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National News

1. West Bengal tops in 100-day work programme

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the state has got the first prize in 100-day work programme for promoting livelihoods. Bankura and Cooch Behar stood first and second respectively among districts in India in implementation of the rural job scheme.

2. Coal Min to set up sustainable development cell to promote clean mining



The Ministry of Coal has decided to establish a Sustainable Development Cell (SDC) in order to promote environmentally sustainable coal mining in the country and address environmental concerns during the decommissioning or closure of mines. This move gains significance as the new private entities are now going to form a significant part of the future, a set of guidelines for proper rehabilitation of mines need to be evolved in tune with global best practices.

According to the Coal Ministry, the SDC will advise, mentor, plan and monitor the mitigation measures taken by the coal companies for maximising the utilisation of available resources in a sustainable way, minimising the adverse impact of mining and

mitigating it for further ecosystem services and will act as nodal point at Ministry of Coal level in this matter. The SDC will adopt a systemic approach, starting from collection of data, analysis of data, presentation of information, planning based on information; by domain experts, adoption of best practices, consultations, innovative thinking, site-specific approaches, knowledge sharing and dissemination and finally end with an aim to ease the lives of people and communities in general. The SDC will focus on land amelioration and afforestation, air quality, emission and noise management, mine water management, sustainable overburden management, sustainable mine tourism, planning and monitoring. It will also monitor the effective utilisation of the Mine Closure Fund and environment budgets of different coal companies.

3. India expands Indo-Pacific Policy to include Gulf and Africa

India announced that it has increased the area covered by its Indo-Pacific policy to include the western Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. This move by the country will include the Gulf states and Africa along with ASEAN. The decision was made at the end of the joint Indian Ocean Dialogue held in New Delhi. The announcement was made by the External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. The Indo-Pacific concept moved beyond cultural, economic, and historical linkages to include an overarching strategic imperative.



The dialogue converged two key foreign policy imperatives

of India namely, the Act East and Indo-Pacific policy. India's approach to this concept has highlighted that both geographical extremities of the Indo-Pacific and the areas that are covered in between should ideally have their own indigenously evolved approach to the Indo-Pacific.

Indo-Pacific policy:

Indo-Pacific covers the region between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. It ranges from the shores of Africa to America. ASEAN is a very important building block of the Indo-Pacific. The US has renamed Pacific Command to US Indo-Pacific Command. It shows the increasing significance of India in the US' strategic calculations. It addressed the strategic interconnection and common problems and challenges that are faced in the Indian and Pacific oceans.

4. Govt extended deadline of Accessible India Campaign to March 2020



On December 13, 2019 the ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) has announced to extend the deadline of Accessible India Campaign to March 2020 due to its slowed progress. The decision in this regard was taken by the Central Advisory Board (CAB) chaired by social justice and empowerment minister Shri Thawar Chand Gehlot. Accessible India Campaign is a program that aims to make public spaces friendly for persons with disabilities.

Previous targets set:

By December 2019: Completing accessibility audit of

50% of government buildings and making them fully accessible in 10 most important cities/towns of States by December 2019.

By May 2018: At least 50% government buildings to be made disabled friendly under the campaign in each of the state capital and central capital till end of May 2018.

The original deadlines under the Accessible India campaign were July 2016 for conducting an accessibility audit of 25-50 of the most important government buildings in 50 cities and making them completely accessible and March 2018.

By Mid 2017: 25% of the public transport vehicles under government to be made as disabled friendly till mid-2017.

By July 2016: All international airports and railway stations the country coming under A1, A and B categories to be made fully disabled-friendly by July 2016.

Targets accomplished:

211 CPWD (Central Public Works Department) buildings had been made accessible for the disabled.

A total of Rs. 354.45 crores had been released for making 1,058 public buildings accessible around the country.

State-wise details of the facilities for the disabled at railway stations were not maintained, but the Indian Railways (IR) was committed to making its stations accessible. Short-term facilities like standard ramps, non-slippery walkways, signages, disabled-friendly toilets and help desks have been included in the plan.

Under the Rights of PwD (Person With Disability) Act, 2016, all existing and new public buildings have to follow the accessibility standards notified on June 15, 2017. The existing buildings were given five years to comply to the standards set.

About Accessible India campaign:

Fact- It is also known as Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan and was launched to serve the differently-able community of the country.

Launch- 3 December 2015 (coinciding international day of persons with disability).

5. ITBP launches matrimonial site to help staff find 'suitable matches'



In a unique approach, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) has started a dedicated matrimonial site for its staff.

The website started last week will be managed by ITBP and only the staff will be able to access it.

"This is the first-ever dedicated and well-managed matrimony portal among the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) started by ITBP on December 9. There are more than 25,000 unmarried men in the Force while more than 1000 women personnel are also unmarried. Keeping in view their duties and engagements after joining the service, finding suitable matches becomes an uphill

task for the serving personnel," an ITBP official said.

The official claimed that due to tough service, the ITBP personnel are not able to get enough time to find a suitable match and therefore to fill this gap the website was started.

"The portal has significant privacy guards for the registered personnel. Without having 'Unmarried' status service record, no one can register here. Means, only unmarried personnel can register," the official claimed.

The ITBP was raised on October 24, 1962, for reorganizing the frontier intelligence and security set up along the Indo-Tibetan border. ITBP presently has 56 service battalions, 4 specialist battalions, 17 training centres and 7 logistics establishments with a total strength of approximately 90,000 personnel.

6. Nagaland Governor RN Ravi to Hold Additional Charge of Meghalaya Amid Protests Against Citizenship Act

Nagaland Governor R N Ravi was on Monday given additional charge of Meghalaya, a statement issued by the Rastrapati Bhavan said. Ravi is also the Centre's interlocutor for talks with Naga insurgents.

"The President of India is pleased to appoint R N Ravi, Governor of Nagaland to discharge the functions of the Governor of Meghalaya, in addition to his own duties, during the absence on leave of Tathagata Roy, Governor of Meghalaya," it said, without citing further details.



The move assumes significance as the state has witnessed protests against the amended Citizenship Act, that seeks to grant Indian citizenship to religious minorities of

Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan facing persecution there.

7. Citizenship (Amendment) Act does not affect any Indian citizens, including Muslims, clarifies Home Ministry

The amended Citizenship Act does not affect any Indian citizens, including Muslims, and they enjoy fundamental rights conferred on them by the Constitution, the Home Ministry said on Tuesday, seeking to counter a “misinformation campaign” on the issue.



It also said the Act does not have anything to do with the deportation of any foreigner in India.

“There has been a misinformation campaign. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA does not affect any Indian citizen, including Muslim citizens,” it said in response to a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the controversial legislation that has led to violent protests in some parts of the country, including the national capital. The set of answers to the FAQs was released by the Ministry.

The new law is relevant only for Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Christian foreigners who have migrated from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan to India up to December 31, 2014, on account of persecution faced by them due to their religion, the home ministry said.

“It does not apply to any other foreigners, including Muslims, migrating to India from any country, including these three countries,” it said and clarified that the CAA does not have anything to do with the deportation of any foreigner in India.

Deporting foreigners

The Ministry said that the deportation process of any foreigners irrespective of religion or country is implemented as per the mandate of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and/or the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920.

“These two laws govern entry, stay, movement within India and exit from India of all foreigners irrespective of their religion or country. Therefore, the usual deportation process would apply to any illegal foreigner staying in India,” it said, in response to the question whether or not Muslim immigrants from these three countries will be deported under the CAA.

The Ministry said deportation of any foreigner is a well-considered judicial process which is based on a proper enquiry by the local police or administrative authorities to detect such illegal foreigners. “It is ensured that such an illegal foreigner has been issued proper travel document by the Embassy of his country so that he can be duly received by officials of his country when he is deported,” it said.

In Assam, the process of deportation happens only after determination of such a person as a “foreigner” under the Foreigners Act, 1946, the Ministry said.

“Then he becomes liable for deportation. Therefore, there is nothing automatic, mechanical or discriminatory in this exercise. State governments and their district level authorities enjoy the power of the central government under section

3 of the Foreigners Act and section 5 of the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, to detect, detain and deport any illegal foreigners," it said.

Getting citizenship

To a question that Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan can never get Indian citizenship, the Ministry said "No". "The present legal process of acquiring Indian citizenship by any foreigner of any category through naturalisation (Section 6 of the Citizenship Act) or through registration (Section 5 of the Act) stays operational. The CAA does not amend or alter it in any manner whatsoever," it said.

The Home Ministry said that hundreds of Muslims migrating from these three countries have been granted Indian citizenship during the last few years. "If found eligible, all such future migrants shall also get Indian citizenship irrespective of their numbers or religion," it said.

In 2014, after the settlement of Indo-Bangladesh boundary issues, 14,864 Bangladeshi citizens were given Indian citizenship when their enclaves were incorporated into the territory of India. Thousands of these foreigners were Muslims, it said.

It clarified that Hindus facing persecution on grounds of religion in any other country (other than Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan) cannot apply under CAA.

"They will have to apply through the usual process to get Indian citizenship just like any other foreigner for either registration or naturalisation as a citizen of India. They would get no preference under The Citizenship Act, 1955 even after the CAA," the MHA said.

It said the CAA does not apply to any Indian citizen at all. "All Indian citizens enjoy the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India. CAA is not meant to deprive any Indian citizen of his citizenship. Rather it is a special law to enable certain foreigners facing a particular situation in three neighbouring countries to get Indian citizenship," the ministry said.

On NRC-CAA link

It said the CAA has nothing to do with NRC. "The legal provisions regarding NRC have been part of The Citizenship Act, 1955, since December, 2004. Also, there are specific statutory rules of 2003 to operationalise these legal provisions. They govern the process of registration of Indian citizens and issuance of national identity cards to them.

"These legal provisions have been on the statute books since last 15-16 years. The CAA has not altered them in any way whatsoever," the Home Ministry said.

The Home Ministry said that appropriate rules under the CAA are being framed. "They will operationalise various provisions of the CAA," it added.

8. Bengal Stops Work On National Population Register Amid Citizenship Row

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who promised on Monday afternoon that the new Citizenship law and the National Register of Citizens would be implemented in the state only over her "dead body", took strong action by the evening, officially stopping work on the National Population Register.

"All activities regarding the preparation/updation of the National Population Register (NPR) are hereby stayed in West Bengal. No activity regarding NRP may be taken up without prior clearance from the Govt. of West Bengal." read the order sent from the Secretariat.

The Population Register was expected to lay the groundwork for rolling out a citizens' list in the future -- one of the key goals of the Centre - to weed out illegal migrants from the country.

The government's order to the civic bodies and district magistrates comes amid furore over the Centre's new citizenship law. Bengal is one of the three states that has refused to implement the law, through the Centre has said that the states have no choice in the matter.

About the citizens' list, Union minister Amit Shah has repeatedly underscored the centre's goal to take it across the country since its introduction in Assam.

During the day, Ms Banerjee had led a mammoth rally against the citizenship law, which expedites the grant of citizenship for non-Muslims from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, who have been living in India after being driven out due to religious persecution.

The opposition contends that the law flies in the face of the Right to equality granted by the constitution.

"As long as I am alive, I will never implement the citizenship law or NRC in the state. You can very well dismiss my government or put me behind bars but I will never implement this black law," the Chief Minister said. "If they want to implement it in Bengal they will have to do it over my dead body," Ms Banerjee added.

9. Android Vulnerable To Cyber attack

Android Vulnerable To Cyberattack - The MoHA has sent an alert to all States warning them about the vulnerability of the Android operating system to a bug called 'StrandHogg'.

About StrandHogg:

It allows real-time malware applications to pose as genuine applications and access user data of all kinds.

This malware can then potentially listen to their conversations, access photo album, read/send messages, make calls, record conversations and get login credentials to various accounts.

Such malware can access private images, files, contact details, call logs, and location information.

Pop-ups asking for permission to send notifications, messages etc. are one of the main entry points for 'StrandHogg' to launch the attack.

An app in which the user is already logged in asking him/her to login again is another anomaly pointing to the possibilities of a cyberattack.

It can activate the microphone, allowing a hacker in a remote location to listen to live conversations. The camera can also be switched on to capture visuals.



10. Government Instant Messaging System

Government Instant Messaging System (GIMS) is a prototype of an Indian equivalent of popular messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp and Telegram for secure internal use.



GIMS seeks to replace existing platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal which are being used by a majority of government departments and organisations.

It will be used by employees of Central and state government departments and organisations for secure intra and inter organisation communications.

It employs end-to-end encryption for one-to-one messaging.

The server hosting GIMS is installed within the country and the information stored would be in the government-based cloud

— NIC-operated data centres that are only meant for use by the government and its departments.

GIMS Portal will administer and monitor the working of an app.

Besides, one-to-one messaging and group messaging, it also provides for documents and media sharing in keeping with the hierarchies in the government system.

GIMS is designed and developed by the Kerala unit of National Informatics Centre (NIC).

The launch of the new app comes after the recent controversy over the WhatsApp breach of some Indian users' mobile devices due to Pegasus.

11. Nirbhaya case: SC confirms death sentence to convict, rejects review plea



The Supreme Court Wednesday "confirmed" the capital punishment awarded to one of the four convicts in the gruesome Nirbhaya gang rape-and-murder case by dismissing his plea which sought review of its 2017 judgement upholding his death penalty.

With this verdict on the plea of convict Akshay Kumar Singh, the review petitions of all the four death row convicts in the case stand dismissed by the apex court.

The convicts are yet to file curative petition which is the last legal recourse available to a person and it is generally considered in-chamber by the top court.

On July 9 last year, the top court had dismissed the review plea filed by the other three convicts -- Mukesh (32), Pawan Gupta (25) and Vinay Sharma (26) -- in the case, saying no grounds have been made out by them for the review.

Dismissing the plea of Akshay, who was the cleaner of the bus in which the incident took place, a 3-judge bench headed by Justice R Banumathi said there was no "error apparent on the face of the record" and none of the grounds raised by him call for review of the 2017 judgment.

"The review petition is not for rehearing of the appeal on reappreciation of the evidence over and over again. A party is not entitled to seek review of the judgment merely for the purpose of rehearing of the appeal and a fresh decision," said the bench, also comprising Justices Ashok Bhushan and A S Bopanna.

"In light of the aggravating circumstances and considering that the case falls within the category of 'rarest of rare cases', the death penalty is confirmed," it said.

The top court announced the verdict within hours of having reserved it Wednesday morning. The parents of the victim were also present in the court.

In the 20-page judgement, the bench termed as "unfortunate" that grounds like "futility of awarding death sentence in 'Kalyug' where a person is no better than a dead body" and "level of pollution in Delhi-NCR is so great that life is short" were raised in the review plea.

"We find it unfortunate that such grounds have been raised in the matter as serious as the present case," it said.

"We do not find any error apparent on the face of the record in the appreciation of evidence or the findings of the judgment dated May 5, 2017. None of the grounds raised in the review petition call for review of the judgment dated May 5, 2017. The review petition is dismissed," the bench said.

The top court said the grounds raised in Akshay's review petition were "almost a repetition of the arguments" raised in the earlier review plea filed by other convicts which were rejected and these issues cannot be "raised repeatedly".

Regarding other grounds raised by Akshay's counsel A P Singh, including alleged flaws in the probe and manipulation of evidence, the bench said these aspects were already dealt with and rejected by it in the 2017 judgement and "same points cannot be urged again and again".

The bench also dealt with Singh's submissions regarding a book titled 'Black Warrant', written by former law officer of Tihar jail Sunil Gupta.

Singh argued that the officer had expressed his opinion in the book that accused Ram Singh, who had allegedly committed suicide in the jail, was "murdered" in prison on March 11, 2013.

"Here again, the opinion of the said former law officer Sunil Gupta is only his opinion which is not supported by any material," the bench said.

"The opinion of the said officer...which is not supported by any material, cannot be a ground for reviewing our judgment," it added.

It also dealt with Singh's allegations that the sole eye-witness, present in the bus along with the victim, had taken "heavy amount as bribe" for giving statements in the media when the trial was on at Saket district court.

"In a criminal case, culpability or otherwise of the accused are based upon appreciation of evidence adduced by the prosecution and also the evidence adduced by the defence," it said.

"The materials or the news emerging in the media and press as also the news channels cannot be taken note of in arriving at a conclusion on the culpability of the accused or to test the credibility of the witness. Such events cannot be urged as a ground for review," the bench said.

It also brushed aside the convict's contention questioning the three dying declarations of the victim and said this argument was already rejected in the 2017 verdict which held them credible.

It rejected Akshay's contentions that he was not present in Delhi on the night of the incident.

Referring to several verdicts of the top court, the bench said it is not for the court to re-appreciate evidence and reach a different conclusion while adjudicating review pleas.

After the verdict was pronounced, Akshay's counsel sought three weeks to file mercy petition before the President.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said that one week is prescribed under the law for filing the mercy petition.

"We are not expressing our view in this regard. If as per the law any time is available to the petitioner, it is for the petitioner to avail the remedy of filing mercy petition within that stipulated time," the bench said.

The 23-year-old paramedic student was gang raped and brutally assaulted on the intervening night of December 16-17, 2012 inside a moving bus in south Delhi by six persons before being thrown out on the road.

She died on December 29, 2012 at Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore.

A juvenile was convicted by a juvenile justice board, and released from a reformation home after serving a 3-year term.

12. Proposed Smog Tower | A large scale Air Purifier System

Recently, The Supreme Court gave three months' time to the Centre and the Delhi government for the pilot project of setting up a 'smog tower' at Connaught Place.



The 'smog tower' will be used to deal with the problem of air pollution.

Major reasons for the Air Pollution in Delhi-NCR Region:

Vehicular pollution due to high number of internal combustion engine (ICE)-vehicles.

The burning of agricultural residues on farms in nearby states.

Construction dust from incomplete infrastructure project.

The arrival of dust-laden air from the Middle East and Afghanistan which creates a temperature inversion (cold air on top while hot air is near the ground).

Relatively less days of rainfall by the South-West Monsoon.

Smog Tower:

Smog towers are structures designed to work as large-scale air purifiers.

