detect corruption and influence redress.**

The social audit process was recently endorsed by the public finance watchdog, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India. The CAG said: *"All over the world, there is a growing perception among the supreme audit institutions that it is important to partner with civil society to ensure the latter's participation in service delivery and public accountability."*

Social audits are losing their relevance in recent times:

Lack of support from government machineries has side-lined social audits. The lack of adequate administrative and political will in institutionalising social audit to deter corruption has meant that social audits in many parts of the country are not independent from the influence of implementing agencies. Social audit units, including village social audit facilitators, continue to face resistance and intimidation and find it difficult to even access primary records for verification.

Lack of any legal proceedings for not following social audit principles. Unless there is a stringent penalty on authorities for not implementing social audit, they will not give up control because it reduces their kickbacks and authority.

Lack of education among the common masses. Since common people are not that educated, they do not know their rights, let alone get them enforced.

Social audit is no longer a choice. Along with other transparency and accountability platforms, it is a legal, moral, and democratic necessity. The government can decide to use these interventions and harness peoples' energies in facing the vast challenge of implementation and monitoring.

5. Universal minimum wage

The Union Cabinet is expected to approve a bill that, among other things, mandates **a universal minimum wage**. The code empowers the Centre to set a minimum wage to help poor, unskilled workers earn more.

Economists, however, have warned for long **that price floors prevent the available supply of goods from being fully sold**. So, the minimum wage would logically hurt workers by increasing unemployment.

A study found *that employment among the youth in Denmark decreased by one-third when they attained the age at which their minimum wage increases by*

40%. Other economists have found similar evidence suggesting that a minimum wage increases unemployment.

The above mentioned logic has been questioned by a famous 1993 study by David Card and Alan B. Krueger that made the case that **a rise in the minimum wage in New Jersey actually decreased unemployment.**

For instance, “*Seattle’s Minimum Wage Experience 2015-16*”, a 2017 study by researchers at the University of California Berkeley, found that since the city raised its minimum wage in 2015, unemployment dropped from 4.3% to 3.3%.

Given such contradictory empirical findings, some say it may be wise to trust age-old economic wisdom. The *minimum wage increases unemployment, except when it is set below the market price for labour; or only marginally higher, in which case the minimum wage enhances the bargaining power of workers.*

6. Debate in SC on J&K special status

The Centre has asked the Supreme Court to debate on the special status granted to the State of Jammu and Kashmir, saying it was both a sensitive and constitutional matter. The court agreed to schedule the case before a three-judge Bench.

The centre’s response came on a PIL plea filed by a Delhi-based NGO, We the Citizens, contending that the J&K government, given the State’s special autonomous status under Articles 35A and 370, was discriminatory against non-residents as far as government jobs and real estate purchases were concerned.

J&K High Court ruling:

Jammu and Kashmir High Court had previously ruled that *Article 370 assumed a place of permanence in the Constitution and the feature was beyond amendment, repeal or abrogation.* The court said **Article 35A gave “protection” to existing laws in force in the State.**

It also observed that the President under Article 370 (1) was conferred with power to extend any provision of the Constitution to the State with such “exceptions and modifications” as may be deemed fit subject to consultation or concurrence with the State government. The High Court said J&K, while **acceding to the Dominion of India, retained limited sovereignty and did not merge with it.**

Article 370:

Article 370 of the Indian Constitution is a **‘temporary provision’ which grants special autonomous status to Jammu & Kashmir.**

Under Part XXI of the Constitution of India, which deals with “Temporary, Transitional and Special provisions”, the state of Jammu & Kashmir has been accorded special status under Article 370.

All the provisions of the Constitution which are applicable to other states are not applicable to J&K.

Important provisions under the article:

According to this article, except for defence, foreign affairs, finance and communications, Parliament needs the state government’s concurrence for applying all other laws. Thus the state’s residents live under a separate set of laws, including those related to citizenship, ownership of property, and fundamental rights, as compared to other Indians.

Indian citizens from other states cannot purchase land or property in Jammu & Kashmir.

Under Article 370, the Centre has no power to declare financial emergency under Article 360 in the state. It can declare emergency in the state only in case of war or external aggression. The Union government can therefore not declare emergency on grounds of internal disturbance or imminent danger unless it is made at the request or with the concurrence of the state government.

Under Article 370 the Indian Parliament cannot increase or reduce the borders of the state.



7.Maharashtra becomes first state to enact law against social boycott

Declaring social boycott a crime, **Maharashtra has become the first Indian state to introduce judicial legislation aimed at preventing extra-judicial courts and caste panchayats from committing atrocities.** As the title suggests, the purpose of this law is to prevent and punish the continuing community-driven practice of social boycotts.

The bill was cleared by the state legislature in April and forwarded by the central government to the president for his assent.

social boycott under the new law

If any individual or group tries to prevent or obstruct another member or group from observing any social or religious custom or usage or ceremony, or from taking part in a social, religious or community function, assembly, congregation, meeting or procession, the act amounts to social boycott.

It also includes challenging the freedom of individuals in the name of jatipanchayats, religion, customs, or denying them the right to practise a profession of their choice. Freedom in this case includes the freedom to marry

outside one's caste, visit places of worship, wear clothes of one's choice and use any specific language.

Discrimination on the basis of morality, political inclination or sexuality also qualifies as social boycott. It includes stopping children from playing in a particular space, or disallowing access to crematoria, burial grounds, community halls or educational institutions with mala fide intentions.

How does the Act seek to prevent social boycott?

A Collector or District Magistrate, on receiving information of the likelihood of unlawful assembly for imposition of social boycott can, by order, prohibit the assembly.

Conviction of the offence of social boycott will attract a prison term of up to three years or a fine up to Rs 1 lakh, or both. Abetment by an individual or group will invite the same punishment.

The offence of social boycott is cognisable and bailable, and will be tried by a Metropolitan Magistrate or a Judicial Magistrate First Class.

To ensure speedy justice, trial would have to be completed within a period of six months from the date of filing the chargesheet.

Other important provisions in the act:

The Act also provides for compensation to victims. The fines imposed on violators will be used to compensate them.

The Act also has a provision to withdraw cases with the consent of victims and permission from a court. In case of a withdrawal, the accused will have to perform community service.

Under the Act, members of extrajudicial bodies like caste and community councils issuing decrees for social boycott can be punished with imprisonment up to seven years and/or a fine of up to Rs. 5 lakh.

