1.MAHARASHTRA'S PWD ENLISTS IT AND PEOPLE-POWER TO SOLVE A FAMILIAR URBAN PROBLEM:

To tackle potholes, the Public Works Department in Maharashtra plans to use citizen participation and modern technology. The PWD, with the State's IT Department, has developed **a mobile app** which will be dedicated to the public next week. The free app will be available on the Android platform.

🔸 When people come across a pothole, they can click a picture, and send it to the PWD via the app. The photo will be sent directly to the concerned executive engineers. The app will automatically add location date, so the person sending the photo will not even need to know where she is or even the name of the road or locality. Once the pothole is filled, pictures of the repaired road will be sent to the complainant and to the war room.

🔸 Government has announced that all potholes on State Highways and district highways will be filled before December 15, and the Maharashtra government will ensure that potholes on National Highways will be eliminated, for which the Chief Minister has had a dialogue with the Centre.

2. DON'T BRING PLASTIC TO SABARIMALA: CHIEF PRIEST

🔸 Pilgrims leaving clothes in river Pampa while returning from the holy hillock of Sabarimala after completing their pilgrimage was not at all a custom and tradition of the pilgrimage,said the chief priest.

🔸 He said there was no basis at all in the unhealthy trend followed by certain pilgrims to throw their clothes and chains of beads into **the river Pampa**, considering it part of the custom and tradition of the pilgrimage. Pilgrims should take extra care to discontinue this trend in the larger interests of keeping the Pampa clean, he said.

🔸 He has further called upon the pilgrims not to bring plastic bags and bottles to Sabarimala **as plastic litters in the forests has been posing alarming threat to the flora and fauna in the sensitive Periyar Tiger Reserve**.

He said no plastic material should be used and cooperation of all concerned was necessary to keep Sabarimala free of plastic.

About Periyar National Park

- Periyar National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary (PNP) is a protected area in Kerala, India.
- It is notable as **an elephant reserve and a tiger reserve**.
- The park is a repository of rare, endemic and endangered flora and fauna and forms the major watershed of two important rivers of Kerala, the **Periyar and the Pamba**.
- It is located high in the **Cardamom Hills and Pandalam Hills**of the south Western Ghats along the border with Tamil Nadu.
- Annual precipitation is between 2000 and 3000 mm, about **two thirds** occurring during the southwest monsoon between June to September. Much of the **rest occurs during the northeast monsoon** between October and December. Summers are warm with some precipitation in April and winters are cold.

3. LINGAYAT MAHASABHA SETS DECEMBER 30 AS 'DEADLINE' ON DEMAND OF SEPARATE RELIGION TAG

In a new turn to the ongoing campaign for **separate religion tag for Lingayats**, the Lingayat Dharma Mahasabha on set December 30 as the deadline for the State government to make such a recommendation to the Centre. It also demanded that **Lingayats be accorded minority religion status**.

- The government was also urged to notify that Lingayat religion was not part of the Hindu religion, and to declare **Basavanna** as the cultural ambassador of Karnataka. The forum also threatened to launch an agitation across the State if the government fails to meet its demands.

BACKGROUND

- Lingayatism is a distinct Shaivite religious tradition in India.Its worship is centered on Hindu god Shiva as the universal god in the iconographic form of Ishtalinga. The adherents of this faith are known as Lingayats. Lingayatism was founded by the 12th-century philosopher and statesman Basava and

spread by his followers, called **Sharanas**. Lingayatism emphasizes qualified monism and bhakti (loving devotion) to Shiva.

- The terms Lingayatism and Veerashaivism have been used synonymously, and Lingayats also referred to as Veerashaivas. Contemporary Lingayatism is influential in South India, especially in the state of **Karnataka**.