They are usually fitted with multiple layers of air filters, which clean the air of pollutants as it passes through them.

China, which has been battling air pollution for a few years, has two smog towers — in its capital Beijing and in a northern city called Xi'an.

The World Intellectual Property Organisation has notified that A City Cleaner developed by the Kurin System is the world's largest as well as the strongest air purifier.

The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO):

WIPO is the global forum for intellectual property (IP) services, policy, information and cooperation.

It is a self-funding agency of the United Nations with 192 member states.

Its mission is to lead the development of a balanced and effective international IP system that enables innovation and creativity for the benefit of all.

Intellectual property (IP):

IP refers to creations of the mind, such as inventions; literary and artistic works; designs; and symbols, names and images used in commerce.

Types of intellectual property: Copyrights, Patents, Trademarks, Industrial Designs, Geographical Indications and Trade Secrets.

Various technologies which could be used to deal with air pollution.

A City Cleaner by the Kurin System:

The purifier which will be 40-feet tall and 20-feet wide, will have the capacity of cleaning 32 million cubic metres of air per day.

Designed on the air quality of the capital, one such purifier will be able to provide clean air in the 3-km radius of its location, impacting about 75,000 lives, said Puri.

The purifier will take air from all angles, which in turn, will help generate 13,00,000 cubic metres of clean air per hour.

The Kurin City Cleaner will work using nine stages of physical filters to clean out 99.99 percent pollutants.

Apart from the pre-filter which will remove the visible (Particulate Matter 10 & above) particles; H14 grade HEPA filter (Highly Effective Particulate Arrestance) will clean out PM 2.5 particle (small particles) up to 99.99 per cent.

The activated carbon filter will remove all offset, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and scents/smells, added Puri.

The tower will also be equipped with as many as 48 fans to keep the flow of clean air constant.

The air-purifier will run on solar energy, thus making it cost-effective and environment-friendly.

Hooded stoves with chimneys vent pollutants outdoors.

Passive solar heating and cooling techniques.

Recommendations of the high-level committee to examine the feasibility of using technology like smog towers and smog guns to combat air pollution.

Painting roads with photocatalytic coating to clean air:

It can be applied on a range of surfaces, such as roofing tiles or even on the surface of roads.

Photocatalytic paints contain titanium dioxide [TiO₂] which acts as a catalyst when exposed to UV rays and removes atmospheric pollutants.

The catalyst converts the pollutants into other species.

Issues: The nano materials may result in production of other undesirable species such as nitrous acid and formaldehyde which will have adverse health impacts.

Using anti-smog guns at construction sites to reduce dust pollution.

Anti-smog gun is a device that sprays nebulised water droplets into the air through high pressure propellers, which help particles to settle down.

It may be effective in controlling localised dust during the period of application and more suitable to high dust emission zones such as large construction sites

Setting up of a 20 metre-high 'smog tower' with air purifiers.

65% reduction in pollution can be achieved on an average up to 700 metres from the tower.

It is expected to influence air quality of more than 1 km in the downwind direction, according to officials.

Issues: Smog towers, as per the current knowledge and experience, may not provide a viable solution to improve air quality on a large scale.

Using of wireless sensors Network (WSN) for monitoring pollution.

WSN may be used as an indicative monitoring tool for a few activities like mining, large construction sites, to supplement air quality data and report to regulator for conducting further investigation.

Oxy furnace

Oxy furnace uses only oxygen as fuel instead of atmospheric air (which contains nitrogen), thus reducing the production of NO_x by about 90% in industries.

Issues: NO_x is mostly released in urban centres from vehicles and not industries.

LiDAR or Light Detection and Ranging:

It is a high-end application of LASER-based technology for monitoring pollution.

This technology may be adopted for vertical monitoring at a few places to track transport of pollutants at higher altitudes.

Other Solutions:

The gasification process for the production of Syngas (a mixture of carbon monoxide and hydrogen) through biomass gasifier running on agricultural residues. The syngas could be used for creating methanol.

The pyrolysis of agricultural residues could efficiently produce pyrolysis oil. This oil can be used as a cooking fuel in suitably designed cookstoves.

Uses of No-till agriculture (NTA) techniques like Happy-Seeders.

Push for electric vehicles and public transportation.

www.successmantra.in

www.easevidya.com

Cleaner stoves and fuels for cooking and heating.

Phasing out coal and kerosene gradually.

Air Pollution chokes the Delhi-NCR region. The government has come forward with various initiatives like VAYU. A long miles are yet to be covered to make the region livable. The government must ensure the completion of the Apex Court direction in this regard.

13. CJI SA Bobde forms two-judge panel to fast-track rape cases across country

Chief Justice of India SA Bobde on Monday set up a two-judge committee of Justice Subhash Reddy and Justice M R Shah of the Supreme Court of India to “monitor, supervise and make suggestions for expeditious trial in cases relating to rape and POCSO across the country.”



According to officials familiar with the matter, the committee initially will ask for all the details of all first information reports (FIRs), charge sheets and trials pending in trial courts and give a report to the Chief Justice of India.

The setting of the committee comes in the backdrop of a series of heinous crimes against women, including the rape and brutal murder of a 26-year-old Hyderabad veterinarian by four men last month. The suspects were killed in a police encounter.

The central government has proposed to set up 1,023 special fast-track courts for speedy trial of over 166,000 pending cases of crimes against women and children across the country.

“Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India has formulated a Scheme, on the lines of other Centrally Sponsored Schemes, for setting up of a total of 1023 Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) for expeditious trial and disposal of rape cases and cases under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The total estimated cost is Rs 767.25 crore, out of which Central share is Rs. 474 crore. It has been proposed to set up 218 FTSCs in the State of Uttar Pradesh, Smriti Irani, the minister of women and child development, said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha in the winter session.

The central support of Rs 474 crore for one year will come from the Nirbhaya Fund, which was created by the Centre in 2013 after the December 16 gang rape and murder of a paramedical in 2012. It was created to support the initiatives of governments and NGOs working for the safety of women.

14. Relief for Vodafone Idea, Airtel as Trai defers scrapping IUC levy

The telecom regulator on Tuesday deferred by a year a plan to scrap a levy charged by operators for handling incoming calls from rival networks, offering relief to older telcos that generate a part of their revenue from interconnect usage charges (IUC).

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) will now scrap IUC from 1 January 2021 instead of next month. As a result, operators will continue to earn 6 paise a minute for every mobile call they receive on their networks until 31 December, 2020.

The regulator has changed its stance about two years after it decided to scrap the levy from 1 January, 2020, a move that older telcos Vodafone Idea Ltd and Bharti Airtel Ltd claimed favoured newer entrant Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd because its outgoing voice traffic was much higher than incoming. Scrapping IUC would benefit an operator with more outgoing traffic.

Trai's decision comes as a major relief for Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea, which have reported record losses in the quarter ended 30 September. Jio, which had 64% of its total traffic as outgoing as of June-end, favoured the levy being scrapped.

A zero IUC, or bill and keep regime means operators would not make any money for receiving calls on their networks. If the traffic flow among operators is symmetrical, it will not have a negative impact on any operator as it is simply a charge paid by one operator to another.



"Trai regulation to maintain IUC at the current 6p/min for a year is along expected lines and provides the most short-term relief to Vodafone Idea, while Jio would see a temporary adverse impact," IIFLCAP, a division of IIFL Securities Ltd, said in a note on Tuesday. "The extension of the IUC regime is a positive for Vodafone Idea from a near-term perspective—in line with the government's stance of ensuring its financial viability."

The regulator has cited "inadequate" adoption of 4G technologies for voice calls and asymmetries in inter-operator traffic as reasons for deferring the scrapping of IUC. "At this point of time, it may not be advisable to implement 'bill and keep' from 1 January 2020," said Trai.

"Implementation of bill and keep from 1 January 2020, with present inadequate adoption of 4G technologies by consumers and asymmetries in traffic, may affect the level playing field among service providers and, in turn, effective competition in the market," said the regulator.

Emailed queries to Jio, Airtel and Vodafone Idea remained unanswered till press time.

Trai had floated a fresh consultation paper on 18 September to examine if there was a need to revise the applicable date for scrapping IUC, given the continuing imbalance in inter-operator traffic.

Airtel and Vodafone Idea, which are currently battling shrinking revenue following a price war triggered by the entry of Jio in September 2016, had then welcomed Trai's regulatory rethink. Jio, however, said a delay in scrapping IUC was unwarranted, arbitrary and anti-poor, and not only affected the credibility of the authority, but also sabotaged the government's Digital India mission.

"This is a welcome step in the right direction," said Rajan Mathews, director general of lobby Cellular Operators Association of India. "We look forward to continuing support from the government and regulator to address the severe financial stress in the telecom sector."

In September 2017, Trai had ordered a reduction in IUC to 6 paise per minute from 1 October 2017, from 14 paise earlier and abolishing it from 1 January 2020. Local telecom operators, reeling from the fierce price war triggered by the entry of Jio, were hit hard by the order.

Jio is the only pure-4G network in India. Vodafone Idea operates a mix of 2G, 3G and 4G networks. Airtel operates 2G and 4G networks and is in the process of phasing out 3G by March next year.

15. Govt launches National Broadband Mission; to invest ₹7 trillion in 4 years

The central government on Friday launched National Broadband Mission, which envisages an investment of ₹7 lakh crore in the next 4 years from both government and industry to connect the country digitally at a faster pace.

The mission, launched by Union Telecom Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, is part of the National Digital Communications Policy, 2018.

The mission envisages ₹7 lakh crore investment from government and private sector together over the next 3 to 4 years. 10 percent of the funds will come from USO Fund and the balance to come from industry in the form of towers and other assets, Anshu Prakash, the Telecom Secretary said at the launch.

The mission will secure universal broadband access for implementation of broadband initiatives.

COAI Director General Rajan Mathews said the mission will fast-track digital connectivity across the country.

16. Green laws must for railway stations: NGT

Railway stations across the country are required to obtain necessary environmental permissions as several polluting activities take place there, the National Green Tribunal has said.

A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel said there can be no dispute about the proposition that the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 also applies to major railway stations.



Directing the Railways to take into account recommendations of the Central Pollution Control Board on implementing the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 and Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, the tribunal asked it to implement action plans for making stations clean.

"The team comprising of CPCB and concerned state pollution control board will evaluate the performance of major railway stations both in terms of implementation of action plans and compliance to the provisions of the Water Act, Air Act and Environmental Protection Act and Rules framed thereunder..." it said.

The NGT said the object of the Environment Act is to control air pollution and if pollutants are emitted in the atmosphere by activities at railway stations, they cannot be excluded from such definition so as to avoid remedial measures.

"The Rules framed under the said Act include solid waste, plastic waste, bio-medical waste, hazardous waste, construction and debris waste, e-waste Rules. Several activities take place at major railway stations which may attract provisions of the Rules. The said Rules have, thus, to be complied by all the major railway stations, to the extent applicable," the bench said.

The NGT said that the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, is an umbrella legislation which enables the central government to frame rules on the subject of environment protection and to issue directions.

"Rules framed applied to every generator of waste and occupier of the place where waste is generated. Undoubtedly, the railway premises are such places. The Railway Administration is the occupier of such places where waste is generated.

"It is difficult to accept that activities of railway establishments at major railway stations having potential of causing pollution are beyond the environmental laws of the land," the bench said.

It said that major stations 'prima facie' cannot be excluded from the ambit of the Water Act and the Air Act.

"It is, thus, clear that wherever there is significant generation of solid and liquid waste and gaseous emissions, the Water Act and the Air Act are attracted so that regulatory functions can be exercised. There is every reason to presume that major railway stations (classified as such by the Railway Administration itself) are generating solid waste and discharging liquid waste water as well as releasing gaseous emissions unless shown to the contrary." it said.

CPCB told the bench that out of 36 stations, five stations (Vadodara, Mysuru, Jaipur, Bilaspur and Visakhapatnam) are in the "Good" category and have achieved ISO 14001 certification. However, as none of the stations has obtained consents under the Air Act and Water Act and authorization under Hazardous Waste (Management and Trans-boundary Movement) Rules 2016, none of them can be certified "Eco Smart".

The NGT had earlier directed the Railways to identify and develop at least 36 stations as 'eco-smart stations' and to submit an action plan for maintaining cleanliness on platforms and tracks.

The green panel had asked the Comptroller and Auditor General to conduct a performance audit at regular intervals.

The NGT had said there was an urgent need for the railways to put in place an effective implementation and monitoring mechanism with provisions of fixing accountability of individuals in respect of solid waste disposal, littering of solid and plastic wastes, defecation, etc.

The NGT was hearing a petition filed by lawyers Saloni Singh and Arush Pathania seeking steps to check pollution on railway properties, particularly on tracks.

17. Govt offers 8.5 lakh mt of pulses to states



the Union Government has decided to offer 8.5 lakh metric tonnes of pulses from central buffer to the state governments at average market rates.

The statement released by the government said, "the Department of Consumer Affairs that maintain buffer stock of Pulses for the

Union Government under the Price Stabilisation Mechanism has offered approximately 8.5 Lakh Metric tonnes of Pulses to state governments at average market rates."

The statement further said, "the decision in this regard was informed during a meeting chaired by the Secretary Consumer Affairs, Avinash Srivastava to review prices and availability of Pulses across the nation. The purpose is to ensure an increased overall availability of Pulses in the market across India and also to ensure that prices remain stable."

The break-up of this 8.5 LMT is as follows:

Tur 3.2 LMT, Urad 2 LMT, Chana 1.2 LMT, Moong 1.5 LMT, Masoor 57,000 MT

18. Jalasathi: Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik launches programme to supply safe drinking water

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik launched the 'Jalasathi' programme on December 18, 2019 with the aim to ensure supply of safe drinking water to all households in the state.

The Odisha CM also launched the 'JalSathi' App on the occasion. During the launch, the Odisha CM reiterated the importance of clean drinking water to maintain good health. He also paid Rs 593 to clear the water cess dues of his residence Naveen Niwas and distributed water quality testing kits and POS (point of sale) machines to the 'Jalasathis'.

The Water Corporation of Odisha (WATCO) signed a memorandum of understanding with the women federations in Bhubaneswar for the implementation of the programme on December 18.



Who are 'Jalasathis'?

The Odisha government has roped in women volunteers to serve the people as 'Jalasathis'. This is a significant step, as it will help boost the economic empowerment of women in the state.

Objective

The JalSathi initiative aims to ensure the supply of clean drinking water to consumers through piped water connections.

Jalasandhi programme: All you need to know

- Under the 'Jalasandhi' programme, over 5,000 women will be engaged in Odisha to supply safe drinking water.
- The programme will be initially implemented in eight wards of Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation under the 5T initiative of the Housing and Urban Development.
- It will be implemented in the remaining wards of the city as well as other urban areas of the state in the next phases. The initiative is expected to benefit around 70 lakh people in urban areas.
- The Jalasathis will serve as the links between consumers and the Public Health Engineering Organisation (PHEO) or WATCO.
- The Jalasathis will be responsible for testing of water quality, facilitating new water connections and regularising connections, reassessing of demands, reading of meter, bill generation and delivery, collection of water charges and facilitating complaints redressal.

Background

The Odisha state government had earlier engaged the women self-help groups for collection of power dues, paddy procurement and mid-day meal preparation activities under its 'Mission Shakti'.

19. HRD Minister, Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank', inaugurates the third chapter of 'Manthan- Impeccable Academia' to promote skill development in Media and Entertainment industry today

Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' inaugurated the third chapter of 'Manthan- Impeccable Academia' today in New Delhi. Media and Entertainment Skills Council (MESC) in collaboration with Ministry of Human Resources and Development (MHRD) organized this event. Filmmaker, Educationist and Chairman MESC Mr. Subhash Ghai, Mr. Subba Rao, Sr. Economic Advisor, Ministry of HRD and other officials and industry



persons were present on this occasion.

Speaking on the occasion Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal said that Skill education forms the backbone of development of any nation, which helps cultivate skilled youth and workforce which is the need of the

hour. India's young population is its most valuable asset and dominates 54% of the population. It also has a history of being the world leader in education; to put our vision and mission to create a better skilled population for future, the work MHRD and MESC are doing is commendable. He congratulated MESC and said that under the leadership of Mr. Ghai MESC is truly promoting the Guru-Shishya culture through Vidyadaan.

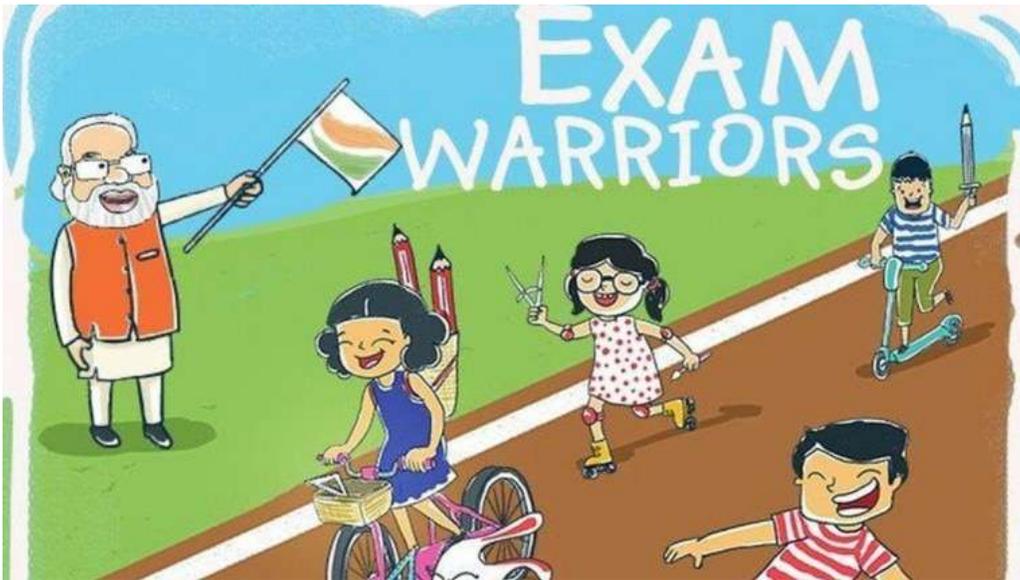
Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Subhash Ghai said that Film industry alone employs 72 type of vocational skill workers. Ministry of Human Resource Development and Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship have brought us on a platform to meet the changing needs of the media and entertainment industry. Along with creating a skilled youth, MESC is also dedicated to creating future leaders by providing them a platform like Vidyadaan to train the youth holistically.

