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1

THE BROADBAND READINESS INDEX (BRI) FOR INDIAN STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES

CONTEXT:

- The Department of Telecom (DoT) and the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop a Broadband Readiness Index (BRI) for Indian States and Union Territories (UT).

ABOUT:

- The first estimate will be made in 2019 and subsequently every year until 2022.
- The National Digital Communication Policy (NDCP) 2018 acknowledged the need for building a robust digital communications infrastructure leveraging existing assets of the broadcasting and power sectors including collaborative models involving state, local bodies and the private sector.
- Accordingly, the policy recommended that a BRI for States and UTs be developed to attract investments and address Right of Way (RoW) challenges across India.
- This index will appraise the condition of the underlying digital infrastructure and related factors at the State/UT level. Such an exercise will provide useful insights into strategic choices made by States for investment allocations in ICT programmes.
- In the spirit of competitive federalism, the index will encourage states to cross learn and jointly participate in achieving the overall objective of digital inclusion and development in India.
- The framework will not only evaluate a state's relative development but will also allow for better understanding of a state's strengths and weaknesses that can feed into evidence-based policy making.
- The methodology developed as a part of this research will be adapted and used on an annual basis for systematic evaluation of state-performance on metrics set out as the goals for 2022 under the new policy. As a result, ranking and understanding State/UT performance over time will be an important part of the exercise.

2

NATIONAL INVESTIGATION AGENCY (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

CONTEXT:

- The National Investigation Agency (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was unanimously passed by Rajya Sabha

ABOUT:

- The Bill amends the National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act, 2008. The Act provides for a national-level agency to investigate and prosecute offences listed in a schedule (scheduled offences). Further, the Act allows for creation of Special Courts for the trial of scheduled offences.
- **Scheduled offences:** The schedule to the Act specifies a list of offences which are to be investigated and prosecuted by the NIA. These include offences under Acts such as the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967. The Bill seeks to allow the NIA to investigate the following offences, in addition: (i) human trafficking, (ii) offences related to counterfeit currency or bank notes, (iii) manufacture or sale of prohibited arms, (iv) cyber-terrorism, and (v) offences under the Explosive Substances Act, 1908.
- **Jurisdiction of the NIA:** The Act provides for the creation of the NIA to investigate and prosecute offences specified in the schedule. The officers of the NIA have the same powers as other police officers in relation to investigation of such offences, across India. The Bill states that in addition,

officers of the NIA will have the power to investigate scheduled offences committed outside India, subject to international treaties and domestic laws of other countries.

- **Special Courts:** The Act allows the central government to constitute Special Courts for the trial of scheduled offences. The Bill amends this to state that the central government may designate Sessions Courts as Special Courts for the trial of scheduled offences.

3

THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

CONTEXT:

- Parliament passed the Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Bill 2019 after the Rajya Sabha approved it unanimously on July 22, 2019. The bill was passed by the Lok Sabha earlier on July 19 through a voice vote.

ABOUT:

The Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2019, inter alia, provides

- That a person who has been a Judge of the Supreme Court is also made eligible to be appointed as Chairperson of the Commission in addition to the person who has been the Chief Justice of India;
- To increase the Members of the Commission from two to three of which, one shall be a woman;
- To include Chairperson of the National Commission for Backward Classes, Chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights and the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities as deemed Members of the Commission;
- To reduce the term of the Chairperson and Members of the Commission and the State Commissions from five to three years and shall be eligible for re-appointment;
- To provide that a person who has been a Judge of a High Court is also made eligible to be appointed as Chairperson of the State Commission in addition to the person who has been the Chief Justice of the High Court; and,
- To confer upon State Commissions, the functions relating to human rights being discharged by the Union territories, other than the Union territory of Delhi, which will be dealt with by the Commission.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

- ▶ NHRC of India is a Statutory public body constituted on 12 October 1993 under the Protection of Human Rights Ordinance of 28 September 1993.
- ▶ It was given a statutory basis by the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.
- ▶ The NHRC is the National Human Rights Commission of India, responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights, defined by the Act as "Rights Relating To Life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants.
- ▶ A Chairperson, should be retired Chief Justice of India.

4

THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

CONTEXT:

- RTI Amendment Bill passed By Parliament.