- **Basavanna** spread social awareness through his poetry, popularly known as **Vachanaas**. Basavanna rejected gender or social discrimination, superstitions and rituals such as the wearing of sacred thread, but introduced **Ishtalinga necklace**, with an image of the Shiva Liṅga, to every person regardless of his or her birth, to be a constant reminder of one's bhakti (devotion) to Shiva.

4.MAKING CASTE SLUR ON SC/STS OVER PHONE AN OFFENCE, SAYS SC

- The Supreme Court has ruled that using **casteist remarks over phone** in a public place against the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe category amounts to criminal offence, warranting a jail of a maximum five years.

- The apex court refused to stay criminal proceedings and quash an FIR against a person, who allegedly used derogatory casteist remarks over phone to a woman from the the SC/ST category.

The key features of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015, are:

•New offences of atrocities like tonsuring of head, moustache, or similar acts which are derogatory to the dignity of members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, garlanding with chappals, denying access to irrigation facilities or forest rights , dispose or carry human or animal carcasses, or to dig graves, using or permitting manual scavenging, dedicating a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe women as devadasi, abusing in caste name, perpetrating witchcraft atrocities, imposing social or economic boycott, preventing Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes candidates from filing of nomination to contest elections, hurting a Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes woman by removing her garments, forcing a member of Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe to leave house , village or residence, defiling objects sacred to members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe, touching or using words, acts or gestures of a sexual nature against members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe.

•Addition of certain IPC offences like hurt, grievous hurt, intimidation, kidnapping etc., attracting less

than ten years of imprisonment, committed against members of Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe, as offences punishable under the PoA Act. Presently, only those offences listed in IPC as attracting punishment of 10 years or more and committed on members of Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe are accepted as offences falling under the PoA Act.

•Establishment of Exclusive Special Courts and specification of Exclusive Special Public Prosecutors also, to exclusively try the offences under the PoA Act to enable speedy and expeditious disposal of cases.

•Power of Special Courts and Exclusive Special Courts, to take direct cognizance of offence and as far as possible, completion of trial of the case within two months, from the date of filing of the charge sheet.

•Addition of chapter on the 'Rights of Victims and Witnesses'.

•Defining clearly the term 'wilful negligence' of public servants at all levels, starting from the registration of complaint, and covering aspects of dereliction of duty under this Act.

•Addition of presumption to the offences –If the accused was acquainted with the victim or his family, the court will presume that the accused was aware of the caste or tribal identity of the victim unless proved otherwise.

5.GOVERNMENT NOD TO SUGGESTION ON HAJ QUOTA INCREASE

The government has accepted a high-level committee's recommendation of **increasing by over 3% the quota of private tour operators** sending Haj pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.The high-level committee formed by the government to frame the **draft 'Haj Policy 2018-2022'** had made the recommendation last month.

- The committee had recommended that the quota of private tour operators be increased from the present 26.47% to 30%.
- Union Minority Affairs Minister has confirmed that the panel's suggestion has been accepted.
- India has an annual Haj quota of 1.70 lakh. Out of this, according to the allocation for 2017, 1.25 lakh pilgrims could travel to Saudi Arabia through the Haj Committee of India (HCoI).
- The private tour operators could transport 45,000 devotees. This will now increase to 51,000 devotees.

6. USE IT TOOLS TO COVER SYLLABUS: CENTRE TO J&K

Schools have been shut for long periods

- With schools in Jammu and Kashmir being shut for extended periods, the Centre wants to put **information and communication technology** to wide use to ensure the completion of the school curriculum.

- A road map for school education in the State — a collaborative effort of the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development and the Education Department of Jammu and Kashmir — has pushed for the increased use of ICT.

- Schools remaining shut for extended periods and not finishing school curriculum is one of the key problems in the State; 41.53% (5,465 schools) of government primary schools did not complete even 200 working days in 2015-16. It is critical to ensure the completion of curriculum in schools for the State.

Distance education

- It has asked to provide ICT-supported education at doorstep to support teaching-learning process and to use National Institute of Open Schooling (**NIOS**) to introduce distance education and facilities for two-way interaction with teachers in the NIOS studios.