MANTHAN is focused on a plethora of opportunities available in the Media and Entertainment Industry. It's highlighting the possibilities of Association between Media and Entertainment Skills Council (MESC) and participating esteemed Academic Institutions, colleges & universities. The Ministry of Human Resource & Development along with MESC has developed specialized employment oriented Bachelor Courses as: BSc. Animation & VFX, BSc. Performing Arts and B.Sc. Film Making.

The Universities concerned are empowered to take up these courses through their colleges, autonomous colleges are readily empowered and other colleges can take up these courses with their University approval. 50 +Colleges/ Universities, signed the MoU with MESC for making the specialized courses for the students at the event including Directorate of higher education, Government of Uttarakhand, Hansraj College, Khalsa College , Tripura University, Sharda university, GD Goenka university, Jain University and many more.

20. Braille version of 'Exam Warriors' penned by PM Narendra Modi released before board exams

Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Thawar Chand Gehlot on Wednesday released the Braille edition of 'Exam Warriors', a book authored by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Speaking on the occasion, Gehlot said millions of blind students of the country will be able to derive motivation and mental strength from Braille edition.

Braille edition prepared in Rajasthan

An official release said the Braille edition in Hindi and English has been prepared at

the Braille Press of Rajasthan Netraheen Kalyan Sangh.

The pictures in the book have been well-described for the benefit of blind readers.

Braille 'Exam Warriors' released ahead of board exams

The release of the Braille edition of 'Exam Warriors' has taken place months ahead of examination for secondary and higher secondary classes.

21. Railways offers 50% concession for youth participating in 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' programme

To facilitate the travel of participants of the 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' programme, railways will grant 50 per cent concession in basic fares of second/sleeper class to youngsters with earnings/emoluments of not more than Rs 5,000 per month, a statement from the ministry said. The concession has been granted as a special case only for normal train services and is not admissible in special trains or coaches, it said.

The concessional return journey tickets may also be issued on payment of one single journey fare of second/sleeper class mail/express fares to persons travelling more than 300 km to the place of the festival.

"This concession will be provided on production of requisite certificate in the prescribed railway format from the secretary of the concerned department of human resource development of various states," it said.

"The intending participants are required to submit the certificate to the authorised officers of the railway concerned, namely the chief commercial manager, the divisional commercial manager etc. who will issue them the concession orders on presentation of which, the station master will allow the concession to them," it added.

Certificates will not be issued to those whose travelling expenses are to be borne by the central or state government, a local or statutory body, a corporation, a government undertaking or a University.

It may also be noted that supplementary charges, reservation charges and other applicable charges etc shall be levied in full for both directions, it said.

22. 2+2 dialogue: India, US conclude Industrial Security Annexe agreement

India and the US have concluded the Industrial Security Annexe agreement, which will facilitate collaboration between defence industries by supporting the secure transfer of key information and technology.

At the second India-US 2+2 dialogue between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Defence minister Rajnath Singh with their American counterparts Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defence Secretary Mark Esper in Washington DC, the US talked tough on Pakistan and both sides asked Islamabad to take immediate, sustained and irreversible action on fighting terror.



However, there was no forward movement on the trade deal.

After the talks, Singh said, "I'm happy that we have been able to sign the Industrial Security Annexe before the 2+2 Dialogue. We hope that this will enable a smooth transfer of classified technology and information between private entities of USA and India."

A joint statement said the ministers welcomed the signing of the Industrial Security Annexe (ISA) which will

facilitate the exchange of classified military information between Indian and the US defense industries. Both sides also "expressed intent to meet in 2020 to discuss ISA implementation", it said.

On Pakistan, Pompeo said, "We understand the concerns, too, that India has, rightful concerns that they have about a terrorism emanating from Pakistan, and we assured them that we would take that into account."

In response to a question, Pompeo said, "We have been unambiguous in our partnership with the Indian government about terror. Terror, from wherever it emanates, whether it's from inside of Pakistan or from anyplace else. We are determined to protect the American people from the threat of terrorism and we're determined to work with our great democratic friends like the Indians to protect the people of India as well, and we'll continue to work on it."

ough task at hand

India and the US have concluded an important defence pact, and have called for Pakistan to act against terrorism. While these are positive outcomes, the two sides tried to underplay the lack of progress on trade deal and the concern in Washington on the recent political turmoil. Delhi and Washington have a tough task at hand to keep their ties from not being affected by these challenges.

Jaishankar also underlined cross-border terrorism, as he said, “Our counter-terrorism effort was also discussed at today’s meeting. And it has been boosted by a growing consensus on the nature of terror threats in the region, and the dangers of cross-border terrorism and sanctuaries... We discussed ways to address these challenges, including by working closely together at the FATF. We also took note of exchanges between our judicial academies for appreciation of challenges and evolving practices in adjudicating counter-terrorism cases, and agreed to further facilitate such exchanges in the areas of criminal jurisprudence.”

The US remained cautious in its position on the new citizenship law in India. Responding to a question, Pompeo said, “We care deeply and always will about protecting minorities and religious rights everywhere. We honour Indian democracy as they have a robust debate on the issue that you raised.”

Jaishankar, in his response, said, “The question that you asked relating to India, if you had followed the debate on that particular legislation carefully, you would see that it is a measure which is designed to address the needs of persecuted religious minorities from certain countries... If you look at what those countries are and therefore what their minorities are, perhaps you understand why certain religions were identified in terms of characterising those who had come across.”

23. Phase III Of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)

Ministry of Rural Development, Agriculture and Farmers Welfare & Panchayati Raj has launched Phase III of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) on the sidelines of the National Workshop on PMGSY organized by the Ministry of Rural Development in New Delhi.

About Phase-III of PMGSY-

It aims at consolidation of 1,25,000 Kms through Routes and major rural Links.

It connects habitations to Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs), Higher Secondary Schools and Hospitals with an estimated cost of Rs. 80,250 crores (Central Share of Rs. 53,800 crores) for the period 2019-20 to 2024-25.

The funding pattern for the PMGSY-III will be 60:40 between Centre and the States for States other than NE & Himalayan States and 90:10 for NE and the Himalayan States as applicable for Central sponsored schemes.

About PMGSY (Phase-I)-

The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) is a nationwide plan in India to provide good all-weather road connectivity to unconnected villages.



This Centrally Sponsored Scheme was introduced in 2000 by the then-prime minister of India Late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

It was phase-I of PMGSY.

The aim was to provide roads to all villages-

with a population of 1000 persons and above by 2003.

with a population of 500 persons and above by 2007.

in hill states, tribal and desert area villages with a population of 500 persons and above by 2003.

in hill states, tribal and desert area villages with a population of 250 persons and above by 2007.

Mukhya Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana run by various state governments are the schemes that complement PMGSY, including in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra.

This program has been attempting to increase the green cover near the roads through the planting of trees saplings, including the planting of fruit-bearing tree saplings. Varying levels of success have emerged from these attempts.

In order to implement this, an Online Management, Monitoring and Accounting System or OMMAS GIS system was developed to identify targets and monitor progress.

About Phase-II of PMGSY-

The Phase II of PMGSY was approved during May 2013.

While the ongoing PMGSY - I continued, under PMGSY phase II, the roads already built for village connectivity was to be upgraded to enhance rural infrastructure.

For the 12th Five Year Plan period a target of 50,000 Km length under PMGSY-II.

75 percent of the cost of the upgradation was by the Centre and 25 percent by the state. For hill states, desert areas, Schedule V areas, and Naxal-affected districts, 90 percent of the cost were borne by the Centre.

The importance of roads in bringing about all-round positive development and empowering the villages. Rural Road Connectivity is not only a key component of Rural Development by promoting access to economic and social services and thereby generating increased agricultural incomes and productive employment opportunities in India, but it is also as a result, a key ingredient in ensuring sustainable poverty reduction.

24. Tripura gets its first SEZ in Sabroom

Tripura is all set to get its first Special Economic Zone (SEZ) as the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MCI) has issued a notification for the same on December 16, 2019. Tripura's first SEZ will be established at Jalefa, Sabroom, South Tripura District.

Sarbroom is about 130 km away from Agartala. This SEZ will be an agro-based food processing sector specific economic zone. This project will help hundreds of native people to get employment and provide an opportunity to learn new technologies in the agro-based food processing sector.

About Sabroom SEZ Project

As per the government notification, the entire investment project will cost around 1550 crore.

www.successmantra.in

www.easevidya.com

Tripura Industrial Development Corporation (TIDC) Ltd will be the developer of the SEZ in the area.

According to the government's estimate, this SEZ will generate 12,000 skilled jobs and employment.

There will be several industries participate in the SEZ including agri-food processing, textile and apparel industries, rubber-based industries and bamboo industry.

Also Read | Aadhaar-Pan linking mandatory by December 31: IT Department

Benefits of Sabroom SEZ Project

The government believes that Sabroom SEZ will open up new avenues to attract private firms to invest in the region. Since the area is close to the Chittagong Port and Feni River in South Tripura, it will provide more overseas business opportunities to the native people. The government will provide 100 percent income tax relief on export. This exemption will be given for the first five years under Section 10AA of the Income Tax Act (ITA). Not only this, there will be a 50 per cent exemption to be provided for the next five years and fifty per cent of the ploughed back export profit for the next five years.

What is SEZ?

A Special Economic Zone or SEZ is a specially defined geographical area for trade, economic activity, production and other commercial activities. These zones are developed within the border of the country to encourage commercial activities keeping in mind the special economic rules and regulations. India is one of the top countries that set up such geographical units specifically to promote industry and trade activities. India is the first Asian country that established an SEZ in Kandla in 1965 to increase exports. It was named Export Processing Zone (EPZ).

25. Concept of 3 capitals to be considered in Andhra Pradesh: Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Tuesday indicated that the state could have three capitals.

YS Jagan Mohan Reddy said on Tuesday that the government has to discuss in the direction of developing all the regions and the "concept of multiple capitals too could be considered".

"We can think in terms of having three capitals, one being the legislative capital and the other two being executive capital and a judicial capital," YS Jagan Mohan Reddy said.



YS Jagan Mohan Reddy said that coastal city Visakhapatnam, which has the infrastructure, could be considered for being the executive capital and Kurnool can be considered as the judicial capital.

YS Jagan Mohan Reddy said that the earlier Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government had brought in a "grand design" of a capital city developing the 53,000 acre with a cost of Rs 1.00 lakh crore "but our priorities are different".

"We need Rs 60,000 crore for that as there was no water in Rayalaseema region despite the heavy rains and floods. We need Rs 16,000 crore for taking Polavaram water to North Andhra and for drinking water grid we need Rs 40,000 crore. For the Nadu-Nedu programme, we need Rs 29,000 crore for the schools and hospitals put together and since our

priorities are so different and aimed at welfare, we have to consider if spending Rs 1.09 lakh crore is necessary for capital formation," YS Jagan Mohan Reddy said.

Since the time the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has taken over the power in the state, the fate of Amaravati -- the 'world class' capital conceived by earlier TDP government chief minister Chandrababu Naidu -- is uncertain.

Amaravati's foundation stone was laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself in a grand function in 2015.

26. Meghalaya House adopts ILP resolution; protests in rest of N-E

The Meghalaya Assembly passed a unanimous resolution for implementation of inner line permit regime in the state on Thursday amid demands and protests by local groups. In neighbouring Assam, protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) continued and mobile internet services remained blocked throughout the state on Thursday, even as the Gauhati High Court directed the state government to lift curbs.

"We have passed a unanimous resolution today for implementation of ILP, like they did to Manipur. We will now impress upon the Centre to consider the implementation of ILP in Meghalaya," said Prestone Tynsong, Deputy Chief Minister, Meghalaya.



The resolution was passed in a special session of the Meghalaya Assembly called today amid demands of ILP in the state which became louder after the CAA was passed by Parliament. Most of Meghalaya comes under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, hence, exempted from the CAA.

"The state needs ILP. Our concern is brothers and sisters from outside. We are such a small population of tribals just a little over 32 lakh in all. We want the people to come from outside but with knowledge of

the government," said Tynsong adding that the state government will simplify things in the rules once the ILP regimes is approved by the Centre.

In November, the state Cabinet passed an ordinance amending the Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act, 2016, which would require visitors to register, akin to an ILP regime.

"The Ordinance is still lying with governor. Leave it aside," Tynsong said amid confusion on the fate of the amendment.

Meanwhile, Robert June Kharjharin, Chairman of CoMSO, an umbrella body demanding ILP welcomed the move.

"ILP will regulate entry of foreigners. It will also ensure that we are exempted from CAA . We are happy. We appeal to the union government to implement ILP," Kharjharin said.

An official said mobile internet services remained blocked in Meghalaya till 5pm on Friday even as curfew which was clamped in parts of Shillong was relaxed for 13 hours on Thursday.

Meanwhile, in Assam, mobile internet services remained blocked despite the Gauhati High Court, hearing a clutch of PILs, directing the state government to lift curbs by 5pm on Thursday.

Assam has been protesting the CAA for a different reason: groups fear that the newly-amended law would lead to an influx of migrants into the state thus disrupting its ethnic fabric -- something which has been at the centre of a decades-

long agitation that was resolved in the 1980s. However, several students groups in northeastern states have released a statement in support of the students of Jamia Millia Islamia, who were detained and reportedly assaulted police on December 15.

A bench of Justices Manojit Bhuyan and Saumitra Saikia directed that mobile Internet services should be restored even as it said that the state government was free to “take steps to curb and stop dissemination of explosive messages and videos on various social media platforms which may have a tendency to incite violence...”

An official with direct knowledge of the proceeding of the court said that the bench did not take into account a report of the Intelligence Bureau.

As violent protests raged in the state, mobile internet services were banned on December 11 in select districts. The ban was subsequently extended to all of Assam.

Meanwhile, as protests continued the state unit of the Congress held demonstrations across Assam against the CAA.

“We demand the repeal of CAA. From day one, since CAB was brought, Congress has been fighting tooth and nail and will continue to fight till BJP repeals it,” Ripun Bora, president of the state unit of the Congress and an MP said.

At a protest in Guwahati, the All Assam Students Union announced a week long protest calendar starting December 21.

With big anti-CAA demonstrations especially in Upper Assam, a delegation of 15 BJP MLAs met chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal and urged him to take immediate steps.

“We asked the chief minister for expediting the proceedings of the clause 6 committee on constitutional safeguards and immediate implementation of its recommendations. It should have been done before the CAA was passed,” said Padma Hazarika, one of the MLAs who met the chief minister.

“If we give immediate concessions, it will help dilute the agitation,” said Prasanta Phukan, a second MLA who was also part of the delegation.

“CM should go to Delhi and discuss the matter and save our life and save the people of Assam,” said Phukan who faced attack on his residence last week. “Third party and anti social elements damaged my house and two vehicles,” he said.

Meanwhile, in Manipur’s capital Imphal, a 12-hour general strike call given by the Left disrupted normal life.

In Tripura, anti-CAA protests were held by the Left Front in Agartala.

“India is a secular country. But the central government is trying to divide the country along ethnic lines, which is unconstitutional and anti-people. And if the Centre wants to provide a place to refugees from foreign countries, then all refugees, irrespective of caste and religion, should be accepted. Moreover, the Northeast is saturated already and we have been demanding that the region be kept out of this Act,” said CPM veteran leader, Pabitra Kar.

CPM’s indigenous wing, Tripura Upajati Gana Mukti Parishad has filed a petition against this Act in the Supreme Court (SC). In Tripura’s Belonia, two cops sustained injuries after some unidentified miscreants pelted stones at CPM’s rally. Police said they are investigating the matter.

In Mizoram, to extend their solidarity to the nation-wide students’ agitations, over 500 students donned in black-attire on Wednesday organised sit-in demonstrations at the Mizoram University campus park. Organised by the Mizoram University Students’ Council (MUSC), professors, teaching faculties and other employees of the Mizoram University participated in the day-long protest programme.

MUSC President Xavier Lalruatkima and Mizoram University Teachers Association Secretary K. C. Malsamzauva in their addresses before the gathering strongly condemned the Delhi police actions on the students.

“We demand justice for our student fraternity in the Jamia Millia Islamia University,” MUSC President said.

27. Govt relaxes guidelines for reissue of OCI cards

India on Wednesday relaxed certain Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) guidelines for reissue of passport for those below 20 years of age and those above 50 years.



20 years of age and those above 50 years.

The "temporary relaxation" has been granted till 30 June next year, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

The ministry said the relaxation has been given in the following cases:

"In case an OCI card holder below the age of 20 years has not got OCI card reissued on change of passport, he/she may travel on the strength of his/her existing OCI card bearing old passport number subject to the condition that along with the new passport, the OCI

cardholder carries old passport mentioned in the OCI card".

"In case an OCI card holder who has attained the age of 50 years and got his/her passport renewed subsequently but has not got his/her OCI card reissued on renewal of passport, he/she may travel until June 30, 2020 on the strength of existing OCI card along-with the new and old passports," the ministry said.

As per guidelines in force since 2005, the OCI card needs to be re-issued each time a new passport is acquired by the cardholder up to the age of 20 years and the card is required to be re-issued once on acquiring a new passport after completing 50 years of age.

The re-issuance of OCI card is not required each time a passport is issued to a cardholder between 21 and 50 years of age.

The ministry, however, said it is advised that OCI cardholders may take steps to comply with the existing OCI guidelines and renew their OCI cards as required by the rules.

28. Madras Waste Exchange: In a first, Chennai launches online portal for recyclable scrap

In a bid to address the waste management issue in the city and reduce their carbon footprint, citizens of Chennai have begun segregating waste and recycling non-biodegradable waste generated in their households every day.