To ensure speedy justice, the law provides for conclusion of trial within a period of six months from the date of filing of the charge sheet.

Any organisation that delivers a judgment or issues fatwas based on caste, would be viewed as a caste panchayat, even if unregistered, the Act says.

The provisions include compensation to victims if a caste council imposed monetary penalties on them.

An official would be appointed to go into complaints of social boycott, which would include preventing a person from participating in social and religious programmes, festivals, processions, rallies, and from using common institutions like schools, club houses and medical facilities.

Those who support decrees issued by caste panchayats would also be treated as accused.

Why was it felt necessary to have such a law in Maharashtra?

The decision was a reaction to pressures from growing incidents of atrocities on individuals by jatipanchayats or gavkis wielding extra-judicial powers. The largest number of cases of social boycott were provoked by inter-caste marriages.

Prevailing laws are frequently challenged in the court, or loopholes are used to escape punishment. The new Act facilitates the framing of charges under Indian Penal Code Sections 34, 120-A, 120-B, 149, 153-A, 383 to 389, and 511 if there is concrete evidence to substantiate an accusation of social boycott.

The Act was also required in the backdrop of prevailing atrocities inflicted on people in the name of tradition, caste and community.

Constitutional provisions in this regard:

Undeniably, the Constitution guarantees religious freedom to communities, and also guarantees the freedom of association.

At the same time, however, *the Constitution also recognises that punitive community action can severely harm individual freedom, dignity, and access to basic public goods. For this reason, it curtails the power of groups in various ways.*

Apart from the prohibition of untouchability, the Constitution guarantees *non-discriminatory access to “shops, public restaurants, hotels, and places of public entertainment” (Article 15(2))*. In legal language, this is known as the “horizontal application of rights”: that is, the Constitution grants individuals rights not merely against the State, but also against other individuals (and groups).

With its focus on caste-panchayat driven community boycotts, the Maharashtra law leaves a significant area of discrimination untouched. To address this, a comprehensive anti-discrimination law is required, on the lines of the Civil Rights enactments in the United States and the United Kingdom.

The Maharashtra social boycott law, therefore, is an important step in the long-standing struggle for social inclusion. It is, however, only one step. As Ambedkar recognised, exclusion occurs along multiple axes: through boycott, through stigmatisation, and through segregation. For now, however, the Maharashtra law is an important first step. The devil, of course, will now lie in the implementation.

8.200th anniversary celebrations of the Paika Rebellion

The President of India ShriPranabMukharjee recently inaugurated the “**Bicentenary celebration of the heroic Paika Rebellion of Odisha**, a valiant uprising of Paikas against the British rule” organised by the Ministry of Culture.

About Paika rebellion:

Two-hundred years ago in 1817, a **valiant uprising of soldiers led by Buxi Jagabandhu (Bidyadhar Mohapatra) took place in Khurda of Odisha.** This is known as Paika rebellion.

Reason for the revolt:

The Paikas were the traditional land-owning militia of Odisha and served as warriors. When armies of the East India Company overran most of Odisha in 1803, the Raja of Khurda lost his primacy and the power and prestige of the Paikas went on a decline. The British were not comfortable with these aggressive, warlike new subjects and set up a commission under Walter Ewer to look into the issue.

The commission recommended that the hereditary rent-free lands granted to the Paikas be taken over by the British administration and this recommendation was zealously adhered to. They revolted against the British.

However, the rebellion had several other underlying causes – like the rise in the price of salt, abolition of the cowrie currency for payment of taxes and an overtly extortionist land revenue policy.

Although initially the Company struggled to respond they managed to put down the rebellion by May 1817. Many of the Paik leaders were hung or deported. Jagabandhu surrendered in 1825.

9. Ram Nath Kovind elected as the 14th President of India

Former Bihar governor Ram Nath Kovind is the 14th President of India. He won with over 7 lakh votes against Opposition candidate Meira Kumar.

Election of the president

Article 54 of the Indian Constitution lays the guidelines about voters in a Presidential election. It says, *“Election of President The President shall be elected by the members of an electoral college consisting of the elected members of both Houses of Parliament; and the elected members of the Legislative Assemblies of the States.”*

Who can't vote? The nominated members of Parliament, Legislative Assemblies, and members of Legislative Council don't vote in the Presidential election.

Who is eligible to run for the President?

- A person who is 35 years of age.
- An Indian National.
- Must have a support of 50 MPs/MLAs (these can't be nominated members).
- Must deposit Rs 15,000 as a security amount with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

- Must not hold any Office of Profit. (Any Constitutional position, which may further give rise to a conflict of interests in discharging of duties).

Voting Pattern:

Article 55 of Indian Constitution lays the guidelines about the way Indian President is to be elected. It says, “*The election of the President shall be held in accordance with the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote and the voting at such election shall be by secret ballot.*”

Secret Vote: Unlike the voting for any Bill or any motion in Parliament or state Assembly, secret voting is done to elect the President (Nobody can ever come to know who voted for whom).

Parties can't issue a whip to their members: Since the Presidential election is intended to be free and fair, and representatives are supposed to exercise their free will, political parties are not allowed to issue a whip to their members for voting.

Vote value: Vote of each MP and MLA carries a certain value. In the case of MLAs, the value is calculated by dividing total population of the state by the number of elected members to the Legislative Assembly, further divided by 1000. As of now, the value of each MLAs vote is fixed. The population data is taken from the 1971 Census. In the case of an MP, the vote value is decided by dividing the total value of votes of all MLAs of the whole country, divided by the total number of elected MPs in Lower House (Lok Sabha) and Rajya Sabha (Upper House). At present, the vote value of each MP is fixed at 708.

Voting System: Unlike the conventional ballot voting, where the voter polls only for a single candidate of his choice, the lawmakers mark their preferences in the Presidential election. It is mandatory for every lawmaker to mark his first preference, otherwise the vote is deemed invalid. He or she, however, can leave other preferences vacant.

Unlike the general election counting, where an MP or an MLA is elected through ‘first past the post’ system, *the winner in Presidential election is declared on the basis of a quote which is obtained by dividing the total number of valid votes by 2, and adding 1 to quotient (total number of valid votes/2+1).*

10. Admiralty Bill

Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Bill, 2017 has been passed unanimously by the Rajya Sabha. The bill was earlier passed by the Lok Sabha in March, 2017.

