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Current Affairs December 2018

- PULLICAT LAKE
- GRAPHENE
- ROTAVIRUS
- MAGNUS CARLSEN
- YELLOW VESTS MOVEMENT
- NATIONAL LIVESTOCK MISSION
- WEIGHT OF SCHOOL BAGS FOR STUDENTS FIXED

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1. WEIGHT OF SCHOOL BAGS FOR STUDENTS FIXED
2. PULLICAT LAKE
3. GRAPHENE
4. ROTAVIRUS
5. MEASLES CASES RISE BY 30% ACROSS THE GLOBE
6. MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT APPROVES 16% QUOTA FOR MARATHAS
7. MAGNUS CARLSEN
8. YELLOW VESTS MOVEMENT
9. NATIONAL E-GOVERNANCE PLAN
10. MISSION MODE PROJECTS
11. e-COURTS
12. ZONAL COUNCILS OF INDIA
13. ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS COMMISSION
14. THE SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE (SLD)
15. SAGAR PROGRAMME (SECURITY AND GROWTH FOR ALL IN THE REGION)
16. 'INDIA THIRD LARGEST CONTRIBUTOR TO CARBON EMISSION'
17. NAPCC (NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON CLIMATE CHANGE)
18. 'WITNESS PROTECTION SCHEME, 2018'
19. NATIONAL MILK DAY
20. NATIONAL LIVESTOCK MISSION
21. COLOUR REVOLUTIONS IN INDIA
22. SAHITYA ACADEMY AWARDS FOR 2018 ANNOUNCED
23. EXPORT CREDIT GUARANTEE
24. MEGHRAJ
25. BHARATNET
26. MINISTRY OF NEW AND RENEWABLE ENERGY CONFERRED SKOCH AWARD
27. WATER STORAGE LEVEL OF 91 MAJOR RESERVOIRS
28. GLOBAL HACKATHON ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
29. HORNBILL FESTIVAL IN KOHIMA
30. DIGITAL SKY PLATFORM
31. EX COPE INDIA 2018
32. SHRI SUNIL ARORA, NEW CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER OF INDIA
33. EX SHINYUU MAITRI-2018
34. INDIAN PAVILLION AT COP-24
35. SWADESH DARSHAN PROJECT IN THE STATE OF NAGALAND
36. INDIA WATER IMPACT SUMMIT-2018
37. INDIA'S HEAVIEST COMMUNICATION SATELLITE GSAT-11 LAUNCHED
38. AGRICULTURE EXPORT POLICY, 2018
39. SHAHPURKANDI DAM (NATIONAL PROJECT) ON RIVER RAVI IN PUNJAB
40. DHARMA GUARDIAN 2018
41. INS ARIHANT, COMPLETION OF NUCLEAR TRIAD
42. 'INDIA ELECTED AS A MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS UNION (ITU) COUNCIL
43. PILOT GANGA GRAMS
44. INSPIRE 2018
45. SAMUDRA SHAKTI
46. INDRA 2018
47. GSLV MKIII-D2 LAUNCHES GSAT-29
48. SEZ POLICY REPORT
49. BLUE REVOLUTION
50. 'SHE-BOX'
51. PAISA
52. MISSION RAKSHA GYAN SHAKTI
53. IN - RN EXERCISE KONKAN-18
54. HAUSLA-2018
55. BHARAT BILL PAYMENT SYSTEM
56. WHITE LABEL ATMs (WLAs)
57. INFLATION INDEXED BONDS (IIBS)
58. SOVEREIGN GOLD BOND (SGB)
59. COMMERCIAL PAPER (CP)
60. CATEGORIES UNDER PRIORITY SECTOR LENDING
61. WTO MEMBERS APPLIED 137 NEW TRADE RESTRICTIVE MEASURES IN 1 YEAR

62. IDENTITY OF RAPE VICTIMS NOT TO BE DISCLOSED IN ANY CASE
63. SC ON ECO SENSITIVE ZONES
64. EXTRADITION
65. RBI GOVERNOR URJIT PATEL QUILTS
66. ARUNDHATI BHATTACHARYA APPOINTED SWIFT INDIA CHAIRMAN
67. BIOPLASTICS
68. NOTA EFFECTS IN RECENT STATE ELECTIONS
69. MEKEDATU PROJECT
70. REVISING GDP ESTIMATES
71. MINORITY WELFARE SCHEMES
72. SAUBHAGYA
73. UDAY
74. UNNAT JYOTI BY AFFORDABLE LED FOR ALL (UJALA)
75. PRAAPTI
76. E-FLOW
77. DEVELOPMENT OF WATER RESOURCES INFORMATION SYSTEM (DWRIS)
78. PRADHAN MANTRI KRISHI SINCHAYEE YOJANA (PMKSY)- HAR KHET KO PANI (HKKP)
79. BORDER MANAGEMENT: SMART BORDER FENCE UNVEILED
80. LAUNCH OF STUDENT POLICE CADET (SPC) PROGRAMME
81. PRADHAN MANTRI ROJGAR PROSAHAN YOJANA (PMRPY)
82. ATAL BIMIT VYAKTI KALYAN YOJANA
83. "UMANG: ESIC – CHINTA SE MUKTI" MOBILE APP
84. HOUTHİ REBELS IN YEMEN
85. JOURNALISM AI
86. BIODIESEL
87. AMENDED CITIZENSHIP RULES 2009
88. 15TH FINANCE COMMISSION
89. RISING CAD
90. INDIA'S ROLE CRUCIAL FOR AFGHAN PEACE PROCESS: PAKISTAN
91. OSIRIS-Rex
92. KERALA MAN'S DEATH PENALTY COMMUTED
93. STATUE OF MAHATMA GANDHI HAS BEEN REMOVED
94. USA BILL ON TIBBET
95. H5N1 VIRUS
96. SATTRIYA DANCE FESTIVAL
97. WORKSHOP ON CHOLA DYNASTY
98. AMITAV GHOSH HONOURED WITH 54TH JNANPITH AWARD
99. WEST JERUSALEM AS ISRAEL'S CAPITAL
100. GRAPHENE CAN DETECT BRAIN DISORDERS
101. MOUNT SOPUTAN VOLCANO
102. BANK CREDIT
103. INDIA IS THE CLOSEST FRIEND OF THE MALDIVES: PRESIDENT IBRAHİM MOHAMED SOLIH
104. COP 24, KATOWICE OUTCOMES
105. CARBON CREDIT CONUNDRUM AT KATOWICE
106. INDIA ANNOUNCES \$1.4 BILLION AID TO MALDIVES
107. UK 'GOLDEN VISA' SCHEME TO BE SUSPENDED DUE TO CORRUPTION FEARS
108. NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR DENOTIFIED, NOMADIC AND SEMI-NOMADIC TRIBES (NCDNSNT)
109. ELECTORAL BOND SCHEME, 2018
110. UNDEMOCRATIC UN BUREAUCRATIC STRUCTURE
111. TRANSGENDER RIGHTS, NALSA JUDGEMENT, TRANSGENDER BILL 2018
112. MILITARY DIMENSION OF CHINA-PAK CORRIDOR CONCERNS India

113. WITHDRAWAL OF US FORCES FROM SYRIA AND AFGHANISTAN
114. INTERCEPTION OF COMPUTER RESOURCES BY 10 AGENCIES
115. BOGIBEEL BRIDGE
116. BANK WRITE OFF vs LOAN WAIVER
117. DAM SAFETY BILL, 2018
118. "SURROGACY (REGULATION) BILL, 2016"
119. THE CONSUMER PROTECTION BILL, 2018
120. INDIAN NAVY'S INFORMATION FUSION CENTRE
121. CYCLONE PHETHAI: RAIN LASHES ODISHA
122. RUPEE LOGS BEST DAY IN OVER 5 YEARS, VAULTS 112 PAISE ON CRUDE SLIDE
123. 'SELFISH BRAIN THEORY'
124. LIFTING THE BAN ON OXYTOCIN
125. UN HUMAN RIGHTS PRIZE FOR 2018
126. FOUR BANKS MAY COME OUT OF PCA
127. ANGEL INVESTOR
128. AUTOMATICALLY SUSPEND MEMBERS WHO ENTER WELL OF HOUSE, AMENDMENT OF RULE 374A (1)
129. INDONESIA'S ANGRY 'CHILD OF KRAKATOA' RUMBLES ON
130. NO RISE IN WORKING WOMEN DESPITE HIGH LITERACY LEVELS: ICRIER STUDY
131. ELECTION COMMISSION MAKES FRESH PUSH FOR POLL REFORMS
132. RBI SHORTLISTS WIPRO, TCS, 4 OTHERS FOR PCR
133. RUSSIA 'SUCCESSFULLY' TESTS HYPERSONIC MISSILE
134. JAPAN TO RESUME COMMERCIAL WHALING
135. BIMAL JALAN TO HEAD PANEL ON RBI'S ECONOMIC CAPITAL FRAMEWORK
136. POCSO ACT: ASSAULT ON BOYS PUNISHABLE BY DEATH
137. CABINET NOD FOR ₹10,000-CRORE GAGANYAAN HUMAN SPACE MISSION
138. INDIAN SCIENTISTS ACHIEVEMENT IN 2018
139. NARENDRA MODI RENAMES ROSS ISLAND TO NETAJI DWEEP

WEIGHT OF SCHOOL BAGS FOR STUDENTS FIXED IN DELHI

The weight of a school bag in Delhi is officially fixed, states a Delhi government circular on Saturday. It says school bags for students in Class I and II should not be above 1.5 kg; for Classes III to V (2-3 kg), Classes VI-VII (4 kg), Classes VIII—IX (4.5 kg), and Class X (5 kg). The circular also asks schools not to assign any home work to Class I and II children.

It asked schools to inform the students in advance about the books and notebooks to be brought to the school on a particular day. The decision of the Delhi Directorate of Education follows Centre's order and guidelines for capping the weight of school bags for Classes I-X.

PULLICAT LAKE

Pulicat Lagoon is the second largest brackish water lagoon in India, after Chilika Lake. Pulicat Lagoon is considered to be the second largest brackish water body in India measuring 759 km². The Lagoon is one the three important wetlands to attract North-East Monsoon rain clouds during October to December season to Tamil Nadu. The lagoon comprises the following regions, which adds up 759 km² according to Andhra Pradesh Forest Department:

- 1) Pulicat Lake (Tamil Nadu-TN & Andhra Pradesh-AP)
- 2) Marshy/Wetland Land Region (AP)
- 3) Venadu Reserve Forest (AP)
- 4) Pernadu Reserve Forest (AP)

The lagoon was cut across in the middle the Sriharikota Link Road, which divided the water body into lake and marshy land. The lake encompasses the Pulicat Lake Bird Sanctuary. The barrier island of Sriharikota separates the lake from the Bay of Bengal

and is home to the Satish Dhawan Space Centre. Major part of the lake comes under Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh.

GRAPHENE

Graphene is an allotrope (form) of carbon consisting of a single layer of carbon atoms arranged in a hexagonal lattice. It is a semimetal with small overlap between the valence and the conduction bands (zero bandgap material). It is the basic structural element of many other allotropes of carbon, such as graphite, diamond, charcoal, carbon nanotubes and fullerenes.

Graphene has many uncommon properties. It is the strongest material ever tested, conducts heat and electricity efficiently, and is nearly transparent. Graphene shows a large and nonlinear diamagnetism, greater than that of graphite, and can be levitated by neodymium magnets. Geim and Novoselov received awards for their pioneering research on graphene, notably the 2010 Nobel Prize in Physics.

ROTAVIRUS

Rotavirus is the most common cause of diarrhoeal disease among infants and young children. It is a genus of double-stranded RNA viruses in the family *Reoviridae*. Nearly every child in the world is infected with rotavirus at least once by the age of five. Immunity develops with each infection, so subsequent infections are less severe; adults are rarely affected. There are nine species of this virus, referred to as A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H and I. *Rotavirus A*, the most common species, causes more than 90% of rotavirus infections in humans.

The virus is transmitted by the faecal-oral route. It infects and damages the cells that line the small intestine and causes gastroenteritis (which is often called

"stomach flu" despite having no relation to influenza).

MEASLES CASES RISE BY 30% ACROSS THE GLOBE

Cases of measles across the world were 30 per cent higher in 2017 than the year before, according to an official report. Health chiefs have blamed anti-vaxxers spreading misinformation for the resurgence of the potentially life-threatening infection. The World Health Organization (WHO) has also pinpointed collapsing health systems and complacency for the worrying trend.

Multiple countries - notably Germany, Russia and Venezuela - have had their measles elimination certificate withdrawn over the last 12 months. A country loses its measles elimination status when 'the same type of virus has been circulating for more than 12 continuous months'.

MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT APPROVES 16% QUOTA FOR MARATHAS

The Bill passed offers reservation of seats for admission in educational institutions and posts in Public Service to Marathas, who have been categorized as educationally and socially backward class. Earlier CM Fadnavis has also tabled the ATR (Action Taken Report) on the SBCC (State Backward Class Commission) recommendations for Maratha community reservations in education and seeking government jobs.

Marathas are entitled to reservation benefits, which is enshrined in Article 15(4) and 16(4) of the Constitution. The panel further suggests looking forward at exceptional circumstances generated on declaring Marathas as educationally and socially backward and their consequential

entitlement to reservation benefits. Therefore, the state government has the power to decide within the Constitutional provision to address the emerging situation in the state.

Maratha community comprises 30 percent of the Maharashtra population, which has been seeking reservation in education and government jobs for a long time. Therefore, their demand for the same in July and August this year had taken a violent turn in the state.

MAGNUS CARLSEN

Sven Magnus Carlsen is a Norwegian chess grandmaster and the current World Chess Champion. His peak rating of 2882, achieved in 2014, is the highest in history. He surpassed a rating of 2800 in 2009 and reached number one in the FIDE world rankings in 2010, becoming the youngest person ever to achieve those feats.

Carlsen became World Champion in 2013 by defeating Viswanathan Anand. In the following year, he retained his title against Anand, and won both the 2014 World Rapid Championship and World Blitz Championship, thus becoming the first player to simultaneously hold all three titles. He defended his main world title against Sergey Karjakin in 2016, and against Fabiano Caruana in 2018.

YELLOW VESTS MOVEMENT (GILETS JAUNAS)

Depending on whom you ask, France is embroiled in its worst unrest in a decade or perhaps even 50 years. Its President Emmanuel Macron returned to the country from the G20 summit on Sunday to find Paris burning, and protests in several other cities to boot. Here's a ready reckoner on the ongoing turmoil that has lakhs of French citizens taking to the streets.

The ongoing protests in France are an extraordinary venting of rage and resentment by ordinary working people, aimed at the mounting inequalities that have eroded their lives. The backlash erupted suddenly in November as a protest against Macron's fuel tax hikes to reduce emissions that are slated to kick-in from January. The protestors took to wearing the high-visibility fluorescent jackets that all motorists in France must carry in their vehicles, thus getting named the Yellow Vests protests. However, as the unrest gained steam over the past three weeks, other demands have been tacked on.

NATIONAL E-GOVERNANCE PLAN

The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) , takes a holistic view of e-Governance initiatives across the country, integrating them into a collective vision, a shared cause. Around this idea, a massive countrywide infrastructure reaching down to the remotest of villages is evolving, and large-scale digitization of records is taking place to enable easy, reliable access over the internet. The ultimate objective is to bring public services closer home to citizens, as articulated in the Vision Statement of NeGP.

The Government approved the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), comprising of 27 Mission Mode Projects and 8 components, on May 18, 2006. In the year 2011, 4 projects - Health, Education, PDS and Posts were introduced to make the list of 27 MMPs to 31 Mission Mode Projects (MMPs). The Government has accorded approval to the vision, approach, strategy, key components, implementation methodology, and management structure for NeGP. However, the approval of NeGP does not constitute financial approval(s) for all the Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) and components under it.

The major core infrastructure components are State Data Centres (SDCs), State Wide Area Networks (S.W.A.N), Common Services Centres (CSCs) and middleware gateways i.e National e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway (NSDG), State e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway (SSDG), and Mobile e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway (MSDG).

