PIB, THE HINDU Newspaper and Editorial Current Affairs

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PIB

One Nation, One Card

Why in news?

Prime Minister launched today One Nation, One Card for transport mobility at a function in Ahmedabad.

Highlights:

- The Indigenous Automatic Fare Collection System based on One Nation One Card Model i.e. National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) is the first of its kind in India.
- India's First Indigenously Developed Payment Eco-system for transport consisting of NCMC Card, SWEEKAR (Swachalit Kiraya: Automatic Fare Collection System) and SWAGAT (Swachalit Gate) is ased on NCMC Standards.
- These are bank issued cards on Debit/Credit/Prepaid card product platform. The customer may use this single card for payments across all segments including metro, bus, suburban railways, toll, parking, smart city and retail.
- The stored value on card supports offline transaction across all travel needs with minimal financial risk to involved stakeholders. The service area feature of this card supports operator specific applications e.g. monthly passes, season tickets etc.
- Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs brought to the fore the National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) to enable seamless travel by different metros and other transport systems across the country besides retail

shopping and purchases.

Background:

- Public Transport is extensively used across India as the economical and convenient mode of commuting for all classes of society.
- Cash continues to be the most preferred mode of fare payments across the public transport. However, there are multiple challenges associated with the cash payment e.g. cash handling, revenue leakages, cash reconciliation etc.
- Various initiatives have been taken by transit operators to automate & digitize the fare collection using Automatic Fare Collection System (AFC).
- The introduction of closed loop cards issued by these operators helped to digitize the fare collection to a significant extent. However, the restricted usability of these payment instruments limits the digital adoption by customers.
- AFC System (gates, readers/validators, backend infrastructure etc.) is the core of any transit operator to automate the fare collection process.
- The major challenge associated with AFC system implementation in India till now is the lack of indigenous solution provider.
- Till now, AFC systems deployed at various Metros are from foreign players. In order to avoid the vendor lock-in and create an interoperable system, there was a need to develop indigenous standards and AFC system under Make in India initiative.
- In order to ensure a seamless travel across metros and other transport systems in addition to retail shopping and purchases, the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) came out with the National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) Program.
- A committee was formed with representatives from National Informatics Centre (NIC), Centre for Development of Advance Computing (C-DAC), Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), National Payment Corporation of India (NPCI) and the Ministry of Finance with an objective to develop the vendor agnostic interoperable ecosystem for NCMC including indigenous AFC System and banking interface.
- NPCI was given the mandate to develop the specifications for card & terminal to support the NCMC ecosystem. Based on the best global practices and dynamics of Indian market, the committee recommended EMV based Open Loop Card with stored value as NCMC

- CDAC was entrusted the task of finalization of NCMC specification for AFC system including the interface with Bank server. CDAC worked in collaboration with NPCI to complete this activity. Thereafter, BEL was roped in for making Gates & Reader.
- The Gate & Reader prototype has been made by BEL. This is the first gate and the reader which has been manufactured by an Indian company. This is also the first indigenous payment reader which has been certified as per International standards. India joins the very few elite nations who have indigenous capacity on gate and reader production.
- NCMC Ecosystem offers the value proposition for customers as they need not to carry multiple cards for different usage. Further, the super quick contactless transactions will improve the seamless experience. For operators, NCMC ecosystem brings common standards for implementation without vendor lock-in.
- This will also help in higher digital payments penetration, savings on closed loop card lifecycle management cost and reduced operating cost. The rich data insights may be used by operators for business intelligence leading to efficient operation.
- With NCMC Ecosystem, Banks will get an access to segments which are highly driven by cash but stickiness in nature. NCMC Ecosystem will further help government in digitization of low value payments and reduced cost for the entire ecosystem.
- In order to showcase the entire NCMC ecosystem for digital fare collection, the complete AFC system has been deployed in Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) across few stations for field trial purpose. Under this pilot, NCMC compliant gates have been deployed at various stations of DMRC and cards have been issued by multiple banks to the users.
- The pilot at DMRC was inaugurated by MoHUA on Jan 31st, 2019. This pilot will help to improve hardware reliability and fine tuning of the software. This will also facilitate large scale indigenous production and deployment in Indian transit system. The first level trails has been successfully completed in collaboration with CDAC, BEL, NPCI and SBI.