Admiralty laws deal with cases of accidents in navigable waters or involve contracts related to commerce on such waters. The Bill repeals laws such as the Admiralty Court Act, 1861, the Colonial Courts of Admiralty Act, 1890.

The Bill aims to establish a legal framework for consolidation of related laws to replace the age old archaic laws with modern Indian legislation and to confer admiralty jurisdiction on all High Courts of the coastal states of the country.

Highlights of the Bill:

Admiralty jurisdiction: The jurisdiction with respect to maritime claims under the Bill will vest with the respective High Courts and will extend up to the territorial waters of their respective jurisdictions. The central government may extend the jurisdiction of these High Courts. Currently admiralty jurisdiction applies to the Bombay, Calcutta and Madras High Courts. The Bill further extend this to the High Courts of Karnataka, Gujarat, Orissa, Kerala, Hyderabad, and any other High Court notified by the central government.

Maritime claims: The High Courts may exercise jurisdiction on maritime claims arising out of conditions including: (i) disputes regarding ownership of a vessel, (ii) disputes between co-owners of a vessel regarding employment or earnings of the vessel, (iii) mortgage on a vessel, (iv) construction, repair, or conversion of the vessel, (v) disputes arising out of the sale of a vessel, (vi) environmental damage caused by the vessel, etc. The Bill defines a vessel as any ship, boat, or sailing vessel which may or may not be mechanically propelled.

While determining maritime claims under the specified conditions, the courts may settle any outstanding accounts between parties with regard to the vessel. They may also direct that the vessel or a share of it be sold. With regard to a sale, courts may determine the title to the proceeds of such sale.

Priority of maritime claims: Among all claims in an admiralty proceeding, highest priority will be given to maritime claims, followed by mortgages on the vessel, and all other claims. Within maritime claims, the highest priority will be given to claims for wages due with regard to employment on the vessel. This would be followed by claims with regard to loss of life or personal injury in connection with the operation of the vessel. Such claims will continue to exist even with the change of ownership of the vessel.

Jurisdiction over a person: Courts may exercise admiralty jurisdiction against a person with regard to maritime claims. However, the courts will not entertain complaints against a person in certain cases. These include: (i) damage, or loss of life, or personal injury arising out of collision between vessels that was caused in India, or (ii) non-compliance with the collision regulations of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 by a person who does not reside or carry out business in India. Further, Courts will not entertain action against a person until any case against them with regard to the same incident in any court outside India has ended.

Arrest of vessel: The courts may order for the arrest of any vessel within their jurisdiction for providing security against a maritime claim which is the subject

of a proceeding. They may do so under various reasons such as: (i) owner of the vessel is liable for the claim, (ii) the claim is based on mortgage of the vessel, and (iii) the claim relates to ownership of the vessel, etc.

Appeals: Any judgments made by a single Judge of the High Court can be appealed against to a Division Bench of the High Court. Further, the Supreme Court may, on application by any party, transfer an admiralty proceeding at any stage from one High Court to any other High Court. The latter High Court will proceed with the matter from the stage where it stood at the time of the transfer.

Assessors: The central government will appoint a list of assessors qualified and experienced in admiralty and maritime matters. The central government will also determine the duties of assessors, and their fee. Typically, assessors assist the judges in determining rates and claims in admiralty proceedings.

India is a leading maritime nation and maritime transportation caters to about ninety-five percent of its merchandise trade volume. However, under the present statutory framework, the admiralty jurisdiction of Indian courts flow from laws enacted in the British era. Admiralty jurisdiction relates to powers of the High Courts in respect of claims associated with transport by sea and navigable waterways. The repealing of five admiralty statutes is in line with the Government's commitment to do away with archaic laws which are hindering efficient governance.

IV. INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND RELATIONS **11. The birth of the new Nuclear Prohibition Treaty**

In July 2017, the United Nations adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which bans and makes it illegal to possess, use, produce, transfer, acquire, stockpile or deploy nuclear weapons. This was the culmination of 10 years of preparation by many national and international organizations. It was signed and approved by 122 of the 123 participant nations, representing two-thirds of the nations in the UN. Interestingly, none of the nuclear weapons nations participated.

The NWPT is the most significant multilateral development on nuclear arms control since the adoption of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968. It has to be ratified by 50 countries to come into force.

Previous efforts in this regard:

The U.N. General Assembly's very first resolution on Jan. 24, 1946, discussed how to abolish weapons of mass destruction. Ever since, activists, NGOs, governments and the U.N. have been relentless in putting in place planks of an increasingly sophisticated normative architecture to limit the spread of nuclear weapon technology, materials and arsenals.

At the centre of the effort lies the NPT itself. But additional planks include the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) following earlier successes in proscribing atmospheric and underground testing; the Nuclear Suppliers Group set up after India's testing breakout in 1974; various regional nuclear weapon-free zones that cover the southern hemisphere and extend to a limited extent into the northern hemisphere in Central Asia and Mongolia; the Proliferation Security Initiative; etc. In addition, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) acts as the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog to ensure compliance with nonproliferation obligations.

Reactions from the Nuclear-Armed States:

Nuclear weapons states and many of their NATO allies have opposed the initiative from the beginning. Although the United States and the United Kingdom participated in the 2014 Conference on the Humanitarian Impacts of Nuclear Weapons in Vienna, leaders from Washington and the other nuclear weapon states boycotted the Open Ended Working Group sessions and the 2017 negotiations on a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons.

These states contend that the nuclear prohibition treaty will distract attention from other disarmament and nonproliferation initiatives, such as negotiating a fissile material cutoff treaty or ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). They have expressed concern that the a nuclear prohibition treaty could undermine the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) – and the extensive safeguard provisions included therein – by giving states the option to “forum shop,” or choose between the two treaties.



Arguments for the “Convention on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons” (CPNW) from Proponent States:

Supporters of the CPNW argue that new treaty will close a “legal gap” that exists regarding nuclear weapons, which are not expressly outlawed by the NPT even though their use would be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict. They argue that the CPNW initiative reinforces the NPT and the requirement in Article VI for nuclear disarmament and that it can reduce the salience nuclear weapons and help prompt more urgent action to reduce nuclear risk and promote disarmament.

What's missing in the treaty?

- It does not offer a practical approach on how to prod nuclear weapons states to join it.
- It contains no mechanism to verify the reduction and abolition of nuclear weapons.
- It also does not provide a solution to the risk of nuclear weapons being used by accident or miscalculation, or by terrorists.

