

● **Appointments**

- **David Malpass** has been appointed as President of World Bank.
- **Air Marshal Rakesh K S Bhaduria** has been appointed as new Vice Chief of Air Staff.
- **Former Army Chief Dalbir Singh Suhag** has been appointed High Commissioner to Seychelles.

- In order to counter fake, sub-standard and expired drugs, **Hindi and regional language** will be used in the tendering process. The Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB) recently recommended that government procurement agencies should take necessary steps in the tendering process to include the regional language, along with English, on the label of iron tablets and polio drops in government programmes.

- The **Asian Tea Alliance (ATA)**, a union of five tea-growing and consuming countries, was recently launched in Guizhou in China. The members of the alliance are the Indian Tea Association, China Tea Marketing Association, Indonesian Tea Marketing Association, Sri Lanka Tea Board and Japan Tea Association. It plans to work towards enhancing tea trade, cultural exchanges, technology exchanges as well as promoting global consumption of tea while creating a sustainability agenda for the future of Asian tea.

- The **International Day of Human Space Flight** was recently celebrated to April 12th. In 2011, the United Nations General Assembly selected the date, recognising the 50th anniversary of the first ever human spaceflight. It was on 12 April 1961 that Yuri Gagarin, a Soviet citizen, carried out the first human space flight, an historic event paving the way for space exploration for the benefit of all humanity.

● **International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace**

- The **first official International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy** for Peace was celebrated on April 24, 2019.
- It was aimed at disseminating advantages of multilateralism and diplomacy for peace by educational and public awareness-raising activities.
- This day was officially approved on 12 December, 2018 by the UN.
- Preserving the values of multilateralism and international cooperation, which underpin the UN Charter and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is fundamental to promote and support the three pillars of the UN - peace and security, development and human rights.

- **World Book Day**, also known as **World Book and Copyright Day**, or **International Day of the Book**, is an annual event organized by the UNESCO to promote reading, publishing and copyright . World Book Day was first celebrated on 23 April 1995, and continues to be recognized on that day.

- **The Civil Services Day 2019:** It was not observed on 21st April 2019 due to General Election.

- **Varuna exercise:** India and France will conduct their largest ever naval exercise 'Varuna' off Goa coast early May 2019.

- **South Korea** has launched the world's first nationwide 5G mobile Network.

- The Reserve Bank of India came out with **guidelines for banks to set up new currency chests**. The new chests should have minimum area of 1,500 square feet for strong room, a processing capacity of 6.6 lakh pieces of banknotes per day, and Chest Balance Limit (CBL) of at least Rs 1,000 crore. Currency chests are branches of selected banks authorised by the RBI to stock rupee notes and coins. The RBI offices in various cities receive the notes from note presses and coins from the

mint. These are sent to the currency chests and small coin depots from where they are distributed to bank branches. As per the RBI's annual report of 2017-18, the currency management infrastructure consists of a network of 19 issue offices of the Reserve Bank, 3,975 currency chests and 3,654 small coin depots of commercial, co-operative and regional rural banks spread across the country.

- The Reserve Bank of India, in consultation with the Government of India, has decided that the **limits for Ways and Means Advances (WMA)** for the first half of the financial year 2019-20 will be Rs 75000 crore. The interest rate on WMA will be Repo Rate, while overdrafts are charged 2% above the repo rate. However, based on prevailing circumstances, RBI will have the flexibility to revise the limit at any time, in consultation with the Government. The RBI, as a banker to government, gives temporary loan facilities to the centre and state governments to deal with temporary mismatches in receipts and payments. This temporary loan facility is called Ways and Means Advances (WMA).
- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has cut the repo rate** (the rate at which it lends to banks) by 25 basis points to 6%. This is the second consecutive rate cut from RBI, after a similar cut in February. The monetary policy committee of the RBI also decided to maintain the neutral monetary policy stance. A neutral policy will mean that depending upon the situation, RBI can increase or decrease interest rates. The RBI Governor expressed concern over monetary transmission, noting that banks have only reduced lending rate by 10 bps after RBI reduced the policy rate by 25 bps in February.
- The **forex reserves of India have reached a 10-month high** of \$411.91 billion aided by record foreign portfolio investment (FPI) inflows and a \$5 billion rupee-dollar swap window by the RBI. A fall in crude oil prices in recent months and appreciation of the Indian rupee vis-à-vis the dollar also helped in steady rise of forex reserves.
- The Nikkei India **Manufacturing PMI dropped to a six-month low** of 52.6, highlighting a loss of growth momentum. A reading above 50 indicates expansion of manufacturing sector while below 50 indicates contraction. The reasons for the drop include softer increases in new orders, production and employment. However, business sentiment strengthened to a seven-month high, amid hopes on favorable public policies after the elections as well as plans on marketing initiatives and capacity expansion.

India Manufacturing PMI: The Nikkei India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) measures the performance of the manufacturing sector and is derived from a survey of 500 manufacturing companies. The Index is based on five individual indexes with the following weights: New Orders (30 percent), Output (25 percent), Employment (20 percent), Suppliers' Delivery Times (15 percent) and Stock of Items Purchased (10 percent). A reading above 50 indicates an expansion of the manufacturing sector compared to the previous month; below 50 represents a contraction; while 50 indicates no change.

