

- **Appointments**

- **Vice Admiral Karambir Singh** is to be appointed as next Navy chief.
- **Pramod Sawant** has been sworn-in as CM of Goa.
- **Hasmukh Adhia** has been appointed as Chancellor of Gujarat Central University.
- **P V Ramesh** has been appointed as the director-general of the National Archives of India
- **Justice SA Bobde** has nominated as NALSA Executive Chairman
- **P. K. Bezbaruah** has been reappointed as Chairman of Tea Board
- **Bhagwan Lal Sahni** has been appointed as Chairman of the National Commission for Backward Classes.
- **Ajit Kumar Mohanty** has been appointed as Director of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre.

- **Awards and Honours**

- **Pritzker Prize 2019** - Japanese Architect Arata Isozaki is the who has received the
- **Nari Shakti Awards 2018** - President Ram Nath Kovind recently presented the Nari Shakti Awards, 2018, the highest civilian honour for women in India, in New Delhi. Forty One individuals and three institutions were given the award this year.
 - It is awarded every year on International Women's Day. Ministry of Women and Child Development confers the award to women and institutions in recognition of their relentless service towards the cause of women empowerment and social welfare.
 - Instituted in 1991, the award carries a cash prize of rupees one lakh and a certificate.
 - The award is given in six categories and is named after eminent women in Indian history
 - Devi Ahilya Bai Holkar Award: 18th-century ruler of Malwa kingdom
 - Kannagi Award: a legendary Tamil woman
 - Mata Jijabai Award: mother of Shivaji, who founded the Maratha Empire in the 17th century
 - Rani Gaidinliu Zeliang Award: a 20th-century Naga spiritual and political leader
 - Rani Lakshmi Bai Award: the Queen of Jhansi
 - Rani Rudramma Devi Award (for both men and women): a 13th-century ruler of Deccan Plateau
- The Odisha government on March 5, 2019 launched **boat ambulance service** for those living in the remote villages near Bhitarkanika National Park in Kendrapara district. It is meant to ferry people to hospitals and clinics in case of emergency.
- Facebook has launched two new India-specific tools viz. '**Candidate Connect**' and '**Share You Voted**' to boost civic engagement on its platform during the Lok Sabha election 2019.
- International Women's Day is celebrated on March 8 every year. It is a day when the world comes together to appreciate womanhood and their importance in society. Its roots can be traced to 1908, when 15,000 women marched through New York City demanding voting rights, better pay and shorter working hours. The UN theme for International Women's Day this year, 'Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change' puts innovation by women and girls, for women and girls, at the heart of efforts to achieve gender equality.

- **e-Dharti GeoPortal and app:** The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry has launched the e-Dharti app and e-Dharti GeoPortal to help the public in getting the necessary information on fingertips and the government to effectively manage its properties.
- **SC Appoints 3 Member Panel To Mediate In Ayodhya Dispute**
 - A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court (SC) referred the Ayodhya dispute for mediation under **Section 89** of Code of Civil procedure. The Court also appointed a panel of mediators, comprising former SC judge **F.M.I. Kalifulla** as chairman, Art of Living founder **Sri Sri Ravi Shankar** and **Sriram Panchu**, a senior advocate with experience in alternative dispute resolution.
 - Section 89 says that “Where it appears to the court that there exist elements of a settlement which may be to the parties, the court shall formulate the terms of settlement and give them to the parties for their observations and after receiving the observations of the parties, the court may reformulate the terms of a possible settlement and refer the same for (a) arbitration; (b) conciliation; (c) judicial settlement including settlement through Lok Adalat or (d) mediation”.
 - The mediation will start in **Faizabad district** of Uttar Pradesh, of which the disputed area is a part with the process conducted in-camera.
 - The mediation panel has been given **eight weeks** and also directed them to file a status report in **four weeks**.
- To boost hydro power generation, the government has approved new measures, including providing **renewable energy status for large hydel projects (LHP)** and new funding provisions. Earlier, hydro projects up to 25 MW capacity were considered as renewables and were eligible for various incentives like financial assistance and cheaper credit. Now, LHPs can also avail the benefits. Hydro Purchase Obligation (HPO) within non-solar Renewable Purchase Obligation will also cover LHPs commissioned from now. In terms of funding, on case to case basis, budgetary support for funding flood moderation component and enabling infrastructure i.e. roads and bridges will also be available.
- The Union Minister of Textiles has launched a comprehensive **Scheme for Development of Knitting and Knitwear Sector** under **PowerTex India**. Knitting and knitwear sector is predominantly MSME in size, a major employment generator, and has a significant contribution on the exports of textiles. The main components of the scheme are Creation of new service centers on PPP model in the knitting and knitwear clusters, and Modernization and upgradation of existing power loom service Centers (PSCs). PowerTex India is a comprehensive union government scheme for powerloom sector development.
- The **NCR region (Delhi, parts of UP and Haryana) attracted the highest FDI** and account for about one-fourth of foreign investment (worth \$8.3 billion) received by India during April-December 2018. However, the data is based on information provided by companies to regional offices of the RBI and does not necessarily means that investments have been made in that particular area. The key sectors that received the maximum foreign investment during the nine months of the fiscal include services, computer software and hardware, telecommunications, trading, chemicals, and automobiles. *Singapore was the largest source of FDI during this period, followed by Mauritius and the Netherlands.*
- Data released by Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion has revealed that the **Delhi NCR region has surpassed Maharashtra in attracting the highest FDI equity inflows** into the country. Delhi (NCR), Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Gujarat received approximately 75% of the total FDI equity inflows into the country in the first nine months of FY2018-19.
- The RBI announced eight-member **Usha Thorat panel** to examine issues related to offshore rupee markets and recommend policy measures to ensure stability of the external value of the domestic