Why a total ban is being demanded?

Disarmament and deterrence are usually advocated by the nuclear weapons states. But, the failure of this policy is never discussed. If a nuclear-armed nation was attacked, either by intention or error, the expected response would be retaliation with a bevy of nuclear weapons. These weapons are indiscriminate and would invariably kill and wound millions. There is unimaginable suffering among the survivors. Operational infrastructure is gone. The North Korea crisis is a prime example of why these weapons do not belong in human hands. The only fail-safe way to prevent a catastrophe is to eliminate the existence of nuclear weapons; any number above zero should be unacceptable.

Will the ban treaty be easily ratified by all nations?

No. But the treaty, for the first time in history, makes nuclear weapons illegal by international law. It makes the issue permanently visible and gives the goal a greater opportunity to be reached.

Ethical imperatives for nuclear disarmament:

Nuclear weapons obliterate the distinction between combatants and civilians that is central to every moral code in all cultures and civilizations. Most countries have chosen nuclear abstinence because people overwhelmingly abhor the bomb as deeply immoral. It is the most indiscriminately inhumane weapon ever invented. Its primary intended deterrent effect relies on the threat to kill millions of innocent civilians. Accurately called the balance of terror, deterrence is a euphemism for state-sanctioned nuclear terrorism.

The preamble of the NWPT explicitly acknowledges *“the ethical imperatives for nuclear disarmament”* and describes a nuclear weapon-free world as *“a global public good of the highest order, serving both national and collective security interests.”*

The new treaty has challenged the following myths on which the NPT is based:

- First, that nuclear weapons are an entitlement bestowed upon only a handful of countries that had tested a nuclear weapon before the treaty entered into force in 1970.
- Second, that the security of most of the world’s nations—indeed world order itself—is based on the possession of or protection by nuclear weapons.
- Third, that nuclear weapons cannot be banned and nuclear disarmament was only possible as part of a process of “general and complete disarmament”, implying that nuclear weapons might be the last to be disarmed.

How is the new treaty different from Nuclear Non- proliferation Treaty (NPT)?

The new NPT challenges the old NPT's myth of entitlement by holding states that after 7 July "owned, possessed or controlled nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices" responsible for "verifying the irreversible elimination of its nuclear-weapon programme" if they become parties to the treaty. In doing so, nuclear weapons have been devalued and are reduced to a liability rather than being treated as an asset.

Similarly, the fact that the majority of the 193 UN members voted for the treaty, including nearly a third of the Group of Twenty, nearly three-fourths of the Non-Aligned, and old NPT members, reflects that most countries do not depend on nuclear weapons for their security. In fact, the entire southern hemisphere is free of nuclear weapons.

The desire for peace emanating from Hiroshima and Nagasaki is nothing other than the desire that no other country become the target or perpetrator of a nuclear attack. A convention to prohibit nuclear weapons would establish this as humanity's shared norm, and Japan's mission lies in doing everything it can to achieve this. So long as arsenals of nuclear weapons continue to exist on our planet, we will be forced to live with the threat that hair-trigger situations like the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis may again arise.

To quote U.S. President John F. Kennedy's 1961 address to the U.N. General Assembly, "*... we far prefer world law, in the age of self-determination, to world war, in the age of mass extermination.*"

The efforts of many states and representatives of civil society to engage in constructive debate on the contours of this treaty can be seen as a forerunner to the kind of "world law" envisaged by Kennedy.

A convention prohibiting nuclear weapons will serve as a crucial impetus for fulfilling the disarmament obligations of the NPT. Its adoption will generate decisive momentum for nuclear weapons abolition, and it is thus vital that this be achieved. Irrespective of its future prospects, the passing of the new NPT has already challenged the very basis of nuclear deterrence and the nuclear order based on the old NPT. India and other nuclear weapon states would do well to track its progress—the future of their nuclear arsenals might depend on it.

12.E-commerce: RCEP nations talk details

Sixteen Asia Pacific nations, including India, are discussing in detail norms on e-commerce as part of negotiations on the proposed mega Free Trade Agreement known as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Issues including digital certification, paperless trading, online consumer protection and customs duties in e-commerce have been identified for discussion.

The discussions follow the setting up of a panel on e-commerce two years ago by RCEP countries in response to a Japanese proposal on easing foreign direct investment in the sector under which member countries would exchange best practices linked to online commerce.

Many RCEP nations including Australia, Japan and China, are pushing for inclusion of a host of elements for 'Terms Of Reference' for RCEP negotiations concerning e-commerce. This is with a view to have some binding commitments from the RCEP members on liberalising e-commerce and ensure that the final pact has a separate chapter on e-commerce.

India's position:

India has been opposing binding norms on opening up the e-commerce sector at the level of RCEP as well as the global level (WTO) talks on grounds including that it (India) is yet to have a comprehensive national policy on the topic. It is also believed that such binding norms would harm development by diminishing policy space, some economists have warned. Also, experts fear RCEP talks could be used by developed countries to get an outcome at the WTO ministerial in Argentina later this year.

About RCEP:

RCEP is proposed between the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and the six states with which ASEAN has existing FTAs (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand).

RCEP negotiations were formally launched in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia.

RCEP is viewed as an alternative to the TPP trade agreement, which includes the United States but excludes China.

13.BITs and pieces of trade with Israel

In their first 25 years of diplomatic relations, India and Israel have established and achieved a lot and there are enthusiastic and passionate discussions on both sides on how much more they can do. Indian prime minister's first visit is considered 'groundbreaking' event in the diplomatic world. This is because it was the first visit of an Indian PM after the establishment of full diplomatic ties in 1992, and also because an Israeli PM, Ariel Sharon, had already visited India back in 2003.

Why is Israel important for India?

Growing trade and investment relations are a strong reason to study India-Israel relations on their own merit.

Trade: Bilateral merchandise trade increased from \$200 million in 1992 to around \$4 billion in 2016, an increase of 2,000% in 25 years.

FDI: Cumulative foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows from Israel, from April 2000 to March 2017, stood at \$122 million. While these are low, constituting only 0.04% of total FDI inflows to India, there is enormous potential for Israeli investment in fields such as renewable energy and water management.

Defence production, which is at the heart of the 'Make in India' campaign, is another area with significant potential for Israeli investment, a move that will help India save billions of dollars it currently spends on importing weapons from Israel.