However, with recycling, arises the question: What do you do with the recycled products? This is where the Madras Waste Exchange comes in. Madras Waste Exchange is a web portal-cum-mobile application that facilitates the trading of recyclable non-biodegradable waste by providing an online market to purchase and sell recyclable scrap materials and recycled products in Chennai. Developed under Smart City Mission, the website, which is the first of its kind in India, was launched by G Prakash, the Commissioner of the Greater Chennai Corporation in Chennai on December 13.

“The website is one of many solutions to tackle the issue of waste management in the city. Instead of tackling the issue in a traditional way, we wanted to take a different approach so we came up with the Madras Waste Exchange”, Azhagu Pandia Raja M P, Fellow with India Smart Cities and one of the three creators of Madras Waste Exchange told Indianexpress.com.

As a part of their fellowship, Azhagu and two others had studied waste management in Chennai for months, where they observed that while the amount of waste generated in Chennai was huge, very little of it was being recycled. "There is a need for waste management and recycling, both of which are not connected. We found that there is a mismatch and wondered if there could be a marketplace that could connect the two, following which the Madras Waste Exchange was created," he said.

The Madras Waste Exchange website helps buyers and sellers identify each other through geotags. Traders have to register themselves on the Madras Waste Exchange and provide their location details, following which a One Time Password (OTP) will be sent to their registered mobile numbers for verification. Once verification is done, other registered buyers and sellers can view the materials for sale using the concerned vendor's geotag.



Sellers can register themselves on the Madras Waste Exchange portal on <https://www.madraswasteexchange.com/#/>. The app, which has only been launched for buyers, can be downloaded from the Google Playstore.

Individuals, apartment complexes, offices, schools, religious institutions and other establishments in the city can register themselves as traders in the exchange. According to Azhagu, around 2000 scrap dealers, 600 buyers and 420 sellers have registered themselves so far. The portal connects buyers and sellers with each other directly, thus eliminating middlemen and ensuring transparency.

"The pricing of the materials is left to the sellers. Since there is no minimum or maximum cap, buyers and sellers can bargain between themselves while trading. They can even choose to sell the materials for free", he said. Currently, purchases have to be made in cash on delivery. The developers are looking at adding an option to enable payment using debit and credit cards and digital wallets in the future.

The portal facilitates the trade of all solid municipal waste that can be recycled, such as plastics, clothes, glass and so on. According to Azhagu, the city generates 5000 metric tonnes of garbage every day. "The garbage collected is sent to the landfills in Kodungaiyur and Perungudi, both of which are nearing full capacity. Our aim is to create zero percent landfills," said Azhagu.

While the Madras Waste Exchange helps connect private traders, the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has set up Resource Recovery Centres (RRC), where the waste collected from households are segregated before being sent to the city's landfills.

"We have around 210 RRCs in Chennai and the government can list these RRCs on the portal so that people can know what materials are available there. The GCC can also fix their prices for the same," said Azhagu.

Since usage and registration of the government-operated portal are free, Azhagu hoped the exchange would encourage entrepreneurship, given that many business ventures were taking up the issue of waste management and providing solutions to tackle the issue in a sustainable manner.

29. Portugal sets up Gandhi Citizenship Education Prize: Facts you need to know

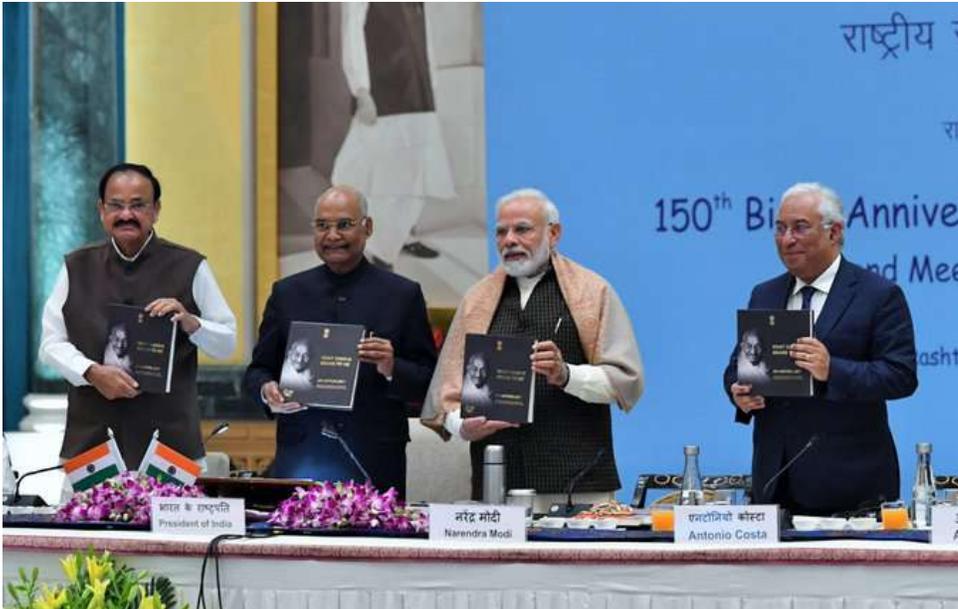
The Gandhi Citizenship Education Prize was announced last month by Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa in to help promote Mahatma Gandhi's ideals while addressing the second meeting of the National Committee for Commemoration Mahatma Gandhi's 150th Birth Anniversary.

1. The Gandhi Education Prize will be given out every year inspired by the thoughts and quotes of Mahatma Gandhi.
2. The first edition of the education prize will be dedicated to animal welfare since Gandhi used to say that the way animals are treated in a nation was indicative of its greatness.

More about the National Committee to remember Mahatma Gandhi

The Government of India created two committees to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi -

1. A National Committee which is headed by the President, and includes the Vice President, Prime Minister, all the state Chief Ministers, political representatives, Gandhians and other eminent personalities from all fields.



Antonio Costa is the only foreign Prime Minister to be a part of the National Commission. Other foreigners include Tulsi Gabbard, Desmond Tutu, Bernie Meyer (also known as the American Gandhi), former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, Kofi Annan etc.

2. An Executive Committee (EC) headed by the Prime Minister of India.

The role of the EC was to lay down the guidelines, and plan the programmes and activities for the commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

30. Daman and Diu, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli to be one UT from January 26

The Union Territories of Daman and Diu, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli will become a single UT on January 26, the Home Ministry announced on Thursday.

Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu (Merger of Union Territories) Bill, 2019 was passed by both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in the just-concluded winter session of Parliament.



"In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (a) of section 2 of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu (Merger of Union Territories) Act, 2019 (44 of 2019), the central government hereby appoints the 26th day of January 2020, as the appointed day for the purposes of the said Act," according to a Home Ministry notification issued by additional secretary Govind Mohan.

The merged Union Territory will be named as Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.

The merger of the two UTs, located along the western coast near Gujarat, is being done for better administration and to check duplication of various works, Union minister of state for home G Kishan Reddy had said.

So far, both the Union Territories have separate budgets and different secretariats even though they are just 35 km apart.

Dadra and Nagar Haveli has just one district while Daman and Diu has two.

Both UTs were under Portuguese rule for a long time and were liberated in December, 1961.

From 1961 to 1987, Daman and Diu was part of the UT of Goa, Daman and Diu.

In 1987, when Goa gained statehood, Daman and Diu was made a separate UT.

Dadra and Nagar Haveli was occupied by the Portuguese in June, 1783.

Residents of Dadra and Nagar Haveli got themselves liberated from Portuguese rule on August 2, 1954.

From 1954 to 1961, the territory was administered by a citizen's council called the Varishta Panchayat of Free Dadra and Nagar Haveli.

In 1961, it was merged with the Republic of India and made a Union Territory.

According to the act, and from the appointed day, two seats shall be allocated to the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu in the House of the People (Lok Sabha).

The Bombay High Court shall continue to extend to the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.

The members of each of the All India Services borne on the existing Union territories cadre immediately before the appointed day shall continue to be in the cadre of the same service of the existing Union territory in which they stand allocated before the appointed day.

Every person employed in connection with the affairs of the existing Union territories and serving immediately before the appointed day in the existing Union territories shall, on and from that day continue to serve in connection with the affairs of the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.

On August 5, the central government had announced the abrogation of the special status given to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 and its division into two Union Territories.

The country currently has nine Union Territories after the creation of the UTs of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

However, with the merger of Daman and Diu, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli, the number of UTs will come down to eight.

31. DGCA approves Dunzo and Throttle for long-range BVLOS drone experiments

While air cargo and logistics companies across the world have been acknowledging the utility of drones for its speed and automation after it made its first public drone delivery six months ago, India is yet to begin its experimental drone flights.

In October, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) had selected seven firms, including Zomato, Swiggy, Zipline and Redwing, for long-range or beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) drone experiments.

These firms were asked to submit technical details by the civil aviation authority.

In the latest development, the applications of Google-backed hyperlocal delivery startup Dunzo and Bengaluru-based drone maker Throttle Aerospace Systems have been finally approved by the DGCA based on their experimental programme called beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) drone operations.

Throttle Aerospace Systems has tied up with SpiceJet's dedicated air cargo service SpiceXpress that will provide the company with drones and assist in the initial testing phase.



BVLOS Experiment Assessment and Monitoring (BEAM) committee is yet to finalize and approve other company's experiments, but Dunzo and Throttle Aerospace have been selected and are waiting for the formal letters.

These approvals were originally planned to be done by August this year, but due to the unavailability of the members of the BVLOS Experiment Assessment and Monitoring (BEAM) committee, the process got delayed by a couple of months.

The two companies are likely to begin their experimental drone flights in February 2020 and are done with identifying airspace outside of Bengaluru.

During the test, which is meant to evaluate the safety and durability of the solutions, the companies will have to each clock 100 hours of drone flights before submitting the proof of concept to DGCA, said an ET report.

In December of 2018, the government legalised the flying of drones or Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS). It had also set up an online portal called 'Digital Sky' for drone registration.

Besides, the government also drafted a new drone policy for regulations under which it defined five different categories — Nano: less than or equal to 250 grams, Micro: from 250 grams to 2 kg, Small: from 2kg to 25 kg, medium: From 25 kg to 150 kg and Large: greater than 150 kg.

Nano drones that weigh less than 250 grams will not require registration.

32. Uttarakhand plans to introduce rhinos in Corbett

The Uttarakhand wildlife advisory board on Tuesday approved a proposal for the reintroduction of rhinoceros on an experimental basis in Corbett Tiger Reserve, emphasising that the geographical terrain and environmental conditions were suitable for the species, said Rajiv Bhartari, chief wildlife warden Uttarakhand.

According to wildlife experts, sighting of a male rhino near Kotdwara in Pauri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand in 1789 confirms that rhinoceros have existed in the Himalayan state in the past.

The proposal was approved in the 14th meeting of the state wildlife board held in Dehradun under the chairmanship of chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat, said Bhartari.

At the meeting, it was also stressed Bhartari that introduction of rhinoceros in Corbett will also boost wildlife tourism in the state.

Bhartari said Rhinoceros will either be brought from Assam or West Bengal as the maximum population of this species is there. "Before that a proposal will be sent to the union environment ministry regarding the translocation," he said

Qamar Qureshi, scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) Dehradun, who had recommended reintroduction of rhinoceros in Corbett in 2007 along with two other experts, said they had studied the protected forest areas in Uttarakhand where rhinoceros could be reintroduced.



“...we found that there were primarily three areas suitable for reintroduction of rhinoceros — one is Corbett, second is Surai Range of Terai East Forest Division on the south-eastern end of Uttarakhand and third is Paterpani, located south of Dhikala grassland. But Corbett is more suitable as it is more protected area and has good floral diversity,” he said.

Qureshi said there have been two major reintroductions of rhinoceros species till now in the country. “First is into Dudhwa National Park of Uttar Pradesh in 1984, which has been very successful. The

rhinoceros were brought there from Nepal’s Chitwan and Assam’s Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary. Second is THE reintroduction of rhinoceros in Manas National Park of Assam where their population had come to an end due to insurgent activities,” he said.

According to 2014 tiger census, Corbett had 215 tigers, the highest for any tiger reserve in the country followed by Bandipur, which had 120 tigers. However, according to the latest tiger census 2018 released in July this year, there are 442 tigers in Uttarakhand. Reserve-wise tiger estimations have not been released yet. But according to wildlife officials here, the tiger numbers have increased from 215 to around 260 in Corbett.

On possible conflict between tigers and rhinos, Qureshi said tigers attack young rhinos and elephants. “Overall the number of such killings by tigers is very less, almost insignificant. Tigers generally don’t kill adult rhinos. Like in Kaziranga, I don’t think there will be any conflict between the two species,” he said.

33. IAF Planning 'Swift Trials' In Rs 1.5 Lakh Crore 114 Fighter Jet Deal

In the over Rs 1.5 lakh crore deal for manufacturing 114 multirole fighter aircraft, the Indian Air Force (IAF) is planning to compress the time taken for carrying out trials of all the participants to less than a year to ensure that the force gets its new combat aircraft at a faster rate.

Last time, when the IAF carried out trials of multiple fighter aircraft for the scrapped deal of 126 multirole fighter aircraft, the service had taken 18 months to complete the process in the contract which lingered on for several years before getting cancelled due to complications. "This time, the IAF is planning to hold trials of all the competitors who participate in the tender in less than a year so that time is saved. The fact that most of the systems and avionics of the participating firms have been tested will also help in shortening the time taken from trials," defence sources told ANI.

All the major fighter aircraft manufacturers including Sukhoi and MiG from Russia, Lockheed Martin and Boeing from the United States of America, Eurofighter consortium from Europe and Saab group from Sweden have responded to the Request for Proposal for the deal expected to be the biggest ever in terms of quantity of aircraft and the amount of money to be spent on it.

The Indian Air Force is expected to seek approval of the Defence Acquisition Council for the deal in the next few months for over Rs 1.5 lakh crore under the strategic partnership policy as part of which Indian firms will have to tie up with foreign partners to build the aircraft in India.

The deal is being considered as an important step in fulfilling the shortage of squadrons in the IAF which is looking for fighters to replace the MiG-21, MiG-23 and MiG-27 fighter planes some of which have already been phased out while others are on their way out of service in the next few years.

The Russian-origin Sukho-30MKI with over 12 squadrons in service will be the mainstay of the force while the two squadrons of the Rafale fighters would be the most potent in terms of capability in the next decade for the force which is looking to indigenous routes for the fifth-generation fighter planes.

34. Rajasthan government starts its first Janta Clinic

Rajasthan Chief Minister inaugurated its first "Janta clinic" at in the Malviya Nagar area of Jaipur. This clinic open to provide free primary health care to people living in slums. In its first phase, 12 Janta Clinics will be opened in Jaipur where people would get free medicines and free medical examination in some cases. Later, in the second and third phases of this scheme, Janta Clinics will be opened in other areas.

Important takeaways for all competitive exams:

CM of Rajasthan: Ashok Gehlot.

Capital of Rajasthan: Jaipur.

Governor of Rajasthan: Kalraj Mishra.

35. India, Afghanistan, Iran meet to monitor implementation of Chabahar pact

The second meeting between officials of India, Afghanistan and Iran took place here on Friday to monitor implementation of the 2016 agreement regarding development and management of the Chabahar port in Iran, according to an official statement.

"All the three countries welcomed steady progress in port operations by India Ports Global Ltd company since the taking over of the port operations at Shaheed Beheshti Port at Chabahar in December 2018," said the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in a statement on Friday.



The second meeting of the "follow-up committee" took place on Friday at the level of "joint secretary/director general" at Delhi.

The Chabahar port -- being jointly developed by India, Iran and Afghanistan -- is considered a gateway to opportunities for trade by the three countries with central Asian nations. It is located on the Indian Ocean in Sistan and Baluchistan province of Iran.

"It was also agreed to include Mormugoa and New Mangalore Port from India; in addition to JNPT (Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust in Mumbai), Mundra, Kandla and Cochin as part of designated route under the Chabahar Agreement," the MEA said.

A study will be conducted by the Federation of Freight Forwarders' Associations in India (FFFAI) to streamline cargo transit through Chabahar port, they said.

The first meeting of this "follow-up committee" took place on October 23 last year.

"It was agreed to finalise the protocol to harmonise transit, roads, customs and consular matters...It was agreed to organise promotional and business events in Afghanistan and India to popularise the Chabahar port," the MEA said on Friday.

The Chabahar port, which is easily accessible from India's western coast, is increasingly seen as a counter to Pakistan's Gwadar Port which is being developed with the Chinese investment.

The third meeting of the "follow-up committee" will take place in the first half of 2020, the MEA said.

36. 67 Lakh street lights replaced with LEDs under AMRUT scheme: MoS Urban Affairs Puri

Addressing the Members of Parliament (MPs) of the Consultative Committee attached to the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) yesterday, Hardeep S Puri, Minister of State (MoS) for Housing & Urban Affairs, spoke about the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation & Urban Transformation (AMRUT), stating that the scheme focuses on the development of basic urban infrastructure in 500 mission cities – potable water for every household, improvement in treatment capacity of sewerage, development of city parks, and reform implementation.



Against the total plan size of Rs 77,640 crore of all the SAAPs, Rs 39,000 crore (50%) has been allocated to water supply followed by sewerage & septage project at over Rs. 32,000 crore (42%), Puri stated.

Works have been completed for 2,326 projects worth Rs. 7,221 crore, contracts awarded & work in progress on 2,962 projects with an investment of Rs 65,000 crore, 460 projects costing over Rs 10,000 crore are under tendering, and detailed projects worth about Rs. 1,000 crore are under preparation, Puri said.

AMRUT also focuses on 11 reforms comprising 54 milestones. These reforms broadly cover online services to citizens, establishing a single window for all approvals, establishing municipal cadres, and achieving at least 90% of billing and collection of taxes/user charges.

Against a target for replacement of 99 lakh streetlights with LED lights, 67 lakh street lights have been replaced so far.

Online Building Permission System (OBPS) has been implemented in 1,887 cities across the country including 440 AMRUT towns.

