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Swachhata Pakhwada

Why in news?

All India Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, under Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family welfare is observing Swachhata Pakhwada during April 1 - 15, 2019.

About Swachhata Pakhwada:

- Swachhata Pakhwada started in April 2016 with the objective of bringing a fortnight of intense focus on the issues and practices of Swachhhata by engaging Central Ministries and Departments in their jurisdiction.
- An annual calendar is pre-circulated among the Ministries to help them plan for the Pakhwada activities.
- The Ministries observing Swachhata Pakhwada are monitored closely using online monitoring system of Swachhata Samiksha where action plans, images, videos related to Swachhata activities are uploaded and shared.

Coffee Board Activates Blockchain Based Marketplace in India

Why in news?

Commerce Secretary, Dr. Anup Wadhawan, launched blockchain based coffee e-marketplace through video conferencing in New Delhi today.

Importance:

- India is the only country in the world where entire coffee is grown under shade, handpicked and sun dried. It produces one of the best coffees in the world, produced by small coffee growers, tribal farmers adjacent to National Parks and Wild Life Sanctuaries in the Western and Eastern Ghats, which are two of the major bio-diversity hot spots in the world.
- Indian coffee is highly valued in the world market and sold as premium coffees. The share of farmers in the final returns from coffee is very meagre.
- This pilot project will help integrate the farmers with markets in a transparent manner and lead to realisation of fair price for the coffee producer.
- Blockchain will also reduce the number of layers between coffee growers and buyers and help farmers double their income.
- Blockchain based market place app for trading of Indian coffees is intended to bring in transparency in the trade of Indian coffee, maintain the traceability of Indian coffee from bean to cup so as the consumer tastes real Indian coffee and the grower is paid fairly for his coffee produced.
- This initiative will help in creating a brand image for Indian Coffee through traceability in reducing growers dependency on intermediaries by having a direct access to buyers for a fair price for their produce, in finding right coffee suppliers for exporters and within the stipulated time to meet the growing demands and in building a better trust and long term relationship due to increased visibility towards the traceability and transparency of the produce.
- Coffee Board is collaborating with M/s Eka Plus, one of the global leaders in Digital Commodity Management platforms for Agriculture for development of Blockchain based marketplace application.
- Eka Plus have developed the application and a group of 15-20 coffee farmers, exporters, roasters, importers and retailers are already

registered on the platform from India and abroad. It is one of the few coffee block chain processor for coffee after France and Ethiopia in the world.

- The stakeholder like coffee farmers, traders, coffee curers, exporters, rosters, importers and retailers register on the platform to make trade transactions. The coffee farmer registers credentials like place where coffee is grown, details of the crop, elevation, certificates if any and any relevant information.
- A block is created for each of the lot the farmer sells on the Blockchain. The credentials of the block/ lot will be stored on the Blockchain throughout its journey and are immutable.

About Blockchain Technology:

- The blockchain is an incorruptible digital ledger of economic transactions that can be programmed to record not just financial transactions but virtually everything of value.
- A blockchain is, in the simplest of terms, a time-stamped series of immutable record of data that is managed by cluster of computers not owned by any single entity. Each of these blocks of data (i.e. block) are secured and bound to each other using cryptographic principles (i.e. chain).
- The blockchain network has no central authority — it is the very definition of a democratized system. Since it is a shared and immutable ledger, the information in it is open for anyone and everyone to see. Hence, anything that is built on the blockchain is by its very nature transparent and everyone involved is accountable for their actions.

Blockchain Explained

- A blockchain carries no transaction cost. (An infrastructure cost yes, but no transaction cost.) The blockchain is a simple yet ingenious way of passing information from A to B in a fully automated and safe manner. One party to a transaction initiates the process by creating a block.
- This block is verified by thousands, perhaps millions of computers

distributed around the net. The verified block is added to a chain, which is stored across the net, creating not just a unique record, but a unique record with a unique history.