National Common Mobility Card:

- Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) has come out with a National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) model to enable seamless travel by

different metros and other transport systems across the country besides retail shopping and purchases.

- A committee was formed with representatives of National Informatics Centre (NIC), Centre for Development of Advance Computing (C-DAC), Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), National Payment Corporation of India (NPCI) and the Ministry of Finance.
- After extensive study of various models being followedacross the world, the Committee recommended the EMV Open Loop Card with stored value based model and the same was approved. This card meets travel needs based on stored value of money and can be used for travelling by any means of transport and also enables account based retail applications.
- Accordingly, this card does away with the need of carrying separate cards for banking and transit requirements.
- With a vision to create One Card for all Payments system, NPCI is working with Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD), Government of India for implementation of National Common Mobility Card Program (NCMC).
- This specification is dual interface (contact & contactless) EMV card based specification and is interoperable based on open standards. This is aimed at low value payments for various segments e.g. Transit, Smart cities, Toll, Parking and other low value merchant payments in addition to the normal day to day retail payments.
- These specifications would be capable of supporting not only payment products but also transit applications like passes & government applications such as social security, driving license, Id/access card etc. This will have increased customers convenience as it would allow customers to use the same card for variety of needs.

Young Scientist Programme

Why in news?

Indian Space Research Organisation has launched a special programme for School Children called "Young Scientist Programme" "YUva VIgyani KAryakram" from this year.

- The Program is primarily aimed at imparting basic knowledge on Space Technology, Space Science and Space Applications to the younger ones with the intent of arousing their interest in the emerging areas of Space activities.
- ISRO has chalked out this programme to "Catch them young". The residential training programme will be of around two weeks duration during summer holidays and it is proposed to select 3 students each from each State/ Union Territory to participate in this programme every year covering CBSE, ICSE and State syllabus.
- Those who have finished 8th standard and currently studying in 9th standard will be eligible for the programme.
- ISRO has approached the Chief Secretaries of the respective States/ Administrators of Union Territories in India to arrange for the selection of three students from each of their State/UT and communicate the list to ISRO.
- The selection is based on the academic performance and extracurricular activities, which is clearly mentioned in the selection criteria already circulated to Chief Secretaries of States/ Administrators of UTs.
- Students belong to the rural area have been given special weightage in the selection criteria.

Sampriti 2019

Why in news?

The eighth edition of joint military exercise 'Sampriti', aiming to increase mutual cooperation, bonhomie and camaraderie between the armies of India and Bangladesh, began Sunday with an impressive ceremony.

About Sampriti Exercise:

- Sampriti 2019, eight edition of India Bangladesh joint military exercise began on 3rd March 2019. The joint exercise is aimed to increase mutual cooperation, bonhomie and camaraderie between the armies of

India and Bangladesh.

- The military exercise Sampriti began in 2009 as a platoon-level exercise and graduated to a company-level exercise in 2015 onwards. During the exercise both sides will jointly train, plan and execute a series of well developed tactical drills for neutralisation of likely threats that may be encountered during simulated UN peace keeping operations.
- Sampriti 2019 Sampriti 2019 is hosted by Bangladesh at Tangail will be held till March 15. Bangladesh is represented by 36 East Bengal Battalion and India side is represented by 9th Battalion the Rajputana Rifles.
- The Sampriti 2019 will see contingents from both sides honing their tactical and technical skills in countering the insurgency, counter-terrorism and aiding civil authorities for disaster management in the UN Peacekeeping scenarios involving a combined deployment at a battalion level.
- The exercise is aimed at increasing mutual cooperation, bonhomie and camaraderie between the two armies through interoperability and joint tactical exercises.

BOLD-QIT project

Why in news?

The Union Home Minister will inaugurate the project BOLD-QIT (Border Electronically Dominated QRT Interception Technique) under CIBMS (Comprehensive Integrated Border Management system) on India-Bangladesh border in Dhubri District of Assam.

Background:

- Border Security Force is responsible for safeguarding of 4,096 Km long International Border with Bangladesh. At various places, it is not possible to erect Border Fence due to the geographical barriers.
- The 61 Kms of Border area in District Dhubri, Assam where River Brahmaputra enters into Bangladesh is consisting of vast char lands and innumerable river channels thus making border guarding in this area, a

daunting task especially during rainy season.