Implementation of OBPS resulted in a quantum jump in India's rank in the World Bank Doing Business Report (DBR) in construction permits component of Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) to 27th in 2020, from 181st in 2018, Puri said.

Puri had earlier welcomed all MPs of the Consultative Committee attached to the MoHUA and stated that the Government is implementing Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), Smart Cities Mission (SCM), Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U) Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U), Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM), Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) and Metro Rails. He said that these complement each other helping the all-round development of cities.

The meeting was attended by Members of Parliament, M V V Satyanarayana, Ramcharan Bohra, Abir Ranjan Biswas, Rajmani Patel, KTS Tulsi, and Sanjay Singh.

Durga Shanker Mishra, Secretary, MoHUA, and senior officers of the Ministry also attended the meeting. Mishra gave an overall view of various missions of the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry. This was followed by presentations by the respective Mission Directors about their missions.

International News

1. Longest UN climate talks end with no deal on carbon markets

Environmental groups and activists accused the world's richest countries of showing little commitment to seriously tackling climate change after marathon talks ended in a deal described as "watered down and weak".

International climate talks closed on Sunday in Madrid, Spain with negotiators postponing until next year a key decision on global carbon markets.



After two weeks of negotiations on tackling global warming, delegates from almost 200 nations passed declarations calling for greater ambition in cutting planet-heating greenhouse gases and in helping poor countries suffering the effects of climate change.

But despite holding the longest climate talks ever in 25 nearly annual editions, they left one of the thorniest issues for the next summit in Glasgow in a year's time - how to deal with carbon emissions.

The climate discussions were accompanied at times by angry protests from indigenous and environmental groups, both inside and outside the venue. The demonstrations reflected growing frustration, particularly among young people, at the slow pace of government efforts to curb climate change.

Many developing countries and campaigners wanted to see much more explicit language spelling out the importance of countries submitting bolder pledges on emissions as the Paris Agreement process enters a crucial implementation phase next year.

"These talks reflect how disconnected country leaders are from the urgency of the science and the demands of their citizens in the streets," said Helen Mountford, vice president for climate and economics at the World Resources Institute think-tank. "They need to wake up in 2020."

Brazil, China, Australia, Saudi Arabia and the United States had led resistance to bolder action, delegates said.

Scientists say greenhouse gas emissions must start dropping sharply as soon as possible to prevent global temperatures rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) by the end of the century.

Sunday's agreement fell well short of what science says is needed to tackle the climate emergency.

The COP25 deal "expresses the urgent need" for new carbon-cutting commitments to close the gap between current emissions and goals of capping global warming at below 2C, host country Spain said in a statement.

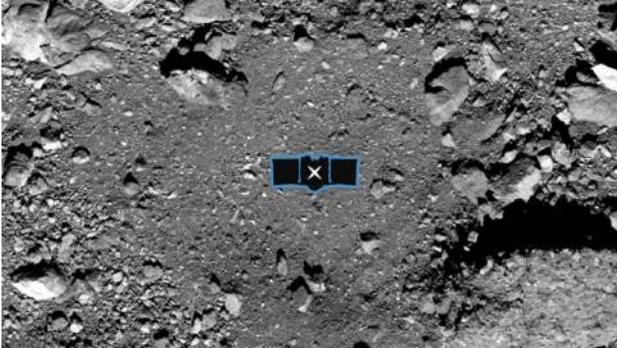
2. NASA Asteroid Mission Picks 'Nightingale' As Sampling Site

We now know where NASA's first asteroid sample-return mission aims to snag its otherworldly stuff.

The OSIRIS-REx spacecraft will swoop down on a site called Nightingale near the north pole of the 1,650-foot-wide (500 meters) asteroid Bennu, which the probe has been orbiting since December 2018, mission team members announced here today (Dec. 12) during a news conference at the annual fall meeting of the American Geophysical Union (AGU).

"This is a day I've been dreaming of for over a decade," Dante Lauretta, OSIRIS-REx's principal investigator and a planetary scientist at the University of Arizona, told Space.com after the news conference. "And it's the culmination of the work of hundreds of people working thousands of hours, poring over the data that we've returned from the asteroid over the past year."

The \$800 million OSIRIS-REx mission is investigating the solar system's early days and the role that carbon-rich asteroids such as Bennu may have played in bringing life's building blocks to Earth. Nightingale gives the team the best chance to make significant progress on those fronts, Lauretta said.



For example, the site has lots of fine-grained material that can be readily sucked up by the spacecraft's sampling mechanism. Nightingale is also close to Bennu's north pole, where temperatures have remained relatively cool over the eons. So, the dirt and rubble up there have experienced less alteration than stuff near the asteroid's equator, increasing the probability that pristine organics and hydrated minerals are there to be collected.

Indeed, Nightingale sports lots of dark material, which may well be indicative of organics, Lauretta said during the news conference. And Nightingale itself is a small impact crater that appears to be young — meaning OSIRIS-REx should be able to pick up asteroid samples that were recently unearthed (and therefore subjected to little space weathering).

However, Nightingale "does have some hazards associated with it," Lauretta said during the news conference.

For example, the crater is just 65 feet (20 meters) or so wide, making it a tight fit for OSIRIS-REx, which spans about 20 feet (6 m), including its solar panels. And the crater is ringed by some rugged rocks, including one that Lauretta has dubbed "Mt. Doom," which rises about 33 feet (10 m) above the crater floor.

OSIRIS-REx will spend the next eight months doing reconnaissance work and practicing for the sampling maneuver. Then, on Aug. 25, the probe will make its move down to Nightingale.

OSIRIS-REx's brush with Bennu will be more of a kiss than a landing. The probe will tap the asteroid with its sampling head, which will blast the space rock with nitrogen gas, stirring up lots of stuff that will get sucked up. (OSIRIS-REx can grab up to 4.4 lbs., or 2 kilograms, of stuff, but the minimum for mission success is 2.1 ounces, or 60 grams.)

These complex moves will all be performed autonomously. Real-time operation from mission control is out of the question, given Bennu's distance from Earth (and the many minutes it would take commands to bridge that gulf.)

But all is not lost if Nightingale proves to be too tough a nut for OSIRIS-REx to crack. The spacecraft will be assessing hazards all the way down, and, if it senses something going amiss, the probe can hit the brakes and head back to asteroid orbit, team members said.

3. China suspends planned tariffs scheduled for December 15 on some U.S. goods

China has suspended additional tariffs on some U.S. goods that were meant to be implemented on Dec. 15, the State Council's customs tariff commission said on Sunday, after the world's two largest economies agreed a "phase one" trade deal on Friday.

The deal, rumors and leaks over which have gyrated world markets for months, reduces some U.S. tariffs in exchange for what U.S. officials said would be a big jump in Chinese purchases of American farm products and other goods.

China's retaliatory tariffs, which were due to take effect on Dec. 15, were meant to target goods ranging from corn and wheat to U.S. made vehicles and auto parts.

Other Chinese tariffs that had already been implemented on U.S. goods would be left in place, the commission said in a statement issued on the websites of government departments including China's finance ministry.

"China hopes, on the basis of equality and mutual respect, to work with the United States, to properly resolve each other's core concerns and promote the stable development of U.S.-China economic and trade relations," it added.

Beijing has agreed to import at least \$200 billion in additional U.S. goods and services over the next two years on top of the amount it purchased in 2017, the top U.S. trade negotiator said Friday.

A statement issued by the United States Trade Representative also on Friday said the United States would leave in place 25% tariffs on \$250 billion worth of Chinese goods.

4. Pakistan court sentences former military ruler Pervez Musharraf to death for treason

Pakistan's anti-terrorism court sentenced on Tuesday former military ruler Pervez Musharraf to death on charges of high treason and subverting the constitution, a senior government official said.

"Pervez Musharraf has been found guilty of Article 6 for violation of the constitution of Pakistan," government law officer Salman Nadeem said.

Musharraf has been on trial for high treason for imposing a state of emergency in 2007.

Musharraf, who seized power in a 1999 coup and later ruled as president, has been living outside of Pakistan. He was not immediately available for comment.

5. UNESCO removes 'anti-Semitic' Belgian carnival from heritage list

A Belgian carnival has been removed from UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list after officials found the "recurrence of racist and anti-Semitic representations" to be incompatible with its principles.

Aalst Carnival was recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), but has been widely condemned by Jewish organizations.

The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity announced Friday it would remove the Aalst Carnival from its heritage list.



"Further to a proposal submitted by the Secretariat of UNESCO, the Committee based its decision on the fact that the recurrence of racist and anti-Semitic representations is incompatible with the fundamental principles of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage," a spokesperson for UNESCO said in a statement.

In December, the town's mayor Christoph D'Haese signaled that the town wanted to end the association with UNESCO after criticism that a float at this year's parade was "anti-Semitic."

"Citizens of Aalst are done with the preposterous insults," D'Haese said in a statement to CNN in December. "Therefore we take the most honorable way out and we no longer seek UNESCO recognition for Aalst Carnival."

CNN has attempted to contact D'Haese for comment about the UNESCO decision.

D'Haese had defended the carnival as satire, but Hans Knoop, a spokesman for the Belgian Forum of Jewish Organization told CNN earlier this month that the carnival float featured the same imagery used to portray Jews in Nazi Germany.

"This was without any doubt anti-Semitic," said Knoop, who also said that in a previous year, some participants had worn SS uniforms.

Critics take issues with Belgian folklore festivals' use of blackface and other offensive tropes. Several regional celebrations use characters in blackface, which are usually depicted as shadowy antagonists.

The UNESCO committee said in a statement that it stood by "its founding principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect among peoples and condemns all forms of racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia."

6. India donates solar lamps to Palestinian kids

India has donated solar powered study lamps to Palestinian elementary school children from a marginalised Bedouin community to spread the principles of self-sufficiency and raise awareness towards the adverse effects of climate change. The solar powered study lamps supplied by IIT-Bombay as part of the initiative on Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary to promote renewable sources of energy. PTI

Instagram expands fact-checking globally

San Francisco: Instagram on Monday announced it had gone global in its fight against misinformation, expanding its third-party fact-checking network around the world. The Facebook-owned social platform launched a fact-checking program in the US early this year. Under the programme, content rated "false" by fact-checkers is downgraded in news feeds so fewer people will see it.



7. U.N. Security Council to meet on Kashmir on Tuesday at China's request

The United Nations Security Council will meet at China's request on Tuesday to discuss the situation in the disputed Indian territory of Jammu and Kashmir, diplomats said.

The council will meet behind closed doors for the first time since a similar gathering in August, which was also called by Pakistan ally China, after India removed the decades-old autonomy the area enjoyed under the Indian constitution.

In a letter to the Security Council on Dec. 12, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi expressed concern about a possible further escalation of tensions.

"In view of the seriousness of the situation and the risk of further escalation, China would like to echo the request of Pakistan, and request a briefing of the Council ... on the situation of Jammu and Kashmir," China's U.N. mission wrote in a note to council members, seen by Reuters.

Diplomats speaking on condition of anonymity confirmed the meeting was scheduled to take place on Tuesday.

The Himalayan region has long been a flashpoint in ties between nuclear-armed neighbors India and Pakistan, with both claiming Kashmir in full but ruling it in part. U.N. peacekeepers have been deployed since 1949 to observe a ceasefire between India and Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir.

For decades, India has battled insurgency in the portion it controls. It blames Pakistan for fuelling the strife, but Pakistan denies this, saying it gives only moral support to non-violent separatists.

The Security Council adopted several resolutions in 1948 and in the 1950s on the dispute between India and Pakistan over the region, including one which says a plebiscite should be held to determine the future of mostly Muslim Kashmir.

Another resolution also calls upon both sides to “refrain from making any statements and from doing or causing to be done or permitting any acts which might aggravate the situation.”

8. The Deepest Point On Land Found In Antarctica

The deepest point of Earth's continents has been identified in Queen Mary Land, East Antarctica. The canyon buried under the ice of the Denman Glacier reaches 11,500 feet (3.5 kilometers) below sea level, for comparison, the lowest exposed land on Earth, the Dead Sea in the Jordan Rift Valley, is just 1,355 feet (413 meters) below sea level. The Mariana Trench in the western Pacific Ocean is still the deepest point on Earth with 36,037 feet (10.9 kilometers), but is geologically speaking part of the oceanic crust.

The discovery was presented at the American Geophysical Union's Fall Meeting in San Francisco and is the result of a six-year-long project to map the bedrock of the Antarctic continent. The goal of the BedMachine Antarctica project is to create an accurate bedrock map of the continent, essential to understand better how ice-streams flow from the central highlands towards the sea surrounding Antarctica.

Using microwave pulses, able to pass the thick ice covering most of the continent, the project compiled a preliminary map of the underlying bedrock. Gaps in the data were filled using physical models of glacier movements. Comparing the volume of ice entering a valley with the volume flowing out, the model can estimate the volume and shape of the buried valley, also giving an insight into the depth and roughness of the hidden valley floor.

9. World's first liquid hydrogen carrier ship launches in Japan

Japan's Kawasaki Heavy Industries debuted on Wednesday the world's first marine carrier that transports liquefied hydrogen, using technology that will vastly expand cargo capacity of the green energy source.

A crowd of 4,000 people gathered at Kawasaki's shipyard in Kobe for the naming and launch ceremony of the Suiso Frontier -- a name adopting the Japanese word for hydrogen. The vessel, measuring 116 meters long, will be fully completed next fall.



Kawasaki will later add tanks that will carry the hydrogen. By liquefying hydrogen at minus 253 degrees Celsius, the cargo can be compressed to one-800th of its gaseous volume.

The carrier will transport to Japan hydrogen produced in Australia from cheap coal, with trial shipments due to begin before March 2021.

Kawasaki's carrier will could be a game changer in a market poised to rapidly expand. Global demand for hydrogen will grow by a factor of more than 50 to around \$3.75 billion in 2030, according to an estimate from market research firm Fuji Keizai.

Hydrogen, which produces no carbon dioxide when burned, is a promising fuel when it comes to reducing the carbon footprint. Middle East tensions are also driving demand for alternative energy sources.

Japanese trading house Marubeni and Electric Power Development, a domestic utility known as J-Power, have partnered with Kawasaki on the project, with energy major Royal Dutch Shell also on board.

Richard Court, Australia's ambassador to Japan, attended the launch ceremony, while Toyota Motor Chairman Takeshi Uchiyamada participated in the event as well. Toyota unveiled its latest version of its Mirai hydrogen fuel cell-powered sedan this October.

JXTG Holdings, Japan's largest fuel wholesaler, produces hydrogen from liquefied petroleum gas in Yokohama. The company supplies the fuel for 41 hydrogen stations across the country.

One obstacle keeping hydrogen from taking off has been the cost. Power generation using liquefied natural gas and coal remain significantly cheaper. For hydrogen to be as cost competitive as LNG, a global supply chain and mass shipments will have to be realized. Kawasaki plans to commercialize the liquid hydrogen vessel around 2030, and will develop larger vessels.

10. Australia declares state of emergency as heatwave fans bushfires

Australia set a record for its hottest day ever for a second straight day with an average national temperature of 41.9 degrees Celsius (107.4 Fahrenheit), a full degree higher than the previous mark.

The Bureau of Meteorology said on Thursday the new nationally averaged maximum was reached Wednesday, topping the 40.9 degrees hit Tuesday, which beat the previous record of 40.3 C in January 2013.

The heatwave has exacerbated an unprecedented, drought-fueled series of bushfires ravaging large areas of Australia.



As the heatwave continued Thursday saw the highest December temperature ever reached in Australia when the West Australian town of Eucla hit 49.8 degrees celsius (121.6 Fahrenheit).

The previous hottest December day was 49.5 degrees celsius in Birdsville, Queensland, in 1972.

Authorities in Australia on Thursday declared a seven-day state of emergency in New South Wales, the second in as many months, as a record heatwave fanned unprecedented bushfires raging across the region.

Some 100 fires have been burning for weeks in the country's most populous state. Half are uncontained, including a "mega-blaze" ringing Sydney and covering Australia's biggest city in a haze of toxic smoke.

NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian said the state of emergency was due to "catastrophic weather conditions".

"The biggest concern over the next few days is the unpredictability, with extreme wind conditions, extremely hot temperatures," Berejiklian told reporters in Sydney.

11. Donald Trump is impeached and faces trial in the US Senate

Donald Trump has become the third US president in history to be impeached by the House of Representatives, setting up a trial in the Senate that will decide whether he remains in office.



The House voted on two charges - that the president had abused his power and that he had obstructed Congress.

Nearly all Democrats voted for the charges and every Republican against.

President Trump's Republicans control the Senate, so it is highly unlikely he will be removed from power.

Democrats are already unhappy at the way the trial could be held. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has now indicated it might delay sending the articles of impeachment to the Senate, in order to bargain on the terms of the proceedings.

This could put off the trial for an indefinite period, denying Mr Trump his expected acquittal.

How will Senate trial work?

What does it take to impeach a president?

Mr Trump remained defiant as the voting took place, telling a campaign rally in Battle Creek, Michigan: "While we're creating jobs and fighting for Michigan, the radical left in Congress is consumed with envy and hatred and rage."

12. A star and its planet gets Indian names

white yellow star in Sextans constellation and its Jupiter like exo-planets, which were hitherto named HD 86081 and 86081b, will now have Indian names.

The International Astronomical Union today announced that while the star will be called Bibhā, the planet will be called Santamasa. The star has been named in honour of a pioneering Indian woman scientist Dr Bibha Choudhury, who discovered subatomic particle, pi-meson, Bhibha also means "a bright beam of light" in Bengali. The planet has been named Santamasa to reflect the cloudy nature of its atmosphere. Santamasa is the Sanskrit term for "clouded".

The IAU chose the name at the end of a global contest called 'NameExoWorlds', which was organised as part of its centenary celebrations. The agency, which turned 100 on July 28, had allowed every country in the world to give a famous name to a selected pair of exoplanet and its host star. India was allotted HD 86081 and its exoplanet HD 86081b.