ABOUT:

- The Bill proposes to change the fixed term of the Information Commissioners, and make their pay and service conditions subject to the executive rules to be made by the government.
- At present, the Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners have a fixed term of five years. The amendment bill changes the period of office of Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioner as "for such term as may be prescribed by the Central Government". In the same manner, the term of office of State Information Commissioners is curtailed by the amendment.
- Section 27 of the Act is amended to give rule making power to the Central Government to determine the pay, allowances and service conditions of Information Commissioner.
- This means that the tenure of the Information Commissioner can be fixed as per the executive rules framed by the Central Government.
- Further, the amendment gives power to the Central Government to fix the salary and allowances of Chief Information Commissioners and State Information Commissioners.

The Right to Information Act, 2005

- ▶ The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 was passed by the Parliament in June 2005 and it came into force in October 2005.
- ▶ The RTI Act replaced Freedom of information Act, 2002 with an aim to provide for the setting up of a practical regime of the right to information for citizens.
- ▶ The RTI Act is a legal right of every Indian citizen.
- ▶ Under its provisions, any citizen of India may request information from a public authority and the authority will be required to reply within 30 days.
- ▶ The request for the information is submitted to the Central Public Information Officer or the State Public Information Officer.

5**CHANDRAYAAN-2 SPACECRAFT****CONTEXT:**

- India's Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle GSLV MkIII-M1 successfully launched the 3840 kg Chandrayaan-2 spacecraft into an earth orbit.

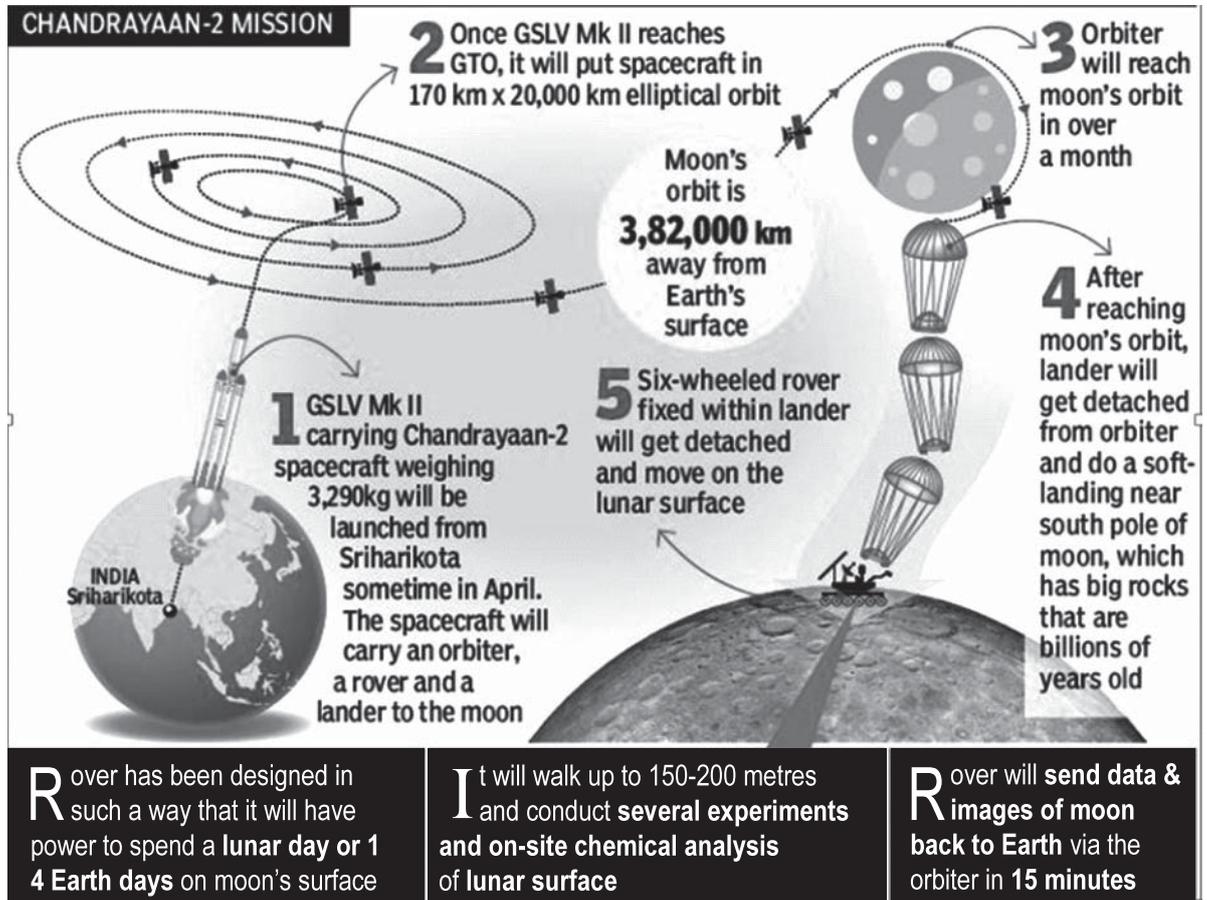
ABOUT:

- Chandrayaan-2 is India's first lander mission.
- It consists of an Orbiter, Lander and Rover, all equipped with scientific instruments to study the moon.
- The Lander and Rover modules will separate from the orbiter and make a soft-landing on moon's surface.
- The lander and rover are designed to work for only 14 days (1 lunar day) while the orbiter would remain in orbit for a year.

Orbiter:

- The Orbiter would once again watch the moon from a 100-km orbit.
- The Orbiter is a 2379-kg spacecraft with 7 instruments on board.
- It is equipped with different kinds of cameras to take high-resolution three-dimensional maps of the surface.

- It also has instruments to study the mineral composition on the moon and the lunar atmosphere, and to assess the abundance of water.
- The Orbiter will observe lunar surface and relay communication between Earth and the Lander.



Lander:

- ISRO has named the Lander module as Vikram, after Vikram Sarabhai, the pioneer of India's space programme.
- The 1471-kg lander will remain stationary after touching down on the moon's surface.
- It will carry three instruments that will mainly study the moon's atmosphere.
- One of the instruments will also look out for seismic activity on lunar surface.

Rover:

- The Rover is a 6-wheeled, Artificial Intelligence-powered and solar-powered vehicle named Pragyan, meaning wisdom.
- Once on the moon, the rover will detach itself from the lander.
- Equipped with two instruments, it would slowly crawl on the surface, making observations and collecting data.
- Its primary objective is to study the composition of the moon's surface near the landing site.
- It would also determine the abundance of different elements on the moon's surface.

Significance of Chandrayan-2:

- With Chandrayaan-2, India will become only the 4th country in the world to land a spacecraft on the moon. So far, all landings, human as well as non-human, on the moon have been in areas close to its equator.

- This was mainly because this area receives more sunlight that is required by the solar-powered instruments to function.
- Chandrayaan-2 will make a landing at a site where no earlier mission has gone, near the South Pole of the moon.
- It is a completely unexplored territory and therefore offers great scientific opportunity for the mission to discover something new.

South Pole

- The south pole of the moon holds the possibility of the presence of water.
- This is one aspect that would be probed meticulously by Chandrayaan-2.
- In addition, this area is also supposed to have ancient rocks and craters.
- It can thus offer indications of history of moon, and also contain clues to the fossil records of early solar system.

Chandrayaan-1 mission:

- ▶ Chandrayaan-1 was the first Indian lunar probe under Chandrayaan program. It was launched by the Indian Space Research Organisation in October 2008, and operated until August 2009.
- ▶ The mission included a lunar orbiter and an impactor.
- ▶ India launched the spacecraft using a PSLV-XL rocket, serial number on 22 October 2008.
- ▶ After almost a year, the orbiter started suffering from several technical issues including failure of the star sensors and poor thermal shielding;
- ▶ Chandrayaan stopped sending radio signals about on 28 August 2009, shortly after which the ISRO officially declared the mission over.
- ▶ Chandrayaan operated for 312 days as opposed to the intended two years but the mission achieved 95% of its planned objectives.

The Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark III (GSLV Mk-III)

- ▶ Developed by ISRO, the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark-III is a three-stage vehicle.
- ▶ Primarily designed to launch communication satellites into geostationary orbit.
- ▶ It has a mass of 640 tonnes that can accommodate up to 8,000 kg payload to LEO and 4000 kg payload to GTO.
- ▶ GSLV Mk-III vehicle is powered by two solid motor strap-ons (S200), a liquid propellant core stage (L110) and a cryogenic stage (C25), that has been designed for carrying the four-tonne class satellites.

6

THE CODE ON WAGES BILL, 2019

CONTEXT:

- The government recently introduced the Code on Wages Bill in Lok Sabha.

ABOUT:

- The bill aims to transform the old and obsolete labour laws into more accountable and transparent ones and seeks to pave the way for the introduction of minimum wages and labour reforms in the country.