- To overcome this problem, in the year 2017, Ministry of Home Affairs decided to go for technological solution besides the physical presence of manpower of BSF.
- In Jan, 2018, Information and Technology Wing of BSF undertook the project BOLD-QIT (Border Electronically Dominated QRT Interception Technique) and completed it in record time with the technical support of various manufacturers and suppliers.

Highlights:

- BOLD-QIT is the project to install technical systems under the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS), which enables BSF to equip Indo-Bangla borders with different kind of sensors in unfenced riverine area of Brahmaputra and its tributaries.
- Now, the entire span of River Brahmaputra has been covered with data network generated by Microwave communication, OFC Cables, DMR Communication, day and night surveillance Cameras and intrusion detection system.
- These modern gadgets provide feeds to BSF Control Rooms on the Border and enable BSF Quick Reaction Teams to thwart any possibility of Illegal Cross Border Crossing/ Crimes.
- The implementation of this project will not only help BSF to curb all type of cross border crimes but also provide respite to the troops from round the clock human surveillance.

About Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) programme:

- The smart border fencing projects built under the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) programme is the first of its kind in the country.
- The two projects each covering a 5.5 km border stretch along the International Border have got hi tech surveillance system that would create an invisible electronic barrier on land, water and even in air and underground and would help the BSF detect and foil infiltration bids in most difficult terrains.
- The CIBMS is designed to guard stretches where physical surveillance is

not possible either due to inhospitable terrain or riverine borders.

- CIBMS uses a number of different devices for surveillance, communication and data storage. Sensors like Thermal Imager, UGS, Fiber Optical Sensors, Radar, Sonar have been mounted on different platforms like Aerostat, tower, poles etc.
- A comprehensive integration of such sensors and other technical systems of communication and data processing have been achieved in the CIBMS project.
- The signals reach the Unified Command and Control Centre where the BSF can monitor the border on real-time basis. The CIBMS enables round-the-clock surveillance on border and under different weather conditions be it in dust storm, fog or rain.
- CIBMS involves deployment of a range of state-of-the-art surveillance technologies -- thermal imagers, infra-red and laser-based intruder alarms that form an invisible land fence, aerostats for aerial surveillance, unattended ground sensors that can help detect intrusion bids through tunnels, radars, sonar systems to secure riverine borders, fibre-optic sensors and a command and control system that shall receive data from all surveillance device in real time.
- The programme is a more robust border management system which is seamlessly integrating modern technology with human resource.
- Based on integrated border management system, this virtual fence would be first of its kind initiative in India.

THE HINDU

Protection of Asian rhinos

Why in news?

India will collaborate with Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia to increase the population of three species of Asian rhinos, including the Greater one-horned rhinoceros found in the Indian sub-continent.

New Delhi Declaration:

- The five rhino range nations signed a declaration 'The New Delhi Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019' for the conservation and protection of the species at the recently held Second Asian Rhino Range

Countries meeting.

- During the meet, Union Environment Minister affirmed India's commitment towards rhino conservation.
- The declaration was signed to conserve and review the population of the **Greater one-horned, Javan and Sumatran rhinos** every four years to reassess the need for joint actions to secure their future.
- The national strategy will pave the path for long-term conservation of the Greater one-horned rhinos in India.
- The declaration includes undertaking **studies on health issues** of the rhinos, their potential diseases and taking necessary steps; collaborating and strengthening wildlife forensics for the purpose of investigation and strengthening of transboundary collaboration among India, Nepal and Bhutan for the conservation and protection of the Greater one-horned rhino.
- The meet was organised by the Environment, Forest and Climate Change Ministry in collaboration with **IUCN Asian Rhino Specialist Group, WWF- India and Aaranyak.**

Asian Rhinos:

- There are three Asian rhino species, all of which have been pushed to the brink of extinction. The greater one-horned is slowly recovering thanks to years of successful conservation efforts but the Sumatran and Javan rhinos remain at great risk.
- Having once roamed across most of Asia, they're now found in the wild in just four countries - India, Nepal, Bhutan and Indonesia. Poaching for their horns and habitat loss are the two greatest threats to the survival of Asia's remaining rhinos.