The contest was launched on 10th July 2019. By August 15, the last date for submission, a total of 1,717 youngsters had suggested names, and a committee of experts shortlisted 10 for public voting. The final entry was selected after voting by 5,587 persons.



Ananyo Bhattacharya, a 22-year old student of Sardar Vallabhbhai National Institute of Technology at Surat had suggested the name of Bhibha for the star and 13-year-old Vidyasagar Daud of Sinhgad Spring Dale Public School, Pune had suggested the name of Santamasa for the planet.

Some of the other names approved by IAU for other stars and planets from other countries include the names of mythological dogs, Bran, Tuiren, from the Irish legend for a host star and its exoplanet located in the

constellation of Canes Venatici (the Hunting Dogs), Wadirum and Petra, names of ancient cities of Jordan for a star and its exoplanet in the constellation of Aquila, Baiduri and Intan, names of gemstones in Malay language for a pair in the constellation of Fornax (the Furnace) and Nakambé and Mouhoun, the two prominent rivers of Burkina Faso for a star and exoplanet in the constellation of Eridanus (The River).

Once a star and few of its characteristics are found, they are listed in a catalogue such as Henry Draper Catalogue (HD) and assigned telephone-number-like designations. "There has been growing interest amongst astronomers and the public alike to also assigning proper names, as is done for Solar System bodies," says Eric Mamajek, co-chair of the NameExoWorlds Steering Committee of IAU.

13. Ethiopia launches its first satellite with the help of China

Ethiopia has launched its first satellite into space, as more sub-Saharan African nations strive to develop space programmes to advance their development goals and encourage scientific innovation.

Before dawn on Friday, senior officials and citizens gathered at the Entoto Observatory and Research Centre just north of the capital Addis Ababa to watch a live broadcast of the satellite's launch from a space station in China.

"This will be a foundation for our historic journey to prosperity," Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen said in a speech at the launch event broadcast on state television.

The satellite was designed by Chinese and Ethiopian engineers and the Chinese government paid about \$6m of the more than \$7m manufacturing costs, Solomon Belay, director-general of the Ethiopian Space Science and Technology Institute, told Reuters News Agency.

Another eight satellites were put into orbit by the same rocket, including an Earth observation satellite jointly developed by China and Brazil as part of a bilateral programme, which is seen as a template for broader cooperation among both countries as well as Russia, India and South Africa.

The China-Brazil Earth Resource Satellite-4A was launched on a Long March-4B rocket in the northern Chinese province of Shanxi, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

The satellite was the sixth developed based on the China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite (CBERS) programme that began in 1988. The satellites are designed for Earth observation from orbit for non-military use.

The CBERS-4A will support the Brazilian government's monitoring of the Amazon rainforest and changes in the country's environment, according to Xinhua.

Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - collectively known as BRICS - have been in talks on a framework agreement to create a constellation of satellites for Earth remote-sensing and share data obtained by each others' satellites.

Each country will provide one to two satellites to the constellation, according to the China National Space Administration in 2018.

The CBERS satellites would be included in the constellation programme.

Currently, only South Africa in the BRICS bloc does not have satellites of its own.

More sub-Saharan African nations have been striving to develop space programmes to advance their development goals and encourage scientific innovation.

The African Union adopted a policy on African space development in 2017 and declared that space science and technology could advance economic progress and natural resource management on the continent.

"Space is food, space is job creation, a tool for technology ... sovereignty, to reduce poverty, everything for Ethiopian to achieve universal and sustainable development," said Belay.

Ethiopia's wide-range, multi-spectral, remote-sensing microsatellite will be used for weather forecast and crop monitoring, officials said.

14. Sri Lanka, not India, will develop Mattala airport: Gotabaya Rajapaksa

Sri Lanka's civil aviation authority will develop the southern airport in Mattala, near the strategically located Hambantota port, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa

15. World's oldest known fossil forest found in New York quarry

The world's oldest known fossil forest has been discovered in a sandstone quarry in New York state, offering new insights into how trees transformed the planet.

The forest, found in the town of Cairo, would have spanned from New York to Pennsylvania and beyond, and has been dated to about 386m years old. It is one of only three known fossil forests dating to this period and about 2-3m years older than the previously oldest known fossil forest at Gilboa, also in New York state.



“These fossil forests are extremely rare,” said Chris Berry from Cardiff University’s School of Earth and Ocean Sciences. “To really understand how trees began to draw down carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, we need to understand the ecology and habitats of the very earliest forests.”

The forest would have been quite open and its ancient trees would appear alien to the modern eye. A walker would have encountered clusters of Cladoxylopsid, a 10m-tall leafless tree with a swollen base, short branches resembling sticks of celery and shallow, ribbon-like roots. The fossils also revealed a tree called Archaeopteris, something like a pine,

but instead of needles the branches and trunk were adorned with fern-like fronds, giving it an almost hairy appearance.

“It’s not something we can immediately recognise as a modern tree,” said Berry.

Archaeopteris also featured enormous

woody roots, which had not previously been seen in forests of this era.



Advertisement

The prehistoric forest would have been sparse on wildlife. The first dinosaurs would only appear 150m years later and there were no vertebrates on land yet and no birds. The forest’s primary occupants were millipede-like creatures, called myriapods, and some other primitive insects that may or may not have begun to fly.

“It’s funny to think of a forest without large animals. No birdsong. Just the wind in the trees,” said Berry.

The emergence of forests is one of the most transformative events in Earth’s history, marking permanent changes to ecology, atmospheric CO2 levels and climate. Before forests, CO2 levels were far higher and the Earth’s climate was hotter with no ice caps. By the end of the Devonian period, about 350m years ago, there were glaciers and, soon after, polar ice became permanent.

However, there have been so few fossil remains of early trees that scientists have had only a hazy idea of which trees dominated which habitats, how root systems altered soil chemistry and how forests opened up new ecological niches for animals.

16. International Astronomical Union names new star 'Sharjah'

The International Astronomical Union (IAU) announced the names of the newly discovered stars and planets, where the name "Sharjah" was chosen for a star with "Barjeel" being the name of one of its planets.

The announcement was made yesterday during a press conference of the IAU in the French capital, Paris, celebrating the centennial of the union. During the announcement, the organisers lauded the efforts and contributions of the Emirate of Sharjah to the global scientific community.

17. Pakistan permits Qatar Emir, 9 others of royal family to hunt endangered houbara bustards

Pakistan has issued special permits to the Emir of Qatar and nine others of the royal family to hunt 100 houbara bustards, an endangered bird species, notwithstanding growing criticism in the country against the move, according to a media report on Tuesday.



Originally an inhabitant of the colder central Asian region, the houbara bustard, in order to avoid harsh weather conditions, migrates southwards every year to spend the winter in a relatively warm environment in Pakistan.

Quoting sources, the Dawn News reported that the permits have been issued for the 2019-20 hunting season by the foreign ministry's deputy chief of protocol, Mohammad Adeel Pervaiz.

The permit holders are Qatar Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, his uncle, brother and seven other royal dignitaries of the oil-rich Gulf

nation.

The permits are issued every year to members of the royal families of the Gulf countries, despite growing criticism in Pakistan against the hunting of the endangered bird species, the report said.

The allotted hunting areas are spread over Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab provinces. The hunters can hunt 100 houbara bustards in a 10-day safari during the three-month hunting season between November 1, 2019 and January 31, 2020. The permit is person-specific, it said.

Economy News

1. 'World Habitat Award' for Odisha's JAGA Mission

Recently, Odisha has won the 'World Habitat Award' for its ambitious initiative- Jaga Mission.

It aims at transforming the slums into livable habitat with all necessary civic infrastructure and services at par with the better off areas within the same urban local body and to continuously improve the standard of the infrastructure and services and access to livelihood opportunities.



World Habitat Award.

This award is given by World Habitat, in partnership with United Nations Habitat, every year, in recognition of innovative, outstanding, and revolutionary ideas, projects, and programmes from across the world in

the field of housing.

United Nations Habitat or United Nations Human Settlements Programme

It is the United Nations agency for human settlements. It is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all.

It was established in 1978 as an outcome of the first UN Conference on Human Settlements and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat I) held in Vancouver, Canada, in 1976.

UN-Habitat is headquartered at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, Kenya.

World Habitat

It is an international not-for-profit organisation/foundation established in the United Kingdom.

It works internationally to help bring the best housing to the people who need it the most.

Jaga Mission

Odisha Liveable Habitat Mission (OLHM)- JAGA is a society under the Housing & Urban Development Department, Government of Odisha.

The slum land titling mission was being executed in collaboration with Tata Trusts and Norman Foster Foundation.

Odisha government rolled out this first of its kind project on May 7, 2018.

This mission was also awarded the 'India Geospatial Excellence Award' for technological innovation in transforming the lives of urban poor.

India Geospatial Excellence Award

This award is given by GeoSmart India which is an interactive platform that demonstrates the collective and shared vision of the Indian geospatial community and is the most prominent stakeholder event of the Indian geospatial ecosystem.

2. Vande Bharata Express: ICF gets nod to manufacture 45 new Train 18 by 2021-22

The Railway Board has given approval to the Integral Coach Factory (ICF) to manufacture 45 new sets of Train 18, which has been christened as Vande Bharat Express, by 2021-22, railway ministry officials said on Wednesday.

A senior railway ministry official connected to the development told IANS, "The work for manufacturing 45 new Vande Bharata train sets has been accorded to ICF."

He said the ICF has been asked to roll out the 45 new trains by 2021-22, when India completes 75 years of Independence. The official pointed out that go through for the manufacturing of 45 trains were given after the Research Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO) approved a revised design which will ensure that the new trains will be lighter in weight, and will consume less power.



The new 45 rakes will be manufactured on a revised design of the Train-18 model approved by the RDSO.

The official also pointed out that the ICF has been asked to first procure the propulsion system for the train and also emphasise on the Make In India initiative of the government while manufacturing the train.

The gleaming blue-nosed train comes with the best amenities, including high-speed on-board WiFi, GPS-based passenger information system, touch-free bio-vacuum toilets, LED lighting, mobile charging points and a climate control system that automatically adjusts the temperature.

The 16-coach train has two executive compartments with 52 seats each and trailer coaches with 78 seats each. The executive class coaches have rotating seats to match the direction of the train.

3. Railways to start free Wi-Fi 'RailWire' at 6,471 stations by March 2021: Piyush Goyal

Minister of Railways and Commerce & Industry, Piyush Goyal, said in the Parliament today that Wi-Fi services are proposed to be provided at 6,471 stations (all stations other than F category halt stations) of the Indian Railways. Under 'RailWire', 5,816 stations are targeted to be provided with Wi-Fi services by March 2020.

The remaining 655 stations are targeted to be provided with Wi-Fi services by March 2021. So far this facility has been provided at 5,491 stations up to 3 December 2019.

RailTel has signed agreement/MoU for extending Wi-Fi services with the following agencies:

Mahataa Information India Pvt Ltd (MI IPL) (a group company of Google).

Power Grid Corporation of India Limited.

Department of Telecom under Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF).

Tata Trusts and Vijaya Vahini Charitable Foundation and Indian Railways.

During the month of October, 2019, a total of 1,51,45,433 (1.51 crore) unique users logged into free Wi-Fi services provided at Railway Stations of Indian Railways.

So far funds of Rs 27.77 crores have been sanctioned by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) under Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) for the provision of Wi-Fi services at 200 railway stations in rural areas.

The remaining stations have been completed in collaboration with other organizations under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)/charity funding and in partnership with Railways.

This information was given by the Minister of Railways and Commerce & Industry, Piyush Goyal in a written reply to a question in Rajya Sabha today.

4. Mandatory to link PAN Card-Aadhaar by December 31: I-T Department



It is mandatory to link your PAN with Aadhaar by the end of this year, the Income Tax Department said in a public message on Sunday.

“Building a better tomorrow! To reap seamless benefits of income tax services, complete the vital link before 31st December, 2019,” the department said.

It is mandatory to link your PAN with Aadhaar, according to the public message issued a fortnight before the deadline ends.

The deadline to link the permanent account number (PAN) with Aadhaar was extended till December 31 by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) through an order issued in September this year. Earlier, the deadline for this linkage was September 30.

The CBDT frames policy for the Income Tax Department.

The Supreme Court, in September last year, had declared the Centre’s flagship Aadhaar scheme as constitutionally valid and held that the biometric ID would remain mandatory for the filing of I-T returns and allotment of PAN. Section 139

AA (2) of the Income Tax Act says that every person having PAN as on July 1, 2017, and is eligible to obtain Aadhaar, must intimate his Aadhaar number to tax authorities.

Aadhaar is issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to a resident of India and PAN is a 10-digit alphanumeric number allotted by the I-T Department to a person, firm or entity.

5. BrahMos missile successfully test-fired from Odisha's Chandipur

Supersonic cruise missile BrahMos was successfully test-fired from a base in Odisha's Chandipur on Tuesday, Defence sources said.



The land-attack version of the missile was test-fired from a mobile autonomous launcher at Launch Complex-3 of the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur near here at around 8.30 am, they said.

The trial of the surface-to-surface missile was successful, meeting all the parameters, a Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) source said.

The BrahMos missile is a medium-range ramjet supersonic cruise missile capable of being launched from submarines, ships, fighter jets or land.

6. GEM launches National Outreach Programme - GEM Samvaad

A national outreach Programme, GeM Samvaad, was launched by Anup Wadhawan, Secretary, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India and Chairman, GeM in New Delhi today. The outreach programme will take place with stakeholders across the country and with local sellers in order to facilitate onboarding of local sellers on the marketplace while catering to specific requirements and procurement needs of buyers.

The outreach programme will take place from 19 Dec 2019 to 17 Feb 2020 and will cover all the States and UTs of the country.

GeM has more than 15 lakh products and around 20,000 services, more than 3 lakh registered sellers and service providers and more than 40,000 Government buyer organizations. In its short journey of three years, GeM has processed more than 28 lakh orders worth Rs. 40,000 crores in Gross Merchandise Value out of which 50% has been transacted by MSMEs.

State Departments and Organizations and Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) have been using GeM for their buying needs. Sellers from the State are also benefiting through access to national Public Procurement market using the portal. Through GeM Samvaad the marketplace is looking forward to receiving feedback from users which shall be used for making improvements and advancements in the system.

Government e Marketplace (GeM) is the national public procurement portal offering end to end solutions for all procurement needs of Central and State Government Departments, PSUs, autonomous institutions and local bodies. Since its commencement on 9th August 2016, GeM has transformed public procurement in the country by leveraging technology and making procurement contactless, paperless, and cashless.

schedule for GeM Samvaad available on GeM website <https://gem.gov.in>

7. Anti-hijacking exercise conducted off Kochi port



The Indian Navy, in collaboration with Indian Coast Guard, Cochin Port Trust and all other concerned stakeholders, conducted a large-scale anti-hijacking exercise off the Port of Kochi on Wednesday.

This was the first time that such a large-scale exercise involving all stakeholders was conducted in Kerala, defence press release said here.

The exercise code-named Apharan saw participation of multiple agencies, including more than 12 ships and helicopters of the Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard and Cochin Port Trust.

"As part of the scenario, interdiction of a rogue vessel outside Kochi port and insertion of Marine Commandos onto the rogue/hijacked vessel through boarding operations, as well as slithering down onto its deck from a Sea King helicopter were conducted," the release said.

Apharan was aimed at streamlining the response mechanism/preparedness to thwart any attempt by anti-national elements to hijack a merchant vessel or attempt forced entry of a rogue/commandeered merchant vessel into the Kochi harbour.

Within the ambit of coastal security architecture, hijacking of a merchant vessel is one of the challenging scenarios, response to which requires synergy of resources, assets and efforts of all stakeholders, including the state government, the release said.

The exercise was conducted under the aegis of the Commander-in-Chief, Coastal Defence (Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Naval Command), Kerala.

The drill provided an opportunity to all stakeholders to assess the preparedness of their respective organisations, identify gaps to address them on priority as well as to formulate an integrated crisis management plan for Kochi Port.

8. Tata vs Mistry: NCLAT restores Cyrus Mistry as chairman of Tata Sons

More than three years after the dramatic boardroom sacking of Cyrus Mistry, an appeals court — National Company Law Appellate Tribunal — on Wednesday reinstated him as the executive chairman of the Tata group. The 172-page order, while upholding Mistry's charges that he was ousted without due process, said the action taken by Ratan Tata and others against the former Tata Sons chairman was oppressive and illegal.

The two-judge Bench headed by Justice S J Mukhopadhyaya declared the October 2016 resolution passed by the Tata Sons board to remove Mistry, a scion of Shapoorji Pallonji family, from his post and all consequential actions taken by Tata Group companies to remove him as director "illegal". Mistry was suddenly and hastily removed without any reason and in the absence of any discussion in the board meeting, according to the NCLAT verdict. The order also held the appointment of N Chandrasekaran, the current chairman of Tata Sons, as executive chairman as "illegal". Chandra was appointed chairman of Tata Sons in February 2017. The court has granted four weeks for restoring Mistry to the post of Tata Sons' executive chairman.

Soon after the 3 pm order, Bombay House, the Tata headquarters in Mumbai, was a scene of gloom and uncertainty, according to an executive.

About 20 minutes drive away, SP Centre, the office of Shapoorji Pallonji Group, was getting into a celebratory mood. “Today’s judgment is not a personal victory for me, but is a victory for the principles of good governance and minority shareholders’ rights,” Mistry said in a statement early evening. The \$110-billion Tata group, busy working the phones and holding meetings with lawyers before challenging the order in the Supreme Court, took time to react. In a carefully worded statement, Shuva Mandal, general counsel, said Tatas were analysing the order. “It is not clear as to how the NCLAT order seeks to overrule the decisions taken by shareholders of Tata Sons and listed Tata operating firms at validly constituted shareholder meetings.”