currency. The panel will assess the causes behind the development of the offshore rupee market and study the effects of the offshore markets on the rupee exchange rate and market liquidity in the domestic market. In setting up the panel, the RBI has been guided by the objective of developing deep and liquid on-shore financial markets that act as a price setter of the rupee globally.

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Bank of Japan have signed a **bilateral swap arrangement (BSA)** for an amount up to \$75 billion. Availability of such swap line to manage difficulties arising out of any Balance of Payment (BOP) issues would deter speculative attacks on the domestic currency (like sudden selling of a nation's currency leading to rise in dollar rate) and greatly enhance the RBI's ability to manage exchange rate volatility. Also, with this arrangement in place, prospects of Indian companies would improve in tapping foreign capital as there would be greater confidence in stability of country's exchange rate. The BSA will contribute to the stability of financial markets, thereby further developing the economic and trade ties between India and Japan.
- RBI has eased business guidelines for **White Label ATMs (WLAs)** allowing those companies to buy wholesale cash from the RBI offices and currency chests, and to source cash from any scheduled bank (they will no longer be dependent on sponsor banks for procurement of cash). WLAs will also be allowed to offer non-bank services like bill payments, cash deposit services and also advertise even non-financial products in their premises. The new relaxations are expected to help increase the revenue earning scope for these companies, and also enhance the viability of WLAs. White Label ATMs are ATMs operated by non-banking entities incorporated in India after obtaining authorisation from RBI under the Payment and Settlement Systems (PSS) Act 2007. WLAs have been permitted by RBI since 2012.
- The RBI has notified the norms for banks with regards to **2% interest subvention or subsidy for short-term crop loans** up to Rs 3 lakh during 2018-19 and 2019-20. The interest subvention scheme has been approved by the central government to ensure availability of agriculture credit at a reasonable cost/at a reduced rate of 7% per annum to farmers. Under the scheme, an additional 3 per cent interest subvention is provided to farmers repaying loans promptly. The scheme is implemented through public sector banks and private sector banks (reimbursement through RBI), Regional Rural Banks and Cooperatives (reimbursement through NABARD).
- Women in India earn 19% less than men, reflecting the **high gender pay gap in the country**, according to the latest **Monster Salary Index (MSI)** survey. The median gross hourly salary for men in India in 2018 stood at Rs 242.49, while for women it stood at around Rs 196.3. The data shows gender pay difference widening with higher skill level - while there is no gender pay gap in semi-skilled work, the gap touches 20% for skilled women and 30% for highly skilled occupations. MSI is an initiative by Monster India in collaboration with Paycheck.in (managed by Wage Indicator Foundation) and IIM-Ahmedabad as a research partner.
- The Gems And Jewellery Sector is set to get India's **first jewellery park** in Navi Mumbai. This park will dedicate half its space to small players in the value chain. It would be developed on co-operative housing model basis, accommodating about 4,800 large and small units encompassing the entire jewellery value chain.
- Department of Commerce of the Ministry of Commerce & Industry has notified a scheme for **Transport and Marketing Assistance (TMA) for Specified Agriculture Products**. It aims to provide assistance for the international component of freight and marketing of agricultural produce to mitigate disadvantage of higher cost of transportation of export of specified agriculture products due to trans-shipment. It also aims to promote brand recognition for Indian agricultural products in the specified overseas markets.