- It suggests the use of either **SWAYAM** – an IT platform that facilitates hosting of all the courses taught in classrooms from 9th class till post-graduation to be accessed anywhere and at any time – or **SWAYAM Prabha** – a group of 32 DTH channels to telecast educational programmes round the clock – for the purpose in Jammu and Kashmir.

ABOUT SWAYAM

- SWAYAM platform is indigenously developed by Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) with the help of Microsoft and would be ultimately capable of hosting 2000 courses and 80000 hours of learning: covering school, under-graduate, post-graduate, engineering, law and other professional courses.

- SWAYAM is a programme initiated by Government of India and designed to achieve the three cardinal principles of Education Policy viz., access, equity and quality. The objective of this effort is to take the best teaching learning resources to all, including the most disadvantaged. SWAYAM seeks to bridge the

digital divide for students who have hitherto remained untouched by the digital revolution and have not been able to join the mainstream of the knowledge economy.

- This is done through an indigenous developed IT platform that facilitates hosting of all the courses, taught in classrooms from 9th class till post-graduation to be accessed by anyone, anywhere at any time. All the courses are interactive, prepared by the best teachers in the country and are available, free of cost to the residents in India. More than 1,000 specially chosen faculty and teachers from across the Country have participated in preparing these courses.
- The courses hosted on SWAYAM will be in 4 quadrants – (1) video lecture, (2) specially prepared reading material that can be downloaded/printed (3) self-assessment tests through tests and quizzes and (4) an online discussion forum for clearing the doubts.

ABOUT SWAYAM Prabha

The SWAYAM PRABHA is a group of 32 DTH channels devoted to telecasting of high-quality educational programmes on 24X7 basis using the GSAT-15 satellite. Every day, there will be new content for at least (4) hours which would be repeated 5 more times in a day, allowing the students to choose the time of their convenience. The channels are uplinked from BISAG, Gandhinagar. The contents are provided by NPTEL, IITs, UGC, CEC, IGNOU, NCERT and NIOS. The INFLIBNET Centre maintains the web portal.

The DTH Channels shall cover the following:

a).Higher Education: Curriculum-based course contents at post-graduate and under-graduate level covering diverse disciplines such as arts, science, commerce, performing arts, social sciences and humanities, engineering, technology, law, medicine, agriculture, etc. All courses would be certification-ready in their detailed offering through SWAYAM, the platform being developed for offering MOOCs courses.

b).School education (9-12 levels): modules for teacher's training as well as teaching and learning aids for children of India to help them understand the subjects better and also help them in preparing for competitive examinations for admissions to professional degree programmes.

c).Curriculum-based courses that can meet the needs of life-long learners of Indian citizens in India and abroad.

d).Assist students (class 11th & 12th) prepare for competitive exams.

7. OVER 200 GOVT. WEBSITES MADE AADHAAR DETAILS PUBLIC: UIDAI

More than 200 Central and State government websites publicly displayed details such as names and addresses of some Aadhaar beneficiaries, the Unique Identification Authority of India has said.

In response to an RTI query, the Aadhaar-issuing body said,

- It had taken note of the breach and got the data removed from those websites. It, however, did not specify when the breach took place.
- Aadhaar details have never been made public from/by UIDAI.
- Approximately 210 websites of Central and State government departments, including educational institutes, were displaying the list of beneficiaries along with their name, address, other details and Aadhaar numbers for information of general public.
- UIDAI has a well-designed, multi-layer approach and a robust security system in place and the same is being constantly upgraded to maintain the highest level of data security and integrity, The architecture of the Aadhaar ecosystem has been designed to ensure data security and privacy which is an integral part of the system from the initial design to the final stage.
- Various policies and procedures have been defined, they are reviewed and updated continually thereby appropriately controlling and monitoring any movement of people, material and data in and out of UIDAI premises, particularly the data centres.
- Security audits are conducted on a regular basis to further strengthen security and privacy of data. Besides this, all possible steps are taken to protect the data.