Greater One Horned Rhino:

- Its original range extended from Pakistan all the way through India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar. However, in 1975, only 600 remained.
- Decades of conservation efforts have seen the population of the greater one-horned rhino rise to 3,500 by mid-2015 and a reclassification from **endangered to vulnerable**.

Javan Rhino:

- The Javan Rhino is the rarest of all species of rhino, with just 35 to 44 individuals left in one **national park in Indonesia**.
- With no animals in captivity, it is vital that this population get all the help they need to ensure long term survival.
- Work has begun on the Javan Rhino Conservation and Study Area to expand the rhinos habitat by removing illegal settlers, eradicating Arenga Palm (an invasive weed that destroys rhino food sources) and planting rhino food. Promisingly, several rhinos have already been sighted in this new area.
- IUCN Critically endangered.

Sumatran Rhino:

- Although the Sumatran Rhino numbers more than its Javan relatives, it is considered to be more threatened due to its extreme population fragmentation.
- The population has declined by 70% over the last two decades due to poaching for its horn as well as increasing destruction of its habitat.
- There are currently four individuals at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary; a 250-acre complex located within Way **Kambas National Park in Sumatra**.
- The SRS is an intensively managed research and breeding program aimed at increasing our knowledge about the Sumatran rhino with the ultimate aim of increasing the population in the wild.
- At the SRS, the rhinos reside in large, open areas where they can experience a natural rainforest habitat while still receiving state-of-the-art veterinary care and nutrition.
- IUCN Critically Endangered.

Rhinos at threat:

- **Poaching**: Around the world, rhinoceroses are poached for their horns which, despite being made simply of hair-like keratin, is highly valued for a variety of ancient medicines and also thought to be an aphrodisiac. Weight for weight people will pay the price of gold for rhino horn on the black market. The trade is highly prolific, despite being highly illegal.
- **Habitat Loss**: Expanding populations, particularly in Asia, mean that associated industries such as logging and agricultural clearing have had a devastating effect on the natural rainforest habitat for many species. Degradation of the environment also has an impact.

- **Fragmentation**: As the available habitat disappears, rhino (or any species) become 'trapped' in small pockets of natural habitat which are isolated from each other. Population fragmentation results in genetic issues and demographic problems (eg: too many males in one population, too few in another). When combined with ruthless poaching, the species is highly vulnerable to extinction.

Asian Rhino Project:

- The Asian Rhino Project (ARP) is an **Australian NGO** raising awareness and support for the three Asian rhinoceros' species.
- Since 2003, the ARP has established itself internationally as a non-government organisation dedicated to the recovery of Asian rhino species in the wild.
- The ARP is actively involved with the IUCN Species Specialist Group, the International Rhino Foundation, WWF AREAS programs as well as many smaller range-state NGOs and boards.
- The ARP works together with these organizations, local governments and communities to achieve positive rhino conservation outcomes.
- ARP encourages projects to be co-contributed or supported by relevant authorities, local and international NGOs operating in the area.
- We believe that collaboration between all stakeholders will achieve positive, more cost-effective rhino conservation outcomes delivered as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Poetry saved from death sentence

Why in news?

Poems written by a condemned man became a reason for the **Supreme Court** to spare him from the gallows.

About the Judgment:

- Dyaneshwar Suresh Borkar's poems that he wrote during the 18 years of his incarceration became a mirror to his reformed soul, the Supreme

Court found.

- In a progressive judgment, the overturned a Bombay High Court verdict confirming the man's death sentence for the murder of a child.

Commutation

- commutation is the substitution of a lesser penalty for that given after a conviction for a crime.
- The penalty can be lessened in severity, in duration, or both.
- Unlike most pardons by government and overturning's by the court, a commutation does not affect the status of a defendant's underlying criminal conviction.

India

In India, the power to grant pardon is conferred upon the President of India and the Governors of States under Articles 72 and 161 of the Constitution of India.

Constitutional Provisions:-

Article 72:

The President shall have the power to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence

a. in all cases where the punishment or sentence is by a Court Martial;
b. in all cases where the punishment or sentence is for an offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the Union extends;
c. in all cases where the sentence is a sentence of death.

Thus, Article 72 empowers the President to grant pardons etc. and to suspend, remit or commute sentences in certain cases.