- Andhra Pradesh's demand of a separate railway zone got fulfilled with the Union Railway minister announcing the **new railway zone -- Southern Coast Railway** -- headquartered in Visakhapatnam. It will be the 18th zone in the country. The new zone will comprise the existing Guntakal, Guntur and Vijayawada divisions that currently fall under the South Central Railway.
- The NITI Aayog and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) organized the first workshop on development of the **India Energy Modelling Forum (IEMF)**. The IEMF seeks to provide a platform for leading experts and policy makers to study important energy and environmental issues and ensure induction of modelling and analysis in informed decision making process.
- The President of India inaugurated the **Festival of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (FINE) 2019** and presented the **Gandhian Young Technological Innovation Awards**.
 - FINE (previously known as Festival of Innovation FOIN) is a unique initiative of the Office of the President of India to recognise, respect and reward grassroots innovations and foster a supportive ecosystem.
 - FINE would provide platform to the innovators for building the linkages with potential stakeholders whose support can improve their prospects in coming years for the larger social good.
 - It will also help in promoting lateral learning and linkages among the innovators to enrich the ecosystem for new India.
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has deferred the implementation of the **Indian Accounting Standard rules (Ind AS)** indefinitely, as necessary amendments to the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 are yet to be made. The delay will bring huge relief to the banks which are yet to recognise stressed assets and make necessary provisions as that would require higher capital. Currently, the banks and non-banking financial companies follow Indian generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) standards for financial reporting. With increasing global reach of Indian companies, there was a need to converge reporting standards with international standards leading to the introduction of Ind AS which are harmonised with the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).
- **WCL Report 2019**
 - The **Worldwide Cost of Living Report 2019** found that some of India's biggest cities like Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai are among the cheapest in the world to live in.
 - In fact, all South Asian cities feature among the cheapest 30 in the world, and continue to offer the best value for money in the region.
 - The report has findings of the Worldwide Cost of Living Survey by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), that compares more than 400 individual prices across 160 products and services in cities around the world. EIU is the research and analysis division of The Economist Group (that brings out The Economist newspaper) providing global business intelligence.
 - Paris, Singapore and Hong Kong were jointly the most expensive cities in the world.
- The **Government has surpassed its Rs 80,000 crore disinvestment target for the current financial year** (ending March 2019) as proceeds from stake sales have touched Rs 85,000 crore. Launch of several tranches of Exchange Traded Fund (ETF) of state-owned companies, Power Finance Corporation acquiring government's stake in Rural Electrification Corporation and PSUs buying back their own shares were among the measures used by the government to achieve its target of stake sales. The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) is mandated to manage Central Government investments in equity, including disinvestment of equity in CPSUs. Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs) are essentially Index Funds that are listed and traded on exchanges and traded like stocks. ETFs are used for disinvestment by Government of India.

- After being grey-listed by Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in June 2018, Pakistan is facing the prospect of being grey-listed by Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG) over terror financing and money laundering. APG is reviewing whether Pakistan has made enough progress on global standards against financial crimes to warrant its exclusion from the Sydney-based APG's grey list.

Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG)

- ✓ The **APG** is the FATF-style regional body (FSRB) for the Asia-Pacific region consisting of 41 member jurisdictions, and is part of a global network of similar bodies.
- ✓ It is an inter-governmental organisation founded in 1997 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- ✓ The members come together on an ad hoc basis (similar to the FATF) and take action collectively on a consensus basis to address the crimes of money laundering (and the associated predicate crimes) as well as terrorist financing.
- ✓ The mutual evaluation process by the APG is separate from the FATF but it is based on the implementation of 40 FATF recommendations.
- ✓ Out of the 40 recommendations, the APG has provisionally assessed Pakistan non-compliant on nearly 28 recommendations.

- The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (**MPI**) **2018 report found that India reduced its poverty rate sharply from 55 % to 28 % in ten years between 2005-06 and 2015-16**. In India, poverty reduction among children, the poorest states, Scheduled Tribes, and Muslims was fastest. However, India still had 364 million poor in 2015-16, the largest for any country. Worldwide, the report found that 1.3 billion people live in multidimensional poverty in the 105 developing countries it covered. The level of global child poverty is staggering, with children accounting for virtually half (49.9%) of the world's poor.

Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) MPI, developed in 2010 by the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is an international measure of acute poverty, covering over 100 developing countries. The MPI looks beyond traditional income-based poverty measures to understand how people experience poverty in multiple and simultaneous ways. It identifies how people are being left behind across three key dimensions: health, education and standard of living, comprising 10 indicators. People who experience deprivation in at least one third of these weighted indicators fall into the category of multidimensionally poor.

- The RBI has imposed monetary **penalty on many banks for non-compliance of regulatory directions with regard to use of global payments network SWIFT**, including Karnataka Bank, United Bank of India, Punjab National Bank (PNB). SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications) is a messaging system used by lenders the world over to transfer money between banks, particularly foreign currency funds. In 2018, the RBI has asked banks to integrate link for SWIFT with their core banking system (CBS) along with other directions. The directions came after the Indian banking system was hit by a \$2 billion fraud at PNB in 2018, resulting from unauthorised credit guarantees to businesses linked to billionaire jeweller Nirav Modi via SWIFT.

Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT)

- ✓ SWIFT was founded in 1973 by a group of 239 banks from 15 countries which formed a co-operative utility to develop a secure electronic messaging service and common standards to facilitate cross-border payments.
- ✓ It is a global member-owned cooperative that is headquartered in Brussels, Belgium.

- ✓ SWIFT is used by banks and other financial institutions to quickly, accurately, and securely send and receive information, such as money transfer instructions through a standardized system of codes.
- ✓ Now, SWIFT is trusted by over 11,000 financial institutions—banks, brokerages, mutual fund firms, and securities dealers—in more than 200 countries.

- **New ‘Black Hole’ Coin:** The UK’s Royal Mint has unveiled a new commemorative 50 pence coin. The coin is inspired by the late legendary British physicist Stephen Hawking’s seminal work on black holes. Hawking, who died aged 76 last year, joins the ranks of other eminent scientists such **Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin** to have a commemorative coin in honour of one of his greatest discoveries. This work, **which used a tentative unification of Einstein’s theory of general relativity with quantum mechanics**, reported that black holes should not be completely black, **instead emitting radiation**, meaning they evaporate and eventually disappear.
- The air forces of the **US, UK and Australia** have concluded the *multinational advanced aerial combat training exercise Red Flag Nellis 19* at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, US. Exercise Red Flag, **established in 1975**, aims to prepare US and its allies to peer-level adversaries in any combat environment. The origin of the exercise is traced to the unacceptable performance of U.S. Air Force fighter pilots and weapon systems officers (WSO) in air combat manoeuvring (ACM) (air-to-air combat) during the Vietnam War.
- Kazakhstan has renamed its capital Astana to **Nursultan**. This was done in the honour of **outgoing leader Nursultan Nazarbayev**, who unexpectedly resigned recently. The change was announced after **Kassym-Jomart Tokayev** was **sworn in as President**.
- World’s longest salt cave has been discovered in Israel. The cave named **Malham**, stretching over 10 kilometres, runs through **Mount Sodom**, Israel’s largest mountain, and spills out to the southwest corner of the adjacent **Dead Sea**. The cave is near the desert site where, according to the Bible, Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt.
- India has launched its third IT corridor in China that will facilitate partnerships between Indian and Chinese companies. The IT industry body has already launched such corridors at **Dalian and Guiyang cities** to cash in on the burgeoning Chinese IT industry market. The first two corridors have paved the way for cooperation in the emerging technologies such as AI, IoT and Analytics in the Chinese market.
- **India, US To Sign Pact For Exchange Of Country-By-Country Reports**
 - India and US will sign an agreement which will enable them to exchange of country-by-country reports (CbC) reports filed by the ultimate parent corporations based in either of the countries.
 - It will reduce the compliance burden on their subsidiaries operating out of these countries.
 - To address the issue of Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS), OECD adopted several measures. One of the measures adopted by OECD is Country-By-Country Reports.
 - The Income-tax Act requires Indian subsidiaries of multinational companies to provide details of key financial statements from other jurisdictions where they operate. This provides the I-T Department with better operational view of such companies, primarily with regards to revenue and income tax paid.
- **J&K Liberation Front Banned Under UAPA**
 - Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has banned separatist Yasin Malik’s Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) under the anti-terror law, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967

(UAPA). The JKLF became the second party to be declared unlawful in Kashmir in less than a month, after religio-political organisation, Jama'at-e-Islamia was banned.