New initiatives include a framework for authentication, viz. e-Pramaan and G-I cloud, an initiative which will ensure benefits of cloud computing for e-Governance projects.

MISSION MODE PROJECTS

A mission mode project (MMP) is an individual project within the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) that focuses on one aspect of electronic governance, such as banking, land records or commercial taxes etc.

Within NeGP, "mission mode" implies that projects have clearly defined objectives, scopes, and implementation timelines and milestones, as well as measurable outcomes and service levels.

NeGP comprises 31 mission mode projects (MMPs), which are further classified as state, central or integrated projects. Each state government can also define five MMPs specific to its individual needs.

e-COURTS

The Indian judiciary comprises of nearly 15,000 courts situated in approximately 2,500 court complexes throughout the country. Under the e-Courts MMP, it is proposed to implement ICT in Indian judiciary in 3 phases over a period of 5 years. The MMP aims to develop, deliver, install, and implement automated decision-making and decision-support systems in 700 courts across Delhi, Bombay, Kolkata and Chennai; 900 courts across 29 State/

Union Territory capitals; and 13,000 district and subordinate courts across the Nation.

The objectives of the project are:

1. To help judicial administration in streamlining their day-to-day activities
2. To assist judicial administration in reducing the pendency of cases
3. To provide transparency of information to the litigants
4. To provide judges with easy access to legal and judicial databases

ZONAL COUNCILS OF INDIA

Zonal Councils are advisory councils and are made up of the states of India that have been grouped into six zones to foster cooperation among them. Five Zonal Councils were set up vide Part-III of the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. The North Eastern States' special problems are addressed by another statutory body - The North-Eastern Council, created by the North Eastern Council Act, 1971. Chairman of every zonal council is Union Minister of Home Affairs and all chief ministers of member states are deputy chairman. Chief secretaries of all states in every zone; council constitute standing committee of zonal councils.

The present composition of each of these Zonal Councils is as under:

- Northern Zonal Council, comprising Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, and Rajasthan;
- North-Eastern Zonal Council, comprising Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura; The State of Sikkim has also been included in the North Eastern Council vide North Eastern Council

(Amendment) Act, 2002 notified on 23 December 2002.

- Central Zonal Council, comprising the States of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh
- Eastern Zonal Council, comprising Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal;
- Western Zonal Council, comprising Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Goa, Gujarat, and Maharashtra;
- Southern Zonal Council, comprising Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Lakshadweep, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana.

ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS COMMISSION

The Administrative Reforms Commission or ARC is the committee appointed by the Government of India for giving recommendations for reviewing the public administration system of India. The first ARC was established on 5 January 1966. The Administrative Reforms Commission was initially chaired by Morarji Desai, and later on K. Hanumanthaiah became its chairman when Desai became the Prime Minister of India.

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) was constituted on 31 August 2005, as a Commission of Inquiry, under the Chairmanship of Veerappa Moily for preparing a detailed blueprint for revamping the public administrative system. It has given total 15 reports on various issues and almost all of them are at various stages of implementation.

THE SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE (SLD)

The IISS Asia Security Summit: The Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) is a "Track One" inter-governmental security forum held

annually by an independent think tank, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) which is attended by defense ministers, permanent heads of ministries and military chiefs of 28 Asia-Pacific states. The forum gets its name from the Shangri-La Hotel in Singapore where it has been held since 2002.

The summit serves to cultivate a sense of community among the most important policymakers in the defence and security community in the region. Government delegations have made the best out of the meeting by holding bilateral meetings with other delegations on the sidelines of the conference. While primarily an inter-governmental meeting, the summit is also attended by legislators, academic experts, distinguished journalists and business delegates.

The participants have included Australia, Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Canada, Chile, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Sweden, Thailand, East Timor, United Kingdom, United States and Vietnam.

SAGAR PROGRAMME (SECURITY AND GROWTH FOR ALL IN THE REGION)

SAGAR is a term coined by PM Modi in 2015 during his Mauritius visit with a focus on Indo-Pacific Rim Countries associated mainly in IOR ARC. In 2018 keynote address to Shangri-La Dialogue PM Modi made it clear that free and open Indo-Pacific navigation on high seas is non-negotiable. It is in consonance with Act East Policy and Doctrine of Blue Navy of India. It is a maritime initiative which gives priority to Indian Ocean region for ensuring peace, stability and prosperity of India in Indian Ocean region. The goal is to seek a climate

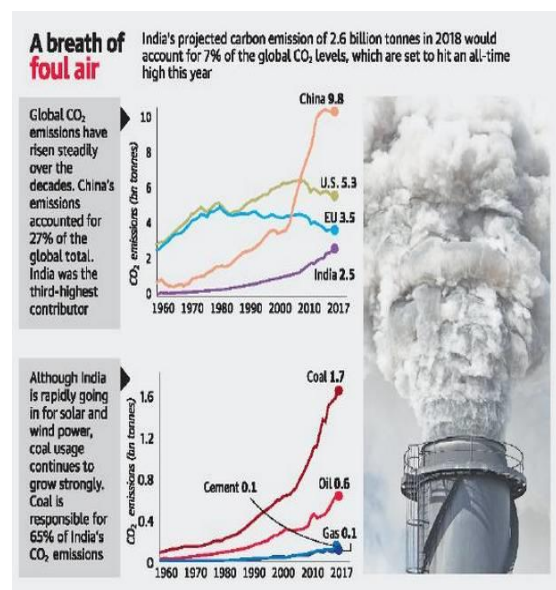
of trust and transparency; respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries; sensitivity to each other's interests; peaceful resolution of maritime issues; and increase in maritime cooperation. It is in line with the principles of Indian Ocean Rim Association.

'INDIA THIRD LARGEST CONTRIBUTOR TO CARBON EMISSION'

India, the third-highest contributor, is projected to see emissions rise by 6.3% from 2017. Global carbon emissions are set to hit an all-time high of 37.1 billion tonnes of CO2 in 2018.

India, the *third-highest* contributor, is projected to see emissions rise by 6.3% from 2017. The 2.7% projected global rise in 2018 has been driven by appreciable growth in coal use for the second year in a row, and sustained growth in oil and gas use, according to the study that was published simultaneously Wednesday in several leading scientific journals.

This week, representatives from more than 190 countries have begun discussions at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 24) in Katowice, Poland, on ways to equitably cut carbon emissions.



The 10 biggest emitters in 2018 are China, U.S., India, Russia, Japan, Germany, Iran, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Canada. The EU as a region of countries ranks third. China's emissions accounted for 27% of the global total, having grown an estimated 4.7% in 2018 and reaching a new all-time high.

Emissions in the U.S., which has withdrawn from its commitment to the Paris Agreement, account for 15% of the global total, and look set to have grown about 2.5% in 2018 after several years of decline.

Limiting global warming to the 2015 Paris Agreement goal of keeping the global temperature increase this century to well below 2°C, would need carbon dioxide emissions to decline by 50% by 2030 and reach net zero by about 2050.

NAPCC (NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON CLIMATE CHANGE)

The Action Plan was released on 30th June 2008. The core of the implementation of the Action plan are constituted by the following eight missions, that will be responsible for achieving the broad goals of adaptation and mitigation, as applicable.

1. **National Solar Mission:** The NAPCC aims to promote the development and use of solar energy for power generation and other uses with the ultimate objective of making solar competitive with fossil-based energy options. The plan includes: Specific goals with a target of 20GW by 2022 which was later increased to 100 GW by the Narendra Modi government in the 2015 Union budget of India.
2. **National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency:** Current initiatives are expected to yield savings of 10,000 MW by 2012. Building on the Energy Conservation Act 2001, the plan recommends: Mandating specific energy consumption decreases in large energy-consuming industries, with a system for companies to trade energy-savings certificates;
3. **National Mission on Sustainable Habitat:** To promote energy efficiency as a core component of urban planning, the plan calls for: Extending the existing Energy Conservation Building Code; A greater emphasis on urban waste management and recycling, including power production from waste; Strengthening the enforcement of automotive fuel economy standards and using pricing measures to encourage the purchase of efficient vehicles; and Incentives for the use of public transportation.
4. **National Water Mission:** With water scarcity projected to worsen as a result of climate change, the plan sets a goal of a 20% improvement in water use efficiency through pricing and other measures.
5. **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem:** The plan aims to conserve biodiversity, forest cover, and other ecological values in the Himalayan region, where glaciers that are a major source of India's water supply are projected to recede as a result of global warming.
6. **National Mission for a "Green India":** Goals include the afforestation of 6 million hectares of degraded forest lands and expanding forest cover from 23% to 33% of India's territory.
7. **National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture:** The plan aims to

support climate adaptation in agriculture through the development of climate-resilient crops, expansion of weather insurance mechanisms, and agricultural practices.

8. **National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change:** To gain a better understanding of climate science, impacts and challenges, the plan envisions a new Climate Science Research Fund, improved climate modeling, and increased international collaboration. It also encourages private sector initiatives to develop adaptation and mitigation technologies through venture capital funds.

'WITNESS PROTECTION SCHEME, 2018'

1. Supporting the 'Witness Protection Scheme, 2018' prepared by the Centre, in Mahender chawala vs union of India 2018 judgement said, "It shall be the law under Article 141/142 of the Constitution till the enactment of suitable parliamentary and/or State legislations on the subject."
2. The witness protection scheme essentially involves concealing the identity of the witness faced with threat, prohibits the publication or revealing, in any manner, the identity of the witness during investigation, trial and post-trial stage.
3. The court ordered that "in all the district courts in India, vulnerable witness deposition complexes shall be set up by the States and Union Territories" and this "should be achieved within a period of one year."
4. Would include that witness and accused do not come face-to-face during investigation or trial, monitoring of mail and telephone calls, changing the telephone number of witness including providing him unlisted number and other measures.
5. All this will be for a specific period and would not exceed three months at a time.
6. It may also include, the court said, "the option of the modification of the image of face of the witness including modification of the audio feed of the witness' voice, so that he/she are not identified. It may also include change of identity or relocation of witnesses to other places" within the state or outside.
7. There would be categorisation of witnesses as A, B , C on the basis of whether threat perception involves life, safety, reputation or property of the witness or his family members, and lastly moderate threat involving harassment or intimidation of the witness or his family member's, reputation.
8. The scheme says that the application for witness protection would be heard in camera where only necessary people would be allowed to be present. Deposition by the protected witness would be through live video links without being present in the courtroom.

NATIONAL MILK DAY

World Milk Day is a day established by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations to recognize the importance of milk as a global food. It has been observed on June 1 each year since 2001. November 26 is celebrated as

National Milk Day in the memory Dr Verghese K. Kurien. On the occasion of National Milk Day on , Union Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare Minister, Radha Mohan Singh said that the milk production has increased significantly from 137.7 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 164 million tonnes in 2016-17. Similarly, the per capita availability of milk increased from 307 gram in 2013-14 to 351 gram in 2016-17. Annual growth rate of Milk Production during the period 2011-14 was 4%, which has increased to 6% during 2014-17. The annual growth rate of world milk production has increased by 2% during 2014-17. India is world number one in milk production.

NATIONAL LIVESTOCK MISSION

National Livestock Mission is an initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. The mission, which commenced from 2014-15, has the objective of sustainable development of the livestock sector.

NABARD is the subsidy channelizing agency under Entrepreneurship Development & Employment Generation (EDEG) component of National Livestock Mission. This includes:

- Poultry Venture Capital Fund (PVCF)
- Integrated Development of Small Ruminants and Rabbit (IDSRR)
- Pig Development (PD)
- Salvaging and Rearing of Male Buffalo Calves (SRMBC)

COLOUR REVOLUTIONS IN INDIA

1. Father of Green Revolution- M.S. Swaminathan

2. Father of Green Revolution -Norman Borlaug
3. Father of Blue Revolution- Dr. Hiralal Chaudhary
4. Father of White Revolution- Dr. Verghese Kurien.

SAHITYA ACADEMY AWARDS FOR 2018 ANNOUNCED

1. Sahitya Akademi announced its annual Awards in 24 languages.
2. Those who have won the award for their collection of poetry include Sananta Tanti in Assamese, Paresh Narendra Kamat in Konkani, S Ramesan Nair in Malayalam and Dr Rama Kant Shukla in Sanskrit.
3. Writers who won the awards for short stories include Sanjib Chattopadhyay in Bengali, Mushtaq Ahmed Mushtaq in Kashmiri and Prof Bina Thakur in Maithili.
4. Inderjeet Kesar in Dogri, Anees Salim in English, Chitra Mudgal in Hindi are among the awardees in the novel category.

EK BHARAT SHRESHTHA BHARAT

Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat was announced by Hon'ble Prime Minister on 31st October, 2015 on the occasion of the 140th birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

The Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat programme, aims to actively enhance interaction between people of diverse cultures living in different States and UTs in India, with the objective of promoting greater mutual understanding amongst them. As per the programme, each year, every State/UT

would be paired with another State/UT in India for reciprocal interaction between the people. It is envisaged through this exchange, that the knowledge of the language, culture, traditions and practices of different states will lead to an enhanced understanding and bonding between one another, thereby strengthening the unity and integrity of India.

All States and UTs will be covered under the programme. There will be pairing of States/UTs at national level and these pairings will be in effect for one year, or till the next round of pairings. The State/UT level pairings would be utilized for state level activities. District level pairings would be independent of the State level pairings.

OBJECTIVES

- To celebrate the unity in diversity of our nation and to maintain and strengthen the fabric of traditionally existing emotional bonds between the people of our country;
- To promote the spirit of national integration through a deep and structured engagement between all states and union territories through a year-long planned engagement between states;
- To showcase the rich heritage and culture, customs and traditions of either state for enabling people to understand and appreciate the diversity that is India, thus fostering a sense of common identity;
- To establish long term engagements; and
- To create an environment this promotes learning between states by sharing best practices and experiences.

EXPORT CREDIT GUARANTEE

The ECGC Limited (Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India Ltd) is a company wholly owned by the Government of India based in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

It provides export credit insurance support to Indian exporters and is controlled by the Ministry of Commerce. Government of India had initially set up Export Risks Insurance Corporation (ERIC) in July 1957. It was transformed into Export Credit and Guarantee Corporation Limited (ECGC) in 1964 and to Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India in 1983.

1. Offers insurance protection to exporters against payment risks
2. Provides guidance in export-related activities
3. Makes available information on different countries with its own credit ratings
4. Makes it easy to obtain export finance from banks/financial institutions
5. Assists exporters in recovering bad debt
6. Provides information on credit-worthiness of overseas buyers
7. Provides a range of credit risk insurance covers to exporters against loss in export of goods and services as well.
8. Offers guarantees to banks and financial institutions to enable exporters to obtain better facilities from them.
9. Provides Overseas Investment Insurance to Indian companies investing in joint ventures abroad in the form of equity or loan and advances.
10. Cooperation has agreement with MIGA (Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency) an arm of World Bank.

MEGHRAJ

Meghraj is the name given to the initiative of Government of India for its new program which is going to take advantage of the Cloud Computing. Another name for Meghraj is the GI Cloud Initiative. It will enable the government to leverage cloud computing for effective delivery of e-services.

1. five essential characteristics (viz. on-demand self service, ubiquitous network access, metered use, elasticity and resource pooling)
2. three service models (infrastructure as a service, platform as a service and software as a service)
3. four deployment models (public cloud, private cloud, community cloud and hybrid cloud)

BHARATNET

The second phase of BharatNet project with an outlay of Rs 31,000 crore got off in November, 2017. Telecom Minister Manoj Sinha, along with Law and IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, Human Resource Development Minister Prakash Javadekar and Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi announced commencement of the phase. Reliance Jio paid the highest advance subscription fee of Rs 13 crore.

1. BharatNet project has the mandate to provide high-speed broadband to all panchayats by March 2019
2. Under BharatNet project, Modi government aims to connect 1.5 lakh panchayats through 10 lakh kilometres of additional optical fibre and give bandwidth to telecom players at nearly 75 per cent cheaper price for broadband and wifi services in rural areas.
3. The total project cost of BharatNet is around Rs 45,000 crore, of which Rs

11,200 crore have been used for the first phase.