- Falsifying a single record would mean falsifying the entire chain in millions of instances. That is virtually impossible. Bitcoin uses this model for monetary transactions, but it can be deployed in many others ways.
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Model Policy for Women in Police in India

Policy framework

- Increasing the numbers and role of women in police has slowly, albeit firmly, gained policy recognition in India. Through several initiatives, the Government of India reiterates gender diversity in policing as an important measure for affording greater protection to, and preventing crimes against, women, and for “improving the image of the police...and making the police station a gender-sensitive place.”
- In 2009, it laid down 33% as the benchmark target for women’s representation in the police. Apart from the Union Territories, nine states have adopted 33% reservation, five states 30%, Bihar 38%, and five states have less than 30% reservation.
- Nine states have not set a target. The central government has also carved out roles for women police to prompt greater recruitment.
- In 2013, the Ministry of Home Affairs recommended each police station to have at least three women SubInspectors and ten women police Constables to ensure women help desks are staffed at all times.
- In 2015, the Ministry proposed creating Investigative Units for Crimes against Women (IUCAW) at police stations in crime-prone districts across states.
- These units are to be constituted on a cost-sharing basis between the Centre and the states, with around 15 specialized investigators dealing specifically with crimes against women. Of the 15 staff, at least one-third are required to be women.

Goal: to embed equality and fair treatment between men and women in police organisations by establishing strategies, policies, and procedures necessary to root out gender bias.

Objectives

The main objectives of this policy are as follows:

1. To recognise that the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men is essential for effective and responsive policing;
2. To achieve equitable representation of men and women at all levels and role structures, including decision-making levels and specialist roles;
3. To provide equal opportunities for women and embed equality of men and women in all aspects of organizational policy, decision-making, procedure and practice;
4. To create a safe, supportive and enabling environment so women from all backgrounds and sections of society can work and flourish on an equal basis;
5. To prohibit and eliminate any act or practice of discrimination against women, sexual harassment and sexism in the workplace;
6. To make policing tasks free from stereotyping based on gender.

Principles:

The following principles underlie the policy for women in police:

- **Principle of non-discrimination** which requires treating men and women on an equal basis at all levels, in all decisions, and taking all measures to eliminate any act or practice of discrimination against women.
- **Principle of substantive equality** which recognizes that equality between men and women requires temporary special measures, also referred to as positive discrimination, positive action, affirmative action, to overcome underrepresentation of women, accelerate the improvement of the position of women, and effect structural, social and cultural changes necessary to correct past and current forms and effects of discrimination against women. The word special must not be taken to mean weak, vulnerable and in need of extra or “special”

measures but designed to meet specific goals.

- **Principle of inclusiveness** which requires taking special measures to reach women who face multiple forms of discrimination, such as rural and indigenous women, women with disabilities, women living in poverty, and women facing other forms of marginalization on the grounds of colour, ethnicity, caste, religion, political affiliation or any other factor.
 - **Principle of efficiency** which requires police services to harness human resources capacity from all sections of society, in an equal and proportionate manner, to improve responsiveness and efficiency in policing.
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U.S. circulates draft resolution on Azhar in Security Council

Why in news?

The U.S. March 28 took the lead in bringing sanctions against Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) chief Masood Azhar at the United Nations by circulating a draft resolution among Security Council members.

About the Sanctions:

- The move comes weeks after the 1267 Sanctions Committee failed to designate Azhar as a terrorist, after China placed a hold on a listing request that the U.S., the U.K., and France had brought before the Committee.
- That listing requests the fourth such unsuccessful one in a decade followed the February 14 suicide attack on a CRPF convoy in Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The draft resolution, which The Hindu has seen, borrows wording from UNSC press statements.
- It condemns in the strongest terms the heinous and cowardly suicide bombing in Jammu and Kashmir, which resulted in over 40 Indian

paramilitary forces dead and dozens wounded on 14 February 2019, for which a member of JeM has claimed responsibility.

- In a related but separate development, the Security Council passed Resolution 2462 on terrorism financing.
- The resolution stresses the primary responsibility of Member States in countering terrorist acts and reiterating their obligation to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorist acts as well as its call upon all States to become party to the international counter-terrorism conventions and protocols as soon as possible.
- The draft resolution identifies Azhar as the founder of the JeM and seeks to impose sanctions on him.
- The draft resolution also says Azhar is associated with ISIL or al-Qaeda for “participating in the financing, planning, facilitating, preparing, or perpetrating of acts” and “supplying, selling or transferring arms and related material to” or otherwise supporting the JeM.
- Resolution 2462 on terrorism financing highlights the obligation states have that prohibit them from making financing available for the benefit of terror organizations “even in the absence of a link to a specific terrorist act.”