- The Goods and Services Tax (**GST**) **collection in March reached an all time high** of Rs 1.06 lakh crore, since it took effect on 1 July 2017, indicating expansion in manufacturing and consumption. GST collections for the whole of 2018-19 stood at Rs 11.77 lakh crore. The monthly average of GST revenue during FY19 was Rs 98,114 crore, 9.2 per cent higher than FY18. The higher GST collection will reduce pressure on the centre as it has to compensate the states for any revenue loss.
- According to a latest analysis by Crisil, the mutual fund industry's average assets under management (AAUM) rose 3.6% in the fourth quarter of fiscal 2019 to Rs 24.5 lakh crore. However, fiscal year growth of 6% was the slowest in seven years. The reason for slow growth rate was the huge outflows seen by the debt funds, which account for 45% of the industry's AAUM.
- Noting that the level of NPAs in the banking sector in India remains high, the IMF and World Bank's India **Financial Sector Assessment Programme (FSAP) for India has recommended**

increasing the level of capitalisation of some banks, particularly government-owned banks. The report acknowledged the steps by the Indian authorities to boost capital buffers in banks and also to improve governance in state-owned banks that have had some positive impact.

Financial	Sector	Assessment	Program	(FSAP)
<p>The global financial crisis of 2008-09 showed that the health and functioning of a country's financial sector has far-reaching implications for its own and other economies. The Financial Sector Assessment Program (FSAP) is a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of a country's financial sector. FSAP assessments are the joint responsibility of the IMF and World Bank in developing economies and emerging markets and of the IMF alone in advanced economies. The FSAP includes two major components: a financial stability assessment, which is the responsibility of the IMF, and a financial development assessment, the responsibility of the World Bank. To date, more than three-quarters of the institutions' member countries have undergone assessments.</p>				

- Hong Kong's equity market has overtaken Japan to be the world's third largest** in value, behind only the U.S. and mainland China. As on 9th of April, the combined market capitalisation of stocks trading on the Hong Kong market totalled US\$5.78 trillion, beating that of US\$5.76 trillion for Japan. The last time Hong Kong's market was more valuable than Japan dated back to April 2015 which lasted for only about two months. **The output of eight core industries rose 2.1%** in February 2019. The slow growth was on account of fall in output registered in the crude oil and refinery products. The highest output growth during February 2019 was registered in coal and cement sectors at 7.3 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively. The eight core industries, including coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement and electricity, are responsible for almost 41 per cent of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
- Infrastructure investment company **Roadis and the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) have announced the creation of a platform that will invest in road projects** in India. The platform will invest up to \$2 billion of equity to target Toll Operate Transfer (TOT) models, acquisitions of existing road concessions and investment opportunities in the road sector with the aim of creating a large roads platform in the country. In TOT model, the government builds the project, operates it for some years and then leases the project to the private sector for the low-risk task of operating and maintaining. Such operational road assets in India offer a steady cash-flow option to private investment firms, while the government can get funds to reinvest in new projects. Roadis is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Public Sector Pension Investment Board (PSP Investments), one of Canada's largest pension funds.
- The **Government e Marketplace (GeM)**, the national public procurement portal, in FY 2018-19 witnessed a four-fold increase in total value of transactions on the portal and doubling of number of sellers in the marketplace. The portal grossed over Rs. 23,000 crores in Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) through more than 17 lakh transactions on the platform. 42% of transactions by volume are done with MSMEs registered on the platform. The products and services are being bought by over 34,000 government organisations registered on the platform. Despite such phenomenal growth in transactions, average rejection rate of supplies remained below one percent, which is proof of high quality of products/services offered on the portal. During the year, GeM was awarded Digital India Platinum Award for 'Exemplary Online Service' by the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY).

<p>Government E Marketplace (GeM): It the national public procurement portal offering end to end solution for all procurement needs of Central and State govt. departments and PSUs. GeM eliminates human interface in vendor registration, order placement and payment processing, to a great extent. Being an open platform, it offers no entry barriers to bonafide suppliers who wish</p>
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to do business with the Government. It helps enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement and eliminate corruption. It also enables the Government buyers to procure Make in India and Small Scale Industries (SSI) goods very easily. Though GeM is not mandatory for State Governments, most states have adopted it for public procurement. Over 8.8 lakh products were available on its platform through a network of over 2 lakh sellers and service providers in FY 2018-19.