Arms: Israel is the third largest supplier of arms to India after Russia and the U.S. Investment in defence production will also give a fillip to domestic manufacturing, reduce dependence on bureaucratic state-owned ordnance factories and bring in new technology.

Is an India-Israel BIT possible?

In 1996, India and Israel signed a BIT. However, this was reportedly terminated by India when it unilaterally discontinued 58 BITs recently. For a new BIT to be negotiated, both sides will have to start afresh.

Challenges :

There are challenges given the many fundamental differences Israel and India have on BITs, as outlined in their Model BITs of 2003 and 2016, respectively.

Investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) provision that allows foreign investors to bring claims against a host state for alleged treaty breaches at international arbitral forums. The Israeli model gives an investor the choice to submit any investment dispute with a state to international arbitration if not resolved within six months through negotiations. The Indian model imposes many procedural and jurisdictional restrictions on an investor's right to bring an ISDS claim. These include a foreign investor having to litigate in domestic courts for five years before pursuing a claim under international law. These requirements make it very difficult for a foreign investor to make efficient use of the ISDS provision.

Definition of FDI: Israel's model provides a broad asset-based definition of foreign investment that covers both FDI and portfolio investment. The Indian model of 2016 defines investment narrowly as an enterprise (with its assets) that has to possess certain characteristics of investment including the investment having 'significance for the development' — words not defined in the BIT — of the host country.

MFN provision: The Israeli model contains a broad most favoured nation (MFN) provision — a cornerstone of non-discrimination in international economic relations — which is missing in the Indian model. The absence of MFN, from Israel’s perspective, would mean that its businesses would have no remedy under international law if India were to discriminate against it, say, by offering greater incentives to another defence manufacturer over an Israeli one.

Taxation: The Indian model excludes taxation altogether from the purview of the BIT. Thus, the foreign investor cannot bring an ISDS claim even if taxes imposed are confiscatory, discriminatory or unfair. However, in the Israeli model, taxation-related measures are recognised as an exception only to MFN and national treatment provisions. Foreign investors can still challenge taxation-related measures for violating other BIT provisions such as the fair and equitable treatment or expropriation.

In sum, the Indian position on BITs is very pro-state, offering limited rights and protection to foreign investors. The Israeli position is the opposite. An India-Israel BIT looks difficult till both sides move away from their stated positions. Both sides should work towards having a BIT that reconciles investment protection with a state’s right to regulate.

14.India, Japan civil nuclear deal comes into force

The India-Japan Agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy entered into force on July 20, 2017 with the exchange of diplomatic notes between Dr. S. Jaishankar, Foreign Secretary and H.E. Mr. Kenji Hiramatsu, Ambassador of Japan to India.

The pact was signed in Tokyo during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Japan on November 11, 2016.

India is the first non-member of the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) to have signed such a deal with Japan. The deal will help India access Japan’s nuclear market.

The deal includes the option that Japan can give a year’s notice before terminating it in case India breaks the nuclear testing moratorium that it had extended to the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 2008.

The deal is significant as it will help guarantee Japan’s continued support to India’s civil nuclear programme.

The deal will bring Japan into the Indian nuclear market where France and Russia have already have a strong presence.

Significance of this move:

This Agreement is a reflection of the strategic partnership between India and Japan and will pave the way for enhanced cooperation in energy security and clean energy.

It seeks to promote full cooperation between the two countries in the development and uses of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes on a stable, reliable and predictable basis.

The deal is essential for bringing a network of nuclear energy cooperation for India, especially with the U.S. as prominent American nuclear companies are owned by the Japanese nuclear majors.

V. ECONOMY, PROJECT AND SCHEMES

15. Export infrastructure plans

The Centre – for the first time under a new scheme called Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES) launched in March to address the infrastructure problem — has given its approval for three proposals.

Proposals include:

An Integrated Cargo Terminal (ICT) at the Imphal International Airport.

Modernisation of infrastructure facility in Karnataka for marine exports.

Construction of a new ‘Standard Design Factory’ building at Cochin Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

Status of export infrastructure in India:

According to a March 2016 report on ‘Export Infrastructure in India’ by the Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce, “deficient infrastructure and the manner in which infrastructure is being operated (in India) are the major obstacles to ensure competitiveness in manufacturing of goods and exports thereof.”

It is estimated that the logistic cost in India is about 14% of the GDP whereas in advanced economies like the U.S. and the European Union, it is 8% and 10% of the GDP respectively. Owing to sub-optimal logistic capability, certain sectors dependent on logistics lose as much as 2% on sales return.

An ASSOCHAM study conducted a few years ago shows that India runs against a disadvantage of about 11% of its trade due to deficient infrastructure.

Need for improvement:

It is estimated that India can save up to \$50 billion if logistics costs are brought down from 14% to 9% of country’s GDP thereby making domestic goods more competitive in global markets.

About TIES:

The Scheme is focussed on **addressing the needs of the exporters**. The scheme replaces a centrally sponsored scheme — Assistance to States for creating Infrastructure for the Development and growth of Exports (ASIDE).

The objective of the TIES is to enhance export competitiveness by bridging gaps in export infrastructure, creating focused export infrastructure and first-mile and last-mile connectivity.

The Central and State Agencies, including Export Promotion Councils, Commodities Boards, SEZ Authorities and Apex Trade Bodies recognised under the EXIM policy of Government of India; are eligible for financial support under this scheme.

The scheme would provide assistance for setting up and up-gradation of infrastructure projects with overwhelming export linkages like the Border Haats, Land customs stations, quality testing and certification labs, cold chains, trade promotion centres, dry ports, export warehousing and packaging, SEZs and ports/airports cargo terminuses.

The TIES, which is being implemented from FY18 till FY20, has a budgetary allocation of Rs. 600 crore.

16. Agrarian crisis – The challenge of a small farmer economy

Though agriculture now accounts for less than 15% of gross domestic product (GDP), *it is still the main source of livelihood for nearly half our population*. Agriculture is still the core of our food security. With over 1.3 billion mouths to feed, imports will not solve our problem if there is a severe drought and food shortage. However, the rising frequency of farmers' agitations in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere and the high incidence of farmer's suicides are symptoms of a deep malaise in the sector.

What are the roots of this crisis?

Fragmentation of land:

Demographic pressure has pushed down the land: man ratio to less than 0.2 hectares of cultivable land per head of rural population. It has also progressively pushed down the size structure of landholdings. Around 83% of rural households are either entirely landless or own less than 1 hectare of land. Another 14% own less than 3 hectares. At the opposite end, less than 0.25% of rural households own more than 10 hectares of land and a minuscule 0.01% own over 20 hectares.