- The decision followed a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) headed by Prime Minister.
- JKLF was the first outfit to pick up arms in the Valley but joined the dialogue process in 2000 with the Centre when late Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the Prime Minister.
- According to the government, the organisation is involved in anti-national and subversive activities intended to disrupt the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India.

[For detailed discussion on UAPA, please refer the topic "**Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act**" from February 2019 issue of CA Magazine]

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) member states, including India and Pakistan, will participate in a joint anti-terrorism exercise this year. The decision to hold the joint exercise -- "**Sary-Arka-Antiterror 2019**" -- was announced during the 34th meeting of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) council of the SCO in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. RATS is a permanent part of the SCO that serves to promote cooperation of member states against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism. It is headquartered in Tashkent.
- The 15th edition of the Maritime & Aerospace Exhibition - **Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIMA) Exhibition 2019** - was held in Malaysia from 26 - 30 March. It was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir bin Mohammed.
 - LIMA is the largest show of its kind within the Asia Pacific region.
 - Held **biennially** since its **debut in 1991**, LIMA is an ideal platform *where industry stakeholders could engage and expand their networks* towards forging new partnerships and business agreements.
 - From Indian side, INS Kadmatt and India's indigenous supersonic fighter jet Tejas took part in the LIMA 2019. INS Kadmatt is an indigenous stealth anti-submarine warfare corvette of the Indian Navy. Tejas is a light combat aircraft (LCA) developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd.
- **Abhedya**
 - Indian Navy has commissioned a state of the art 'Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Training Facility - Abhedya', at INS Shivaji, Lonavla. The facility was initiated in 2016 and executed by the **Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL)**.
 - It will provide realistic training to naval personnel in detection, protection against and decontamination of nuclear, biological and chemical agents.
 - Earlier there used to be only theoretical training about how to deal with hostile nuclear-chemical-bio weapons environment.

INS Shivaji, Lonavla will be celebrating **2019-20 as the 'Platinum Jubilee Year'**. The **premier Cat 'A' training establishment** of the Indian Navy, commissioned as **HMIS Shivaji** in 1945 has entered her 75th year of commission. It imparts training in engineering discipline to personnel of the Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard and several friendly foreign countries.

- 33rd Edition of **India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol (Ind-Indo Corpat)** Commenced at Port Blair (Andaman & Nicobar Islands, India). The ship and aircraft from both the countries would undertake patrolling on the respective sides of 236 nautical miles long International Maritime Boundary line. The IND-INDO CORPAT Series of bilaterals seek to underscore India's peaceful presence and solidarity with friendly Maritime neighbours countries.