Article 161:

Power of Governor to grant pardons, etc, and to suspend, remit or commute sentences in certain cases The Governor of a State shall have the power to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the State extends

Difference between pardoning powers of President and Governor:

- The scope of the pardoning power of the President under Article 72 is wider than the pardoning power of the Governor under Article 161. The power differs in the following two ways:
- The power of the President to grant pardon extends in cases where the punishment or sentence is by a Court Martial but Article 161 does not provide any such power to the Governor.
- The President can grant pardon in all cases where the sentence given is sentence of death but pardoning power of Governor does not extend to death sentence cases.

Crop burning raises risk of respiratory illness threefold

Why in news?

The burning of agricultural residue a contributor to north India's winter pollution increases the risk of respiratory illnesses threefold for those who experience it.

Effects

The burning of stubble, contrasted with alternatives such as ploughing the stubble back into the ground, has a number of consequences and effects on the environment.

Beneficial features

- **Quickly clears the field and is cheap.**
- **Kills weeds, including those resistant to herbicide.**
- **Kills slugs and other pests.**
- **Can reduce nitrogen tie-up.**

Harmful effects

- **· Loss of nutrients**

- **· Pollution from smoke**

- **· Damage to electrical and electronic equipment from floating threads of conducting waste**

Risk of fires spreading out of control First victims:

- Study shows that it is not only the residents of Delhi, but also women, children and men of rural Haryana who are the first victims of crop residue burning.
- Much of the public discussion on the ill-effects of crop residue burning ignores this immediately affected vulnerable population.
- For about a decade now, Delhi has been complaining about the practice of stubble burning, holding it responsible for the abysmal air quality in the capital in winter.

Zero tolerance:

- In 2013, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) issued a directive to Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, asking them to ban stubble burning.
- The Environment Ministers of these States as well as top officials at the Centre declared a "zero tolerance" policy on the burning of stubble, which has been estimated to contribute anywhere from 7% to 78% of the particulate matter-emission load in Delhi during winter.

ST status for Meiteis

Why in news?

Manipur Chief Minister told the Assembly that the government will give "positive consideration" to the demand for the inclusion of **Meiteis, a non-tribal indigenous community**, in the Scheduled Tribes list.

ST demand:

- Replying to a calling attention motion CM said there are some issues over the demand and the government is merely seeking time to discuss

them minutely.

- The Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee has been resorting to various forms of agitations in the State, demanding ST status for the Meiteis.

Criteria for ST

The criteria presently followed for specification of a community as a Scheduled Tribe are:

 I. indications of primitive traits
 II. distinctive culture
 III. geographical isolation
 IV. shyness of contact with the community at large
 V. backwardness.

However, these criteria are **not spelt out in the Constitution.**

Meitei

The Meitei people are the majority ethnic group of Manipur, a north-eastern state of India. They primarily settle in the central plain region of Manipur. A significant population of the Meitei also are settled in domestic neighboring states such as Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. They have also settled in Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Art & Culture

Most of the rich culture of Manipur can be credited to the Meiteis. Since ancient times the valley region of Manipur was trading crossroads between India and Myanmar and gradually the valley portion of Manipur became the melting pot of Indo-Burman culture.

- The famous Manipuri dance form had its roots from the Lai Haraoba dance form.
- The Manipuri martial art Thang-ta is a combative sport which had its origin from the Meitei knights during the kings rule.
- Mukna a unique form of wrestling popular amongst the Meiteis.

Simultaneous Parliament and Assembly polls

Why in news?

The J&K's **political parties** called for "simultaneous and early" Assembly and Parliament elections, as the full team of Election Commission of India (ECI) arrived in Srinagar on a two-day visit to hold deliberations and assess the ground situation.

ECI in JK:

- The ECI team, comprising Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sunil Arora and Election Commissioners Sushil Chandra and Ashok Lavasa, met at least 11 political parties and individuals in Srinagar.
- It also held discussions with senior officers of the police and the administration to get a first-hand information on the ground situation of the State, which witnessed several cycles of both street and militancy-related violence since 2014.
- Elections are soon going to be held to uphold the principles of democracy. The ECI desires that the elections should be the most inclusive with absolute neutrality by people involved in organising them.
- Prevailing alienation and unpredictable situation can only be handled by an elected government and both the elections should be held simultaneously.
- Meanwhile, the ECI team reviewed "preparedness of various departments of civil and police administration", besides transportation of EVMs and polling material.
- J&K first came under the Governor's rule on June 19, 2018 and under President's rule on December 19, 2018. The state is without an elected government for around 10 months and the President's rule will complete its six months in June this year.