Chinese Opposition:

- The designation of Azhar as an international terrorist has so far been discussed in the 1267 committee of the UNSC.
- But China has repeatedly placed a “technical hold” on banning the head of JeM, which has already been listed as a terrorist organisation.
- On March 13, China stood out as the only member of the 15-nation UNSC, which effectively blocked listing Azhar as a global terrorist by placing a “hold”.
- China said Washington’s move had reduced the authority of the (1267) committee as the main anti-terrorism body of the Security Council.

U.S. tracking space debris from India’s ASAT test

Why in news?

The United States has reacted to Prime Minister Modi's statement that India had successfully tested an anti-satellite (ASAT) missile in what he termed Mission Shakti.

US Statement:

- The State Department saw PM Modi's statement that announced India's anti-satellite test.
- As part of our strong strategic partnership with India, we will continue to pursue shared interests in space and scientific and technical cooperation, including collaboration on safety and security in space," a State Department spokesperson said
- India was uniquely designated a '**Major Defense Partner**' of the United States in 2016.
- The U.S. is one of the now four (including India) countries that has demonstrated an ability to strike down an orbiting satellite.
- U.S. President Donald Trump has been pushing for the U.S. to have a 'Space Force' and has directed the administration to enhance America's space-war fighting capabilities.
- This has been driven in part by the long-standing American concern that China and Russia were developing their ASAT systems, putting American GPS-based technology at risk.

Issue of Space Debris:

- The U.S. reaction also raised the issue of space debris.
- The issue of space debris is an important concern for the U.S. government. We took note of Indian government statements that the test was designed to address space debris issues, the spokesperson said.
- The U.S. is tracking over 250 pieces of debris from Mission Shakti. It will provide close-approach notifications as required until the debris enters the Earth's atmosphere.
- The Indian government has said that there will be no space debris.
- The test was done in the lower atmosphere to ensure that there is no space debris. Whatever debris that is generated will decay and fall

back onto the earth within weeks.

4 ecotourism centres closed in Wayanad

Why in news?

The entry of tourists to four major ecotourism tourism centres under the South Wayanad Forest Division in Wayanad district has been closed as per a directive of the Kerala High Court.

About the Ban:

- The court on March 21 issued an interim stay on all ecotourism activities in the forest division on a petition filed by the Wayanad Prakriti Samrakshana Samiti, an environmental organisation.
- The Soochipara waterfalls under the Meppadi forest range, Kuruva islets on the Kabani under the Chethalayath forest range, Chembra peak under the Meppadi forest range, and the Meenmutty waterfalls at Padinharethara, under the Kalpetta forest range, had been closed as per the court directive.
- The entry of tourists to Soochipara was closed on Thursday and the Kuruva islets.
- Tourists had already been barred from Chembra and Meenmutty from the middle of January owing to risk of wildfire.

Data ownership

Why in news?

The ownership of aggregate data remains a bone of contention between the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) and stakeholders, including start-ups and SMEs, in the ongoing consultations

over the draft e-commerce policy.

About the Issue:

- The issue had come up for discussion during a recent meeting between industry representatives and DPIIT officials.
- While the draft e-commerce policy stated, India and its citizens have a sovereign right to their data.
- Even after anonymisation, the interests of the individual cannot be completely separated from the derivatives that may be obtained by analysing and drawing inferences from a certain set of data.

Concerns on source code:

- The concerns were raised over government reserving the right to seek disclosure of source code and algorithms.
- Stakeholders have sought that the government should only have the right to seek aggregated data, source code and algorithms only in case of law and order or investigation situations and they have taken note of it.
- The policy added that business models of companies are increasingly centered around data with targeted advertisements and personalised recommendations as a means to attain competitive advantage, the importance of ownership of data must not be undermined.
- The government put out the draft e-commerce policy in February and had invited comments from all stakeholder till March 29.

New loan pricing scheme

Why in news?