- The Delhi High Court has held that the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) prevails over the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) when it comes to attachment of properties** obtained as “proceeds of crime” and in matters dealing with “money-laundering”. As per PMLA, “proceeds of crime” means any property derived or obtained, directly or indirectly, by any person as a result of criminal activity relating to a scheduled offence or the value of any such property. The high court said the empowered enforcement officer has the authority of law in PMLA to attach not only a "tainted property" which is acquired or obtained directly or indirectly from proceeds of criminal activity, but also any other asset or property of equivalent value of the offender of money laundering. However, the Court also said that various legislations in this regard (like the PMLA, IBC, Recovery of Debt and Bankruptcy Act (RDBA) and SARFAESI Act) must co-exist and be enforced in harmony.
- The union government had earlier identified about 35 central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) for strategic sale, including Air India, Pawan Hans, BEML etc. Now, the Finance Ministry has asked those CPSEs to immediately prepare a list of assets, and ensure proper title deeds are available for sale. **The identified CPSEs will have 12 months to monetise non-core assets** identified by a ministerial panel, headed by the Finance Minister, failing which the finance ministry may restrict budgetary allocations to CPSEs. The non-core assets should either be put in a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to hold and monetise such assets, or be disposed off in a case-by-case basis with the approval of the inter-ministerial group (IMG). The amount raised through the sale of non-core assets would form part of the disinvestment proceeds. Non-core assets are parts of a company's business that are not essential for the generation of revenue, cash flow or profits (for example, expensive paintings and artefacts with Air India).
- The inter-ministerial steering committee of the National Mission for Transformative Mobility has decided that **only companies that meet the 50% localisation threshold (that is, 50% of the content must be locally sourced) will be eligible for the incentives under the FAME-II scheme**. The decision was taken so as to promote local manufacturing rather than subsidizing imports (of parts for EV vehicles). The Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME-II) scheme is an extension of earlier FAME scheme to boost electric mobility as well as the 'Make in India' initiative.
- **The Finance Ministry has asked all departments to undertake a review of government guarantees given by respective ministries to their CPSEs or entities**. Advances to CPSEs by banks and other lenders are often supported by government guarantees. The sovereign guarantee is normally extended to improve viability of projects by government entities, to enable PSEs to raise resources at lower interest charges or to fulfil the requirement in cases where sovereign guarantee is a precondition for concessional loans from bilateral/multilateral agencies to sub-sovereign borrowers. But the guarantees become liabilities and impact the financial performance of the government. Article 292 of the Constitution of India extends the executive power of the Union to the giving of guarantees on the security of the Consolidated Fund of India, within such limits, if any, as may be fixed by Parliament. The FRBM Rules stipulate that the government cannot guarantee more than 0.5 per cent of the GDP of the respective financial year to CPSE/entities.
- **The Reserve Bank of India has sold its entire stake of in National Housing Bank (NHB) and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) to the government of India.**

With this, both these financial institutions will be fully government owned. The move is part of ending the cross-holding in regulatory institutions (that is, RBI is regulator as well as owner of these entities). This divestment was based on the recommendations of the Narasimham Committee-II and the Discussion Paper prepared by RBI on Harmonizing the Role and Operations of Development Financial Institutions and Banks.

- The **Indian rupee fell to a seven week low past the past 70-to-a-dollar mark** at the end of April as a rising dollar and high crude prices affected the sentiment. Brent crude reached \$75 a barrel, a first since October, 2018, due to the US decision not to renew sanctions waivers on Iran and halting of Russian oil flows to parts of Europe due to unusual impurities in the crude. Any disruption to oil supply from Libya and Venezuela will put further pressure on India's macroeconomic situation. A \$10/bbl increase in oil prices impacts India's current account by around \$15 billion or 50 bps of GDP.
- The **Banks Board Bureau (BBB) has identified 75 senior management personnel of Public Sector Banks (PSBs)** to take over leadership roles in the future. After deeper assessments of these personnel, Individual Development Plans will be generated, and they will also undergo intensive leadership development training at a globally-ranked Indian institution. In its latest activity report, the Bureau has also sought autonomy for the PSBs to decide on their organisational structure. It also asked the government to revamp the credit governance architecture in nationalised banks to strengthen efforts to minimise credit costs.

<p>Banks Board Bureau (BBB): The Banks Board Bureau (BBB) was constituted in 2016 as an autonomous recommendatory body to improve the governance of PSBs, recommend selection of chiefs of government-owned banks and financial institutions, and to help banks in developing appropriate strategies for their growth and development and capital raising plans. It is also engaging with the PSBs to help build capacity to attract, retain and nurture both talent and technology.</p>

- According to the latest WFE-IOMA 2018 Derivatives Report by the World Federation of Exchanges (WFE) and the International Options Market Association (IOMA), the Indian stock exchanges **NSE and the BSE accounted for 96% of the currency derivatives trading in the Asia-Pacific region in 2018**. This is despite the fact that Indian exchanges do not offer trading in more interesting derivative instruments like their counterparts in the developed markets in the U.S. and Europe. A derivative is a contract between two or more parties whose value is based on an agreed-upon financial asset (like security) or set of assets (like an index). Futures contracts, that is agreements between two parties for the purchase and delivery of an asset at an agreed upon price at a future date, are one of the most common types of derivatives. An example of currency derivative is a "currency future", which is a futures contract to exchange one currency for another at a specified date in the future at a price (exchange rate) that is fixed on the purchase date.
- The Financial Action Task Force (**FATF**), the **international terror financing watchdog**, has asked **Pakistan to document and regulate all gold markets and the purchase and sale of gold in the country**, as part of its demand to implement a new set of constraints in its crackdown against terror financing. It also asked Pakistan to restrict the sale and purchase of gold items using cash, and to ensure restriction on supply of gold and jewelry to banned outfits and terrorist organisations. Pakistan is due to submit a third report on the measures being taken by the government in compliance with the recommendations of the FATF and its regional affiliate, the Asia-Pacific Group (APG). The compliance report would be taken up by the FATF review group in its meeting scheduled to be held in May. In June, 2018, the FATF had placed Pakistan on the 'grey list' of countries whose domestic laws are considered weak to tackle the challenges of money laundering and terrorism financing. To get out the list, Pakistan has to take tangible measures as recommended by the FATF to curb terror financing and money laundering.