- It regulates the wages and bonus payments in all employments where any industry, trade, business, or manufacturing is being carried out.
- The bill subsumes the following four labour laws:
 - The Payment of Wages Act, 1936
 - The Minimum Wages Act, 1948
 - The Payment of Bonus Act, 1965
 - The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.
- It universalizes the provisions of minimum wages and timely payment of wages to all employees irrespective of the sector and wage ceiling and seeks to ensure "Right to Sustenance" for every worker and intends to increase the legislative protection of minimum wage.
- It has been ensured in the bill that employees getting monthly salary shall get the salary by 7th of next month, those working on a weekly basis shall get the salary on the last day of the week and daily wagers should get it on the same day.
- The provisions of the bill will apply to all the employees.
- At present, the provisions of both the Minimum Wages Act and Payment of Wages Act apply on workers below a particular wage ceiling working in Scheduled Employments only.
- Many unorganized sector workers like agricultural workers, painters, persons working in restaurants and dhabas, chowkidars, etc. who were out of the ambit of minimum wages will get legislative protection of minimum wages after the bill becomes an Act.
- The Central Government is empowered to fix the floor wages by taking into account the living standards of workers. It may set different floor wages for different geographical areas.
- The minimum wages decided by the central or state governments must be higher than the floor wage.

Implications:

- It seeks to reduce compliance costs for employers.
- It is expected to reduce litigation as it streamlines the definition of wages.
- It will substantially reduce the number of minimum wages in the country from the existing more than 2000 rates of minimum wages.
- This would ensure that every worker gets a minimum wage which will also be accompanied by an increase in the purchasing power of the worker thereby giving a fillip to growth in the economy.

7

THE CODE ON OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY, HEALTH AND WORKING CONDITIONS BILL, 2019

CONTEXT:

- The government recently introduced the Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Bill, 2019.

The features of the bill are:

- The bill is applicable to business entities where more than 10 workers are employed and it will be applicable to mines and docks that employ even one worker.
- The bill seeks to merge 13 labour laws into one code on occupational safety, health and working conditions.
- The Bill is second of four proposed codes that aim to merge 44 labour laws.
- The code is applicable to all trades, including IT establishments and the service sector.
- The bill makes it mandatory for employers to provide free annual medical check-ups.

- The multiple also proposes to replace committees under five labour Acts with the National Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Board.
- The code also frames rules for women workers working night shifts. Women would be permitted to work beyond 7 p.m. and before 6 a.m. subject to the safety, holidays, working hours or any other condition as prescribed by the appropriate government in respect of prescribed establishments but only after taking their consent for night work.
- The bill also envisages uniform threshold for welfare provisions such as crèche, canteen, first aid and welfare officer.
- The bill states that part of the penalty for contravention of provisions leading to death or serious bodily injury to any person may be given to the victim or the legal heirs of the victim by the court.
- When approved by the parliament the Labour safety code bill is expected to benefit 40 crore workers in informal sectors.

8

ONE NATION - ONE RATION CARD SCHEME**CONTEXT:**

- To sustain the reforms brought in by scheme on 'End to End Computerization of Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) Operations' the Department of Food & Public Distribution has launched a new scheme namely "Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS)" for implementation during 2018-19 and 2019-20.

ABOUT:

- The main objective of the scheme is to introduce nation-wide portability of ration card holders under National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA), to lift their entitlement foodgrains from any FPS in the country without the need to obtain a new ration card, by integrating the existing PDS systems/portals of States/UTs with the Central systems/portals, etc.
- The poor migrant workers will be able to buy subsidised rice and wheat from any ration shop in the country but for that their ration cards must be linked to Aadhaar.
- Migrants would only be eligible for the subsidies supported by the Centre, which include rice sold at Rs. 3/kg and wheat at Rs. 2/kg, It would not include subsidies given by their respective state government in some other state.
- This scheme will ensure that no poor person is deprived of subsidised grains.
- The scheme can be implemented as already 77% of the ration shops across the country have PoS machines and more than 85% of people covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) have their cards linked to Aadhaar.
- For remaining beneficiaries, all the States have been given one more year to use point of sale (PoS) machines in the ration shops and implement the scheme

9

CONSUMER PROTECTION BILL, 2019**CONTEXT:**

- Recently, the Lok Sabha has passed the Consumer Protection Bill, 2019, which seeks to strengthen the consumer rights and provides a mechanism for redressal of complaints regarding defects in goods and deficiency in services.