Banks will be getting more time to migrate to the new loan pricing regime which was scheduled to be implemented from April 1.

About new Scheme:

- This new pricing scheme, based on an external benchmark, will be applicable for floating rate loans extended to individuals and small businesses.
- Bankers said with the central bank yet to come up with the final guidelines, the introduction of the scheme was expected to be postponed.
- During the December monetary policy review the central bank had said that all new floating rate retail loans such as housing and auto loans, and floating rate loans extended by banks to micro and small enterprises from April 1, 2019, should be linked to an external benchmark.
- RBI also said that the final guidelines would be issued by December-end.
- The final guidelines on the loan pricing based on external benchmark are yet to be released by RBI. Banks would need some time to prepare after the final norms are issued. So, it is likely to be postponed.
- Last week, the RBI indefinitely postponed the implementation of **IND-AS, a new accounting policy for banks**.
- While RBI had given four options to banks to choose the external benchmark, most banks were zooming in on repo rate, the key policy rate of RBI, as the external benchmark.
- Most banks have opposed the decision of linking lending rates to an external benchmark saying their cost of funds is not linked to those external benchmarks. They argued that lending rates should depend on the cost of funds.

SBI rate:

- State Bank of India, in order to make the cost of funds responsive to an external benchmark, has already linked **its savings bank rate with repo rate**, with effect from May 1. At the current repo rate of 6.25%, SBI's savings rate has been fixed at 3.5%.
- RBI has also mandated that the spread over the benchmark rate, which will be decided by banks at the inception of the loan, should remain unchanged through the tenure of the loan, unless the borrower's credit assessment undergoes a substantial change or as agreed upon in the loan contract.

What is IND-AS?

- Ind AS or Indian Accounting Standards govern the accounting and recording of financial transactions as well as the presentation of statements such as profit and loss account and balance sheet of a company.
- For long, there has been a heated debate about Indian companies moving to the globally accepted **International Financial Reporting Standards** (IFRS) for their accounts.
- But firms have resisted this shift, stating that this will lead too many changes in the capture and reporting of their numbers.
- Ind AS has been evolved as a compromise formula that tries to harmonise Indian accounting rules with the IFRS.

Why is it important?

- Ind AS will not just change the way companies present their numbers, but may also bump up or knock down the profits/losses of firms. Here are a few instances.
- Under the existing rules, incentives, discounts or rebates given to customers by a firm can be shown as part of advertising, sales promotion or marketing expenses, which figure in the costs.
- But under Ind AS, these will have to be deducted from sales (revenues). Excise duties which are currently netted off from revenues to show 'net sales', will have to be shunted under 'expenses' under Ind AS.
- Intangible assets such as goodwill had to be amortised, or written off as expenses over a period of time until now.
- Ind AS treats such items as having an indefinite life and hence they need not be amortised. This can lift the profits of firms which carry sizeable goodwill on their books.
- Ind AS advocates the 'fair value' method of accounting. For example, currently, investments by a company in government securities or mutual funds is shown at the lower of cost and fair value (market value).
- Under Ind AS, these will have to necessarily be captured at fair value. For firms which have legacy or under valued investments, this revaluation can expand the balance sheet size.
- The new Ind AS also promises clearer disclosures to investors in certain cases. So far companies reported their segment-wise

performance based on a broad product/service grouping or even geographical segments (within India, Outside India).

- But Ind AS requires that segments reported to investors are the same as the firm uses for the purpose of assessing performance and allocating resources.
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What the world thinks of India

Why in news?

There are many ways to assess a country's role in the world. Outcomes are one of them, including economic exchanges, political decisions, and military cooperation. Resources whether economic, military, diplomatic, or cultural are another. But public perceptions should not be discounted. While the attention devoted by other countries' leaderships and the growth of the Indian economy since 1991 suggest that India's standing in international affairs has improved.