- **India was a net importer of steel during the 2018-19 fiscal year, the first time in three years**, according to preliminary government data. This is a result of India losing market share among its traditional steel buyers (Middle East and Africa) and imports jumped on demand for higher quality steel (primarily for the auto sector and high-end electrical steel) domestically. India's finished steel exports fell by 34% in the fiscal year that ended in March to 6.36 million tonnes, while finished steel imports rose 4.7% to 7.84 million tonnes. As the US and Europe's tariffs and other protectionist measures made it difficult for steelmakers in China, Japan, South Korea and Indonesia, they ate into India's marketshare in the Middle East and Africa.
- The US government has decided not to renew waiver that let countries like India buy Iranian oil without facing US sanctions. As a result, **India will stop importing crude oil from Iran**, and will use alternate supply sources such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE etc. to make up for the lost volumes. India, the world's third-biggest oil consumer, meets more than 80 per cent of its oil needs through imports. Iran in 2017-18 was its third-largest supplier after Iraq and Saudi Arabia and meets about 10 per cent of total needs. India is the second biggest buyer of Iranian crude oil after China. US President Donald Trump in 2018 withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, and revived a range of sanctions against the Iran. It, however, then granted a six-month waiver from sanctions to eight countries - China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Italy, and Greece - but with a condition that they would reduce their purchases of Iranian oil.
- In a major success, the Investor Education and Protection Fund (IEPF) Authority forced a company to transfer depositor's money worth about Rs 1514 crore to IEPF. The money was lying unclaimed with the company for the past 15 years. As per the law, a company needs to transfer the matured deposits to IEPF if they remain unclaimed for a period of seven years. The investors can claim the refund from the IEPF. The IEPF Authority is also in the process of commissioning an online facility to collect primary information directly from retail investors about the deposits which have matured and are still pending with various entities for repayment or payment of interests.

Investor Education and Protection Fund (IEPF) Authority: There is a large amount of unclaimed money in terms of dividend, deposits, debentures etc., which is lying with the companies. Many people don't know about this money as they never invested in these shares but have inherited from their parents and grandparents. Also, few people who had invested in physical shares may not have the record of the investments or due to reasons like change in address, the company communication has never reached to them. Therefore, to make people aware and protect their money from being misused, the government has formed IEPF authority, which spreads awareness among investors and protects their rights. IEPF Authority has been set up in 2016 under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India as a statutory body under Companies Act 2013 to administer the IEPF (Investor Education and Protection Fund) with the objective of promoting Investor's Education, Awareness and Protection. The Authority also makes refunds of shares, unclaimed dividends, matured deposits/debentures etc. to investors. Secretary Ministry of the Corporate Affairs is the Chairperson of the Authority.

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has set up **Suresh Mathur committee to review the regulatory framework on microinsurance and recommend measures to increase the demand for such products**. A micro-insurance policy is a general or life insurance policy with a sum assured of Rs 50,000 or less. Micro-insurance policies has been created by the IRDAI to promote insurance coverage among economically vulnerable sections of society. Micro-insurance business is done through intermediaries such as NGOs, SHGs and Micro-Finance Institutions (MFIs). Though microinsurance policies seek to support sustainable livelihoods of the poor, their market penetration remains low leading to IRDAI looking for new ways to increase the demand for them.

- The highly-anticipated details of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into **Russian involvement in the 2016 presidential election** were released. The report stated definitively that it did not establish evidence that President Trump's team or any associates of the Trump campaign had conspired with Russia to sway the 2016 election.
- **Facial Recognition Technology for Uighurs**
 - Chinese authorities are using a vast, secret system of advanced facial recognition technology to **track and control the Uighurs**, a largely Muslim minority.
 - According to experts, it is the first known example of a government intentionally using artificial intelligence for racial profiling.
 - Chinese authorities already maintain a vast surveillance net, including tracking people's DNA, in the western region of Xinjiang.
 - But the scope of the new systems, previously unreported, extends that monitoring into many other corners of the country.
- China has financed and constructed Sri Lanka's first new railway line after the island nation became independent in 1948. The 26.75-km long **Matara-Beliatta railway extension** was declared open for the public. The Chinese have made deep inroads into the strategically located nation in the Indian Ocean and have a 99-year lease of the Hambantota Port after Sri Lanka failed to pay back loans.
- **Japan's new imperial era**
 - According to Japanese government, the **reign of the next Japanese emperor** will be known as the "**Reiwa**" era.
 - The era, whose name includes the **character for "harmony,"** will formally begin once **the new Emperor is crowned on May 1.** Crown Prince Naruhito is to be coroneted.
 - The new name was adapted from an 8th century anthology (Manyoshu) of classic poetry.
 - It is to be noted that **it is the first time that the name of an era has been taken from classical Japanese literature, rather than Chinese.**
 - This is a long tradition in Japan that the ascension of a new emperor to the Chrysanthemum Throne spurs a new era in the nation, which is marked by a new name.
 - The current **Heisei Era** began in 1989, when Akihito succeeded his father Emperor Hirohito, who ruled during the Showa period and is now known as the Showa Emperor. It will come to a close on April 30, the day Akihito abdicates.
- **Omar al-Bashir forced to resign as Sudan's president**
 - Omar al-Bashir has resigned as president of Sudan. Bashir, **who is wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of war crimes** and genocide, came to power in a 1989 coup and was one of the longest serving presidents in Africa.
 - Weeks of protests, which erupted in December 2018, have become the biggest challenge to Bashir's three decades of rule.
 - Sudan, along with Iran, Syria and North Korea, is on Washington's blacklist as state sponsors of "terrorism".
- **Britain to fund anti-slavery projects**
 - Britain has pledged £4 million to support global anti-slavery projects ranging from sexually exploited girls in Ethiopia to migrant workers in Malaysia and Mauritius.