4. After rural exchange rollout in the country when telecom services started, this is the biggest project involving domestically manufactured products for the entire project
5. This is the 2nd phase of BharatNet project. Under the second phase, the government will lay down optical fibre network across 1.5 lakh village panchayats. The first phase of BharatNet will be completed by the end of the year.
6. The project, then called the National Optical Fibre Network, was approved by the previous government in October 2011. However, only a few hundred kilometres out of 3 lakh kilometres of optical fibre were laid across the country.
7. Narendra Modi government approved changes in the project to expedite rollout and renamed it as BharatNet.
8. The Modi government expects to complete the entire BharatNet project, entailing an investment of Rs 42,000 crore in both the phases, by March 2019.
9. The government estimates that the second phase of BharatNet will double the existing optical fibre footprint in the country and generate employment of 10 crore mandays during the rollout of the project.
10. Under BharatNet phase 1, the government has set up 15,000 wifi hotspots of which around 11,000 are in rural areas and the rest in semi-rural
11. The government expects to complete the entire BharatNet project by March 2019.

MINISTRY OF NEW AND RENEWABLE ENERGY CONFERRED SKOCH AWARD

Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Government of India has been conferred the Skoch Award for National Significance at an event held recently in New Delhi.

The award has been conferred on the Ministry considering its purpose and critical role played in installing about 73 GW renewable energy capacity in the country. With 21 per cent of total installed capacity, within the year renewable energy grossed a magic figure of providing one billion units of electricity in the country.

Today, India ranks 4 in the world in wind energy capacity and 5th in solar & total renewable energy capacity installed in the world. India has played a critical role in setting up of international solar alliance.

WATER STORAGE LEVEL OF 91 MAJOR RESERVOIRS

The water storage available in 91 major reservoirs of the country for the week ending on December 06, 2018 was 94.994 BCM, which is 59% of total storage capacity of these reservoirs.

States having better storage than last year for corresponding period are Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. States having lesser storage than last year for corresponding period are Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, AP&TG (Two combined projects in both states), Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

GLOBAL HACKATHON ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

With the vision to further expand the idea of 'Artificial Intelligence, AI for All' articulated in the National AI Strategy, NITI Aayog organises hackathons to source sustainable, innovative and technologically-enabled solutions to address various challenges in the development space.

Taking the initiative forward, NITI Aayog is now partnering with Perlin – a Singapore-based AI start up - to launch the 'AI 4 All Global Hackathon', and is inviting developers, students, start-ups and companies to develop AI applications to make significant positive social and economic impact for India.

The challenge question seeks to develop solutions in Distributed Computing and Privacy Preserving techniques, such as multi-party computation, in AI. NITI Aayog organized its first hackathon, 'MoveHack' in August, on the sidelines of the Global Mobility Summit 2018, with the aim of garnering cutting-edge mobility applications.

HORNBILL FESTIVAL IN KOHIMA

The Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh inaugurated the hugely popular Hornbill Festival on December 1, 2018 in Kohima, coinciding with the Formation Day of Nagaland. Addressing the gathering, the Union Minister said that the annual Hornbill Festival is a spectacular event showcasing the rich ancient culture and civilization of the people of Nagaland.

DIGITAL SKY PLATFORM

Remotely Piloted Aerial Systems (RPAS), popularly referred to as drones, are a technology platform with wide-ranging applications. In August 2018, India had announced the release of its Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) to enable safe flying of RPAS in India. The CAR detailed the obligations of operators, remote pilots/users and manufacturers/ OEM for safe operations of RPAS and co-operative use of airspace. It also announced Digital Sky Platform, a first of its kind that implements 'no permission, no take-off' (NPNT) – a novel system of software-based self-enforcement to minimize deviations from the CAR. The regulations were to come in effect from December 1, allowing the industry time to ready themselves for the launch. Nano drones in India can start flying legally from today. For micro and above categories, operators and pilots are required to register on the Digital Sky Portal.

The platform has begun accepting registrations of users. Payments for Unmanned Aerial Operator's Permit (UAOP) and Unique Identification Numbers (UIN) will be accepted through the Bharat Kosh (bharatkosh.gov.in) portal.

To get permissions to fly, RPAS operators or remote pilots will have to file a flight plan. Flying in the 'green zones' will require only intimation of the time and location of the flights via the portal or the app. Permissions will be required for flying in 'yellow zones' and flights will not be allowed in the 'red zones'. The location of these zones will be announced soon. Permission, if granted, will be available digitally on the portal.

EX COPE INDIA 2018

Ex Cope India-18 is the fourth edition in the series of Bilateral Joint exercise held between IAF and USAF, which is conducted in India. This is the first time, the exercise is being planned at two Air Force bases, Kalaikunda and Panagarh from 03-14 Dec 18. USAF is participating with 12 X F15 C/D and 03 X C-130. IAF is participating with the Su-30 MKI, Jaguar, Mirage 2000, C-130J & AWACS aircraft.

SHRI SUNIL ARORA, NEW CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER OF India

Shri Shri Sunil Arora today assumed charge as the 23rd Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of India succeeding Shri O.P.Rawat. Shri Rawat who demitted the office on 1st December, 2018 after completing his tenure.

EX SHINYUU MAITRI-2018

The Japanese Air Self Defence Force (JASDF) is in India for a bilateral air exercise SHINYUU Maitri-18 with Indian Air Force from 03-07 Dec 18 at A F Station Agra. The theme of the exercise is joint Mobility/Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief (HADR) on Transport aircraft. The JASDF C2 aircraft along with aircrew/observers are part of this first air exercise between the two Air Forces. IAF is participating with An-32 and C-17 aircraft with aircrew & observers. The focus of the exercise is set for the IAF and JASDF crews to undertake Joint Mobility/ HADR operations. Display of heavy loading/ off loading are also planned to be practiced during this exercise.

INDIAN PAVILLION AT COP-24

Union Environment Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan inaugurated Indian Pavilion at the 24th meeting of Conference of Parties (COP-24) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which is being held at Katowice, Poland.

This year the theme of India Pavilion is 'One World One Sun One Grid' as highlighted by our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi during first assembly of the International Solar Alliance on October 2018. The Hon'ble Prime Minister has set an ambitious target that 40 per cent of its installed power capacity will be from non-fossil fuels by 2030.

SWADESH DARSHAN PROJECT IN THE STATE OF NAGALAND

"Development of Tribal Circuit: Peren-Kohima-Wokha Project" will be inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Nagaland, Shri Neiphiu Rio. This is the first project to be implemented in the state under Swadesh Darshan Scheme of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

The project "Development of Tribal Circuit: Peren-Kohima-Wokha" was sanctioned by the Ministry of Tourism in November 2015 for Rs. 97.36 Crores. Under the project the Ministry has developed facilities like Tribal Tourist Village, Eco Log Huts, Open Air Theatre, Tribal Rejuvenation Centre, Cafeteria, Helipad, Tourist Interpretation Centre, Wayside Amenities, Last Mile Connectivity, Public Conveniences, Multipurpose Hall, Nature Trails, Trekking Routes etc. Swadesh Darshan scheme is one among the flagship schemes of the Ministry of Tourism for development of thematic circuits in the country in a planned and prioritised manner.

INDIA WATER IMPACT SUMMIT-2018

India Water Impact Summit 2018, being jointly organized by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) and the Centre for Ganga River Basin Management and Studies (cGanga) from 5-7 December 2018 in New Delhi.

The efforts may take various forms including (but not limited to): data collection (sensors, LIDAR, modelling etc), hydrology, e-flows, agriculture, waste water and more.

Spotlight on 5 states: Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Delhi and Bihar. The objective is to showcase the efforts and works going on within the respective states.

Ganga Financing Forum: The 2018 Summit also introduces the inaugural Ganga Financing Forum that will bring a number of institutions to a common knowledge, information and partnership platform. The Hybrid Annuity Model has redefined the economic landscape of water and wastewater treatment in India. All tenders have been successfully bid out and financial closures being achieved. Additionally, the Government is also now encouraging development of smaller decentralised waste water treatment projects. The Financing Forum will bring together financial institutions and investors interested in Namami Gange programmes.

INDIA'S HEAVIEST COMMUNICATION SATELLITE GSAT-11 LAUNCHED

Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) heaviest and most-advanced high throughput communication satellite GSAT-11 was successfully launched from the Spaceport in French Guiana during the early hours today.

The launch vehicle Ariane 5 VA-246 lifted off from Kourou Launch Base, French

Guiana at 02:07 am (IST) carrying India's GSAT-11 and South Korea's GEO-KOMPSAT-2A satellites, as scheduled. The 5,854-kg GSAT-11 will provide high data rate connectivity to users of Indian mainland and islands through 32 user beams in Ku-band and 8 hub beams in Ka-band.

"GSAT-11 will boost the broadband connectivity to rural and inaccessible Gram Panchayats in the country coming under the Bharat Net Project, which is part of Digital India Programme," ISRO Chairman Dr K Sivan said. The Bharat Net Project aims to enhance the public welfare schemes like e-banking, e-health, e-governance among others.

AGRICULTURE EXPORT POLICY, 2018

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the Agriculture Export Policy, 2018. The Government has come out with a policy to double farmers' income by 2022.

Objectives of the Agriculture Export Policy are as under:

1. To double agricultural exports from present ~US\$ 30+ Billion to ~US\$ 60+ Billion by 2022 and reach US\$ 100 Billion in the next few years thereafter, with a stable trade policy regime.
2. To diversify our export basket, destinations and boost high value and value added agricultural exports including focus on perishables.
3. To promote novel, indigenous, organic, ethnic, traditional and non-traditional Agri products exports.
4. To provide an institutional mechanism for pursuing market access, tackling barriers and deal with sanitary and phyto-sanitary issues.

5. To strive to double India's share in world agri exports by integrating with global value chain at the earliest.
6. Enable farmers to get benefit of export opportunities in overseas market.

SHAHPURKANDI DAM (NATIONAL PROJECT) ON RIVER RAVI IN PUNJAB

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi today has approved implementation of Shahpurkandi Dam Project, Punjab on river Ravi. For this, Central Assistance of Rs. 485.38 cr (for irrigation component) would be provided over five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23.

Details:

- On completion of the project an Irrigation Potential of 5,000 ha in Punjab State and 32,173 ha in J&K State would be created.
- Funding for Central Assistance to Shahpurkandi Dam project shall be made through NABARD under existing system for funding of 99 PMKSY-AIBP projects under LTIF.
- In addition to existing monitoring mechanism for projects by Central Water Commission, a committee headed by Member, Central Water Commission and consisting of concerned Chief Engineers of Punjab and J&K and other concerned officers would be constituted to oversee/monitor the implementation of project.
- The Advisory committee of MoWR, RD&GR on Irrigation, Flood Control and Multipurpose Projects accepted the second Revised Cost Estimate amounting to Rs. 2715.70 crore (February, 2018 Price Level) in its 138th meeting held on 31.10.2018.
- The project would be implemented by Govt. of Punjab with Central Assistance of Rs. 485.38 crore The

project would be completed by June 2022.

Impact:

- Some of the water of the River Ravi at present is going waste through the Madhopur Headworks downstream to Pakistan whereas there is requirement for the same for use in Punjab and J&K. Implementation of the project would minimise such wastage of water.
- On completion of the project an additional Irrigation Potential of 5000 ha in Punjab State and 32173 ha in J&K State would be created.
- In addition, water being released to provide irrigation in 1.18 Lac ha area under UBDC system in Punjab would be managed/regulated efficiently through this project and the irrigation in the area would be benefitted. On completion, Punjab would also be able to generate 206 MW of hydropower.

DHARMA GUARDIAN 2018

Exercise DHARMA GUARDIAN - 2018, a joint military exercise between Indian & Japanese Armies, commenced at Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School, Vairengete, Mizoram, India on 01 November 2018. The Japanese contingent is being represented by 32nd Infantry Battalion, while the Indian side is being represented by 6/1 Gorkha Rifles. Approximately one platoon strength each of both the battalions is participating in this exercise. The opening ceremony was given a patriotic start by contingents of both the countries singing their respective national anthems. Being first of its kind, the 14 days long joint exercise is being conducted from 01 Nov 2018 to 14 Nov 2018.

INS ARIHANT, COMPLETION OF NUCLEAR TRIAD

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi received today the crew of Strategic Strike Nuclear Submarine (SSBN) INS Arihant. The submarine recently returned from its first deterrence patrol, completing the establishment of the country's survivable nuclear triad.

Stressing the significance of the successful deployment of INS Arihant for the completion of India's nuclear triad, the Prime Minister congratulated the crew and all involved in the achievement which puts India among a handful of countries having the capability to design, construct and operate SSBNs.

“INDIA ELECTED AS A MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS UNION (ITU) COUNCIL

India has been elected as a Member of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Council for another 4-year term (2019-2022). The elections to the Council were held during the ongoing ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2018 at Dubai, UAE. By securing 165 votes, India ranked third among the 13 countries elected to the Council from the Asia-Australasia region, and eighth among the 48 countries elected to the Council globally. The ITU has 193 member states who elect representatives to the Council.

PILOT GANGA GRAMS

Ganga Gram is a concept to transform the villages on the bank of river Ganga into ideal villages with emphasis on Open Defecation Free, Solid and Liquid Waste Management, Water Conservation, Ground Water

Recharge, modern crematorium, tree plantation, organic and medicinal plants. After declaration of all 4465 Ganga Bank villages as ODF, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation is working in the direction of sustaining the ODF status of this area.

INSPIRE 2018

“Energy efficiency saves the environment and makes businesses more competitive. While India needs to grow but we need to grow responsibly and the Government has taken several measures in this regard.” said Shri R K Singh, Union Minister of State (IC) for Power and New & Renewable Energy. The Minister was speaking at the inaugural of the International Symposium to Promote Innovation & Research in Energy Efficiency (INSPIRE 2018) here today. This is the second edition of INSPIRE and is being organised by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) and World Bank. The three-day symposium will focus on enhancing grid management, e-Mobility, financial instruments and technologies for energy efficiency in India.

SAMUDRA SHAKTI

INS Rana of the Eastern Fleet based at Visakhapatnam under the Eastern Naval Command is on deployment to the South East Asia and arrived at the port of Surabaya to participate in the inaugural edition of Indian Navy – Indonesian Navy Bilateral Exercise ‘*Samudra Shakti*’ scheduled from 12 to 18 Nov 18.

INDRA 2018

The joint military exercise between Indian and Russia EXERCISE INDRA 2018 on combating insurgency under the aegis of United Nations (UN) is being conducted at Babina Field Firing Ranges, Babina Military

Station from 18 November 2018. Company sized contingents of the 5th Army of the Russian Federation and a Mechanised Infantry Battalion of Republic of India will participate in the training exercise spanning for eleven days including induction and de-induction of the Russian contingent. The training will be supervised by a joint directing panel comprising of senior officials of both the national contingents.

GSLV MKIII-D2 LAUNCHES GSAT-29

India’s GSAT-29 communication satellite was successfully launched by the second developmental flight of Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle MarkIII (GSLV MkIII-D2) today from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) SHAR, Sriharikota.

GSLV MkIII-D2 lifted off from the Second Launch Pad of SDSC SHAR carrying the 3423-kg GSAT-29 satellite. About 17 minutes later, the vehicle injected the satellite into the Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO) as planned. After injection, ISRO’s Master Control Facility at Hassan has assumed the control of the satellite. In the coming days, three orbit raising manoeuvres will be executed to position the satellite in the Geostationary Orbit at its designated location.

GSAT-29 is a multiband, multi-beam communication satellite, intended to serve as test bed for several new and critical technologies. Its Ku-band and Ka-band payloads are configured to cater to the communication requirements of users including those from remote areas especially from Jammu & Kashmir and North-Eastern regions of India.

SEZ POLICY REPORT

The Baba Kalyani led committee constituted

by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry to study the existing SEZ policy of India submitted its report to the Union Minister for Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation, Suresh Prabhu, in New Delhi today.

The objectives of the committee were to evaluate the SEZ policy and make it WTO compatible, suggest measures for maximizing utilisation of vacant land in SEZs, suggest changes in the SEZ policy based on international experience and merge the SEZ policy with other Government schemes like coastal economic zones, Delhi-Mumbai industrial corridor, national industrial manufacturing zones and food and textiles parks.