- The sixth edition of **Mitra Shakti VI**, a 14-day joint training exercise by the Indian army and Sri Lankan army, is being conducted from March 26 to April 8. The exercise primarily focuses on training and equipping both the country's contingents to undertake joint counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations in urban and rural environment under the United Nations flag.
- **Theatre Level Readiness and Operational Exercise (TROPEX)** held earlier this year in the Arabian Sea and north Indian Ocean. It is an inter-service military exercise involving the participation of the *Indian Army, Air Force, Navy and the Coast Guard*. The exercise was conducted from 07 Jan 2019 and graduated smoothly into providing the Indian Navy a high operational readiness posture post the Pulwama attack on 14 Feb 19. The exercise also included a Tri-services Amphibious Exercise in the A&N islands that saw the participation of the Army and the Air Force.
- The inaugural edition of the **Africa-India Field Training Exercise-2019 (AFINDEX-19)** culminated at Pune on 27 March 2019. 17 African nations participated in this exercise. These were - Benin, Botswana, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. AFINDEX-19 demonstrated the commitment and capabilities of the participating nations in working closely with each other in Humanitarian Mine Assistance and Peace Keeping Operations under the United Nations mandate.
- The third edition of joint military training exercise between Indian Army and Royal Oman Army, **Exercise AL NAGAH 2019** concluded at Jabel Al Akhdar training camp, Oman on 25 March 2019. This exercise will go a long way in further cementing relationship between the nations and will act as a catalyst in bringing synergy and cooperation while undertaking such operations under the United Nations mandate.
- Indo-Bangladesh eighth edition of joint military exercise, '**Exercise Sampriti 2019**' was held at Tangail, Bangladesh. The aim of the exercise is to increase mutual cooperation, bonhomie and camaraderie between the two armies through interoperability and joint tactical exercises.
- Border Security Force (BSF) and Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) has concluded a three-day '**Mainamati Maitree Exercise 2019**' as a part of 'Confidence Building Measures' between the two border guards. The exercise was named after a hill range situated 8 km west of Comilla township in Bangladesh, which is home to an ancient Buddhist archaeological site in the region. The main objective of this exercise was to plan and conduct anti-smuggling and anti-criminal activity related operations. The ultimate aim was to achieve better joint operational efficiency and border management in the area of responsibility of respective BSF and BGB Battalions participating in the joint exercise.
- The Defence Ministry has approved a **new branch for vigilance**, which will have the Vigilance Investigation Unit under it. The new Vigilance branch will be headed by a Major General rank officer and will report to the Army Chief. The unit will use **Corps of Military Police (CMP) personnel** to conduct independent investigations into corruption allegations when instructed by Army Chief. The army's field formations already have vigilance setups to investigate corruption allegations. However, **issues of transparency** could have arisen in the past.
- India has conducted a '**Third Surgical Strike**' in Myanmar under **Operation 'Sunrise'** jointly with the Myanmar Army. This operation launched was to neutralize militants along the Indo-Myanmar border, thwarting threat to the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project. Militants targeted were '**Arakan Army**' and in a subsequent phase of 'joint operations' the **National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K)** was also targeted.
- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has carried out back-to-back successful tests of the **Pinaka** multi-barrel rocket system. It is indigenously developed by the

country's defence lab DRDO. The Indian Army HAD used Pinaka Mark I in the 1999 Kargil war. The name of the rocket derives from Pinaka which is the bow of Lord Shiva.

- The Indian Air Force has formally inducted the **CH 47 F(I)- Chinook heavy lift helicopters** into its inventory at Air Force Station Chandigarh. These helicopters will be deployed in the **Northern and Eastern regions of India**. The helicopter capable of transporting howitzers and troops to forward and high-altitude areas across the country, adding more teeth to IAF's heavy lift capabilities as well as place India-US defence cooperation on a stronger footing. The government-to-government deal was inked by India and the US in September 2015 for 15 Chinooks and with an option of buying seven additional platforms.
- DRDO has successfully test-fired indigenous **man-portable anti-tank guided missile** in the deserts of Pokhran in Rajasthan. The missile launched from the shoulder is low weight and operates on fire and forget principle. It has many advanced features like a state-of-the-art imaging infrared radar seeker with integrated avionics. It has a top attack capability and has a maximum engagement range of about 2.5 kilometres. MPATGMs are being developed to replace the **French origin anti-tank guided missile Milan** and **Soviet semi-automatic wire-guided missile Konkur** in service with the Indian army.
- The **UN World Wildlife Day** is being celebrated on 3rd March every year to celebrate and raise awareness of the world's wild animals and plants. On that date in 1973, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was signed. The **theme of World Wildlife Day in 2019 was "Life Below Water: For People And Planet"**, which aligns with goal 14 of UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- At the second meeting of the Asian rhino range countries in 2019, the **New Delhi Declaration on Protection And Conservation of Asian Rhino Population** was adopted by the *five Asian Rhino-range countries (India, Nepal, Bhutan, Indonesia and Malaysia)*.
 - The three types of Asian Rhinos are: **Greater one-horned Rhino** in India, Nepal and Bhutan; **Javan Rhino**; **Two-horned Sumatran Rhino**.
 - **The Greater one-horned Rhino** (Indian Rhino) is the largest of the rhino species, and has been accorded with '**Vulnerable Status**' in the IUCN Red List. Assam's Kaziranga National Park has the bulk of the rhinos in India.
 - **Sumatran and Javan Rhinos** have been accorded the '**Critically Endangered**' Status under IUCN Red List.
- A species of **wood snake** (*Xylophis indicus*), that was last seen 140 years ago, was discovered recently in the Meghamalai Wildlife Sanctuary in the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu. This species of wood snake is a 'point endemic' i.e. found only in Meghamalai sanctuary.
- The **Annual Frontiers Report 2019**, published by the United Nations (UN), has highlighted **nitrogen pollution** in its latest edition, indicating that pollution caused by the reactive forms of nitrogen is now being recognised as a grave environmental concern on a global level. The report noted that growing demand on the livestock, agriculture, transport, industry and energy sector has led to a sharp growth of the levels of reactive nitrogen — ammonia, nitrate, nitric oxide (NO), nitrous oxide (N₂O) — in our ecosystems. Nitrogen is essential to all life on Earth as it forms an important component of life-building, but reactive forms of nitrogen cause environmental impact through smog, acid rain, biodiversity loss etc.
- For the first time, Uttar Pradesh is taking a **census of Otters** in its protected areas, beginning with the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (PTR). Otters are mammals that spend much of their time in or close to water bodies, and are an important part of the forest ecosystem. A thriving population of otters means a healthy ecosystem.