- Six organisations, such as charity Anti-Slavery International and the United Nations University, a research institution, will share the aid money from The Modern Slavery Innovation Fund.
- The funding will also be used to run workshops on modern slavery in South Africa, improve support for survivors in India, and develop an online data hub to boost anti-slavery policies.
- The Modern Slavery Innovation Fund was announced in 2016 and previously gave £6 million to schemes such as awareness-raising campaigns in Nigeria, the Philippines and Vietnam.
- **Arab League pledges \$100m to Palestinian Authority**
 - The Arab League has pledged to pay \$100m a month to the Palestinian Authority.
 - This step was taken to plug the gap left when Israel blocked tax transfers earlier in the year.
 - Israel collects taxes on behalf of the PA but withheld \$138m in transfers in February over Palestinian payments to political prisoners jailed for attacks against Israelis.
 - Arab League is a regional organization of Arab states in and around North Africa, the Horn of Africa and Arabia. At present, it has 22 members.
- Iran and Pakistan has agreed to set up a joint border "**reaction force**" to counter terrorism. The border skirts the volatile southeastern Iranian province of Sistan-Baluchistan which has been the scene of frequent attacks on Iran's security forces. Iran- Pakistan relations have been strained in recent months. Both sides have been accusing each other of not doing enough to stamp out militants present on either sides.
- Indonesia has released a special commemorative stamp on the theme of Ramayana to mark the **70th anniversary of the establishment** of its diplomatic ties with India. The stamp, designed by **renowned Indonesian sculptor Padmashri Bapak Nyoman Nuarta**, featured a scene from *Ramayana in which Jatayu valiantly fought to save Sita*.
- **Legislation seeking strengthening of US-India partnership**
 - American lawmakers has reintroduced an important legislation in the **bill H R 2123 which seeks to advance the US-India strategic relationship**.
 - If enacted, the legislation would ensure that the US State Department treat India as a NATO ally for the purposes of the Arms Export Control Act.
 - The law would send a powerful signal that defence sales to India should be prioritised according to US-India Strategic Partnership Forum.
 - Earlier, the **National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal 2017** included special language recognising the unique US-India defence relationship that designated India as a "**Major Defence Partner**" of the United States.
 - To fulfil the spirit and intent of the NDAA 2017, the **US-India Enhanced Cooperation Act** would amend the Arms Export Control Act to put *India on par with NATO allies*.
- **Russia's Highest Civilian Award to Indian PM**
 - **The Order of Saint Andrew The Apostle**, the highest civilian honour of the Russian Federation, was conferred **upon PM Narendra Modi**.
 - He has been given this award for *exceptional services in promoting special & privileged strategic partnership between Russia and India, and friendly relations between the Russian and Indian peoples*

- This award is the **highest order and the oldest state order of Russia**, first established in **1698**. It was abolished under the Soviet Union but re-established in 1998.
- **Zayed Medal to Indian PM**
 - PM Modi was awarded **Zayed Medal**, the United Arab Emirates' highest civilian award.
 - This was given as a mark of *appreciation for his efforts to boost bilateral ties between the two nations*.
 - The Zayed Medal has earlier been awarded to Russian President Vladimir Putin, former US president George W Bush, former France president Nicolas Sarkozy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Queen Elizabeth II from the United Kingdom and Chinese President Xi Jinping.
- UAE has announced that India will be the Guest of Honour country at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair, ADIBF 2019, to be held from 24th to 30th April. The fair aims to highlight the UAE's rich heritage, showcasing its authenticity and modernity, as well as its cultural and literary output.
- **India-Africa Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development**
 - Ministry of External Affairs signed an MoU with National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development Consultancy Service (NABCONS) for setting up **India-Africa Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development (IAIARD) in Malawi**.
 - It will be a Pan-African Institute wherein trainees from all African countries will receive training.
 - The entire expenditure on faculty from India, the travel, logistics and training course expenses for students from other African countries **will be borne by the Government of India for an initial period of three years**. This institute will be the first of its kind developed in an African country by India.
 - NABCONS is a fully owned subsidiary promoted by NABARD and is engaged in providing consultancy in all spheres of agriculture, rural development and allied areas.
- **USTR Places India On Priority Watch List**
 - In its latest Special 301 report released by the United States Trade Representative (USTR), the US government has retained India on the "**priority watch list**".
 - Alleged poor enforcement of intellectual property (IP) regulations by India has been cited as one of the reasons to do so.
 - USTR in its report identified 11 countries, including India, in its 'Priority Watch List'.
 - China, Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela are among others. It has also placed 25 countries, including Pakistan and Turkey, on the Watch List.
- **UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)**
 - A total of **150 Indian peacekeepers** serving with the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) have received **medals of honour** for their dedicated service and sacrifice. These peacekeepers were serving in UNMISS in Malakal.
 - Indian peacekeepers serving with the mission have undertaken numerous training sessions of community animal health workers, providing value addition training for farmers to help them make the most of their produce.
 - India is one of the top troop contributing countries to UN peacekeeping missions. More than **200,000 military and police** have **served over the past 70 years** and 168 Indian military personnel have lost their lives under the UN flag.