ALSO READ: NCLAT order a victory of good governance & vindication of my stand: Mistry

The group will take appropriate legal recourse, he said, while assuring stakeholders that it will continue to “operate in a fair and equitable manner”. Earlier in the court, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, Tata Sons Counsel said, “all legal resources will be taken.” The court has asked Ratan Tata and the nominees of the Tata Trusts to desist from taking any decision in advance which requires majority resolution of the board of directors. Tata Trusts, which holds 66 per cent in Tata Sons, had played a critical role to remove Mistry as the group chairman in 2016.

In his order, Mukhopadhyay said, “For over 50 years, the Mistry family as the significant minority shareholder of Tata

Sons, has always endeavoured to play the role of a responsible guardian of an institution the entire nation is proud of.” He added, “We further hold that the company’s affairs have been or are being conducted in a manner prejudicial and oppressive to Cyrus Mistry and the interest of the company and group companies.”

Corporate governance issues: The appellate tribunal also termed the conversion of Tata Sons Limited from being a public company to private as illegal and oppressive to the minority members and depositors. It asked the registrar of companies to make the required corrections.

ALSO READ: Cyrus reinstated: Tata Group stocks to remain under pressure, say analysts

Tata Sons had sought shareholders’ consent to convert itself to a private company in September 2018, impacting the minority shareholders’ rights to sell their shares.

NCLAT directed the Tata Group to protect the interest of all stakeholders in the future by consulting the minority shareholders Shapoorji Pallonji Group for appointment of executive chairman, independent directors and directors.

9. RBI goes for ‘Operation Twist’ to bring down long-term rates

On December 19, the Reserve Bank of India decided to conduct its version of ‘Operation Twist’ through simultaneous purchase and sale of government securities under Open Market Operations (OMOs) for Rs 10,000 crore each on December 23. Operation Twist is the name given to a US Federal Reserve monetary policy operation, which involves the purchase and sale of government securities to boost the economy by bringing down long-term interest rates.

Why Operation Twist now?

The RBI slashed key interest rate — repo rate — by 135 points to 5.15 per cent this year but banks passed on only part of it. The one-year median marginal cost of funds based lending rate (MCLR) has declined only 49 basis points (bps).
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Operation Twist normally leads to lower longer-term yields, which will help boost the economy by making loans less expensive for those looking to buy homes, cars and finance projects, while saving becomes less desirable because it doesn't pay as much interest. The RBI says the decision follows "a review of the current liquidity and market situation and an assessment of the evolving financial conditions". The central bank is keen that long-term rates are brought down to kickstart investment and revive the economy. The idea is that business investment and housing demand were

primarily determined by longer-term interest rates.

What the RBI plans on December 23?

The central bank has decided to purchase Rs 10,000 crore worth of one security — the 6.45 percent GS 2029. This is a long term 10-year bond. On the sell side, it has proposed to sell four securities for a total of Rs 10,000 crore — 6.65 percent GS 2020, 7.80 per cent GS 2020, 8.27 per cent GS 2020 and 8.12 per cent GS 2020. All these four securities are short term, and maturing in 2020. When the RBI purchases 6.45 per cent bond on December 23,



demand is expected to rise, leading to lower long-term yield. On the other hand, sale of short-term securities will push up the short-term rate. However, bankers say 'Operation Twist' is likely to put an end to the interest rate cut expectations. "It's a signal of the RBI displeasure on Treasury Bill yield curve trending below the repo rate and its willingness to absorb the government's supply at a time when the investors' appetite is low in long duration," said a banker.

The US experience.

In 1961, the John F Kennedy administration proposed a solution to revive the weak economy through lower longer-term interest rates while keeping short-term interest rates unchanged — an initiative now known as 'Operation Twist' in homage to the Chubby Checker song and dance then sweeping the nation. The US Fed employed the policy. The Fed then implemented the 'Operation Twist' programme in late 2011 and 2012 to stimulate the economy hit by the global financial crisis. The first programme was from September 2011 through June 2012 and involved the redeployment of \$400 billion in Fed assets. The second ran from July 2012 through December 2012 and encompassed a total of \$267 billion in response to continued sluggish growth in the US economy. In December 2012, the Fed ended the programme and replaced it with another policy of "quantitative easing", which seeks to lower long-term rates by making open-market purchases of longer-dated Treasuries and mortgage-backed securities.

What are Open Market Operations?

The RBI manages and controls the liquidity, rupee strength and monetary management through purchase and sale of government securities (G-Secs) in a monetary tool called Open Market Operations. OMOs are the market operations conducted by the RBI by way of sale and purchase of G-Secs to and from the market with an objective to adjust the rupee liquidity conditions in the market on a durable basis. When the RBI feels that there is excess liquidity in the market, it resorts to sale of securities thereby sucking out the rupee liquidity. Similarly, when the liquidity conditions are

tight, the RBI may buy securities from the market, thereby releasing liquidity into the market. On Friday, the yield on 10-year benchmark bonds fell by 13 bps to 6.60 per cent, following the RBI announcement.

10. Pinaka guided rocket system successfully test-fired from base on Odisha coast

Upgraded version of Pinaka guided rocket system successfully test-fired from base on Odisha coast on December 19. The flight of the Pinaka guided rocket was successfully tested from Integrated Test Range, Chandipur, off the Odisha coast.

Pinaka is an artillery missile system capable of striking into an enemy territory up to a range of 75 km with high precision.



The Pinaka Mk-II rocket is modified as a missile by integrating with the navigation, control and guidance system to improve the accuracy and enhance the range.

The navigation system of the missile is also aided by the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) also called as NAVIC.

The mission achieved all the objectives including enhancing the range, accuracy and sub-system functionality.

The missile was fired from Pinaka launcher system in deployment configuration.

The flight article was tracked by multiple range systems viz telemetry, radars, electro-optical targeting system (EOTS), etc, which confirmed the textbook flight performance.

The missile system has been jointly developed by various Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) laboratories viz Armament Research and Development Establishment (ARDE), Research Centre Imarat (RCI), Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), Proof & Experimental Establishment (PXE) and High Energy Materials Research Laboratory (HEMRL).

The trial was conducted under the supervision of Director RCI BHVS Narayana Murthy, Director ARDE Dr V Venkateswara Rao, Director ITR Dr BK Das, and Director PXE Shri DK Joshi.

Secretary DDR&D and Chairman DRDO Dr G Satheesh Reddy congratulated the teams involved in the flight trial.

11. HDFC Bank becomes third Indian company to cross \$100 billion-mark

HDFC Bank crossed the \$100 billion market capitalization became the third firm in the country to achieve this milestone. HDFC Bank has a market cap of \$140.74 billion, and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) a market cap of \$114.60 billion. HDFC Bank ranks 110th in the list of world's most valued companies. There are 109 companies on the list with a market cap of over \$100 billion. The world's most valued banks and financial companies which have a market cap of over \$100 billion, HDFC Bank ranked at 26.

Stock Values

The stock trading 0.4% higher at Rs 1,297.50 on the BSE while Sensex fell 0.09% to 41519.69 points. The stock gained 22%, while the S&P Bankex, the broader gauge of banking stocks, rose nearly 20%. TCS, Reliance Industries and HDFC Bank each can notch Rs 20 lakh crore in market capitalisation over the next few years.

HDFC Bank growing 20-22 per cent consistently as it is very good money deployment machine with a strong size. The capital well above regulatory requirements, analysts expect HDFC Bank to deliver strong credit growth going forward. HDFC Bank's share comes after most analysts remain bullish on the stock considering the lender's strong focus on productivity and digitization along with cost rationalization which can result in better profitability and credit growth going forward.

HDFC Bank

It surpassed Rs 7 trillion in market capitalization for the first time. It became the third Indian company after TCS and Reliance Industries to reach this milestone. The private lender in November touched Rs 7,00,252.30 crore market capitalization, a metric used to evaluate the size of a company.

Awards

1. President Ram Nath Kovind presents Visitor's Awards 2019

President Ram Nath Kovind will present the Visitor's awards, 2019 at Rashtrapati Bhavan. The awards will be conferred during the conference of Vice-Chancellors of Central Universities, Directors of IISERs and Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. These will be on issues such as the promotion of research, innovation and entrepreneurship, industry-academia linkages, filling up of vacancies, creating and utilising alumni-based endowment funds and completing infrastructure projects.

2. 2020 Crystal Award: World Economic Forum



The World Economic Forum (WEF) announced the Winners of 26th Annual Crystal Award for the year 2020. The Crystal Awards recognise as well as celebrates the achievements of leading artists and cultural figures whose leadership inspires inclusive and sustainable change. The annual awards are hosted by the World Economic Forum's World Arts Forum.

WEF's 2019 Crystal Award Recipients

Jin Xing– China's media personality. She was recognized for her leadership in shaping inclusive cultural norms

Theaster Gates– Chicago-based artist. He was recognized for his

leadership in creating sustainable communities

Lynette Wallworth- Australian artist. She won for her leadership in creating inclusive narratives

Deepika Padukone- Indian actress. She won the award for her remarkable leadership in raising mental health awareness. She is the only Indian actress who has won the 26th Annual Crystal Award for spreading mental health awareness.

The three awardees will be honoured at opening session of the World Economic Forum's 2020 Annual Meeting in Davos-Klosters, Switzerland, on 21-24 January. The 2020 annual meeting will take place from 22-25 January under the theme, 'Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World'. The WEF Annual Meeting brings together leaders from international organisations, government, civil society, culture and media, business, foremost experts and young generation from all over the world, at the highest level and in representative ways.

3. Amitabha Bagchi wins 2019 DSC Prize

Amitabha Bagchi on Monday won the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature 2019 for his novel "Half the Night is Gone".

The book beat "99 Nights in Logar" (Jamil Jan Kochai), "The Far Field" (Madhuri Vijay), "There's Gunpowder in the Air" (Manoranjan Byapari, translated from Bengali by Arunava Sinha), "The City and the Sea" (Raj Kamal Jha) and "The Empty Room" (Sadiah Abbas) for the USD 25,000 prize.

The prize was awarded at the IME Nepal Literature Festival which concluded on Monday here.

Bagchi was handed over the prize by Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali.

This year's international jury panel was headed by Harish Trivedi and Jeremy Tambling, Kunda Dixit, Carmen Wickramagamage and Rifat Munim as its other members.

The festival was organised at the Taalbarahi Chowk on the bank of the lake Fema in this picturesque Nepal city.

4. Indian peacekeepers in South Sudan receive prestigious UN medal

Recently, Indian peacekeepers serving in South Sudan have been awarded the United Nations (UN) medal for their service and contribution to building peace in the country.



Facts:

About United Nations Peacekeeping:

United Nations Peacekeeping was created in 1948. It provides security and the political and peacebuilding support to help countries make the difficult, early transition from conflict to peace.

It deploys troops and police from around the world,

integrating them with civilian peacekeepers to address a range of mandates set by the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the General Assembly.

The UN Peacekeeping is guided by three basic principles (1) Consent of the parties (2) Impartiality and (3) Non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.

The UN Peacekeepers are led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DKPO).

UN Peacekeepers are often referred to as Blue Berets or Blue Helmets.

Significance of UN Peacekeeping:

UN peacekeeping is a unique global partnership. It brings together the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Secretariat, troop and police contributors and the host governments in a combined effort to maintain international peace and security.

Its strength lies in the legitimacy of the UN Charter and in the wide range of contributing countries that participate and provide precious resources.

India and UN Peacekeeping:

India has a long history of cooperation with the UN peacekeeping. One of the earliest peacekeeping missions deployed in India was the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) in 1948 itself.

Currently, there are more than 6,700 troops and police from India who have been deployed to UN peacekeeping missions. India is the fourth highest amongst troop-contributing countries.

In 2007, India became the first country to deploy an all-women contingent to a UN peacekeeping mission.

Reforms needed under UN Peacekeeping:

Improving the safety of peacekeepers

Finding political solutions to conflicts and enhancing the political impact of peacekeeping

Reforming peacekeeping based on incentivisation, innovation and institutionalisation.

Allowing troop-contributing countries like India to participate in decisions of the UN Security Council concerning the deployment of her troops.

5. Sahitya Akademi announces its annual Award

Sahitya Akademi announced its annual Award- 2019 in 23 languages yesterday.

In Hindi, Nand Kishore has been awarded for his Poetry 'Chheelate Hue Apne Ko' and in English Dr Shashi Tharoor has been awarded for his Non-Fiction 'An Era of Darkness'.

In Tamil, Cho Dharman has been awarded for his Novel 'Sool' and in Gujarati, Ratilal Borisagar has been awarded for his Essays 'Mojama Revu Re'.

In Sanskrit, Penna Madhusudan will get the award for his Poetry 'Prajna Chakshusha' and in Urdu, Shafey Kidwai will be awarded for his Biography 'Sawaneh-E-Sir Syed: Ek Bazdeed'.

Events

1. India to Host 36th International Geological Congress in March 2020



India is gearing up to host the 36th International Geological Congress (IGC) in the capital during the first week of March next year. The theme of the forthcoming conference is 'Geosciences: The Basic Science for Sustainable Development'. Popularly described as the Olympics of Geosciences, the IGCs are a prestigious global geoscientific events held once in four years and participated by around 5000-6000 geoscientists from all across the world. In a bid to gear up for the same, a half-day interactive workshop was held in the capital yesterday which was inaugurated by the Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences Dr. M. Rajeevan, and Secretary Coal & Mines, Shri Anil Kumar Jain, Secretary, Coal & Mines.

Speaking on the occasion, Shri Jain said that the 36th IGC is expected to provide a platform for international cooperation in all major field of geosciences including launching of collaborative programs, provision of investment opportunities in mining, mineral exploration and environmental management and related enterprises. Dr. M. Rajeevan said that the forthcoming IGC would help us in dealing with the problems of sustainability, energy crisis, water crisis, climate change, environmental issues and resource management.

Informing about the highlights of the forthcoming 36th IGC, it was said that it has an exhaustive Science program and an impressive range of field excursions. A state-of-the-art geo exposition will be held alongside the Congress where leading companies in the mines and mineral sector will showcase their products and services. Considering the scale and importance of the event, an emphatic participation from states was sought as they stand to benefit immensely from the scientific conclave.

It may be noted that India is the only Asian country to host the event twice. In 1964, India had hosted it for the first time, which was the 22nd IGC. The event was inaugurated by the then President of India Dr.SarvepalliRadhakrishnan. The IGC is making a comeback to the Indian soil after 56 long years much to the enthusiasm of the entire geoscientific community. The event is being funded by the Ministry of Mines (MoM) and Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) with the support of the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) and the National Science Academies of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Geological Survey of India is the nodal agency for organizing the event

The interactive half day conference held in the capital was attended by Dr.K.Rajeswara Rao, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Mines, Padma Shri V.P. Dimri, President, 36th IGC and Shri Alok Chandra, Economic Adviser, Ministry of Mines. The workshop was attended by senior level officers of 14 State Governments who evinced great interest in all aspects of the Congress.

2. MP govt to host Orchha festival in March, 2020

"Namaste Orchha" festival marking the cultural landscape of Madhya Pradesh will be held in the ancient town in March next year, a top bureaucrat said on Wednesday.

The three-day festival will be organised by the state government from March 6 to March 8 in Orchha, which won the award for the best heritage city for 2017-18.

Orchha, a town in Bundelkhand region, is famous for its Ram Raja temple besides numerous monuments and royal palaces.

"Orchha remains among the essential destinations of about 97,000 out of 3.50 lakh foreign tourists visiting the state. This is possibly the biggest tourist spot for foreign tourists visiting the state," Madhya Pradesh Chief Secretary Sudhi Ranjan Mohanty said.

3. Rashtrapati Bhavan Hosts Conference of Heads of Central Universities /Institutes of Higher Learning

Rashtrapati Bhavan hosted a conference of 46 Heads of Central Universities/Institutes of Higher Learning in the fields of agriculture; pharmaceuticals; aviation; design; footwear-design; fashion; petroleum and energy; maritime studies; planning and architecture and information technology, today (December 14, 2019).



During the Conference different sub groups comprises of heads of various institutes made presentations on issues such as promotion of research; promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship among students; building industry - academia linkages; filling up of vacancies including faculty from foreign universities; creating alumni funding and enhancing alumni activities; completion of major infrastructure projects in a time bound manner.

Speaking at the concluding session, the President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, said that India has set itself for sustainable development as it strives to eliminate poverty and become a middle-income country. Each of these institutes will be instrumental to the realisation of our socio-economic goals. He said that the Central Agricultural Universities can support our national goal of promoting sustainable agriculture, productivity and supporting our farmers with useful research. The same is true of all other institutes linked to different areas be it pharmaceutical, aviation, oceanography, petroleum and energy, IT, Design, Architecture and others. Each of them is doing well but we need to raise the bar further. As our economy grows we need to acquire the scale and efficiency that is greater and better than the best in the world. These institutes have the mandate to lead research, to provide skilled talent, to spur innovation and to set an agenda for sustainable and climate-friendly development.

The President said that while developing their specialisations, these institutes should collaborate and learn from each other. This is possible for institutes in the same field. It is also possible across categories. For example, advances in Information Technology can aid Architects and town planners to design Smart Cities that minimise use of energy. All of them should set up systems that can scout for and support cross-category collaborations which might hold creative promises to solve many of our problems.

The President said that great institutes of learning are different due to the leadership they nurture and build. The heads of leading higher education institutes must discharge their key role as leadership mentors for the next generation of academic-administrators. This would ensure that we have a ready talent pool of directors, deans and administrators who can conceive, establish and administer our institutes of higher education.

Union Ministers for Chemicals and Fertilizers; Human Resource Development; Commerce and Industry; Petroleum and Natural Gas and Minister of State in the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare also addressed the Conference.

4. The 5-day music festival Tansen Samaroh began in Gwalior

The Music festival Tansen Samaroh began in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh on 17 December. The festival will be held from 17-21 December 2019. The popular classical music festival began with the traditional style with the recitations of Harikatha and Milad. 2019 is the 95th year of the festival. It is one of the oldest and most esteemed classical music



festivals.