Advantages of Simultaneous Elections:

· **Reducing government expenditure: Holding an election costs crore of rupees to the government or the public exchequer. And holding elections many times a year to the state legislatures in addition to holding the Lok Sabha election once every 5 years costs thousands of crores to the public exchequer. If elections are held simultaneously there will be significant savings of**

public money that can be utilised for development works.

· **Reducing party election expenses: Fighting elections costs huge amounts of money to the political parties as well who leave no stone unturned to ensure victory for their candidates. Political parties have to engage in continuous resource generation since every year there are elections in at least 2 or 3 states. If elections are held at once, then expenses of political parties will also be under control. This will reduce the role of black money in election funding since political parties will not be tempted to seek illegal sources of funding for elections.**

· **More time for development work: Right now ministers and their parties are in constant election mode since election to some or the other state legislature is just a few months away. This results in less time to devote to their official duties. If elections are held simultaneously to the Lok Sabha and the state legislatures the ministers and MPs and MLAs will be free for at least 4 years to devote to their official duties and constituencies.**

· **Better utilisation of security forces: For holding elections hundreds of central police forces in addition to state police have to be deployed. Not only this cost huge amount of money but the security forces also are diverted from their core mandate of ensuring internal security in the country. If elections are held simultaneously to the Lok Sabha and the state legislatures it will free up the security forces to devote to their core duties for the rest of the period.**

Pharma sector growth hits 4-year low

Why in news?

Growth of the Indian **pharmaceutical** industry hit a four-year low in 2017-18, registering a percentage increase of only 3.03 % from 29.01 % in 2014-15.

Government Response:

- When the 54th Parliamentary Standing Committee on Chemical and Fertilizers (2018-19) asked the Department of Pharmaceuticals the reason for the reduction in percentage growth of the pharmaceutical industry from 29% to 3%, the Department, in a written note, explained that "though the percentage increase has reduced, the annual turnover has increased continuously.''

Slow-moving stocks:

- Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), said that the domestic consumption reduced in 2017 because of the Goods Services Tax (GST) roll-out which forced the pharmaceutical industry to manage slow-moving stocks.
- Domestic growth, however, picked up from 2018 till January 2019 as per our records which shows 8-9 % growth. The sales have registered a robust domestic growth.
- It is not just GST; even demonetisation had a very negative impact on the market growth.
- Sadly, the industry hasn't managed to recover yet. They demand that the Central government bring in 0% GST on medicines and life-saving drugs.
- This will increase the purchasing power of the consumers and push up sales which will increase the business.
- The government, on its part, has maintained that its policies are driven by the need for regulating pricing of drugs so as to ensure availability of essential medicines at reasonable prices even while providing sufficient opportunity for innovation and competition to support the growth of pharmaceutical industry.
- A spokesperson from the drug manufacturing industry, on condition of anonymity, said that the industry was just recovering from the onslaught of GST as well as demonetisation, which had forced the retailers to reduce their stocks to 10 days from 40-45 days earlier.
- With Ayushman Bharat, the demand for treatment will go up and with that all medical-related businesses, including pharmaceuticals will grow.'

SWIFT implementation

Why in news?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has imposed a penalty of ₹4 crore on Karnataka Bank, 3 crore on City Union Bank, ₹2 crore on DCB Bank and ₹1 crore on Karur Vysya Bank Ltd. for delayed implementation of SWIFT-related operational controls.

PNB fraud aftermath:

- Following the ₹14,000-crore fraud in Punjab National Bank, RBI had directed banks on time-bound implementation and strengthening of SWIFT-related operational controls, in a circular dated February 20, 2018.
- Last week, SBI, Union Bank of India, Dena Bank and IDBI Bank had informed the exchanges about the monetary penalty imposed on them for non-compliance with various directions.
- In September 2018, the RBI had also imposed ₹5 crore on KVB for non-compliance with its directions on "Income Recognition and Asset Classification norms, reporting of frauds, and on the need for discipline at the time of opening of current accounts."
- Besides these four banks, the RBI has also fined Indian Bank (₹4 crore), IOB (₹3 crore) and United Bank of India (₹3 crore) for the same violations. SWIFT is the global messaging software used for transactions by financial entities.