While submitting the report to the Commerce Minister, Baba Kalyani, Chairman, Bharat Forge Ltd., said that if India is going to become a USD 5 trillion economy by 2025 then the current environment of manufacturing competitiveness and services has to undergo a basic paradigm shift.

The Government of India has set a target of creating 100 million jobs and achieving 25% of GDP from the manufacturing sector by 2022, as part of its flagship 'Make in India' programme. Furthermore, the Government plans to increase manufacturing value to USD 1.2 trillion by 2025.

BLUE REVOLUTION

Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Shri Radha Mohan Singh has said that the Blue Revolution mission aims at doubling the income of farmers and in the last four & half years, Rs 1915.33 crore has been released for the implementation of Blue Revolution schemes. He said that under the Blue Revolution scheme, 29,128 hectares has been developed for aquaculture and fishermen are being benefitted. Besides, 7441 traditional boats

have been modernized and converted into motorized boats. The government has approved Rs 7522 crore Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF). This fund will create employment opportunities to over 9.40 lakhs fishers/ fishermen/ fisher folks and other entrepreneurs in fishing and allied activities and attract private investment in creation and management of fisheries infrastructure facilities.

'SHe-Box'

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has linked SHe-Box, the online portal to report complaints of Sexual Harassment at Workplace, to all the Central Ministries, Departments and 653 districts across 33 States/Union Territories. For prompt disposal of complaints on SHe-Box, each case goes directly to the central/ state authority concerned having jurisdiction to take action in the matter.

PAISA

A centralized electronic platform for processing interest subvention on bank loans to beneficiaries under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) named "PAiSA – Portal for Affordable Credit and Interest Subvention Access", was launched here today. The web platform has been designed and developed by Allahabad Bank which is the Nodal bank. Launching the portal, Sh Durga Shankar Mishra, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs said, "PAiSA is yet another effort by the government to connect directly with the beneficiaries, ensuring that there is greater transparency and efficiency in delivery of services. DBT of subvention on monthly basis under DAY-NULM will give the necessary financial support to small

entrepreneurs in a timely manner". All 35 states / UTs & all scheduled commercial banks, RRBs and Cooperative Banks are expected to be on board the PAiSA portal the year end.

MISSION RAKSHA GYAN SHAKTI

Raksha Mantri Smt Nirmala Sitharaman has formally launched 'Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti'. The event showcased salient inventions and innovations achieved by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and Ordnance Factories (OFs) which have resulted in successful filing of Intellectual Property Right (IPR) applications.

While addressing the audience, Raksha Mantri lauded the efforts of Department of Defence Production and Directorate General Quality Assurance (DGQA) for focused efforts in spreading awareness about IPR, thus promoting a culture of innovation and creation of Intellectual Property. Smt Sitharaman highlighted that while India has always been a knowledge hub since ancient times, however, due to lack of awareness on modern legal framework for protection of IP rights, our knowledge and creativity have often not been utilised to its full potential.

DONBASS WINS THE GOLDEN PEACOCK AT IFFI 2018

Donbass' directed by Sergei Loznitsa has won the coveted Golden Peacock Award at the 49th International Film Festival of India (IFFI), which concluded in Goa on November 28, 2018. The Golden Peacock Award carries a cash prize of Rs 4 million (Rs 40 lakhs) to be shared equally between the Producer and the Director, Trophy and the citation.

Donbass tells the story of a hybrid war taking place in a region of Eastern Ukraine, involving an open armed conflict alongside killings and robberies perpetrated on a mass scale by separatist gangs.

IN - RN EXERCISE KONKAN-18

Naval cooperation between India and the United Kingdom is based on the long term strategic relationship between both countries. Both Navies have, over the years, undertaken bilateral activities such as training exchanges and technical cooperation. The Bilateral KONKAN exercise provides a platform for the two Navies to periodically exercise at sea and in harbour, so as to build interoperability and share best practices.

The KONKAN series of exercises commenced in 2004, and since then has grown in scale. KONKAN-2018 will be conducted from 28 Nov to 06 Dec 18 off Goa with units participating from both navies.

HAUSLA-2018

The 4 Day carnival- HAUSLA-2018- for the children from Child Care Institutions (CCIs) by the Ministry of WCD concluded today, in the national Capital, in the august presence of Justice Deepak Gupta, Hon'ble Judge, Supreme Court of India and Ms. Kalpana Saroj, Padma Shri Awardee and entrepreneur.

The National Festival for Children of CCIs witnessed participation of more than 600 Children drawn from CCIs from 18 states in the various events like painting competition, athletics meet, football, chess competition and speech writing as part of the Festival. The team from Orissa walked away with the Rolling Trophy with the Chhattisgarh team finishing close second.

BHARAT BILL PAYMENT SYSTEM (BBPS)

The Bharat bill payment system is a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) conceptualised system driven by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). It is a one-stop ecosystem for payment of all bills providing an interoperable and accessible “Anytime Anywhere” bill payment service to all customers across India with certainty, reliability and safety of transactions.

Bharat BillPay - The One stop destination for Bill Payment
Bharat BillPay has multiple modes of payment and provides instant confirmation of payment via an SMS or receipt. It offers myriad bill collection categories like electricity, telecom, DTH, gas, water bills etc. through a single window. In future biller categories may be expanded to include insurance premium, mutual funds, school fees, institution fees, credit cards, local taxes, invoice payments, etc. An effective mechanism for handling consumer complaints has also been put in place to support consumer regarding any bill related problems in Bharat BillPay

Bharat BillPay transaction can be initiated through multiple payment channels like Internet, Internet Banking, Mobile, Mobile-Banking, POS (Point of Sale terminal), Mobile Wallets, MPOS (Mobile Point of Sale terminal), Kiosk, ATM, Bank Branch, Agents and Business Correspondents, by just looking at the Bharat BillPay logo

Bharat BillPay facilitates myriad payment modes enabling bill payments. The payment modes options facilitated under the ecosystem are Cards (Credit, Debit and Prepaid), NEFT Internet Banking, UPI, Wallets, Aadhar based Payments and Cash.

WHITE LABEL ATMs (WLAs)

ATMs set up, owned and operated by non-banks are called White Label ATMs. Non-bank ATM operators are authorized under Payment & Settlement Systems Act, 2007 by the Reserve Bank of India.

In White Label ATM scenario, logo displayed on ATM machine and in ATM premises pertain to WLA Operator instead of a bank. However, for a customer, using WLA is just like using the ATM of other bank (bank other than card issuing bank).
ii) Acceptance of cash deposits at the WLAs is not permitted at present.

The rationale of allowing non-bank entity to set up White Label ATMs has been to increase the geographical spread of ATM for increased/enhanced customer service.

INFLATION INDEXED BONDS (IIBS)

Inflation Indexed Bonds (IIBs) were issued in the name of Capital Indexed Bonds (CIBs) during 1997. How is the new product of IIBs different from earlier CIBs. The CIBs issued in 1997 provided inflation protection only to principal and not to interest payment. New product of IIBs will provide inflation protection to both principal and interest payments. Inflation component on principal will not be paid with interest but the same would be adjusted in the principal by multiplying principal with index ratio (IR). At the time of redemption, adjusted principal or the face, whichever is higher, would be paid. Interest rate will be provided protection against inflation by paying fixed coupon rate on the principal adjusted against inflation.

SOVEREIGN GOLD BOND (SGB)

SGBs are government securities denominated in grams of gold. They are substitutes for holding physical gold. Investors have to pay the issue price in cash and the bonds will be redeemed in cash on maturity. The Bond is issued by

Reserve Bank on behalf of Government of India.

The quantity of gold for which the investor pays is protected, since he receives the ongoing market price at the time of redemption/ premature redemption. The SGB offers a superior alternative to holding gold in physical form. The risks and costs of storage are eliminated. Investors are assured of the market value of gold at the time of maturity and periodical interest. SGB is free from issues like making charges and purity in the case of gold in jewellery form. The bonds are held in the books of the RBI or in demat form eliminating risk of loss of scrip etc. There may be a risk of capital loss if the market price of gold declines. However, the investor does not lose in terms of the units of gold which he has paid for.

COMMERCIAL PAPER (CP)

Commercial Paper (CP) is an unsecured money market instrument issued in the form of a promissory note. It was introduced in India in 1990 with a view to enabling highly rated corporate borrowers to diversify their sources of short-term borrowings and to provide an additional instrument to investors. Subsequently, primary dealers and all-India financial institutions were also permitted to issue CP to enable them to meet their short-term funding requirements for their operations.

All eligible participants shall obtain the credit rating for issuance of Commercial Paper either from Credit Rating Information Services of India Ltd. (CRISIL) or the Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency of India Ltd. (ICRA) or the Credit Analysis and Research Ltd. (CARE) or the FITCH Ratings India Pvt. Ltd. or such other credit rating agency (CRA) as may be specified by the Reserve Bank of India from time to time, for the purpose.

The minimum credit rating shall be A-2 [As per rating symbol and definition prescribed by Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)]. The issuers shall ensure at the time of issuance of CP that the rating so obtained is current and has not fallen due for review. CP can be issued for maturities between a minimum of 7 days and a maximum of up to one year from the date of issue. However, the maturity date of the CP should not go beyond the date up to which the credit rating of the issuer is valid.

CATEGORIES UNDER PRIORITY SECTOR LENDING

Priority Sector includes the following categories:

- (i) Agriculture
- (ii) Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
- (iii) Export Credit
- (iv) Education
- (v) Housing
- (vi) Social Infrastructure
- (vii) Renewable Energy
- (viii) Others

Targets for Domestic scheduled commercial banks (excluding Regional Rural Banks and Small Finance Banks) and Foreign banks with 20 branches and above is 40% of their Adjusted Net Bank Credit to total priority sector.

Of this, 18 per cent must go to agriculture sector. Within agri sector credit at least 8% must go to small and marginal farmers. 7.5% of total lending must go to micro enterprises. 10% must go to weaker section borrowings.

WTO MEMBERS APPLIED 137 NEW TRADE RESTRICTIVE MEASURES IN 1 YEAR

Members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) have applied as many as 137 new trade restrictive measures, including tariffs hikes and quantitative restrictions, during

the one-year period starting October 2017. There are 164 members of the Geneva-based global trade rule making body WTO, including India, China, the US and the UK.

It said that the trade coverage of the import-restrictive measures (USD 588.3 billion) is more than seven times larger than that recorded in the previous annual overview. Commenting on the report, WTO Director-General Roberto Azevedo said that this proliferation of trade restrictive measures and the uncertainty created by such actions could place economic recovery in jeopardy.

IDENTITY OF RAPE VICTIMS NOT TO BE DISCLOSED IN ANY CASE: SC

Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code, (i.e. IPC), which was first introduced in 1983 and subsequent amended in 2013, prohibits the publication of the identity of rape victims (specifically, persons against whom offences under Sections 376, 376A, 376B, 376C, 376D and 376E, IPC, are alleged or found to have been committed). The prohibition under this Section has been worded to prohibit the publication of not only victims' names but also any matter which could make victims' identities known. Those who violate the publication prohibition under s. 228A, IPC, are liable to be punished with either simple or rigorous imprisonment for up to two years and are be liable to be fined unless the publication is:

- (a) by or under the order in writing of the officer-in-charge of the police station or the police officer making the investigation into such offence acting in good faith for the purposes of such investigation; or
- (b) by, or with the authorisation in writing of, the victim; or
- (c) where the victim is dead or minor or of unsound mind, by, or with the authorisation in writing of, the next of kin of the victim:

Provided that no such authorisation shall be given by the next of kin to anybody other than the chairman or the secretary, by whatever name called, of any recognised welfare institution or organisation.

SC ON ECO SENSITIVE ZONES

The Supreme Court on Tuesday directed the Centre to declare "at the earliest" 10 km area around 21 national parks and wildlife sanctuaries in the country as Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) to protect wild birds and animals. The areas close to national parks and wildlife sanctuaries are notified as ESZ by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) notifies, with an aim to create "shock absorbers" for the protected animals and birds, by regulating and managing the activities there. It can direct that certain industries and operations are not carried out, or subjected to safeguards, in ESZs.

"Under the circumstances, we direct that an area of 10 Kms (kilometres) around these 21 National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries be declared as Eco-Sensitive Zone by the MoEF. The declaration be made by the MoEF at the earliest," the bench noted in its order. The 21 national parks and wildlife sanctuaries - without ESZ declaration - are in Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

EXTRADITION

As defined by Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, 'Extradition is the delivery on the part of one State to another of those whom it is desired to deal with for crimes of which they have been accused or convicted and are justifiable in the Courts of the other State'. An Extradition request for an accused can be initiated in the case of under-investigation, under-trial and convicted

criminals. In cases under investigation, abundant precautions have to be exercised by the law enforcement agency to ensure that it is in possession of prima facie evidence to sustain the allegation before the Courts of Law in the Foreign State.

The Extradition Act 1962 provides India's legislative basis for extradition. To consolidate and amend the law relating to the extradition of fugitive criminals and to provide for matters connected therewith, or incidental thereto, the Extradition Act of 1962 was enacted. It consolidated the law relating to the extradition of criminal fugitive from India to foreign states. The Indian Extradition Act, 1962 was substantially modified in 1993 by Act 66 of 1993.

Section 2(d) of Extradition Act 1962 defines an 'Extradition Treaty' as a Treaty, Agreement or Arrangement made by India with a Foreign State, relating to the Extradition of fugitive criminals and includes any treaty, agreement or arrangement relating to the Extradition of fugitive criminals made before the 15th day of August 1947, which extends to and is binding on, India. Extradition treaties are traditionally bilateral in character.

1. the principle of extraditable offences lays down that extradition applies only with respect to offences clearly stipulated as such in the treaty;
2. the principle of dual criminality requires that the offence for which the extradition is sought be an offence under the national laws of the extradition requesting country as well as of the requested country;
3. the requested country must be satisfied that there is a prima facie case made out against the offender/accused;
4. the extradited person must be proceeded against only against the offence (rule of speciality) for which his extradition was requested; and
5. he must be accorded a fair trial (this is of course part of international

human rights law now). Judiciary and other legal authorities are likely to apply these principles equally to situations where no extradition treaty exists.

RBI GOVERNOR URJIT PATEL QUILTS

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Urjit Patel has resigned citing personal reasons, said a statement by him on the central bank's website on Monday. Patel, 55, was appointed as the 24th Governor of the RBI on September 2016 for a three-year term. His resignation comes a day ahead of the results of the crucial Assembly elections in Rajasthan, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Mizoram, which have been touted as the semi-finals for the general elections in 2019.

Relations between the Mint Road and North Block have reportedly soured since late October this year after the finance ministry started consultations under the never-before-used Section 7 of the RBI Act, which empowers the government to direct the central bank to undertake certain policy measures in public interest. The government primarily wants the RBI to help the struggling non-bank lenders and MSMEs get some liquidity support, liberalise the prompt corrective action framework on 11 of the state-run banks and undertake other steps that will help push growth, while RBI has been maintaining a conservative stance avoiding any bad precedents.

Shaktikanta Das was appointed new governor of the Central Bank.

ARUNDHATI BHATTACHARYA APPOINTED SWIFT INDIA CHAIRMAN

After joining the boards of two leading companies, Wipro and Reliance Industries Limited, in October, former SBI chairman Arundhati Bhattacharya is now ready to take

on a new challenge. She has been appointed the chairman of SWIFT India Domestic Services, the local unit of SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) global, The Economic Times reported.

BIOPLASTICS

Bioplastics are plastics derived from renewable biomass sources, such as vegetable fats and oils, corn starch, straw, woodchips, food waste, etc. Bioplastic can be made from agricultural by-products and also from used plastic bottles and other containers using microorganisms. Common plastics, such as fossil-fuel plastics (also called petrobased polymers) are derived from petroleum or natural gas. Not all bioplastics are biodegradable nor biodegrade more readily than commodity fossil-fuel derived plastics. Bioplastics are usually derived from sugar derivatives, including starch, cellulose, lactic acid. As of 2014, bioplastics represented approximately 0.2% of the global polymer market (300 million tons).