ABOUT:

- Apart from setting up of authorities for timely and effective administration and settlement of consumer disputes, the bill also seeks to bring in e-commerce under their jurisdiction and hold celebrities accountable for false and misleading advertisements of products that they endorse.
- Apart from the consumer courts at the district, state and national level, the bill proposes a Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to promote, protect and enforce consumer rights as a class and protect them from unfair trade practices.
- CCPA, envisaged as a regulator, can file a class action suit if required and would take immediate action on any consumer complaint.
- The bill proposes strict action against the advertiser in case of misleading advertisements but not against the media through which the advertisement is being publicised.
- Celebrities can be fined up to Rs. 10 lakh. For repeat offences, this may rise to Rs. 50 lakh, with a jail term of up to five years
- It also provides for product liability action on account of harm caused to consumers due to defective products or deficient services.
- The Bill will replace the earlier Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

10

MUSLIM WOMEN (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS ON MARRIAGE) BILL 2019

CONTEXT:

- Parliament passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill 2019 or Triple Talaq Bill after it was approved by Rajya Sabha.

ABOUT:

- It replaces Ordinance promulgated on February 21, 2019.
- It aims to declare practice of instant triple talaq void and illegal by making it cognizable penal offence.

Salient Features of Bill

- **Objective:** Protect rights of married Muslim women and ensure gender equality and gender justice to Muslim women by declaring practice of triple talaq as void and illegal i.e. not enforceable in law and prevent divorce by practice of 'talaq-e-biddat' by their husbands.
- **Definitions:** It defines talaq or any other similar form of talaq pronounced by Muslim man resulting in instant and irrevocable divorce. It defines Talaq-e-biddat as practice under Muslim personal laws, as pronouncement of word 'talaq' by Muslim husband thrice in one sitting to his wife, resulting in instant and irrevocable divorce
- **Offence and Penalty:** It makes this offence punishable with imprisonment up to 3 years and fine. It also makes all declaration of talaq, including in written or electronic form (email, text message etc) to be void and illegal.
- It proposes to make offence cognizable, if information relating to commission of an offence is given to police officer by married Muslim woman upon whom talaq is pronounced or by any person related to her by blood/marriage.
- It makes offence compoundable with permission of Magistrate at the instance of the married Muslim woman upon whom talaq is pronounced. It further provides for hearing married Muslim woman upon whom talaq is pronounced, before accused is released on bail by Magistrate.
- **Allowance:** It also provides for payment of subsistence allowance (to be determined by Magistrate) to married Muslim women against whom talaq has been declared and dependent children. The amount of allowance will be determined by Magistrate.
- **Custody:** It entitles Muslim woman against whom such talaq has been declared to seek custody of her minor children. In this case, Magistrate is empowered to determine manner of custody.

11

CABINET APPROVES SIGNING OF THE UN CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL SETTLEMENT AGREEMENTS**CONTEXT-**

- The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister has approved the signing of the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements (UNISA) resulting from mediation by India.

BENEFIT:

- Signing of the Convention will boost the confidence of the investors and shall provide a positive signal to foreign investors about India's commitment to adhere to international practice on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

BACKGROUND:

- The United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation ("the Convention") on 20th December 2018.
- The General Assembly authorized that the Convention will open for signature at a signing ceremony to be held on 7th August 2019 in Singapore and will be known as the "Singapore Convention on Mediation" (the Convention).
- The Convention provides a uniform and efficient framework for the enforcement of international settlement agreements resulting from mediation and for allowing parties to invoke such agreements.
- The Convention defines two additional grounds upon which a court may, on its own motion, refuse to grant relief. Those grounds relate to the fact that a dispute would not be capable of settlement by mediation or would be contrary to public policy.

Initiatives to promote ADR Mechanisms:

- In order to encourage international commercial arbitration in India, to evolve a comprehensive ecosystem of arbitration the Government is establishing the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC) as a statutory body.
- The Commercial Courts Act, 2015, has been further amended and legislative exercise to further amend the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, is currently underway.
- These initiatives are being taken with a view to encourage the settlement of commercial disputes, domestic and international, in India through ADR Mechanism of Arbitration, Conciliation and Mediation.
- A new Chapter (III A) has been inserted in the Commercial Courts Act, 2015, for mandatory pre-institution mediation and settlement in certain category of cases. Therefore, the provisions of the 'Convention' are in line with the domestic laws and the efforts made to strengthen Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms.