About SWIFT:

- SWIFT, or the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, is the **world's largest electronic payment messaging system**, facilitating the exchange of more than $6 trillion a day, according to 2012 estimates.

  - Though it gets lumped in with electronic funds transfer systems, it doesn't do any of the funds transfers itself. In fact, it doesn't even touch money. (Although, as we'll unpack in part 2 of this series—on the massive Bangladesh hack—it does make money move.)
  - At its core, SWIFT is basically just a bank-to-bank messaging

system. It supplies a standardized language that institutions use to communicate payment instructions and other info to each other.

- SWIFT messages are programmed in a language known as FIN. A sample of FIN language is shown at right.
- The origins of SWIFT demonstrate how, in spite of tensions, competitive entities—and interests—have historically come together to address shared problems; in this case, issues with interbank payments.

Media gag on lawyers

Why in news?

Gagging lawyers from speaking to the press about their pending cases would amount to muzzling the media and depriving the public their fundamental **right to information,** 15 eminent persons, including writers and senior journalists, told the Supreme Court.

Background:

- They have filed two intervention applications against a February 6 order in which a Bench led by Justice Arun Mishra recorded its decision to examine the possibility of imposing curbs on advocates and litigants airing their views in the media about pending cases.
- The February 6 order came on back-to-back contempt of court petitions filed by Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal and the Centre against noted civil rights lawyer Prashant Bhushan for his tweets on February 1 in connection with a pending case filed by NGO Common Cause challenging the appointment of M. Nageshwar Rao as interim CBI Director.

Gagging the media:

- Senior journalists like N. Ram, Arun Shourie, author Arundhati Roy, activist Aruna Roy and former chief information commissioner Wajahat

Habibullah have argued that any restraint on lawyers and litigants from commenting on *sub-judice* cases would amount to shackling the media.

- They said any such restraint by the court would have "serious consequences on the **Freedom of the Press,** its rights under Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution and its ability to inform the people about important public interest issues pending in the courts".
- The application filed by Mr. Shourie and Mr. Ram and three other senior journalists question the very logic of a gag on discussing pending cases in public.
- Besides, they said the "best information" about a case would come from the lawyer or litigant who is directly involved in the case.
- The media cannot prop up a "bystander" and expect him to give authoritative information about a case.
- The apprehension that the views of the lawyer or litigant may be based is taken care when the person's involvement in the case is informed to the public.
- Another fear that judges would be influenced by what the lawyers tell the media is also unfounded. Judges hear the same lawyer in court in the case and their repeating in the media what they have already said in court would hardly influence a judge.
- They have contended that a gag would "have a seriously deleterious impact on not merely the freedom of speech of lawyers and litigants but also on the right of the people and civil society to be informed about pending court proceedings which are of public interest."

SEBI seeks changes to Companies Act

Why in news?

Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has asked the government to amend the Companies Act to **ensure that a director declared by the regulator as a disqualified person should immediately vacate the position**, a plea triggered by defaulter businessman Vijay Mallya's reluctance to do so.

Changes in the act:

- Under the Act, the office of a director becomes vacant in case of he or she being disqualified by an order of a court or a tribunal, among other reasons, but there is no explicit mention of an order by the SEBI.
- In a proposal, SEBI has now proposed that the Companies Act should also clearly mention that a person should vacate the office of a director if it orders his or her disqualification.
- Officials said the Finance Ministry is in agreement with the SEBI on the proposed amendment and has asked the regulator to get it approved by its board and then forward it to the Corporate Affairs Ministry.
- SEBI, in its proposal, has referred to its interim order dated January 25, 2017, through which the regulator had barred Mr. Mallya and six others from holding directorship in any listed company till further directions.
- The SEBI order followed a probe into alleged illegal fund diversions at United Spirits, an erstwhile firm of business group headed by Mr. Mallya, which he later sold to global liquor giant Diageo.
- However, Mr. Mallya did not comply with the order as he did not step down as a director of United Breweries Ltd. for months.