NOTA EFFECTS IN RECENT STATE ELECTIONS

Fewer elections would have been more closely contested than the just concluded assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. The BJP was defeated by the Congress in both the states but the margin of defeat for the party was not big. On many seats, the victory margin for the Congress was less than Nota (none of the above) votes. At least 22 assembly seats were decided in the Madhya Pradesh assembly election by a victory margin of less than the votes polled under Nota. Twelve of these seats decided against the BJP, which fell six short of the Congress's tally of 114 after counting of votes that went on for over 24

hours. In Madhya Pradesh, NOTA votes were 1.5% of the total counted votes.

In 12 Assembly seats in Rajasthan, NOTA (None of the Above) garnered more votes than the margin by which candidates won the election, affecting both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The NOTA votes in Rajasthan elections were 1.3%.

MEKEDATU PROJECT

In a setback to Tamil Nadu on Mokedatu Dam issue, the Supreme Court yesterday refused to stay the permission given to Karnataka for preparing a Detailed Project Report (DPR) to construct a new dam on Cauvery River and directed the Central Water Commission (CWC) to file its response in four weeks.

Mekedatu is a location along Kaveri in Kanakapura Taluk of Ramanagara District. Sangama is the place where Arkavati merges with Kaveri. From this point, about 3.5 kilometers downstream, the river Kaveri flows through a deep and narrow gorge.

REVISING GDP ESTIMATES

GDP base year to be changed to 2017-18, while for CPI it will be 2018.

the Mundle expert panel was constituted to prepare the back series under the revised methodology. Three changes occurred in the revision that was first announced in 2015:

1. the base year;
2. the methodology from GDP at factor cost to GDP at market price
3. the method of estimating company output/revenue, which has been done in a much more detailed manner using new data collected by

the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA 21).

Investment to GDP is the most egregious source of difference in economic performance between the two periods. In 2003-04, India's savings rate had risen from 9.5% of GDP in 1950-51, and stood at 25.9%. It rose sharply thereafter to peak at 36.8% — precisely because of a rise in per capita income growth — to a level unprecedented in India's economic history, and not achieved since.

This rising savings rate contributed to an unprecedented increase in the investment to GDP ratio, which peaked at 36.8% in 2007-08, having risen from 23.8% of GDP in 2002-03. Then the investment to GDP fell in the wake of the global economic crisis. But in 2010-11, it still stood at 34% of GDP. In the 2011-12 series, the new government, having inherited an investment/GDP share of 31.3% in 2013-14, allowed it to fall to 30.4% in 2014-15, to 29.3% in 2015-16, to 27.1% next year (provisional estimate), and 26.4% in 2017-18. It is investment that mainly drives growth.

MINORITY WELFARE SCHEMES

The schemes/ programmes implemented by this Ministry for the minority communities notified under section 2(c) of the NCM Act 1992 viz Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Parsis are :-

1. Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK) [restructured Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MsDP)] - implemented in identified Minority Concentration Blocks, Minority Concentration Towns, Minority Concentration District Headquarters & Clusters of Villages for infrastructure development.
2. Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme, Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme and Merit-cum-Means based Scholarship Scheme – for educational empowerment.
3. Maulana Azad National Fellowship – for research fellows' empowerment.
4. "Naya Savera" Free coaching and Allied Scheme - to enhance skills and knowledge of students and candidates for employment through competitive examination and admission in technical and professional courses.
5. Padho Pardes – Scheme for interest subsidy on educational loans for overseas studies in technical and professional courses.
6. Nai Udaan - Support for students clearing Preliminary Examination conducted by UPSC, SSC, State Public Service Commissions, etc.\
7. Jiyo Parsi – Scheme for containing population decline of Parsis.
8. Nai Roshni – Scheme for leadership development of minority women.
9. Seekho Aur Kamao – Skill development initiative for minorities.
10. Nai Manzil – Scheme for formal school education & skilling of school dropouts.
11. USTTAD - Upgrading the Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development.
12. Hamari Dharohar - Scheme to preserve rich heritage of minority Communities under the overall concept of Indian Culture.
13. Grants-in-Aid to Maulana Azad Education Foundation (MAEF) for implementation of education and skill related schemes.
14. Garib Nawaz Skill Development Centre Scheme.

15. Equity to National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC) for

providing loans at concessional interest rates to minorities for self-employment and income generating activities.

SAUBHAGYA

1. Launched for universal electrification in September, 2017
2. Camps organised at village level. Minimum documentation required
3. Special drive for economically weaker sections under Gram Swaraj Abhiyan
4. Over 2.1 crore households electrified since 11th Oct, 2017
5. 9 States have achieved 100% saturation in household electrification under Saubhagya namely Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Bihar, J&K, Uttarakhand, Mizoram, Sikkim, Telangana and West Bengal.
6. Thus total 16 States in the country now have 100 % household electrification.
7. Many more State like Maharashtra, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh etc. are left with small number of un-electrified households and expected to achieve saturation any time.
8. Nation expected to achieve 100 % household electrification by 31st December, 2018

UDAY

1. More than Rs.34,000 Crores interest cost saved by DISCOMs under UDAY within two years.

2. Reduction in AT&C losses in 22 States within two years of operation. AT&C losses have come down to 18.76% in FY18 as compared to 20.77% in FY16. Revenue gaps bridged by 72 per cent within two years operation of UDAY. The national level ACS-ARR gaps are at 17 paise/unit in FY18 as compared to 60 paise/unit in FY16.
3. India's rank improved to 24 in 2018 from 137 in 2014 on World Bank's Ease of doing business - "Getting Electricity" Ranking.

UNNAT JYOTI BY AFFORDABLE LED FOR ALL (UJALA)

1. 31.68 crore LED bulbs distributed under UJALA scheme resulting in estimated cost saving of INR 16,457 crore per year, estimated energy savings of 41.14 billion kWh per year with avoided peak demand of 8,237 MW and GHG emission reduction of 33.32 million t CO₂ per year.
2. 88 percent reduction in LED bulb procurement cost through demand aggregation

PRAAPTI

A Web portal and an App namely PRAAPTI (Payment Ratification and Analysis in Power procurement) for bringing Transparency in Invoicing of generators), www.praapti.in, has been officially launched.

E-FLOW

The Central Government on October 10th 2018 notified the minimum environmental flows for River Ganga that has to be

maintained at various locations on the river. Environmental flows are the acceptable flow regimes that are required to maintain a river in the desired environmental state or predetermined state. The notification issued by the Government will ensure that the river has at least the minimum required environmental flow of water even after the river flow gets diverted by projects and structures for purposes like irrigation, hydropower, domestic and industrial use etc. This was an important step taken towards maintaining the uninterrupted or Aviral flow of the river.

DEVELOPMENT OF WATER RESOURCES INFORMATION SYSTEM (DWRIS)

DWRIS Scheme is a continuing scheme of XII five year plan which is under implementation for creation of reliable and sound database for planning and policy formulation for Water Resources Projects, timely dissemination of flood forecast, etc.

PRADHAN MANTRI KRISHI SINCHAYEE YOJANA (PMKSY)- HAR KHET KO PANI (HKKP)

PMKSY has been formulated amalgamating ongoing schemes viz. Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP), Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP), the On Farm Water Management (OFWM). Under PMKSY, Ninety Nine (99) ongoing Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (AIBP) Major/Medium projects along with their Command Area Development & Water Management (CADWM) work shaving potential of 76.03 lakh ha. and estimated cost of Rs. 77595 cr. have been identified in consultation with States, for completion in phases up to December, 2019. Funding mechanism

through NABARD has been made by the Government for both central and state share for timely completion of 99 prioritized projects.

1. The scheme of PMKSY approved in 2015 envisaged ground water development through tube well/ dug well etc. to cover 2.5 lakh hectare during 2015-16 to 2019-20.
2. The guidelines of the scheme has been revised for already approved scheme for 2015-20 and circulated to all the States and UTs for submitting proposals/ DPRs in accordance with the revised operating guidelines.
3. Under the scheme irrigation facilities will be created through tube wells, dug wells, bore wells and Dug cum Bore wells etc in SAFE assessment units characterised by
4. Less than 60 per cent of Stage of Ground Water Development and there is scope for further groundwater development without endangering groundwater sustainability.
5. Average annual rainfall of more than 750 mm and
6. Groundwater levels are less than 15 m bgl.
7. Under the scheme following components are proposed to be funded:
8. Construction cost of well with material
9. Cost of Pump (Electric and Solar)
10. Cost of 200 m canvas pipe for water distribution
11. Cost of investigation for site selection.
12. Provision of 75% Electric and 25% solar pumps have been kept in a cluster/proposal.

13. A provision of Rs 200 crore has been kept towards the Central Assistance for the FY 2019-20 for Ground water irrigation under PMKSY-HKPP.

BORDER MANAGEMENT: SMART BORDER FENCE UNVEILED

On 17th September, Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh inaugurated two pilot projects of smart fencing along the Indo-Pak International Border in Jammu. The smart border fencing projects built under the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) programme is the first of its kind in the country. The two projects each covering a 5.5 km border stretch along the International Border have got hi-tech surveillance system that create an invisible electronic barrier on land, water and even in air and underground and help the BSF detect and foil infiltration bids in most difficult terrains. The CIBMS is designed to guard stretches where physical surveillance is not possible either due to inhospitable terrain or riverine borders.

LAUNCH OF STUDENT POLICE CADET (SPC) PROGRAMME

In a novel initiative, the Union Home Minister launched the Student Police Cadet (SPC) programme for nationwide implementation at a ceremony in Gurugram, Haryana on 21st July. The SPC programme focuses on students of Classes 8 & 9 and special care has been taken to ensure that it does not lead to increase in the workload of the students.

PRADHAN MANTRI ROJGAR PROTSAHAN YOJANA (PMRPY)

Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY), the Government of India is now

paying full employer's contribution (EPF and EPS both) with effect from 1st April, 2018 for a period of three years to the new employees as well as to the existing beneficiaries for their remaining period of three years. Before 1st April, 2018, the Government was paying under PMRPY only the EPS share (8.33% of the wages) out of the total employer's share of contribution (12% of the wages).

ATAL BIMIT VYAKTI KALYAN YOJANA

Considering the change in employment pattern and the current scenario of employment in India which has transformed from a long term employment to short term engagement in form of contract and temping, the ESI Corporation has approved a Scheme named "ATAL BIMIT VYAKTI KALYAN YOJANA" for Insured Persons (IPs) covered under the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948. This scheme is a relief payable in cash directly to their Bank Account in case of unemployment and while they search for new engagement.

"UMANG: ESIC – CHINTA SE MUKTI" MOBILE APP

IP centric information services are now made available through 'ESIC – Chinta Se Mukti' mobile app launched through UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance) platform. The IP, who has registered his mobile number in ESIC database, can access variety of information through this app downloaded free of cost from Google Play Store on multiple channels like mobile application, web, etc., and can be accessed through smartphones, tablets and desktops, etc.

With a simple mobile based authentication system, the IP can know about his personal and enrolled family demographic details, Contribution details, Insurance & eligibility

details, information on entitled Benefits, Claim Status, Dispensary and Branch Office to which he is associated, etc. He can submit his feedback and avail services through this app. In addition, there is a knowledge bank pertaining to various benefits of ESI scheme. In due course, the App shall be made available in 13 different Indian languages including Hindi and English.

HOUTHİ REBELS IN YEMEN

A Yemeni government official said on December 8, that Houthi rebels were “not serious” on finding common ground to end the devastating war, three days into United Nations-brokered talks in Sweden.

Nearly four years into a war that has pushed 14 million Yemenis to the brink of starvation, the Saudi-backed government of Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi and Houthi rebels, linked to Riyadh’s archrival Iran, are in the rural town of Rimbo for what UN officials expect will be a week of negotiations.

JOURNALISM AI

To help news industry use Artificial Intelligence (AI) in more innovative ways, Google has announced a partnership with Polis, the international journalism think-tank at London School of Economics and Political Science, to create “Journalism AI”.

Part of the Google News Initiative (GNI), the “Journalism AI” project will focus on research and training for newsrooms on the intersection of AI and journalism.

BIODIESEL

Biodiesel is made from renewable sources such as vegetable/plant oils for use in diesel engines. Biodiesel comprises mono-alkyl

esters of long chain fatty acids derived from these oils — designated as B100, meaning pure biofuel. The biodiesel blend is a mix of biodiesel with fossil fuel. Currently, it is blended with the fossil fuel in the proportion of 2%, 5%, 20% and so on, although technically it can be used as a pure fuel with some minor modifications in existing engine systems.

Advantages

First, it addresses the environmental concerns: it is less toxic than, say, common salt and biodegradable, as good as the sugar.

Second, from the energy point of view, as a renewable source of energy it helps energy conservation and ensures regular availability. Biodiesel requires less energy to produce than fossil fuels.

A U.S. study indicates a whopping 78% reduction of CO₂ emission compared to fossil fuel. Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) and nitrated PAH compounds are considered carcinogenic — 75% reductions in the production of these compounds are noticed with biodiesel.

Relevance to India

Biodiesel is more relevant to our country than to any other, in multiple ways. Abundant availability of fallow land and agricultural labour, favourable weather conditions, availability of a wide range of oilseed crops such as neem, mohwa, jatropha, castor, kusum palash and karanja, eternal energy shortages, and a perpetually ailing agricultural economy are compelling reasons to go in for biodiesel. This can be recognised by the fact in India, arable land is around 51% of the total against the world average of 11%.

AMENDED CITIZENSHIP RULES 2009

Union Home Ministry has notified amendments to the Citizenship Rules, 2009, to include a separate column in the citizenship form for applicants belonging to six minority communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

A parliamentary committee has been examining the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, that proposes citizenship to six persecuted minorities — Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians and Buddhists — from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, who came to India before 2014. It has run into strong resistance in the BJP-ruled Assam because it will pave the way for giving citizenship mostly to illegal Hindu migrants from Bangladesh in Assam, who came after March 1971, in violation of the 1985 Assam Accord.

15TH FINANCE COMMISSION

The Chairman of the Fifteenth Finance Commission, N.K. Singh, says that though the Commission will have to take the 2011 census as the base year for population.

The Presidential notification on the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Commission says that wherever we have to use population we have to use 2011 as the base year.

The wording of the ToR of the 14th Finance Commission gave it some latitude and it therefore chose to give 27% weightage to population – 17% and 10%, ie 10% for the later 2011 population and 17% for the earlier one.

What is the biggest challenge for the Commission?

Right now, the most important challenge for the Commission is that we don't know what the resources are because of several factors. First and foremost, the GST itself.

Last year, in the notification issued by the Ministry of Finance, they have made

Centrally Sponsored (CS) schemes have a sunset clause that is co-terminus with the cycle of the Finance Commission.

This is a very important change, that the open ended Schemes in a major rationalisation taken up last year, all now have a sunset clause, unless specifically so indicated — like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana has just been extended to 2022-23. This clause means that for the continuation of the schemes in the next Commission cycle, they must be reviewed and some conclusion on their continuation must be reached.

A committee under Shivraj Singh Chauhan which suggested the rationalisation of the CS schemes which was accepted by the council, classifying them as 'core of the core' and 'the core and the optional'.

RISING CAD

The latest trade figures published by the Reserve Bank of India confirm the damage caused by high global oil prices in the last few months. India's current account deficit (CAD) widened to 2.9% of gross domestic product (GDP) in the July-September quarter, a four-year high, under increasing pressure from the oil bill. This is in contrast to the same quarter a year ago when the CAD was only 1.1% of GDP.

The widening of the CAD was due to an increase in the trade deficit, which jumped to \$50 billion in the September quarter as compared to \$32.5 billion a year ago, due to a higher import bill. The government, however, may not be too worried about the widening CAD figures as the major factor that was behind the phenomenon has abated; global oil prices have dropped sharply since early October. Brent crude is down almost 30% from the high it reached in early October. A widening current account deficit *per se* should not be a cause for worry as long as foreign capital inflows

into the economy are brisk enough to fund its huge import needs.