- India is the **second largest contributor** of peacekeepers to UNMISS with more than 2,400 military and police personnel currently deployed the mission.
- **Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union Media Summit**
 - **5th Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) Media Summit** on Climate Action and Disaster Preparedness was held in Kathmandu, Nepal.
 - Theme - **“Media Solutions for Sustainable Future: Saving Lives, Building Resilient Communities”**
 - The basic aim of the summit was to address the issue of fully utilizing media’s potential of accelerating climate action and disaster preparedness and connect stakeholders to media professionals for collaboration and joint practical projects.
 - ABU is a non-profit, non-governmental, non- political, professional association of broadcasting organisations, which assist development of broadcasting in region.
 - Established in 1964, it has Secretariat in **Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**.
- **NuGen Mobility Summit 2019**
 - The **International Centre for Automotive Technology (ICAT)** is organizing a **NuGen Mobility Summit, 2019**, at Manesar, NCR, from 27th to 29th November 2019.
 - The objective of the Summit is to create a platform for faster adoption, assimilation and development of advanced automotive technologies for a smarter and greener future.
 - The Summit is being organized in association with SAENIS, SAE INDIA, SAE International, NATRiP, DIMTS, Department of Heavy Industry, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, SIAM and ACMA.
 - ICAT Manesar is a division of NATRIP Implementation Society (NATIS) under the Department of Heavy Industries, Government of India.
 - It provides quality services to the industry in all the domains of automotive and non automotive development.
- **Guided Missile Destroyer INS Imphal**
 - The Indian Navy has launched its **third guided missile destroyer** “INS Imphal” at Mazgaon Docks.
 - It has been launched as part of its **Project 15B**, which is aimed at adding state-of-the-art warships to the naval fleet. Project 15B is a class of stealth guided missile destroyers.
 - The Navy had launched **INS Vishakhapatnam**, the **first Project 15B** ship, in April 2015, while the **second ship, INS Mormugao**, was launched in September 2016.
- **International Fleet Review 2019**
 - International fleet review was held at Qingdao on April 23 as part of the **70th anniversary celebrations of the People’s Liberation Army Navy**.
 - Two ships of Indian Navy namely INS Kolkata (stealth destroyer) and INS Shakti (fleet tanker) participated.
 - International Fleet Review (IFR) is a parade of naval ships, aircraft and submarines, and is organised by nations to promote goodwill, strengthen cooperation and showcase their organisational capabilities.
 - IFR also serves as an ideal platform for world’s navies to showcase their prowess and indigenous ship designing and ship building capabilities in a global/ international arena.

- The second IFR was conducted by India off Visakhapatnam in Feb 2016
- **Nirbhay Missile**
 - The DRDO has successfully test fired the **long-range subsonic cruise missile** Nirbhay from the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur in Odisha.
 - Nirbhay has a **range of 1000 km** and can fly very low to the ground to avoid detection by enemy radar called terrain hugging capability.
 - The missile was primarily designed and developed by the **Advanced Defence Establishment** of DRDO located in Bengaluru in cooperation with other DRDO laboratories.
 - Once inducted, Nirbhay, **similar to U.S. Tomahawk cruise missile**, will give Indian armed forces a long range standoff capability to strike targets on land.
- **Coast Guard patrol ship Veera**
 - Indian Coast Guard Ship Veera has been commissioned at a ceremony held at Vishakhapatnam.
 - Veera, **third in the series of offshore patrol vessels** of the Coast Guard, was built by L&T at its shipbuilding facility at Kattupalli in Chennai.
 - Veera is equipped with the state-of-the-art machinery comprising an integrated bridge system, which includes advanced navigation and communication technology and integrated platform management system.
- **Bold Kurukshetra 2019**
 - Bold Kurukshetra is a **joint military exercise** between **India and Singapore**.
 - The 2019 edition (**12th edition**) was held at Babina Military Station in Jhansi district of Uttar Pradesh.
 - It focused on developing interoperability and conduct of joint tactical operations in mechanised warfare.
- **Veer Pariwar Mobile' App**
 - While paying tributes to the fallen troops at the National Police Memorial on the occasion of the CRPF's Valour Day(**Shaurya Diwas**), the President launched the Veer Parivar App for families of personnel killed in the line of duty.
 - The app will act as an interface between Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) authorities and the next of kin of a slain personnel. It will render all assistance to them with regard to **issuance of ex gratia, pensionary benefits and information about all welfare schemes** of the government meant for them.
 - Assistance through the app will be rendered to the families on a real-time basis and the CRPF headquarters and various group centres across the country will respond to these issues. The android-based app will be installed by the force's officials securely on the phone of the families and will not be available over the app stores.
 - Over 2,000 personnel of the CRPF have laid down their lives in the line of duty till now. The over three-lakh personnel strong force observes the **Valour Day on April 9** every year to remember **the gallant fight back by its personnel at the Sardar post in Gujarat's Rann of Kutch against Pakistani troop on this day in 1965**.
- **Romeo Seahawk Helicopters**
 - The United States has cleared the sale of 24 MH-60R **Seahawk choppers to India**.
 - The multi-mission helicopters can detect, track and attack submarines and surface ships.