8. RBI TO LAUNCH MULTIMEDIA CAMPAIGN

The Reserve Bank is planning to launch a full-fledged multimedia and multilingual campaign to create general awareness among citizens of its regulations and initiatives.

- The RBI's communication department has sought applications from advertising agencies for designing the creatives for the pan-India awareness campaign.

- The campaign will be in 14 languages — Hindi, Assamese, Bangla, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, and English — with focus on regional languages.The media mix will include traditional ones such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television channels and cinema halls and new ones that include digital.

- The RBI is planning close to 15 TV commercials, 15 radio spots and 15 print advertisements each year.

- It also plans to create an awareness campaign — **Suno RBI Kya Kehta Hai** — through SMSs to warn the public against falling prey to unsolicited and fictitious offers from fraudsters.
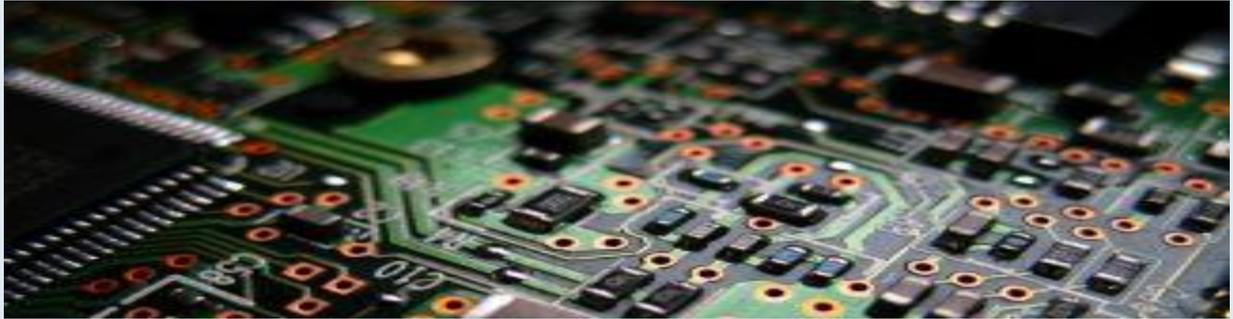
9. CHINA OFFERS TO MEDIATE DIALOGUE BETWEEN BANGLADESH, MYANMAR

China has expressed its willingness to facilitate a dialogue between Bangladesh and Myanmar to solve the Rohingya refugee crisis.

- Chinese Foreign Minister said Beijing was willing to facilitate the dialogue, acknowledging that the Rohingya crisis was a "big challenge for Bangladesh".

- China does not want the Rohingya issue to overshadow or slow down the progress of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar economic corridor initiative.

- Ms. Hasina reiterated her call to the international community, including China, to mount pressure on Myanmar to take back its nationals.