The trouble arises when foreign inflows dry up and restrict the ability to purchase essential imports. So as liquidity conditions continue to tighten across the world, India's heavy import dependence is a cause for concern. Meanwhile, when Western central banks tighten their monetary policy, the RBI will be forced to tighten its own policy stance in order to retain investment capital and defend the rupee. This will impact domestic economic growth negatively.

INDIA'S ROLE CRUCIAL FOR AFGHAN PEACE PROCESS: PAKISTAN

Probably for the first time, Pakistan has acknowledged that India has stakes in Afghanistan and its cooperation is necessary for the peace process in the war-torn country.

Speaking in the National Assembly on Monday, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said Pakistan alone cannot bring peace in Afghanistan as it was a "shared responsibility" of regional countries.

"Prime Minister Imran Khan had said that peace could not be established in Afghanistan through military power. Today the U.S., Pakistan, Afghanistan and Taliban also wanted a solution through dialogue," Mr. Qureshi said.

OSIRIS-REx

NASA's OSIRIS-REx spacecraft has discovered ingredients for water on a nearby skyscraper-sized asteroid, a rocky acorn-shaped object that may hold clues to the origins of life on the earth, scientists said on Monday.

OSIRIS-REx, which flew last week within a scant 19 km of the asteroid Bennu some

2.25 million km from the earth, found traces of hydrogen and oxygen molecules — part of the recipe for water and thus the potential for life — embedded in the asteroid's rocky surface.

KERALA MAN'S DEATH PENALTY COMMUTED

The Supreme Court on Wednesday commuted the death penalty of a man who murdered six of a family, including children, in Kerala on the ground that none of the courts that heard the case bothered to examine the probability of his "reform or rehabilitation and social reintegration."

The Review Bench said none of the courts, from the trial court to the Supreme Court, gave a thought to the possibility of his reform. The Bench held that though the socio-economic condition of a convict was not a factor in disproving his guilt, it was a factor that must be taken into consideration for awarding him an appropriate sentence.

"There are a number of cases where convicts have been on death row for more than six years, and if a standard period was to be adopted, perhaps each and every person on death row might have to be given the benefit of commutation of the death sentence to life imprisonment," Justice Lokur said. The Review Bench agreed that there was no material to back the State of Kerala's claim that Antony was a "hardened criminal."

STATUE OF MAHATMA GANDHI HAS BEEN REMOVED

A statue of Mahatma Gandhi has been removed from Ghana's most prestigious university after complaints that "he was racist against black Africans".

India's former president Pranab Mukherjee had unveiled the statue of the global peace

icon at the University of Ghana in Accra two years ago as a symbol of close ties between the two nations. But lecturers soon began a petition calling for its removal, citing passages written by Mahatma Gandhi claiming that Indians were “infinitely superior” to black Africans.

USA BILL ON TIBBET

China on Friday rebuked the U.S. Congress over legislation seeking greater access to Tibet, saying American lawmakers “grossly interfered” in Beijing's domestic affairs.

The bill, which passed this week with bipartisan support, demands access to the region for U.S. diplomats, journalists and tourists, threatening to bar Chinese officials responsible for the policy from the U.S. if barriers remain for foreigners in Tibet.

Foreign visitors are generally required to obtain a special permit, with the region completely closed off to outsiders at certain times of the year.

H5N1 VIRUS

Lakhs of migratory birds which have congregated at the Chilika lake are facing a threat to their lives following the detection of avian influenza virus barely a few kilometres away from the Nalabana Bird Sanctuary.

Some crows and chickens were found dead inside poultry farms in Krushnaprasad block last week. Subsequently, samples were sent to the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases, Bhopal, for testing.

The State government informed that the samples have tested positive for H5N1 virus and a massive culling operation would be undertaken from Friday inside private poultry farms in the affected villages,

including Sana Sahi, Maluda and Patharganj.

SATTRIYA DANCE FESTIVAL

The four-day “Nriya Parva” mounted by Sattriya Kendra, Sangeet Natak Akademi, Guwahati at Srimanta Sankaradeva Auditorium was perfectly pitched to ease the audience into a closer understanding of Sattriya culture.

Apart from the accompanying musicians and the Borgeet singers, about 40 khol and cymbal (taal) players and a minimum of 60 well-trained dancers participated this year. Morning sessions were devoted to lecture demonstrations by experts and dance gurus who analysed and enriched the academic components of the Sattriya dance. But the stellar performances came in the evenings by some highly powerful and outstanding young dancers.

WORKSHOP ON CHOLA DYNASTY

Imagine waking up in 1050 AD in Thanjavur. You step outside your house, and there are tanks, farms with stepwells, and good drainage system in the neighbourhood. Trade is bustling too. The chieftain of your town has been democratically elected, despite you being a subject of a great dynasty's rule: the Cholas to be precise. Wonder what your life would have been like?

“Oh, it was a glorious time. Rajendra Chola had a long and significant reign,” says historian Chithra Madhavan, who, along with other experts, will be giving talks on the various aspects of the Chola dynasty at a two-day event, ‘Pechchu Kachcheri’ organised by the Tamil Heritage Trust. They will discuss the legacy the Cholas left behind across arts, architecture, literature and culture.

AMITAV GHOSH HONOURED WITH 54TH JNANPITH AWARD

Eminent novelist Amitav Ghosh has been chosen for this year's Jnanpith Award, the Bharatiya Jnanpith announced on Friday. The award is given to an author for "outstanding contribution towards literature".

Mr. Ghosh's novels include *Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide*, and the Ibis trilogy — *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke*, and *Flood of Fire* — discussing the opium trade between India and China run by the East India Company.

WEST JERUSALEM AS ISRAEL'S CAPITAL

Australia now recognises West Jerusalem as Israel's capital, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Saturday, but a contentious embassy shift from Tel Aviv will not occur until a peace settlement is achieved.

Mr. Morrison also committed to recognising a future state of Palestine with east Jerusalem as its capital when the city's status is determined in a peace deal.

GRAPHENE CAN DETECT BRAIN DISORDERS

Graphene, a form of carbon and a super-strong, ultra-light material discovered in 2004, enables flexible electronic components, enhances solar cell capacity, and promises to revolutionise batteries. Now scientists have added one more use to this list.

They have found a potential new application of this material for detecting Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) — a progressive brain disorder for which there is currently "no objective diagnostic test." This is described in the journal *Applied Materials & Interfaces of the American Chemical*

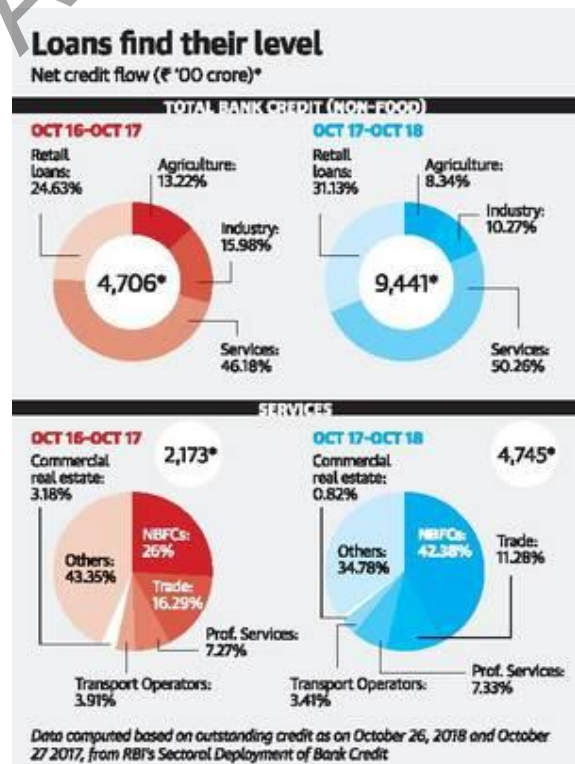
Society. ALS is characterised by rapid loss of motor neurons controlling skeletal muscles, leading to paralysis.

MOUNT SOPUTAN VOLCANO

A volcano erupted in Indonesia's North Sulawesi province on Sunday, spewing a column of ash measuring 7.5 km to the sky, a disaster agency official said.

Mount Soputan erupted twice — first at 7.43 a.m. and the second at 8.57 a.m., an agency spokesman told Xinhua news agency. Ashes were spread toward south west and south of the crater and small tremors jolted the area.

BANK CREDIT



Credit flow to industry, or the lack of it, has been a bone of contention between the Centre and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). While RBI and its supporters assert that bank lending is now growing at a brisk pace.

RBI data shows that Indian banks' non-food credit growth, which had slumped to 7-8% in the three years to October 2017, got back to double-digit growth in the last one year (October 2017 to October 2018) at 13%.

Historically, bank credit in India has either matched or grown ahead of nominal GDP. In the three years from FY15 to FY18, bank credit growth at 7-9% lagged nominal GDP growth of 10-11%. But as the nominal growth rate picked up to 12.8% in the first half of this fiscal, bank credit has matched this expansion.

Absolute numbers on net credit flow make it even clearer that banks have stepped up their lending. In the year from October 2017 to October 2018, banks added a net ₹9.44 lakh crore to their outstanding loan books. This reflects new credit flow to the economy. It is more than twice the ₹4.7 lakh crore addition in October 2016-17.

These numbers suggest that RBI is right to take the view there's no systemic problem impeding bank credit, despite its sweeping a few public sector banks into the Prompt Corrective Action framework.

For instance, for every ₹100 of new bank loans added, it was services which bagged ₹50, while industry received just ₹10. Out of the ₹10 advanced to industry, large firms cornered ₹8.30, while medium and small enterprises had to make do with just ₹1.70. Apart from lending directly to large firms, banks were also heavy subscribers to corporate bonds, which are mostly floated by large companies.

As much as ₹31 out of every ₹100 of new bank loans did not go to businesses at all, but to retail folk borrowing towards their home, credit card or personal loans.

INDIA IS THE CLOSEST FRIEND OF THE MALDIVES: PRESIDENT IBRAHIM MOHAMED SOLIH

Boosting ties: President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and First Lady Fazna Ahmed after arriving in New Delhi on Sunday.

President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih of the Maldives began his trip to India in an upbeat note by declaring his country's commitment for trade with foreign partners. Addressing a public event on December 16, Mr. Solih said that there are no obstructions in doing business with his country and described India as the 'closest friend' of Male.

"Maldives and India have been friends since time immemorial. India is our closest neighbour and our people have ties of friendship and cultural affinity and within those close links trade and commerce have flourished. India is not only our closest friend, it is also one of our largest trading partners," said President Solih at the event organised by CII, FICCI and ASOCHAM.

COP 24, KATOWICE OUTCOME

After two weeks of talks in the Polish city of Katowice, nations finally reached consensus on a more detailed framework for the 2015 Paris Agreement, which aims to limit a rise in average world temperatures to "well below" 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels.

At the 11th hour, ministers managed to break a deadlock between Brazil and other countries over the accounting rules for the monitoring of carbon credits, deferring the bulk of that discussion to next year, but missing an opportunity to send a signal to businesses to speed up their actions.

Some countries and green groups criticised the outcome for failing to urge increased ambitions on emissions cuts sufficiently to

curb rising temperatures. Poorer nations vulnerable to climate change also wanted more clarity on how an already agreed \$100 billion a year of climate finance by 2020 will be provided and on efforts to build on that amount further from the end of the decade.

A U.N.-commissioned report by the IPCC in October warned that keeping the Earth's temperature rise to 1.5 degrees C would need "unprecedented changes" in every aspect of society.

CARBON CREDIT CONUNDRUM AT KATOWICE

United Nations' climate talks to agree on the rules of the 2015 Paris Agreement became deadlocked over the monitoring of carbon credits to reduce emissions, in marathon negotiations which have already overrun.

Although a text of the package of rules has been published which shows many points have been settled, a stand-off continues over the accounting rules for future carbon permit schemes.

A senior negotiator said Brazil had concerns about some of the rules for governing international carbon credit schemes. Rich nations often reduce their emissions by paying for carbon-cutting projects in other countries. But these programmes are not often transparent and hard to monitor.

One risk is the double counting of emissions reductions, when they are included by both the host country and the purchasing country, which could ruin the integrity of the Paris Agreement. This is why a solid set of accounting rules is needed.

INDIA ANNOUNCES \$1.4 BILLION AID TO MALDIVES

India on Monday declared an aid of \$1.4 billion to the Maldives. The financial package that was prepared over the last

month was formally announced at a joint press conference held by President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih of the Maldives and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In response, President Solih said his government would walk the path of cooperation and development. His discussion with India covered a wide swath of issues such as health, education, and defence, he noted.

UK 'GOLDEN VISA' SCHEME TO BE SUSPENDED DUE TO CORRUPTION FEARS

Applicants will no longer be able to invest in government bonds as part of the reforms, and must invest in active and trading UK companies. Tier 1 visas, known as "golden visas", have been criticised for providing an easy route into the UK for oligarchs and the super-rich looking to launder stolen wealth. In July, figures showed a 46% increase in the number of applicants to the tier 1 investor visa scheme, with more than 400 applications from wealthy overseas investors. The changes to the scheme come after a government review of the visa as part of a crackdown on money laundering in the UK.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR DENOTIFIED, NOMADIC AND SEMI-NOMADIC TRIBES (NCDNSNT)

The National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NCDNSNT) is a national commission set under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, to study various developmental aspects of denotified and nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes in India.

Denotified Tribes (DNTs), also known as *Vimukta Jati*, are the tribes that were listed

originally under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, as *Criminal Tribes* and "addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences." Once a tribe became "notified" as criminal, all its members were required to register with the local magistrate, failing which they would be charged with a "crime" under the Indian Penal Code. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1952 repealed the notification, i.e. 'de-notified' the tribal communities. This Act, however, was replaced by a series of Habitual Offenders Acts, that asked police to investigate a "suspect's" "criminal tendencies" and whether their occupation is "conducive to settled way of life." The denotified tribes were reclassified as "habitual offenders" in 1959.

The Commission was first set up on 22 November 2003 and reconstituted on 16 March 2005 as the earlier commission could not make much headway for a number of reasons. Mr. Balkrishna Sidram Renke, Laxmanbhai Kalidas Patni and Laxmi Chand were appointed as the Chairperson, Member and Member Secretary of the commission, respectively. The commission assumed its functioning w.e.f. 6 February 2006.

The commission had following terms of reference:

- a. To specify the economic interventions required for raising the living standards of Denotified, Nomadic and Semi Nomadic Tribes by asset creation and self-employment opportunities;
- b. To recommend measures to utilize the existing channeling agencies set up for the economic development of SC/STs and OBCs for extending an economic development package to these groups, keeping in view their specific requirements; and
- c. To identify programmes required for their education, development and health;

d. To make any other connected or incidental recommendation, that the Commission deems necessary.

The Commission submitted its report on 2 July 2008 making several recommendations, which include that some reservations as available to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes be extended to around 11 crore people of denotified and nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes in India; it is also recommended that the provisions of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 be applicable to these tribes as well.

ELECTORAL BOND SCHEME, 2018

Electoral bond was announced in the Union Budget 2017-18.

Eligibility for purchase and encashment of electoral bond.-

- (1) The Bond under this Scheme may be purchased by a person, who is a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India.
- (2) A person being an individual can buy bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals.
- (3) Only the political parties registered under section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (43 of 1951) and secured not less than one per cent of the votes polled in the last general election to the House of the People or the Legislative Assembly, as the case may be, shall be eligible to receive the bond.
- (4) The scheme removes an existing condition that had prohibited companies from donating anything more than 7.5% of their average net-profit over the previous three years.

Applicability of Know Your Customer Norms.-

(1) The extant instructions issued by the Reserve Bank of India regarding Know Your Customer norms of a bank's customer shall apply for buyers of the bonds.

(2) The authorised bank may call for any additional Know Your Customer documents, if it deems necessary.

(3) As per Section 29C(1) of The Representation of People Act, 1951, the political party needs to disclose the details of non-governmental corporations and persons who donate more than Rs. 20,000 to it in a financial year. Vide the Finance Bill 2017, it has been specified that no report needs to be prepared in respect of the contributions received by way of an electoral bond.