- The helicopters will provide India the ability to “perform anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare missions along with the ability to perform secondary missions including vertical replenishment, search and rescue, and communications relay”.
- Lockheed Martin’s Lockheed Martin Rotary and Mission Systems will be the lead contractor on the deal.

- **Longest Suspension Maitri Bridge**

- The Indian Army has completed construction of the **longest suspension bridge** over **Indus river in Leh** within a span of just 40 days.
- The 260-foot long cable-suspension bridge has been named as '**Maitri Bridge**'.
- It was built by combat engineers of the '**Sahas aur Yogyata**' regiment of the Indian Army's 'Fire and Fury Corps'.
- The bridge is expected to improve connectivity in remote regions of Leh and Ladakh.
- It will connect the remote areas of Choglamsar, Stok and Chuchot, which are said to be the largest villages in the region.

Leh-Ladakh is a key area due to its geographic position. Last year Border Roads Organisation (BRO) built a **35-meter Chamesahn bridge** in the region which would remove a major travelling bottleneck in Leh and ease the vehicle movement to the base of Siachen Glacier. The project was completed under **Project HIMANK**.

- **Indian Army Launches a Recruitment Drive for Women Soldiers**

- In a first, Indian Army has started a recruitment drive for women soldiers.
- It has started an online registration for recruiting women in military police as soldiers, aiming to fill nearly 100 vacancies.
- The recruitment rally will be conducted at Ambala, Lucknow, Jabalpur, Bangalore and Shillong.
- So far the Indian army recruited women *only as officers and not as soldiers*, making this move significant

- **Long-Range Dhanush Howitzers**

- The Indian Army on Monday received its first batch of artillery guns also known as ‘desi Bofors’.
- The 155 mm x 45 Calibre artillery was manufactured by the **Gun Carriage Factory, Jabalpur** – one of the units of the Ordnance Factory Board – using the Bofors FH-77B gun technology.
- Dhanush not only has a superior range of 38 km compared to Bofors, which can fire up to 27 km, but several of its functions are automated.
- Dhanush is the most manoeuvrable artillery system and can be deployed in any terrain.
- It will be deployed along India’s borders with Pakistan and China.

- Around 40 **vultures belonging to three endangered species (Himalayan griffon, white-backed and slender-billed vultures)** died after feeding on **poisoned cattle carcass** (carcass was poisoned by villagers to target feral dogs) in eastern Assam. Forest officials and a wildlife rescue team from the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) rescued another 34 vultures in a critical condition, and they were nursed back to health by the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) at Kaziranga. Vultures are big scavenging birds crucial for maintaining the ecological balance. Nine species of vultures are found in India.

- A **new species of 'jumping spider'** was discovered in Mumbai and named as Jerzego Sunil Limaye, after Sunil Limaye, the additional principal chief conservator of forest. They have a crescent-shaped golden–yellow stripe in the posterior half of the abdomen. Jumping spiders comprise 13% of the global spider diversity. Spiders are important creatures as they are pest-controllers, and important for ecological balance.
- The world's southernmost coral reef i.e. **coral reef of "Lord Howe Island" (a tiny Australian island in the Tasman Sea) has been hit by bleaching** due to rising sea temperatures, indicating that climate change is affecting even the most isolated ecosystems. However, severe bleaching only affected inshore, shallow lagoon reefs while the deeper-water corals mostly escaped the bleaching. Bleaching occurs when abnormal environmental conditions, such as warmer sea temperatures, cause corals to expel tiny photosynthetic algae, draining them of their colour.
- A **group of jumping spiders that mostly occur in Eurasia and Africa, has been spotted for the first time in Illithodu forests in Kerala** by arachnologists (those who study spiders). The spider has single long spine, are predominantly brownish-black in colour with white and creamy-yellow patches. The spider, named *Habrocestum longispinum*, is a species new to science. Scientists say the discovery also lends support to the continental drift theory that suggests that the world's continents were one large, contiguous landmass where these creatures thrived many millions of years ago.
- The **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) was awarded the distinction of "Public Water Agency of the Year"** by Global Water Intelligence at the Global Water Summit. The awards recognise excellence across the international water industry and reward those initiatives in the water, waste water, and desalination sectors, which bring remarkable improvements in the lives of people. Global Water Intelligence is the leading publisher and events organiser serving the international water industry. It organizes the Global Water Summit, which is one of the major congresses that gathers key global water market players.
- **Earth Hour 2019** was organized on 30 March 2019 from 8:30 pm, with its campaign 'Connect2Earth' aiming to build mass awareness on why nature is important and create a movement for nature. Earth Hour is a worldwide movement organized by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Starting as a symbolic lights out event in Sydney in 2007, Earth Hour grew to be the world's largest movement for the environment, inspiring people to take action for the planet and nature. The event is held annually encouraging individuals, communities, and businesses to turn off non-essential electric lights, for one hour, from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. on a specific day towards the end of March, as a symbol of commitment to the planet.
- The amicus curiae appointed by the Kerala High Court to assist it in flood-related cases informed the court that the sudden release of water simultaneously from different reservoirs during the heavy rain in August 2018 had aggravated the damage during the floods. None of the 79 dams in the State were operated or used for the purpose of flood control and moderation, despite the obligation to utilise them for flood control as per the stipulations under the National Water Policy, NDMA guidelines on flood and RTIO (real-time integrated operation). None of the dams had EAP (Emergency Action Plan) despite the mandate of the NDMA to have it by 2009. The amicus curiae has recommended appointment of an independent expert committee headed by a superior court judge to ascertain what caused the floods of August 2018 and to come up with recommendations for strengthening dam management.
- More than **19 million children in Bangladesh are most vulnerable to the disastrous consequences of climate change**, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in a new report. Children staying in and around river systems (from floods), on the coastline facing the