Shortage of money:

Landless or marginal farmers lack the resources to either buy or lease more land or invest in farm infrastructure—irrigation, power, farm machinery, etc.—to compensate for the scarcity of land.

Weather:

The large majority of small farmers are dependent on the rains. A weak monsoon or even a delayed monsoon—timing matters—means a significant loss of output. Soil fertility, pests and plant diseases is another risk.

Price variations:

Farmers are usually at the mercy of traders. The better the crop the lower would be the price. Net income sometimes collapses if there is a very good crop of perishables. The highly distorted and exploitative product market is the second most important factor responsible for the misery of the small farmer.

MSP:

small farmers usually do not benefit from the government assured MSPs. It mainly benefits the large traders who sell grain to the government. Small farmers typically do not have enough marketable surplus to justify the cost of transporting the crop to government corporations in the towns. Their crop is usually sold to traders at rock bottom post-harvest prices in the village itself or the nearest mandi.

APMCs:

Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs), which were supposed to protect the farmer, have had the opposite effect. Farmers have to sell their produce through auctions in regulated markets controlled by cartels of licensed traders, whose licences give them oligopolistic market power. These cartels fix low purchase prices, extract large commissions, delay payments, etc. According to a study, the farmers may typically get as little as 25% of the price that consumers finally pay. A consolidated mark-up of 300%.

Migration:

The rural youth, especially young males, are migrating to the towns and cities for a better future. But their dreams are quickly shattered. There is not much employment growth anyway and they lack the skills required for a decent job. What remains is a burgeoning army of unemployed, miserable and frustrated young men.

Measures:

An idea that has gained much traction in recent days is **cooperative farming**. This is already popular in France, Germany, Romania, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Kenya, and Bangladesh among others. There are several variants of cooperation ranging from collective action in accessing credit, acquiring inputs and marketing to production cooperatives that also include land pooling; labour pooling; joint investment, joint water management and joint production.

Advantages of cooperative farming:

The advantages of aggregating small farms into larger, voluntary, cooperatives include greater capacity to undertake lumpy investment in irrigation and farm machinery, more efficient farming practices, greater bargaining power and better terms in the purchase or leasing of land, access to credit, purchase of inputs and the sale of produce.

The cooperative approach also has its problems, such as internal conflict, free riding, etc., but farming communities have also found institutional solutions to these problems. The conditions for success of such cooperative approaches include voluntariness, cooperative units of small groups, relative socioeconomic homogeneity of cooperating households, transparent and participatory decision-making, checks and penalties against free riding, and group control over the fair distribution of returns.

The agrarian crisis is morphing into a social nightmare. Its time for a complete overhaul. There are many lessons of successful cooperative farming in India and abroad that will have to be learned for the institutional transformation of our small farmer economy into cooperative farming systems on a national scale to address the agrarian crisis.

17.PradhanMantriVayaVandanaYojana (PMVVY)

PradhanMantriVayaVandanaYojana (PMVVY), a pension scheme exclusively for senior citizens, has been launched.

PMVVY is a Pension Scheme exclusively **for the senior citizens aged 60 years and above.**

The Scheme can be purchased offline as well as online through Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India which has been given the sole privilege to operate this Scheme.

Benefits under the PradhanMantriVayaVandanaYojana (PMVVY):

- Scheme provides an assured return of 8% p.a. payable monthly (equivalent to 8.30% p.a. effective) for 10 years.
- Pension is payable at the end of each period, during the policy term of 10 years, as per the frequency of monthly/ quarterly/ half-yearly/ yearly as chosen by the pensioner at the time of purchase.
- The scheme is exempted from Service Tax/ GST.
- On survival of the pensioner to the end of the policy term of 10 years, Purchase price along with final pension installment shall be payable.

- Loan upto 75% of Purchase Price shall be allowed after 3 policy years (to meet the liquidity needs). Loan interest shall be recovered from the pension installments and loan to be recovered from claim proceeds.
- The scheme also allows for premature exit for the treatment of any critical/terminal illness of self or spouse. On such premature exit, 98% of the Purchase Price shall be refunded.
- On death of the pensioner during the policy term of 10 years, the Purchase Price shall be paid to the beneficiary.

18.AajeevikaGrameen Express Yojana

The Ministry of Rural Development is all set to launch a new sub-scheme under DeendayalAntyodayaYojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) which will be named as “AajeevikaGrameen Express Yojana (AGEY)”.

About AGEY:

The main objectives of AGEY are **to provide an alternative source of livelihoods to members of Self Help Groups (SHGs) under DAY-NRLM by facilitating them to operate public transport services in backward rural areas.**

This will provide safe, affordable and community monitored rural transport services like e-rickshaws, 3 and 4 wheeler motorised transport vehicles to connect remote villages with key services and amenities including access to markets, education and health for the overall economic development of the area.

Implementation:

The sub-scheme will be implemented in 250 blocks in the country on a pilot basis for a period of 3 years from 2017-18 to 2019-20. The States have been informed about the number of blocks allocated to them to take up this sub-scheme in the pilot phases.

One of the options proposed to be given under the sub-scheme is that the Community Based Organisation (CBO) will provide interest free loan from its own corpus to Self Help Group member for purchase of the vehicle.

19.PradhanMantriMatruVandanaYojana

Draft guidelines for implementation of PradhanMantriMatruVandanaYojana (PMMVY) have been prepared by the Ministry.

The draft guidelines inter-alia provide Aadhaar linkage, Direct Benefit Transfer of Rs. 5000 in beneficiary's bank/post office account in three instalments at the stage of early registration of pregnancy, after six months of pregnancy on at least one antenatal check-up and registration of child birth & first cycle of immunisation of the child.

About PradhanMantriMatruVandanaYojana (PMMVY):

- PradhanMantriMatritvaVandanaYojana (PMMVY), previously Indira Gandhi MatritvaSahyogYojana (IGMSY), is a maternity benefit program run by the government of India.
- It is a **conditional cash transfer scheme for pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for first two live births.**
- It provides a **partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare** and to provide conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices.
- In 2013, **the scheme was brought under the National Food Security Act, 2013** to implement the provision of cash maternity benefit of ₹6,000 stated in the Act.
- It is Centrally Sponsored Scheme under which the cost sharing ratio between the Centre and the States & UTs with Legislature is 60:40, for North-Eastern States & three Himalayan States, it is 90:10 and 100% Central assistance for Union Territories without Legislature.