- The Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES) at the Indian Institute of Science (IIS) has launched an online database of peer-reviewed information on over 10,000 plant species in peninsular India called the **Digital Flora of Peninsular India**. The IISc had acquired it from taxonomist and filed biologist Cecil J Saldanha after his retirement.
- The **Grey Hypocolius (Hypocolius ampelinus)** has been sighted in Western Rajasthan for the first time. It is a small migratory bird that usually makes its home in West Asia and North Africa and is a regular visitor to Kutch, Gujarat.
- To strengthen environmentally sound management of hazardous waste in the country, the government has amended the **Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management & Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016**. The amendment prohibits import of solid plastic waste into the country including in Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and by Export Oriented Units (EOU). Also, some types of industries [those that do not require consent under Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1974 and Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1981] are now exempted from requiring authorization under the 2016 rules, provided that hazardous and other wastes generated by them are handed over to the authorized actual users, waste collectors or disposal facilities.
- The Union Ministry of Power has now brought **Microwave Ovens and Washing Machines under the Star Rating program** (Standards & Labelling) for Energy Efficiency for Appliances. The Star Rating Program, formulated by Bureau of Energy Efficiency, is aimed at improving energy efficiency in household appliances (like ACs, Refrigerators and now Ovens and Washing Machines) to reduce energy bills of common consumers.

Unlocking NATIONAL Energy Efficiency potential (UNNATEE): UNNATEE is the national strategy document developed by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) for accelerating energy efficiency in India. It contains a plain framework as well as implementation strategy to establish a clear linkage between energy supply-demand scenarios and energy efficiency opportunities.

- The Indian Sundarban has been accorded the status of **'Wetland of International Importance' under the Ramsar Convention**. Located on the southwestern part of the delta of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra, the Indian Sundarban constitutes over 60% of the country's total mangrove forest area. It is the **27th Ramsar Site in India**, and with an area of 4,23,000 hectares is now the largest protected wetland in the country. The Indian Sundarban is also a **UNESCO world heritage site**, and is home to the Royal Bengal Tiger. The Ramsar status will help to highlight conservation issues of the Sundarbans at the international level.

Ramsar Convention: The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, better known as the Ramsar Convention, is an international agreement promoting the conservation and wise use of wetlands. It is the only global treaty to focus on a single ecosystem. The convention was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975.

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to prepare a **noise pollution map and remedial action plan** to solve the issue across the country. The CPCB will have to identify pollution hotspots and categorise the cities with specified hotspots. The NGT also directed the CPCB to extend noise monitoring mechanism from seven cities currently to all cities where noise pollution is beyond permissible limits.
- Researches have noted that protection of coral cover along the existing protected marine areas in the Andaman and Nicobar islands and fishing regulations are necessary for conservation of the **Bumphead Parrotfish** (*Bolbometopon muricatum*). Bumpheads are the *world's largest parrotfish*. The species is categorized as **'vulnerable'** in the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- Seven Indians, including **Piyush Goyal** (current Railways Minister and former Power minister) and **Harsh Vardhan** (Environment Minister), have been named in the **'World's 100 Most Influential'**

People in Climate Policy for 2019 for taking steps in order to combat climate change. The list was unveiled by *Apolitical*, a global network for government helping public servants find the ideas, people and partners they need to solve the hardest challenges.