Denomination.-

The bonds shall be issued in the denomination of Rs. 1000, Rs. 10,000, Rs. 1,00,000, Rs. 10,00,000 and Rs. 1,00,00,000.

Validity of Bond.-

(1) The bond shall be valid for fifteen days from the date of issue and no payment shall be made to any payee political party if the bond is deposited after expiry of the validity period.

(2) The bond deposited by any political party to its account shall be credited on the same day.

Issuing offices and commission payable.-

No commission, brokerage or any other charges for issue of bond shall be payable by the buyer against purchase of the bond.

Encashment of the bond.-

(1) The bond can be encashed only by an eligible political party by depositing the same in their designated bank account.

(2) The amount of bonds not encashed within the validity period of fifteen days shall be deposited by the authorized bank to the Prime Minister Relief Fund.

UNDEMOCRATIC THE UN BUREAUCRATIC STRUCTURE

The 53-strong Asia Pacific Group accounts for 27% of UN members and over half the world's population. Yet Asians comprise only 17% of the secretariat's international staff. Even worse disparity at senior levels with 14% of UN membership, the West European and Others Group (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the US) provides 6 of 14 current UN peacekeeping force commanders. Among the high-level representatives of the secretary-general (special representatives and envoys), Asians accounted for only 12% while westerners dominated with 47%.

TRANSGENDER RIGHTS, NALSA JUDGEMENT, TRANSGENDER BILL 2018

The term 'Transgender' refers to those who don't identify themselves completely with either of the dichotomous genders – male/female. The World Health Organization (WHO) has clearly demarcated the difference between these often interchangeably used terms.

According to WHO, Sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women while Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.

In **NALSA v/s Union of India, 2014**, Supreme Court (SC) of India rolled out a landmark judgment giving a framework for recognising the rights of transgenders. It stated:

1. The right to choose one's gender is part of the right to life and live with dignity – thus recognising the civil rights of this section.
2. SC directed the government to include 'third gender' in all official documents/forms, thus recognising transgenders (excluding lesbian, gay and bisexual grouping) as the third gender.
3. To choose from one of the three genders was mandated to be only the person's choice.
4. It also provided for avenues of reservation within the OBC quota to this 'marginalised' section (In June 2016 Odisha became the 1st state to provide for social welfare benefits to transgenders, however, demands of reservation in government jobs and electoral seats are yet to be heeded to).
5. It was suggested that a commission to protect rights of this community must be setup just like the National Commission for SC/STs.
6. SC also gave a green signal to the Expert Committee Report prepared by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) (This report talked about the plight of transgenders in India and provided for identification, sex-reassignment procedures, legal protection, precautions to check exploitation, etc).

In **Ram Singh v/s Union of India case, 2015**, (famously known as the Jat Reservation case) SC while quashing

attempts of granting reservation to Jat groups in nine states stated:

1. Reservation solely on the basis of caste must be discouraged, and affirmative actions must be provided to those who are the most deserving.
2. There is a need to come up with new criteria for reservation.

Thus, NALSA case and later the Ram Singh v/s UoI case laid down the groundwork for the government to follow in spirit (both were welcome judgments).

On Dec 17, 2018, the Lok Sabha passed the Government of India's **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2018**. Bill suggests setting up of screening committees to recognise transgender persons—dehumanising a transgender person. It reads, "A transgender person may make an application to the District Magistrate for issuing a certificate of identity as a transgender person... District Magistrate shall refer such application to the District Screening Committee to be constituted by the appropriate Government for the purpose of recognition of transgender persons." This is an outright violation of the NALSA judgment directive, which read, "[t]hat any procedure for identification of transgender persons' which goes beyond self-identification, and is likely to involve an element of medical, biological or mental assessment, would violate transgender persons' rights under Article 19 and 21 of the Constitution".

Along with this, according to the Bill, those who have not had gone through Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) can only identify as transgender, and not as male or female, and the identification as transgender depends on scrutiny and certification by a District Screening Committee; those seeking to identify as

male or female need to have had SRS. This misreads transgender identity not as a gender identity, but a sexual identity.

In case of sexual violence and abuse against the transgender person, the Bill dictates punishment of six months to two years with a fine. This is lesser when compared to the punishment under section 376 – against rape, which is for seven years.

MILITARY DIMENSION OF CHINA-PAK CORRIDOR CONCERNS INDIA

India has since long been concerned over Belt-and-Road initiative of China and protesting against its flagship component China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). What however added to New Delhi's concerns are moves to add a military dimension to Beijing-Islamabad cooperation on the Chinese President Xi Jinping ambitious \$ One Trillion cross-continental connectivity initiative.

The New York Times recently reported that Beijing and Islamabad were working on a proposal for China to use a Special Economic Zone set up in Pakistan as part of the CPEC to produce fighter aircraft as well as other weaponry and military hardware.

Sources in New Delhi told the DH that if what New York Times had reported were proved to be based on facts, it would just confirm what India had since long been suspecting about China's real intentions behind working with Pakistan on the CPEC.

The New York Times published the report on December 19 – just two days before External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi in New Delhi. Swaraj and Wang launched a new

framework for cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

WITHDRAWAL OF US FORCES FROM SYRIA AND AFGHANISTAN

President Trump has ordered the withdrawal of 2,000 American troops from Syria, bringing a sudden end to a military campaign that largely vanquished the Islamic State but ceding a strategically vital country to Russia and Iran. Mr. Trump had ordered that the withdrawal be completed in 30 days. From Afghanistan also troops will be reduced from current 30 thousand to 15 thousands with immediate effect. This will impact interests of India.

INTERCEPTION OF COMPUTER RESOURCES BY 10 AGENCIES

A recent Union government order authorising 10 central agencies to access "**any information**" on computers within the country is crucial for national security and there are adequate safeguards against its misuse.

The order must be seen in the context of Section 69 of the IT Act, which sets out specific reasons under which interception can be approved, the official added. "Each case of monitoring or interception requires prior approval of home secretary and approval can be given only for purposes mentioned in Section 69". Cases that could threaten sovereignty and integrity of India, public order, diplomatic relations or investigation of any offence are among those that can warrant interception or monitoring of communication. Critics are worried about right to privacy after this order.

BOGIBEEL BRIDGE

Bogibeel bridge is a combined road and rail bridge over the Brahmaputra river in the north eastern Indian state of Assam between Dhemaji district and Dibrugarh district. Bogibeel river bridge is the longest rail-cum-road bridge in India measuring 4.94 kilometres over the Brahmaputra river. As the Bogibeel bridge being situated in an earthquake prone area it is India's first bridge to have fully welded steel-concrete support beams that can withstand earthquakes of magnitudes upto 7 Richter Scale. This is also Asia's 2nd longest rail-cum-road bridge that has a serviceable period of around 120 years. This is the 4th longest bridge in India after Bhupen Hazarika Setu, Mahatma Gandhi Setu and Bandra-Worli Sea Link. It was inaugurated by prime minister Narendra Modi on 25th December 2018 on the occasion of Good Governance Day.

BANK WRITE OFF vs LOAN WAIVER

Bank write off is the deduction in the value of earnings by the amount of an expense or loss. It means to remove loans from their balance sheets only and reduce the overall tax liability.

eg - If a person 'X' takes a loan from from the bank(or lender) and is unable to pay back the loan to bank or the bank(or lender) is not able to collect its amount from the loan taker 'X'. Then the bank will clean up their balance sheet and show that the amount is paid technically in order to achieve taxation efficiency.

Bank waive off is voluntary action of a person that removes that person's right or particular ability in an agreement. The waiver can either be in written form or some form of action. A waiver essentially removes a real or potential liability for the other party in the agreement.

For example - If a person 'X' takes a loan and is unable to pay its loan amount to the bank. Then bank can relinquish its right to pursue any further legal action on the person 'X'.

DAM SAFETY BILL, 2018

Key Provisions:

- Dam Safety Bill 2018 will empower the dam safety institutional set-ups in both the Centre and States
- It will help in standardizing and improving dam safety practices across the country.
- It will address all issues concerning dam safety including regular inspection of dams, Emergency Action Plan, comprehensive dam safety review, adequate repair and maintenance funds for dam safety, Instrumentation and Safety Manuals.
- The bill will constitute National Committee on Dam Safety (NCDS), National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA), and State Dam Safety Organization (SDSO) with well defined duties and functions.
- The Bill provides for comprehensive safety evaluation (CSE) by independent panel of expert. First CSE within 5 years, and thereafter at regular intervals specified by NCDS.
- Comprehensive Safety Evaluation would be compulsory in case of major modification to structure or design criteria; discovery of unusual condition at dam or reservoir rim; an extreme hydrological or seismic event.
- The Bill provides for punishment / penalty if the dam safety provisions are not followed

Number of Dams (ICOLD 2016)

S No	Country	No. of Dams
1	China	23842
2	United States of America	9261
3	India	5102
4	Japan	3112
5	Brazil	1411
6	Canada	1170
7	South Africa	1114
8	Spain	1063
9	Turkey	972
10	Iran	802

Dam Safety Bill and Disaster Management:

The Bill provides for an emergency action plan to combat any disaster arising out of dam failures. The key provisions related to disaster management are:

- Establish hydro-meteorological network and inflow forecasting system
- Establish an emergency flood warning system
- Test periodically for the aptness of above systems;
- Make available information on anticipated inflows, outflows, flood warnings & adverse impacts to authorities and public domain;
- Carry out risk assessment study at interval as specified. First such study within five years;
- Prepare emergency action plan within 5 years; and for new dams, before the initial filling.
- Emergency Action Plan to include type of emergencies likely to occur; likely flood in the event of dam failure, along with probable areas, population, structures and installations likely to be affected; Warning procedures, inundation maps and advance preparations for handling adverse situations to avoid loss of human life; cooperation with disaster management agencies.

Why Tamil Nadu oppose the bill

- The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly passed a resolution to oppose the Dam Safety Bill, 2018 proposed by the Central government.
- The resolution mentions that all the states must be consulted and a consensus must be reached on the contents of the bill before it is passed in the Parliament.
- The Tamil Nadu government had opposed it on the grounds that it overrode the federal nature of the constitution
- Bill give overriding power to NDSA over state committee on dam safety in case of Dams constructed by the State Government in the neighbouring State over
- The state had objection to its coverage of Mullaperiyar dam.

Mullaperiyar Dam Issue

Tamil Nadu and Kerala have been in conflict over the Mullaperiyar dam in Kerala. The dam is owned by Tamil Nadu but situated in Kerala. When Tamil Nadu wanted to increase storage of the dam, Kerala opposed it citing safety threats. Eventually, a Supreme Court team inspected the dam and confirmed in November 2014 that the dam was safe.

CABINET APPROVES INTRODUCTION OF THE “SURROGACY (REGULATION) BILL, 2016”

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its

approval for introduction of the “Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016”.

1. The Bill will regulate surrogacy in India by establishing *National Surrogacy Board* at the central level and *State Surrogacy Boards* and *Appropriate Authorities* in the State and Union Territories.
2. The legislation will ensure effective regulation of surrogacy, *prohibit* commercial surrogacy and allow *ethical surrogacy* to the needy infertile couples.
3. Altruistic surrogacy involves an arrangement where the couple does not pay the surrogate mother any compensation other than the medical and insurance expenses related to the pregnancy.
4. The surrogate mother must be a ‘close relative’ of the intending couple. The Bill does not define the term ‘close relative’. Further, the surrogate mother (close relative) may donate her own egg for the pregnancy.
5. All infertile Indian married couple who want to avail ethical surrogacy will be benefited. Further the rights of surrogate mother and children born out of surrogacy will be protected.
6. While commercial surrogacy will be prohibited including sale and purchase of human embryo and gametes, ethical surrogacy to the needy infertile couples will be allowed on fulfilment of certain conditions and for specific purposes.
7. As such, it will control the unethical practices in surrogacy, prevent commercialization of surrogacy and will prohibit potential exploitation of surrogate mothers and children born through surrogacy.
8. Undertaking surrogacy for a fee, advertising it or exploiting the

surrogate mother will be punishable with imprisonment for 10 years and a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh.

9. The 228th report of the Law Commission of India has also recommended for prohibiting commercial surrogacy and allowing ethical altruistic surrogacy to the needy Indian citizens by enacting a suitable legislation.
10. In 2008, the Supreme Court of India in the *Baby Manji Yamada vs. Union of India* case highlighted the lack of regulation for surrogacy in India.

THE CONSUMER PROTECTION BILL, 2018

The Consumer Protection Bill, 2018 was passed by the Lok Sabha and the new bill which is to replace the 1986 act is a huge step forward.

[1] The new Bill expands the ambit of consumer protection itself by explicitly including the transactions under telecommunication, online and teleshopping transactions, housing constructions, etc for a consideration. However, it still excludes free and personal services.

[2] In addition to the pre-existing list of unfair trade practices under the act, the Bill has prescribed the addition of three more such practices: (i) failure to issue a bill or receipt; (ii) refusal to accept a good returned within 30 days; and (iii) disclosure of personal information given in confidence, unless required by law or in public interest.

[3] The Bill has added provisions regarding product liability whereby, the consumer may present a claim against the manufacturer, service provider, and seller. Furthermore,

the compensation can be more easily obtained by proving any of the details which are presented in the bill to the consumer.

[4] The Bill also added provisions relating to unfair contracts which were absent in the Act previously. Unfair contracts are defined as contracts that cause significant change in consumer rights and a list of six terms are given which are deemed to give rise to an unfair contract which include the following: (i) requiring excessive security deposits; (ii) imposing a disproportionate penalty for a breach in contract; (iii) refusing to accept early repayment of debts; (iv) terminating the contract without reasonable cause; (v) transferring a contract to a third party to the detriment of the consumer without his consent; or (vi) imposing unreasonable charge or obligations which put the consumer at a disadvantage.

[5] One of the major changes was brought in by establishing a Regulator under the act. The Bill establishes the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) in order to promote, protect, and enforce the rights of consumers as a class. CCPA is also given the powers to: (i) issue safety notices; (ii) pass orders to recall goods, prevent unfair practices, and reimburse purchase price paid; and (iii) impose penalties for false and misleading advertisements.

[6] The Bill also amends the pecuniary jurisdictions of the District, State and National Commissions. The District's jurisdiction has been increased to Rs. 1 crore from Rs. 20 lakhs. The State's jurisdiction has been increased from Rs. 1 crore to now Rs. 10 crore. And the National jurisdiction has been increased to include claims of over Rs. 10 crore.

[7] The Composition of the Commissions has also been altered. Previously, retired/current judges and two/four members were selected as the presiding authority but the Bill proposes that the

Commission be headed by a President and two/four members as the case may be.

[8] Changes have also been brought regarding the process of appointment of the Members of the Commission. Previously, the members were appointed by way of a selection committee which comprised of retired judges and other members. However, now the requirement of the Selection Committee has been deleted and the appointment was to directly take place by way of a notification by the central government.

[9] Another stark change has been brought in by attachment of a Mediation Cell with each of the District, State and National Commissions, which was absent in the Act. The addition of Mediation as a form of dispute redressal would result in a lot of preservation of time and resources of the Commissions at each level and also result in faster and amiable resolution of disputes.

[10] The penalties under the Act for non-compliance has been increased under the Bill by increasing the fine imposed on a person. The fine has been increased to be between Rs. 25 thousand to Rs. 1 lakh whereas it was previously between Rs. 2 thousand to Rs. 10 thousand only.

[11] The much needed provisions relating to e-commerce platforms have been added by the Bill of 2018 wherein it defines direct selling, e-commerce and electronic service providers. And also authorizes the central government to prescribe rules for preventing unfair trade practices in e-commerce and direct selling by their respective service providers.

INDIAN NAVY'S INFORMATION FUSION CENTRE

Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman inaugurated the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre (IFC) that aims to collaborate

with partner countries and multi-national agencies to develop maritime awareness and share information on vessels.

Speaking at the inauguration, Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lanba said India aims to work closely with multinational constructs and other Information Fusion Centres through this new centre.

Additionally, the IFC-Indian Ocean Region would work towards capability-building in the region, coordination of incident response and disaster relief, and in time, also share submarine safety information, he said.