20. National Trade Facilitation Action Plan

The National Trade Facilitation Action Plan (NTFAP) has been released.

About NTFAP:

The Action Plan aims to transform cross-border clearance ecosystem through efficient, transparent, risk-based, co-ordinated, digital, seamless and technology driven procedures which are supported by advanced sea ports, airports, and land borders.

The NTFAP aims to achieve improvement in ease of doing business by reducing cargo release time and cost, promote paperless regulatory environment, transparent and predictable legal regime and improved investment climate through better infrastructure.

NTFAP also awards specific responsibilities to all regulatory agencies like Customs, FSSAI, Drug Controller, Plant Quarantine, DGFT, etc to be completed in a time-bound manner.

This Action Plan gives a time bound map, not only for implementing TFA, but also for India's initiatives for trade facilitation and Ease of Doing Business which goes beyond TFA.

Apart from activities under the ambit of TFA, the Action Plan also goes beyond to what has been defined as **TFA Plus category**. It covers many activities in the areas of infrastructure augmentation, particularly the roadways and

railways leading to ports and the infrastructure within ports, airports, ICDs, land customs stations that cuts across all stakeholders for which various ministries like shipping, civil aviation, railways, road transport and highways, Home Affairs, Finance, Commerce etc have been assigned specified targets.

All actions covered under the plan have been categorized by prioritizing the activities into short term, midterm and long term. The National Plan would be monitored by the Steering Committee (the operational arm of the NCTF) chaired by the Revenue Secretary and the Commerce Secretary. The plan would be reviewed by the Cabinet Secretary.

Trade facilitation:

The Trade Facilitation Agreement forms part of **the Bali Package agreed by members at the Ninth Ministerial Conference in Bali.**

The agreement contains provisions for faster and more efficient customs procedures through effective cooperation between customs and other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance issues.

It also contains provisions for technical assistance and capacity building in this area.

It is being believed, especially by the proponents of the agreement that deal could add \$1 trillion to global GDP and also can generate 21 million jobs by slashing red tape and streamlining customs.



21.MPC members to disclose assets

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently notified *the Monetary Policy Committee and Monetary Policy Process Regulations, 2016.*

Highlights of the regulations:

Remuneration:

Members of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) will be paid Rs. 1.5 lakh per meeting along with air travel and other reimbursements.

Silent period:

Members will have to observe a “silent period” of seven days before and after the rate decision for “utmost confidentiality”. Members are also required to be mindful of any conflict between their personal and public interest while interacting with profit making organisations and making personal financial transactions.

Voting pattern:

Each member of the MPC has one vote and in case the numbers are equal, the governor has the casting vote.

Report:

The MPC, which has the responsibility of achieving a set inflation target, should submit a report to the government in case of failure to achieve the required target. In such instances, the report shall be sent to the central government “within one month from the date on which the bank has failed to meet the inflation target“.

Meetings:

MPC has to hold meetings at least four times in a year. The schedule of the MPC meetings for the entire fiscal year needs to be announced in advance. At least 15 days of notice is required for convening a meeting ordinarily, but an emergency meeting can be called with 24 hours notice for each member and technology-enabled arrangements need to be made for even shorter notice period meetings.

Assets declaration:

All members need to disclose their assets and liabilities and update this information once every year.

After conclusion of MPC meeting, a resolution needs to be made public including on the policy repo rate and any other monetary policy measures at the discretion of the Chairperson while keeping in view the functioning and timing of financial markets.

About the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC):

The six-member MPC was constituted in September 2016. It has been deciding on policy rates since October last year.

Composition:

The **committee will have six members**. Of the six members, the government will nominate three. No government official will be nominated to the MPC.

The other three members would be from the RBI with the governor being the ex-officio chairperson. Deputy governor of RBI in charge of the monetary policy will be a member, as also an executive director of the central bank.

Decision: Decisions will be taken by majority vote with each member having a vote.

RBI governor’s role: The RBI Governor will chair the committee. The governor, however, will not enjoy a veto power to overrule the other panel members, but will have a casting vote in case of a tie.

Selection: The government nominees to the MPC will be selected by a Search-cum-Selection Committee under Cabinet Secretary with RBI Governor and Economic Affairs Secretary and three experts in the field of economics or banking or finance or monetary policy as its members.

Term: Members of the MPC will be appointed for a period of four years and shall not be eligible for reappointment.

VI. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

22. Multi Drug Resistant TB

- The results from a limited number of children tested, under the Revised National TB Control Programme, is worrying.
- About 5,500 of over 76,000 children tested in nine Indian cities have been diagnosed with tuberculosis.
- 9% of them with multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB).
- Many children tested positive for TB showed resistance to Rifampicin, a first-line drug.

MDR-TB & MDR/RR-TB

MDR-TB is an abbreviation of Multi Drug Resistant TB and it is a specific type of drug resistant TB infection. It means that the TB bacteria that a person is infected with, are resistant to at least two of the most important TB drugs, isoniazid (INH) and rifampicin (RMP). If bacteria are resistant to certain TB drugs this means that the drugs won't work. Other drugs then need to be taken by the person if they are to be cured.

Since the incidence of TB among children is a reflection of the prevalence of the disease in the community at large, the high prevalence of both drug-sensitive TB and drug-resistant TB in children from these nine cities is a grim reminder of the failure of **the health-care system to diagnose the disease early enough in adults and start them on treatment.**

Measures

A proactive approach to **testing helps in early and correct diagnosis** of all contacts and in cutting the transmission chain. In line with World Health Organisation guidelines, the RNTCP requires all household contacts, particularly children, of a newly diagnosed pulmonary TB patient to be tested and started on treatment if needed. *Children below six years of age in the household of a newly diagnosed patient are required to be given the drug Isoniazid as a prophylactic even when they do not have the disease.*

The government should take up **contact screening** more urgently. Using the Xpert molecular diagnostic test to screen children with TB is a positive step and should be welcomed, but all the diagnosed children should be guaranteed

paediatric Fixed-dose combination (FDC) drugs. It would be unethical to deny them this lifeline.

23.GM mustard policy

The government has informed the Supreme Court that a policy decision on the commercial release of the Genetically Modified (GM) mustard crop is yet to be finalised. It said it was poring through the various suggestions on and objections to the commercial rollout of the GM crops.