Findings of the Report:

- On March 25, the Pew Research Center released a study of India, based on surveys conducted over the past year. Among the findings were 27 countries' public views on India's rise.
- The U.S. (40%), the U.K. (46%), France (49%), Japan (48%) and Australia (40%) thought that India played a more important role in the world compared to 10 years ago, and only a minority (4 to 17%) felt it was less important.
- Similar patterns were discernible in Canada, Germany, South Korea, Sweden, and the Netherlands.
- The perception of India as a rising power in North America, Europe, Northeast Asia, and Australia should be little surprise, given that these are the places with the most active Indian businesses, diasporas, and government-to-government relations.
- On the flip side, very small numbers in Southern and Eastern Europe and Latin America perceived India playing a more important role, with respondents more likely to see India's position declining.

- Only 17% in Poland, 21% in Brazil, and 14% in Mexico saw India's role as having enhanced over the past decade. This too is not surprising. India's presence is less likely to be felt in Latin America.
- Southern and Central Europe is also a more crowded space, with the U.S., the EU, Russia, and (increasingly) China jostling for influence.
- Somewhere in the middle of the pack are Russia (where 22% saw India playing a more important role, and 21% less) and Africa, where the numbers are mixed in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa.
- This should be expected, given their priorities and the vector of relations with India, particularly relative to other powers.

Points of Concern:

- From an Indian perspective, there are two points of concern.
- One is Israel, where only 27% saw India playing a more important role and 31% less.
- This is surprising only because that relationship has appeared to be on a positive trajectory over the past decade.
- Defence ties, technological relations, and political links have been consolidated.
- Recent years saw the first presidential and among the first prime ministerial visits by Indian and Israeli leaders to each other's countries.
- India also remains a popular destination for Israeli tourists.
- The other, more minor, surprise concerns South-East Asia, particularly Indonesia.
- That only 21% of Indonesians and 15% of Filipinos perceived India as a rising power means that India's Act East policy remains a work in progress.

Israel unveils world's longest salt cave

Why in news?

Israeli researchers say they have discovered the world's longest salt cave near the desert site where, according to the Bible, Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt.

Where it is?

- The 10-km long warren of underground passages and chambers in **Mount Sodom, overlooking the Dead Sea**, was mapped out over two years by cavers from nine countries, led by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The **cave is called Malham**.
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Centre should address States' concern on GST transfers

Why in news?

While the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council was designed as a federal body between the States and the Centre, the complaint of the States is that the Centre is taking advantage of the arrangement and is delaying the dues to be paid to the States longer than is needed, according to Y.V. Reddy, former chairman of the Fourteenth Finance Commission.

Reddy's Observations:

- The GST Council is an institution built on the cooperation of the Centre and the States in the matter of taxation.
- It is a huge achievement, but in the implementation of the GST so far, the States have a feeling that the Centre is taking advantage of the current arrangement.
- The Centre is supposed to give money to the States, but that distribution is taking time and accounts are not being finalised. There is a feeling that the Centre is trying to keep the money longer than required.
- The former RBI Governor also pointed out that the empirical evidence showed that, while the transfers mandated by the Finance Commission from the Centre to the States had been to the benefit of the poorer States, the discretionary spending allowed by the Centre

had, in fact, only been to the benefit of the richer States.

- There is an impression that leaving expenditure to the Centre's discretion, instead of the FC, means that they can spend on the backward States."

Recast NITI Aayog:

- On the future roles of the FCs and the NITI Aayog, Mr. Reddy said that there was a need for a body such as the FCs to make sure that there was a stable formula for transfers to the States.
- There was also a need for a federal body, which is trusted by both the States and the Centre, that would provide a forum for the political bargaining that was behind the allocation of other funds to the States, such as grants in aid.
- The right way of going about it is that there should be a political forum and expertise also, which will arrive at the criteria for such transfers.
- That body should come under the confidence of both the States and the Centre, and not just identify with the Centre.
- If the NITI Aayog were to occupy this role, then the first thing is for it to get the trust of the States.

Terms of Reference:

- Mr. Reddy also weighed in on the controversy surrounding the Terms of Reference for the Fifteenth Finance Commission, saying that the way forward was to use the latest population data available, and then also factor in other factors that would reward the efficiency of the States.
 - Population is the easiest and most quantifiable metric, provided it is the relevant population.
 - It should be population of the period for which you are giving the award. Definitely the outdated data is not appropriate. The latest data should be used.
 - The whole debate is whether to reward efficiency or try for equity.
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