- **International Day of Forests 2019** (IDF) is celebrated on **21 March** every year since the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed this day as IDF in 2012. The theme for 2019 is "**Forests and Education**". The Day celebrates and raises awareness on importance of all types of forests.
- **World Water Day** is held annually on **22 March** as a means of focusing attention on the importance of freshwater and advocating for the sustainable management of freshwater resources. The theme for World Water Day 2019 is '**Leaving no one behind,**' which is the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A new World Water Development Report is released each year on or near World Water Day, to provide decision-makers with tools to formulate and implement sustainable water policies.
- After the successful completion of the **first-ever vulnerability assessment** of 12 Himalayan states to climate risks, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) is now extending the assessment to all States/UTs in India. This would enable comparison of vulnerability profiles of all states and prioritize action on climate change. The assessment would be based on the **global methodological framework of 2014 IPCC report**, where vulnerability is *defined by how 'sensitive' a specific eco-system is to climate change risks and what is the current adaptive capacity to mitigate the risks*. The assessment would create the first-such **climate vulnerability index** for all states to determine which states are more vulnerable to climate risks based on a common set of indicators — socio-economic, demographic, health, sensitivity of agricultural production, forest-dependent livelihood and access to information.
- According to the latest data compiled in the **IQ Air Visual 2018 World Air Quality Report**, Delhi has been ranked the most polluted capital in the world, while Gurugram ranked as the most polluted city. **Fifteen of the top 20 most polluted cities** in the world are located in India. Of the cities analysed, 64% exceeded the WHO's annual exposure guideline (10g/m³) for fine particulate matter, also known as PM_{2.5}. When ranked by country, *Bangladesh emerged as the most polluted followed by Pakistan and India respectively* while Iceland emerged as the one with the cleanest air. The report is based on air quality data collected in 2018 from public monitoring sources, with a special focus on data which has been published in real-time or near real-time.
- A powerful storm system, referred to as the "**Bomb Cyclone**", slammed the central U.S. with hurricane-force winds and heavy precipitation. If a winter storm is referred to as a bomb cyclone or "bombogenesis" by meteorologists, it means it is expected to see explosive storm strengthening i.e., rapidly intensify over a 24-hour span. A bombogenesis storm can be tropical or non-tropical. The difference in temperature between the normally warmer ocean (particularly in the Atlantic, with the Gulf Stream pumping up warmer water from the south) and the cold landmass often creates the fuel source for powerful East Coast lows. In the US, it is not unusual to get at least one storm that is classified as a bomb cyclone a year.
- **India now has a globally recognised forest-certification scheme** developed specifically for Indian forests. The Certification *Standard for Sustainable Forest Management (SFM)* was developed for India by Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF), an Indian non-profit organisation. It was recognized by the council of Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), the Geneva-based international non-profit that provides independent third-party certification for sustainable forest management. As several developed countries have put trade restrictions on import of non-certified timber, non-timber forest products and wood-based goods into their countries, getting sustainable forest management certificates has become important for exports. **NCCF was set up in 2015** by representatives of forest-based industries, non-profits, forest auditors and government

forest departments with an objective to establish a country specific forest certification scheme and promote responsible forest management in the Country.

- **Project Varshadhare:** Through **Project Varshdhare**, the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department will be using **cloud seeding operations** to enhance rainfall during the monsoons of 2019 and 2020. Cloud-seeding is a weather modification procedure that attempts to enhance the amount of precipitation from the clouds to generate more rain. A small plane will spray sodium chloride, potassium chloride and silver iodide into clouds in an attempt to increase precipitation across the catchment areas of major rivers in the state.
- **World Meteorological Day**
 - Since 1961, the World Meteorological Organization has been celebrating World Meteorological Day every year on 23 March. This day is observed in order to commemorate the coming into force on **23 March 1950 of the Convention establishing the World Meteorological Organization**.
 - This year's theme - **The Sun, the Earth and the Weather**
 - Established in 1950, the WMO became a specialized agency of the United Nations in 1951. Headquarter in Geneva, Switzerland, it has 192 Member States and Territories. Its mandate is in the **areas of meteorology** (weather and climate), **operational hydrology and related geophysical sciences**.
- **UN World Food Programme**
 - Japan has donated 69 million dollars to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). The aim of this donation is to provide vital aid to **28 countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia**, with the **biggest shares** of the money **earmarked for Yemen and Iraq**.
 - In the 1960 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Conference, the need was felt for setting up a multilateral food aid programme. As a result, the World Food Programme was **established in 1961 by the FAO and the United Nations General Assembly**.
 - Headquarter – Rome, Italy
 - World Food Programme is the UN agency focused on hunger alleviation and food security. It also aims to fight micronutrient deficiencies, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, and combat disease, including HIV and AIDS.