The court has granted the government one week to report back on when the policy would be finalised. It said the policy should be good-intentioned and well-informed.

The court had on October 17, 2016, extended the stay on the commercial release of the GM mustard until further orders. It had asked the Centre to collect public opinion before the release. The government had assured the court that there would be no commercial release of GM seeds till the views of the public were collected and placed before the appraisal committee.

About GM crop:

A GM or transgenic crop is a plant that has a novel combination of genetic material obtained through the use of modern biotechnology.

For example, a GM crop can contain a gene(s) that has been artificially inserted instead of the plant acquiring it through pollination. The resulting plant is said to be “genetically modified” although in reality all crops have been “genetically modified” from their original wild state by domestication, selection, and controlled breeding over long periods of time.

GM crops in India:

The **GM mustard, developed by a Delhi University institution, is only the second food crop which got its clearance from the central regulator.** The GEAC had earlier in 2010 cleared the BtBrinjal but the decision was not accepted by then environment minister Jairam Ramesh. Currently, only Bt Cotton – a non-food GM crop – is commercially cultivated in the country.

An application for commercial release of the GM Mustard was filed in December 2015. The GEAC had subsequently set up a sub-committee to examine the safety aspect of the use of transgenic variety of the mustard. The sub-committee had last year given its safety clearance while noting that the GM Mustard is safe for human consumption and environment. Decision of the GEAC was, however, vehemently opposed by environmentalists and anti-GM groups.

24.National strategic plan for malaria elimination

The ambitious National Strategic Plan (NSP) for Malaria Elimination (2017-22) has been launched. The NSP, a year-wise roadmap for malaria elimination across the country, is based on last year's National Framework for Malaria Elimination, which was, in turn, spurred by World Health Organisation's Global Technical Strategy for Malaria, 2016-2030.

What is this plan to eradicate malaria?

The NSP divides the country into four categories, from 0 to 3. Zero, the first category, has 75 districts that have not reported any case of malaria for the last three years.

Category 1 has 448 districts, in which the annual parasite incidence (API, or the number of positive slides for the parasite in a year) is less than one per 1,000 population. In **Category 2**, which has 48 districts, the API is one and above, but less than two per 1,000 population. **Category 3** has 107 districts, reporting an API of two and above per 1,000 population.

The plan is **to eliminate malaria (zero indigenous cases) by 2022 in all Category 1 and 2 districts**. The remaining districts are to be brought under a pre-elimination and elimination programme.

The NSP also **aims to maintain a malaria-free status for areas where transmission has been interrupted**. It seeks to achieve universal case detection and treatment services in endemic districts to ensure 100% diagnosis of all suspected cases, and full treatment of all confirmed cases.

Components of the plan:

The plan has **four components, based on WHO recommendations**: diagnosis and case management; surveillance and epidemic response; prevention — integrated vector management; 'cross-cutting' interventions, which include advocacy, communication, research and development, and other initiatives.

What kind of challenges is the NSP likely to face?

One of the biggest challenges is the shortage of manpower. According to the Health Ministry, there are only about 40,000 multipurpose health workers (MPWs) against the approximately 80,000 sanctioned posts in the 1,50,000 subcentres in the country. Other problems include access to conflict-affected tribal areas, and to areas with a high malaria endemicity and insecticide resistance. High endemicity states include those in the Northeast, which share borders with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, where the prevalence of malaria is high.

In India, malaria is caused by the parasites *Plasmodium falciparum* (Pf) and *Plasmodium Vivax* (Pv). Pf is found more in the forest areas, whereas Pv is more common in the plains. The disease is mainly concentrated in the tribal and

remote areas of the country. The majority of reporting districts are in the country's eastern and central parts — the largest number of cases are found in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and the Northeastern states of Tripura, Mizoram and Meghalaya.

25. Plastic realities

The use of plastics has increased substantially since the 1960s. Though, various regulations are in place to curb the overuse of plastics, hardly anything has changed on the ground.

Threats posed by the overuse of plastics:

Environmental threats: These bags pollute the environment, especially soil and water, as they take about 200 years to decompose naturally.

Food chain: The use of plastic has become so ubiquitous that even birds, animals and fish have unwittingly made it part of their diet. Disposed plastic degrades slowly, its chemicals getting leached into surroundings. Further, it breaks down into smaller components over time, entering our food chain and landing up on our plates.

Microbeads: Microbeads have emerged as a new form of threats. First patented in 1972 for use in cleansers, microbeads began to replace natural material like ground almonds, oatmeal and sea salt in the area of cosmetics. Many cosmetics and toiletry products — ranging from facewashes to toothpastes — use it today. Their abrasive nature lends itself to use in industries such as petroleum, textiles, printing and automobile. BIS has classified them as unsafe for consumer products.

Measures:

People's participation: This multifaceted problem cannot be dealt with by the government alone. While the government should take measures to strengthen the recycling economy and recycle the most plastic bags in use, people have to learn to sort the garbage they produce every day so that waste management facilities and businesses can easily separate the recyclable waste to turn them into resources again.

The problem of plastic bags is not only related to social governance, but also to our idea about modern society. As such, the government must take multiple measures to make the ban on plastic bags truly effective, and reverse the current polluting trend, which will not only help protect the environment but also restore the credibility of the legal system.

26.Cyber space global conference

India will be hosting the 5th Global Conference on Cyber Space (GCCS) in 2017, one of the world's largest conference on Cyber Space and related issues.

The GCCS is taking place **outside OECD nations for the first time.**

It is being held **in India for the first time.**

The **theme** for the GCCS 2017 is '*Cyber4All: An Inclusive, Sustainable, Developmental, Safe and Secure Cyberspace*'.

Participants:

The conference will see participation of around 2000 delegates from senior Government officials, industry leaders, academia and civil society from over 100 countries.

Aim of the conference:

GCCS will congregate and deliberate on issues relating to promotion of cooperation in cyberspace, norms for responsible behaviour in cyberspace and to enhance cyber capacity building.

About GCCS:

GCCS is a prestigious international conference that aims **at encouraging dialogue among stakeholders of cyberspace**, which has been taking place since 2011. Incepted in 2011 in London, GCCS witnessed a participation of 700 global delegates. Global Forum on Cyber Expertise (GFCE) for capacity building in cyber space was launched in the fourth edition of the conference held in The Hague, Netherlands.