Highlights:

- ◆ The festival is organized by Ustad Alauddin Khan Kala Evam Sangeet Academy that functions under the Madhya Pradesh culture department.
- ◆ The music-driven platform in the festival is used by the musicians and instrumentalists from all over the world
- ◆ The artist will showcase talent during the festival.
- ◆ Participants:

The festival attracts thousands of musicians and aspiring singers from all over India. Artistes from the US, Greece, Iran, and Belgium will perform in different sessions of the Tansen festival. The festival is also attended by a huge crowd of music lovers every year.

History:

The five-day festival is celebrated in the memory of one of the most eminent singers of Indian history Mian Tansen every year. Tansen was one of the nine gems in the court of Emperor Akbar, one of the greatest Mughal rulers of India.

2019 Tansen Award:

Vocalist Pandit Vidyadhar Vyas will be presented with the National Tansen Award for 2019 during the Tansen Festival. The award was instituted by the Madhya Pradesh government. The award recognizes the outstanding exponents of Hindustani classical music. It carries a cash prize of Rs.2 lakh.

5. Three-day state-level orange festival begins in Manipur

In Manipur, a three-day State-level Orange Festival began yesterday. Chief Minister N. Biren Singh inaugurated the festival at district headquarters Tamenglong. Tamenglong district is the largest producer of orange fruit in Manipur. The state government under the sponsorship of North Eastern Council organise the festival annually to promote the fruit and encourage its growers.. This year, there are more than 300 orange stalls in the festival. On day one, orange growers' competition was held and prizes were distributed to top position holders.

As part of the festival, cultural shows, traditional games, orange queen completion, seminar for growers will be held. The festival will conclude tomorrow.

Speaking at the inaugural function Manipur Chief Minister said Tamenglong orange would received Geographical Indication Tagging Certificate very soon. Separate fund would kept in the state budget for festivals related to fruit and would increase the prizes for participating orange growers from next year.

Sports News

1. Smriti Mandhana in ICC Women's ODI and T20I teams of the year

India opener Smriti Mandhana was on Tuesday named in both the International Cricket Council's ODI and T20 teams of year.



Mandhana has Jhulan Goswami, Poonam Yadav and Shikha Pandey for company in the ODI team of the year and all-rounder Deepti Sharma in the T20 side. The 23-year-old Mandhana has played 51 ODIs and 66 T20Is for India, besides a couple of Test matches.

She has combined tally of 3476 runs in T20Is and ODIs.

Australia's Alyssa Healy was chosen as the T20 cricketer of the year following her record-breaking 148 against Sri Lanka earlier this year.

The ODI cricketer of the year honour went to Australia's Ellyse Perry, who scored 441 runs at an average of 73.50 and took 21 wickets at 13.52.

2. Deepak Punia Crowned United World Wrestling Junior Freestyle Wrestler Of The Year

World Championships silver medallist Deepak Punia added yet another feather to his cap after being named the 'Junior Freestyle Wrestler of the Year' by United World Wrestling (UWW). Punia's transition from the junior to the senior circuit has been phenomenal as he not only ended an 18-year drought to become the first Indian wrestler to win a junior world title but he also backed it up with a silver medal on his debut at the 2019 Senior World Wrestling Championships.



"I am feeling very happy. It's a great honour for me to be selected among all the wrestlers from the world over. This is really a big source of inspiration for me to keep improving and giving my best," said Punia on the rare honour.

Punia's maturity, resourcefulness and fearless on the big stage made him the only Indian wrestler to make it to the final at Nur-Sultan. An injury prevented him from taking the mat against Hassan Yazdani of Iran in the final but Punia made it a debut to remember by grabbing a highly-coveted Tokyo Olympics berth in 86kg as well.

The sterling display propelled him to the No. 1 position in 86kg in the UWW rankings and the talented teenager is leaving no stone unturned to prepare for the Olympics next year. The 2016 cadet world champion is putting in the hard

yards under the watchful eyes of the 2008 Beijing Olympics silver medallist and 2003 World Championships silver medallist, Murad Gaidarov brought in by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) and Principal Sponsor Tata Motors.

"I have been pretty satisfied with the few days of training we did so far. Gaidarov has been working hard on my weaknesses. We had worked on my ground wrestling and my speed work and I feel I am getting better," explained Punia.

"My confidence level no doubt has been steadily increasing. Now I feel more eager and motivated to give my 100% at the Tokyo Olympics next year and I am really thankful to Tata Motors for taking care of all my needs," he added.

3. Pat Cummins becomes most expensive foreign buy in history of IPL auctions

Australia fast bowler Pat Cummins on Thursday etched his name into the annals of IPL history by breaking Ben Stokes' record for the most expensive foreign player at IPL auctions. Being bought at INR 15.50 crores by Kolkata Knight Riders, Cummins's figure went past Stokes' auction bid of 14.5 crores at the IPL 2017 auctions.



Australian all-rounder Glenn Maxwell, who had a base price of INR 2 crores was bought by

Kings XI Punjab (KXIP) after a fierce bidding war with Delhi capitals. In doing so, Maxwell crossed the highest bid foreign player in the IPL in the last 2 years, surpassing Sam Curran who was bought for INR 7.2 crores at last year's auction.

"Absolutely pumped to be back on board, KKR. I can't wait to work with Baz McCullum, Eoin Morgan, Sunil Narine and Andre Russell. Can't wait to get over there," said Pat Cummins after being bought by KKR.

Maxwell was part of the 2nd set of players to be auctioned at the 2020 IPL Auction in the all-rounder category. As soon as Maxwell's name came up for the auction, Delhi Capitals and Kings XI Punjab got involved in a fierce bidding war which started from 2 crores and only ended at 10.75 crores with the player being bought by Kings XI Punjab with Anil Kumble accepting the warm applause.

Earlier, Maxwell's compatriots Chris Lynn and Aaron Finch too went under the hammer with Mumbai Indians buying the former for Rs 2 crore (Base price) while the latter being pocketed by Royal Challengers Bangalore for INR 4.4 crores.

4. ICC continues partnership with UNICEF for ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2020

The International Cricket Council (ICC) today announced it has extended its partnership with UNICEF through to the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2020 with the focus on empowering women and girls through cricket.

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The extension of the global charity partnership will once again see the ICC provide UNICEF with a platform for fundraising to help bring positive change to women and girls and drive awareness for the work that UNICEF does as a global champion for children's rights in cricket playing nations around the world.

During the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup, UNICEF raised \$180,000 as part of One Day 4 Children and this money will go directly to fund a girls' cricket project in Afghanistan. The programme which will run for 12 months, will comprise of a new competitive cricket competition for school aged girls as well as training for 120 teachers and providing cricket equipment to deliver cricket and a community outreach programme working with elders to reinforce the positive impact girls playing cricket can have.

5. Mirabai Chanu bags Gold in 6th Qatar International Cup in Doha

Former world champion, weightlifter Saikhom Mirabai Chanu won the women's 49kg category gold medal to open India's account at the 6th Qatar International Cup in Doha yesterday.

Chanu bagged gold with an effort of 194kg in the Olympic qualifying event, with the points which will come in handy when the final rankings for Tokyo 2020 cut are done. The 24-year-old Manipuri lifted 83kg in snatch and 111kg in clean and jerk to finish on top of the podium.

However, it was a performance way below her personal best of 201 kg.

6. Kuldeep Yadav becomes first Indian to bag two international hat-tricks

Wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav on Wednesday became the first India player to claim two hat-tricks in international cricket, joining an elite band that includes pace legend Wasim Akram.

He achieved the feat during the second One-day International against the West Indies here.

The 25-year-old from Uttar Pradesh, who had claimed his first ODI hat-trick against Australia in Kolkata in 2017, dismissed Shai Hope, Jason Holder and Alzarri Joseph in the last three deliveries of the 33rd over to achieve the milestone.



Former Pakistan captain Akram, ex-Pakistan spinner Saqlain Mushtaq, former Sri Lankan pacer Chaminda Vaas and New Zealand's Trent Boult have two hat-tricks to their name.

Chetan Sharma, Kapil Dev and Mohammed Shami are the other Indians to have claimed a hat-trick in international cricket.

Veteran Sri Lankan pacer Lasith Malinga is the only bowler in the history of the game to take three hat-tricks, including two in the World

Cup.

Kuldeep achieved the feat in his eighth over with skipper Virat Kohli starting the proceedings with a stunning catch at deep mid-wicket, which sent opener Hope (78) back to the pavilion.

Holder was next in line as he was deceived in flight and Rishabh Pant whipped off the bails in time.

Alzarri then failed to pick up a wrong'un and was caught by Kedar Jadhav as his teammates celebrated.

Days

1. International Migrants Day-18 December



2. Geneva to host first Global Refugee Forum: UN

The first-ever "Global Refugee Forum" will take place here between Dec. 16 and 18, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) announced on Monday.

The UNHCR and the government of Switzerland will jointly host this global meeting at the Palais des Nations, the European headquarters of the United Nations, it said in a statement.

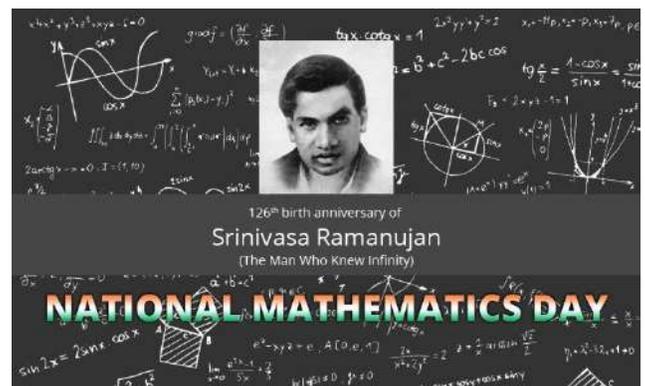
Convened at the ministerial level, the event will be the first high-level gathering to follow up on the practical implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, which was affirmed by the United Nations (UN) in New York in December 2018.

The aim of the forum is to give impetus to efforts to achieve the compact's objectives and translate international solidarity into concrete action, the UNHCR said.

High-level delegations from co-host Switzerland and from co-convening countries Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Germany, Pakistan and Turkey as well as the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres are scheduled to attend the forum.

3. National Mathematics Day 2019

Different people have a different perception of Maths, for some it's boring and for some it's very dangerous. Shakuntala Devi once said 'What is mathematics? It is only a systematic effort of solving puzzles posed by nature'. The former Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh declared this day as National Mathematics Day on February 26, 2012, when he was visiting the Madras University in order to pay tribute to Ramanujan's achievements and celebrated his 125th birth anniversary. Since then, December 22 is celebrated as India's National Mathematics Day.



The day marks the birth anniversary of self-taught Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan and his contributions in the field of mathematics. Ramanujan was born on December 22, 1887, into a Tamil brahmin Iyenger family in Erode, Madras Presidency. The main objective behind celebrating the day is to raise awareness among people about the importance of mathematics for the development of humanity.

Marking the importance of National Mathematics Day 2019. Here are some interesting, inspirational and humorous math quotes. Happy Mathematics Day 2019 to all!

37. Nation celebrates Vijay Diwas

The nation celebrated Vijay Diwas to commemorate India's victory over Pakistan in 1971 war. Rich tributes are being paid to the martyrs who laid down their lives during the war.

On this day in 1971, the chief of the Pakistani forces, General Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi, along with 93 thousand troops, had surrendered unconditionally to the allied forces consisting of Indian Army and Mukti Bahini led by Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora in Dhaka after their defeat in the Liberation war. After the end of 14 day war resulted in subsequent secession of East Pakistan into Bangladesh.

People in News

1. CBI officer wins India Cyber Cop of the Year' award



CBI officer B P Raju has won the 'India Cyber Cop of the Year 2019' award by NASSCOM-DSCI for cracking a fraud case in an online entrance exam conducted by an engineering college in Rajasthan, officials said on Tuesday.

The award was given to Raju by Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Ajay Prakash Sawhney, during the annual Information Security Summit held at Gurgaon, a CBI spokesperson said here.

Raju had investigated the case and exposed the fraud in the online entrance examination, he said.

"The investigation team headed by B P Raju, arrested nine accused persons and collected incriminating evidence from digital devices, which revealed the modus operandi adopted by the accused. The investigation was also completed within the stipulated time period," he said.

2. ASU head of research Sethuraman Panchanathan nominated to lead National Science Foundation

An Arizona State University administrator could soon be the director of the National Science Foundation.

Sethuraman Panchanathan, known as "Panch" to most, is an executive vice president and the chief research and innovation officer at ASU.

The Trump administration announced Thursday that it will nominate Panchanathan to the NSF leadership position. The agency's director position is appointed by the president and needs confirmation by the U.S. Senate. A director's term lasts six years.



During his time at ASU, the university's research expenditures have increased dramatically, to \$635 million in 2018.

He was appointed to the National Science Board in 2014, the first American of Indian origin to serve on the board, according to his ASU biography. The board oversees the National Science Foundation.

The foundation, a federal agency with an annual budget of more than \$8 billion, funds nearly a quarter of all federally supported research at colleges and universities, the agency's website says.

"In many fields such as mathematics, computer science and the social sciences, NSF is the major source of federal backing," the foundation's website says.

Panchanathan has worked in various roles at ASU since 1997. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in India, and his Ph.D. in electrical and computer engineering in Canada, according to his curriculum vitae.

In 2017, Panchanathan was one of two finalists for president of the University of Arizona. The Arizona Board of Regents ultimately selected Robert Robbins to lead the university.

3. Miss World 2019: Jamaica's Toni-Ann Singh Wins Miss World 2019, India Bags Third Spot

The coveted Miss World title for the year 2019 was today won by Jamaica's Toni-Ann Singh, beating her contenders from France and India. Suman Rao, who represented India in the annual beauty pageant, came in third while France's Ophely Mezino came in a close second. Toni-Ann Singh, 23, is a women's studies and psychology student at US' Florida State University, according to the Miss World website. Ms Singh, according to the website, aspires to be a medical doctor and has previously served as the president of the Caribbean Students Association at the university.

Ms Singh, who is the fourth Jamaican woman to win the beauty pageant, enjoys singing, cooking, vlogging, volunteering and singing in her spare time. The most important thing in her life, according to the Miss World website, is her mother, who she credits for allowing and supporting her to pursue her dreams in every way possible.



The prestigious title was won by Jamaica after a decades-long gap. The island-nation had last won the contest in 1993, when Lisa Hanna had represented the country.

The last time India had won the Miss World title was in 2017, when Manushi Chillar represented the country, in a win which had come in 17 years after Bollywood actor Priyanka Chopra had bagged the title in the year 2000.

The 2019 Miss World contest was held in London. British broadcaster Piers Morgan was the head judge of the event and had asked questions to the finalists. Mr Morgan, on Twitter, congratulated Ms Singh.

4. Sridhar Patra appointed NALCO CMD

Sridhar Patra was on Monday appointed as the chairman-cum-managing director of NALCO, a Personnel Ministry order said.

Patra is at present Director (Finance) in the National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO).

He has been appointed as the CMD of NALCO till the date of his superannuation, i.e. October 31, 2024, the order said.

5. Lt Gen Manoj Mukund Naravane to take over as new Army chief on Tuesday

Lieutenant General Manoj Mukund Naravane will on Tuesday take over as the next chief of Army staff leading the 1.3 million-strong force. He is currently serving as vice-chief of the army. Army Chief Gen Bipin Rawat is due to retire on December 31 after a three-year stint as the Army chief.

Before taking charge as vice-chief of the Army staff in September, Lt Gen Naravane was heading the Eastern Command of the Army which takes care of India's nearly 4,000-km border with China.

"It is an honour to be given this responsibility," Lt Gen MM Naravane said in his first reaction after appointment as next Army chief.

When asked about the challenges that may lay ahead of him in his new posting, Lt Gen MM Naravane had said that it was too early to say about it right now as to what would be the focus areas. "Will have to deliberate on it in times to come."

In his 37 years of service, Lt Gen Naravane has served in numerous command and staff appointments in peace, field and highly active counter-insurgency environments in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast. He has also commanded a Rashtriya Rifles Battalion in Jammu and Kashmir and an infantry brigade on the eastern front.

He was also part of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka and had served as India's defence attache at the Indian Embassy in Myanmar for three years.

Rankings

1. India is the world's third largest producer of scientific articles, following China and US: Report

India has emerged as the world's third-largest publisher of science and engineering articles, according to the latest US report created with statistics compiled by the US National Science Foundation (NSF).

The data, which was released on Tuesday, stated that in 2008, India published 48,998 science and engineering articles.

This increased to 1,35,788 articles in 2018 and the country now accounts for 5.31 per cent of the total world publications in science and engineering.



In China, the number of global scientific publications increased from 2,49,049 in 2008 to 5,28,263 in 2018, in a growth rate of 7.81 per cent per annum.

The US, the total global publications in science and engineering articles grew at a rate of 0.71 percent from 3,93,979 in 2008 to 4,22,808 in 2018.

According to the report, China's rate of research output has grown almost twice as fast as the world's annual average for the last 10 years, while the output of the US and the European Union (EU) has grown at less than

half the world's annual growth rate.

"China and India have increased their share of the growing world output," the report said.

Though a long way to go, as compared to the US and China in terms of the number of scientific article publications, India's emergence as the third largest publisher is mainly due to a phenomenal double-digit growth rate in the last one decade from 2008 to 2018, the report noted.

The global research output, as measured by peer-reviewed science and engineering (S&E) journal articles and conference papers, grew about four per cent annually over the last 10 years.

Other countries in top 10 scientific article producers in the world

The other countries which made it to the top 10 list are Germany (1,04,396), Japan (98,793), UK (97,681), Russia (81,579), Italy (71,240), South Korea (66,376) and France (66,352).

Research papers from the US and the EU continue to have the most impact.

However, China has shown a rapid increase in producing impactful publications, as measured by references to journal articles and conference papers.

Specialisation in scientific fields differs among countries, with the US, the EU and Japan more specialised in health sciences and China and India more specialised in engineering, as measured by journal articles and conference papers.

"Among the 15 largest publication producers, countries with higher than average growth rates include South Korea (four per cent), Brazil (five per cent), China (eight per cent), Russia (10 per cent), India (11 per cent) and Iran (11 per cent)," the report said.