- Foreign minister's visit came days after the UN revived a resolution on Myanmar that was dropped last year due to the country's progress on human rights. The UN General Assembly's Third Committee, which focuses on human rights, called on Myanmar to end operations that have "led to the systematic violation and abuse of human rights" of Rohingya Muslims. A total of 135 countries voted in favour of the resolution and 10, including China, against it, while there were 26 abstentions.
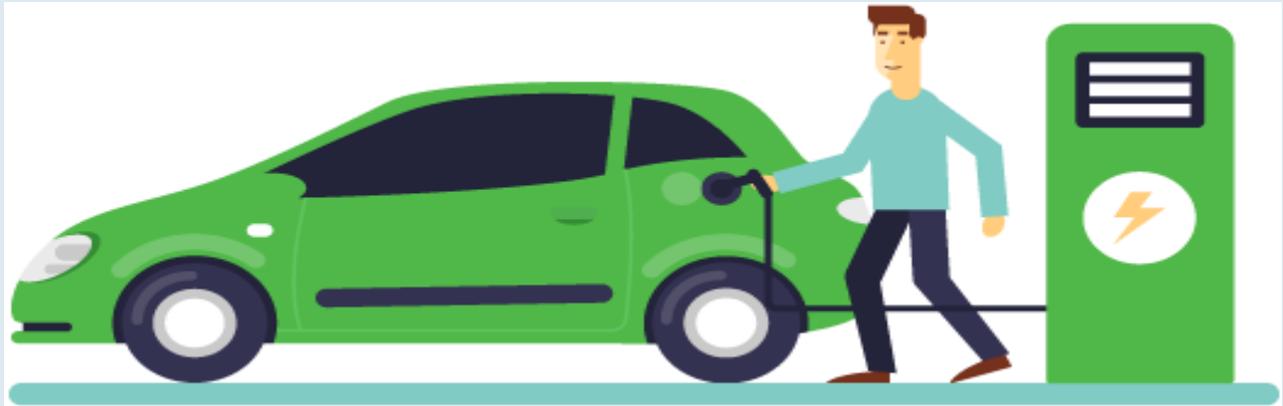
10. CENTRE TO SPUR LOCAL ELECTRONICS OUTPUT

The government is set to bring out a new policy to spur domestic electronics production by March 2018 in a bid to boost its flagship 'Make in India' programme and curb the country's trade deficit.

- Government has set a target of net zero imports in electronics by 2020, and the new policy will focus not only on ramping up domestic production, but also on making India an export hub.
- The work was under way to release a draft policy that would outline a framework to make India a global leader in product verticals such as medical and automotive electronics, besides mobile phone and consumer electronics.
- The government had first unveiled an Electronics Manufacturing Policy in 2012, which included schemes such as **Modified Special Incentive Package Scheme and electronic development fund**. The new policy is likely to take a re-look at the utility of these schemes which have either ended or will expire soon.
- The working groups, including industry leaders, experts and MeitY officials, are focusing on individual product lines such as mobile handsets and related components, LED products, medical electronics, consumer electronics and automotive electronics (including electric vehicles). Other groups have been tasked with framing a strategy for boosting solar photovoltaic cells, fabless chip design, electronic manufacturing services and products such as semiconductors.
- The revised policy will include **Horizontals focussed policy interventions** — tariff structure, infrastructure development, generation of intellectual property, promotion of export, management of e-waste, skill development, as well as verticals specific policy directives — vision, mission and strategies, for the identified thrust areas.
- The revised National Policy on Electronics will strive to increase the competitiveness of the electronics manufacturing industry; innovation, R&D and start-ups; promoting research in emerging technologies and India-specific initiatives and strategies to promote/ incentivise exports in electronics system design and manufacturing.

- IOC sets up **'India's first'** **e-vehicle charging unit**

- State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) announced the rolling out of nation's first electric vehicle charging station at a petrol pump in **NAGPUR**. IOC, in collaboration with Ola, unveiled the electric charging station at one of its petrol-diesel stations in Nagpur.

12. CENTRE READIES INSTITUTIONAL BODY TO PUSH ELECTRIC MOBILITY

The government plans **to set up a committee for an institutional framework** on large-scale adoption of electric vehicles in India as a viable clean energy mode particularly for shared mass transport to help bring down alarming levels of pollution in big cities.

- NITI Aayog has sought comments from Ministries, including heavy industry, environment, road, transport and highways, and power on the issue and is in the process of chalking out the nitty-gritty of the framework.
- The panel will be tasked with issues related to electric mobility, including setting up of charging stations across the country and subsidising the cost of electric vehicles on a long-term basis.
- The Centre has recently invited proposals from cities with population of above 10 lakh for extending grants under the **FAME India** (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric and Hybrid Vehicles in India) scheme to promote large-scale adoption of EVs (electric vehicles) in multi-modal public transport.