Bay of Bengal (from cyclones) and several more remote inland areas (from drought) are the most vulnerable. The UNICEF report advocates for policies building resilience of resources and infrastructure to climate and non-climate disasters — such as floods, cyclones and earthquakes — to ensure minimum disruption of health services. It also recommends promoting the demand for, and utilisation of, climate resilient or adaptive services, technologies and facilities. Poor families bear the brunt of climate-related impacts as they are unable to ensure basic necessities like protection, nutritious food and clean water.

- Despite gaining global recognition, the issue of marine plastics pollution lacks focus on the need for stricter and more committed governance. As per some estimates, about 8 million tonnes of plastic enter the oceans every year. The World Wildlife Fund had warned that plastic pollution will double worldwide by 2030 unless major changes are made in how the waste is managed. At a gathering of environment ministers of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden at the Nordic Council, they made a declaration **calling for a global treaty to reduce marine plastic pollution**. The demand has been sent to the European Union, United Nations Environment Programme, the G7 and the G20 groups. The fourth UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-4) held in 2019 had also stressed upon an intergovernmental process to address marine litter and the proliferation of microplastics.
- One of the world's rarest turtles, a **Yangtze giant softshell turtle**, has died in China, leaving just three known survivors of the species. With the passing of this female turtle (**possibly the last female**), only three known individuals of this species remain in the world. The Yangtze giant soft shell turtle is the *largest freshwater turtle* in the world. It is believed to have inhabited the Yangtze river in China and the Red river that flows from southern China into northern Vietnam for millions of years. The species used to be widespread in the fresh waters of China and Vietnam, but have dwindled to **near-extinction** due to hunting and habitat loss.
- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has constituted a **Central Monitoring Committee to prepare and enforce a national plan to make over 350 river stretches across the country pollution free as it has caused serious threat to safety of water and environment**. The NGT has also directed the CPCB and state pollution control boards to launch nationwide programme on biodiversity monitoring and indexing of the rivers to assess the efficacy of river cleaning programme. Further, for safety of human health and maintaining sanctity of the rivers, regular hygienic surveys of the rivers should be carried out. It will have senior representatives of NITI Aayog, Secretaries of relevant union ministries, apart from the CPCB Chairman and Director General, National Mission for Clean Ganga,
- There are **150 Great Indian Bustards (GIB) in the Desert National Park (DNP)** in Thar, Rajasthan, as per the report by the state forest department to NGT. The bird, listed as **critically endangered species** listed the Red List, is also found in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The DNP, spread over Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Barmer and Bikaner districts in Rajasthan, however remains its main habitat. Wind power projects and transmission lines are a major hazard for the survival of the endangered species in the Park.
- **Earth Day 2019 was observed with the theme “Protect Our Species”**. The first Earth Day was celebrated on **April 22, 1970**. It activated millions of Americans to protest against the negative impacts of 150 years of industrial development, and is widely credited with launching the modern environmental movement. Earth Day is now a global event each year, and is the largest civic-focused day of action in the world. **Earth Day Network, (EDN)** is the organization that leads Earth Day worldwide.
- According to the Odisha Forest and Environment Department, **lakhs of baby turtles hatched and entered Bay of Bengal from the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary in Odisha**. An estimated 4.5 lakh turtles had arrived at beaches under the sanctuary to lay eggs this year. The Olive

Ridley turtle is the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles, and are found **only in warmer waters**, including the southern Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans. The species is recognized as **Vulnerable** by the IUCN Red list. Olive Ridley turtles are legally protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and Appendix I of the CITES Convention which prohibits trade in turtle products.

- A new genetic method hopes to make **studying as well as conserving wild species quicker, easier and cost-effective**. It derives information from animal sources containing extremely low-quality DNA — including faeces and cooked meat. This method, being developed by a team including scientists from Bengaluru's National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), relies on identifying multiple, short portions of DNA segments in a single experiment. The method can be used in *species census, monitoring of species, conservation efforts and tackling wildlife crimes*.
- A report by the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) and Greenpeace has brought **into focus the impact of China's waste ban on communities in Southeast Asia**. For many years, China received the bulk of scrap plastic from around the world, and processed much of it into a higher quality material that could be used by manufacturers. However, it has put a ban on accepting the world's used plastic in 2018, in a push to protect the local environment and air quality. This has since plunged the global recycling into turmoil, with plastic being redirected in huge quantities to Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia, with environmental and health concerns.

The **bamboo rice** (it grows out of a dying bamboo shoot), which grows only twice or thrice in a century, is being harvested this year from the Chandaka-Dampara Wildlife Sanctuary in Cuttack district, Odisha. The sanctuary has been opened for forest dwellers to come and collect the rice, as it will otherwise be attacked by rats. This variety looks like paddy rice and tastes more like wheat. It is believed to have low glycaemic index compared to other varieties and it is good for diabetics. It is rich in proteins and does not contain any fat