As part of the IFC-IOR's collaborative and capability development endeavours, a Maritime Information Sharing workshop in Delhi is also planned next year, Lanba said. The IFC-IOR is initially being launched as a virtual construct wherein information exchange will be done electronically through the Internet. He said the Centre would also host international liaison officers from participating countries on a permanent basis that will help accrue immense value from the combined expertise.

CYCLONE PHETHAI: RAIN LASHES ODISHA

Rainfall, coupled with squally winds, lashed several parts of Odisha on Tuesday under the impact of Cyclone Phethai that barrelled through coastal Andhra Pradesh.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast isolated heavy to very heavy rainfall in south Odisha and heavy rainfall in western region till December 19 as the cyclonic storm weakened gradually.

“The depression over north coastal Andhra Pradesh moved in north-north-east direction and weakened into a well marked low pressure area and lay over north-west and adjoining west-central Bay of Bengal and

Odisha Tuesday morning,” Director of the Meteorological Centre here, H.R. Biswas said.

As many as 11,600 people were evacuated in Gajapati district even as houses ravaged by Cyclone Titli in October are yet to be fully repaired, a senior official at the Special Relief Commissioner's (SRC) office said. People from seven vulnerable blocks in Gajapati district have been accommodated in safer places.

RUPEE LOGS BEST DAY IN OVER 5 YEARS, VAULTS 112 PAISE ON CRUDE SLIDE

The Indian rupee on Tuesday rallied by a whopping 112 paise, its best single-day gains in over five years, to settle at 70.44 against the U.S. dollar as softening crude oil prices eased concerns over India's current account deficit expansion.

Besides, sustained selling of the American currency by exporters and banks as well as the greenback's weakness against its key rivals globally ahead of the U.S. Fed policy decision on December 19 also helped the domestic unit scale further heights.

The Brent crude, an international benchmark, was trading 2.26% lower at \$58.26 per barrel, a 14-month low.

At the Interbank Foreign Exchange (Forex) market, the rupee opened on a firm note at 71.34 from. It gained further ground to hit a high of 70.44, a massive climb of 112 paise over its previous closing.

'SELFISH BRAIN THEORY'

This refers to a scientific hypothesis which states that the brain prioritises its own relatively high energy needs over those of the rest of the body. This hypothesis overturned the earlier belief among scientists that the energy needs of various

organs of the body are met equally without any kind of internal discrimination within the body. The selfish brain theory was developed by German brain researcher Achim Peters to explain the prevalence of obesity as the result of an imbalance in the energy supplied to the brain and the metabolic system. Some believe that the selfish brain may be the consequence of evolutionary forces favouring an alert brain over an agile body.

LIFTING THE BAN ON OXYTOCIN

The Delhi High Court restores the retail sale and private manufacture of a life-saving drug. In a crucial development that exposes the flaws in health policy-making in the country, the Delhi High Court quashed a government ban on the retail sale and private manufacture of oxytocin.

Notified by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in April, the ban referred to a 2016 Himachal Pradesh High Court judgment, which discussed oxytocin's misuse in dairy cattle, fruits and vegetables.

However, soon after the order was issued, health experts pointed to the absurdity of it. Oxytocin is a life-saving drug used to stem post-partum bleeding among new mothers. Because of this it had been listed by both the World Health Organization and the Health Ministry as an essential medicine. Around 45,000 women die from post-partum complications in India each year, and in 38% of the cases the reason is haemorrhaging. Without the easy availability of inexpensive oxytocin, efforts to stem the maternal mortality epidemic could have suffered a costly setback. These worries led to the All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN), a patient-rights group, to challenge the order in the Delhi High Court.

In its judgment on December 14, in response to AIDAN's and drug manufacturers' petitions, the court struck

down the ban, calling it "unreasonable and arbitrary".

The court found that the government had failed to weigh the danger the ban posed to thousands of young mothers. What is more, it had failed to show that the drug was widely misused for veterinary purposes, the purported reason behind the order.

UN HUMAN RIGHTS PRIZE FOR 2018

Late Pakistan lawyer and human rights activist Asma Jahangir has been awarded the UN Human Rights Prize for 2018. Her daughter Munizae Jahangir received the prestigious award on behalf of her mother.

Jahangir was announced as one of the four winners of the quinquennial prize in October. Other winners included women's rights activist in Tanzania, Rebeca Gyumi; activist for the rights of indigenous Brazilian communities Joenia Wapichana and Ireland's human rights organisation Front Line Defenders.

FOUR BANKS MAY COME OUT OF PCA

Four public sector banks — Bank of Maharashtra, Corporation Bank, Allahabad Bank and Bank of India — that are under the prompt corrective action framework of RBI, may come out of the restrictions following improved performance, banking industry sources said.

This follows a review of the performance of all 11 banks that are under the PCA framework, as decided during the November board meeting of the Reserve Bank of India. The board of financial supervision of the RBI has reviewed the banks' half yearly performance.

In addition, these banks have been asked to make projections of their provisioning requirements for the third and fourth quarter of the current financial year to assess how much capital is required to meet regulatory requirement. The government is likely to

infuse any shortfall in regulatory capital in order to help the lenders to come out of the PCA framework, sources said.

ANGEL INVESTOR

Angel investors invest in small startups or entrepreneurs. Often, angel investors are among an entrepreneur's family and friends. The capital angel investors provide may be a one-time investment to help the business propel or an ongoing injection of money to support and carry the company through its difficult early stages.

Angel investors provide more favorable terms compared to other lenders, since they usually invest in the entrepreneur starting the business rather than the viability of the business. Angel investors are focused on helping startups take their first steps, rather than the possible profit they may get from the business. Essentially, angel investors are the opposite of venture capitalists.

Angel investors are also called informal investors, angel funders, private investors, seed investors or business angels. These are affluent individuals who inject capital for startups in exchange for ownership equity or convertible debt. Some angel investors invest through crowdfunding platforms online or build angel investor networks to pool in capital.

AUTOMATICALLY SUSPEND MEMBERS WHO ENTER WELL OF HOUSE, AMENDMENT OF RULE 374A (1)

The Lok Sabha's Rules Committee on Friday recommended "automatic suspension" of members who enter the well of the house or willfully obstruct its business by shouting slogans despite being repeatedly warned by the Chair.

The panel's recommendation to Speaker Sumitra Mahajan comes at a time regular

disruptions of the House have become the norm. The recommendation, to suspend five consecutive sittings or remainder of the session whichever is less, was made in a draft report placed before the committee in its meeting chaired by the speaker.

According to the draft report placed before the committee, an amendment of Rule 374A (1) of the Lok Sabha's Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business, which deals with suspension of the member, has been recommended. Those members repeatedly asked by the Speaker to go to their own seats and warned shall be automatically suspended rather than being named by the speaker, it was proposed. At present the rules state that such members will only be suspended after they are named by the Speaker.

INDONESIA'S ANGRY 'CHILD OF KRAKATOA' RUMBLES ON

The volcano that triggered a deadly tsunami in Indonesia emerged from the sea around the legendary Krakatoa 90 years ago and has been on a high-level eruption watchlist for the past decade.

Anak Krakatoa (the "Child of Krakatoa") has been particularly active since June, occasionally sending massive plumes of ash high into the sky and in October a tour boat was nearly hit by lava bombs from the erupting volcano. Experts say Anak Krakatoa emerged around 1928 in the caldera of Krakatoa, a volcanic island that violently erupted in 1883.

A tsunami killed more than 200 people on the Indonesian islands of Java and Sumatra and injured hundreds following an underwater landslide caused by a volcanic eruption on Saturday, the disaster mitigation agency said. Indonesia sits on the seismically active Pacific Ring of Fire and is regularly hit by earthquakes.

NO RISE IN WORKING WOMEN DESPITE HIGH LITERACY LEVELS: ICRIER STUDY

A rise in literacy levels among women has failed to translate into an increase in the number of working women due to a combination of socio-economic factors such as the importance of education for improving marital prospects as well as higher prestige attached to households which keep women out of labour force, according to a new research.

A study authored by Surbhi Ghai and published by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) has cited the Labour Bureau's employment figures to show that there is a rise in the percentage of women out of labour force between 2011-2012 and 2015-2016 across all levels of education and age-cohorts.

For example, the age cohort 30 years and above shows that the percentage of women with graduate degrees and above who are not in the labour force has increased from 62.7% to 65.2%. At the same time, the percentage of illiterate women out of the labour force too increased from 67.6% to 70.1%. The author says that this is an indicator that despite one's educational attainment there has been a decline in the incentive for women to participate in the labour force.

ELECTION COMMISSION MAKES FRESH PUSH FOR POLL REFORMS

Highly placed sources in the commission said its officials would raise the subject of making bribery during the election period a cognisable offence at the meeting planned with Legislative Secretary G. Narayana Raju after the winter session of Parliament ends on January 8.

While the Law Ministry is the administrative Ministry for the EC, the Legislative

Department is the nodal unit for issues related to the panel.

The sources said the Commission would ask the Ministry to take a call on its demand to extend constitutional protection to the two Election Commissioners on the lines of the provision given to the Chief Election Commissioner.

Referring to the issue of false declarations, the sources said that, as of now, the penalty was a jail term of six months. But the EC wants to make it into an "electoral offence". Conviction in an electoral offence is a ground for disqualification. "Jail term of six months does not instil fear. Disqualification would," another official said. As of now, candidates contesting the Legislative Council elections do not have a bar on expenses.

RBI SHORTLISTS WIPRO, TCS, 4 OTHERS FOR PCR

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has shortlisted six major IT companies, including TCS, Wipro and IBM India, to set up a digital public credit registry (PCR) for capturing details of all borrowers and wilful defaulters.

The proposed PCR will also include data from entities such as markets regulator SEBI, the Corporate Affairs Ministry, Goods and Service Tax Network (GSTN) and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), to enable banks and financial institutions to get a 360-degree profile of existing as well as prospective borrowers on a real-time basis.

"Consequent to the publication of expression of interest (EoI) on October 27, 2018, the RBI had received responses from several vendors for implementation of end-to-end solution for PCR," the central bank said.

The other three shortlisted vendors are Capgemini Technology Services India, Dun & Bradstreet Information Services India and Mindtree Ltd. The RBI would soon seek request for proposals from the six vendors.

RUSSIA 'SUCCESSFULLY' TESTS HYPERSONIC MISSILE

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday hailed final tests of a hypersonic missile, which he had earlier said would render existing missile systems obsolete.

“Russia has a new type of strategic weapon,” he said, adding that the intercontinental “Avangard” system would be ready for use from 2019.

Mr. Putin had unveiled features of the Avangard during his annual address in March, which he said would be part of a new generation of “invincible” weaponry. The hypersonic missile could fly at 20 times the speed of sound and manoeuvre up and down, meaning that it could breach defence systems.

JAPAN TO RESUME COMMERCIAL WHALING

Japan on Wednesday said it is withdrawing from the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and will resume commercial whaling next year, in a move expected to spark international criticism.

The announcement had been widely expected and comes after Japan failed in a bid earlier this year to convince the IWC to allow it to resume commercial whaling.

“Commercial whaling... will be limited to Japan’s territorial waters and exclusive economic zones. We will not hunt in the Antarctic waters or in the southern hemisphere,” Mr. Suga added.

BIMAL JALAN TO HEAD PANEL ON RBI'S ECONOMIC CAPITAL FRAMEWORK

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), in consultation with the government, has set up a six-member committee to review the economic capital framework of the central bank.

Former RBI Governor Bimal Jalan will be the committee’s chairman and former Deputy Governor Rakesh Mohan deputy chairman. The other members are Economic Affairs Secretary Subash Chandra Garg, RBI Deputy Governor N.S. Vishwanathan and two board members of the RBI — Bharat Doshi and Sudhir Mankad.

Dr. Jalan was the Governor of the RBI between November 1997 and September 2003.

The committee would submit its report within 90 days from the date of its first meeting, the RBI said in a statement on Wednesday. The terms of reference of the committee would be to review status, need and justification of various provisions, reserves and buffers presently provided for by the RBI, keeping in mind ‘public policy mandate of the RBI, including financial stability considerations.

POCSO ACT: ASSAULT ON BOYS PUNISHABLE BY DEATH

The government on Friday approved amendments to the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, to bring punishments for sexual assaults on boys on a par with those against girls. These include the provision of death penalty when the child is under 12 years and when a penetrative sexual assault is committed by a relative.

The amendments approved by the Union Cabinet will now have to be passed by Parliament. An official of the Ministry of Women and Child Development said the government intends to introduce the amendment Bill in the Rajya Sabha.

CABINET NOD FOR ₹10,000-CRORE GAGANYAAN HUMAN SPACE MISSION

The Union Cabinet on Friday approved the ambitious Gaganyaan programme, which will send three Indian astronauts to space for up to seven days by 2022 at a cost of ₹10,000 crore. The project was first announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day speech this year. As part of the programme, two unmanned flights and one manned flight will be undertaken.

The first human space flight demonstration is targeted to be completed within 40 months of the sanction date. Prior to this, two unmanned flights in full complement will be carried out to gain confidence, the government said. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has developed the launch vehicle GSLV MK-III, which has the necessary payload capability to launch a three-member crew module in low earth orbit.

INDIAN SCIENTISTS ACHIEVEMENT IN 2018

1. A gel that can protect farmers from toxic pesticides

Most farmers do not wear any protective gear while spraying chemicals in fields, which often leads to pesticide exposure and toxicity. Scientists at the Institute for Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine, Bangalore have developed a protective gel - poly-Oxime - that can be applied on skin and can break down toxic chemicals into safe substances, preventing them from going deep into the skin and organs like the brain and the lungs.

2. World's thinnest material with novel technique

Pushing the envelope in nanotechnology, researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar have developed a material that is 100,000 times thinner than a sheet of paper. They synthesized a two-dimensional material of just one-nanometer thickness (a human hair is about 80,000 nanometer wide) using Magnesium diboride – a compound of boron. This is said to be the world's thinnest material. It can find a range of applications – from next-generation batteries to ultraviolet absorbing films.

3. Gene editing applied to banana genome

Using the gene editing technique - CRISPR/Cas9 - researchers at the National Agri-Food Biotechnology Institute, Mohali have edited the banana genome. This is the first such work in any fruit crop in India. Banana is a the fourth most important food crop after wheat, rice and corn in terms of gross value of production. Gene editing could be deployed for improving nutritional quality, agronomical important traits as well as pathogen resistance in banana.

4. Discoveries to tackle Zika, dengue, JE and chikungunya

The National Brain Research Centre (NBRC) at Manesar has figured out cellular and molecular mechanisms that show how Zika virus causes microcephaly or small head size in babies. Researchers discovered that envelop protein of zika virus affects proliferation rates of human neural stem cells and promotes premature but faulty neuron formation. Another study led by scientist at the Regional Centre for Biotechnology, Faridabad has identified a key protein which helps dengue as well as Japanese Encephalitis viruses replication inside human body by inhibiting anti-viral cytokines. This finding could pave way for development of targeted drugs for dengue and JE. For detecting Chikungunya, a group of researchers from Amity University, Noida, Jamia Millia Islamia University, Delhi and

Maharishi Dayanand University, Rohtak, have developed a biosensor using molybdenum disulphide nanosheets .

5. Faster diagnostic tests for tuberculosis

Scientists at the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute, Faridabad and All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi have jointly developed highly sensitive and rapid tests for detection of **tuberculosis** infection in lungs and surrounding membranes. Unlike current tests that use antibodies for detection of bacterial proteins in sputum samples, new tests use Aptamer Linked Immobilized Sorbent Assay (ALISA) and Electrochemical Sensor (ECS) for detection of a bacterial protein in the sputum.

6. Arsenic found in Punjab groundwater

Till now arsenic was a major problem in West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Chhattisgarh. It was also known that there is arsenic contamination in groundwater in Punjab. Now a new study done by New Delhi-based TERI School of Advanced Studies has found that Punjab's floodplains are severely affected by arsenic contamination . In some wells, arsenic levels were found to be 20 to 50 times higher than WHO prescribed limit.

7. Space weather warning model rules out 'mini ice age'

A team of scientists from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Kolkata have dismissed the speculation that the upcoming sunspot cycle is going to be stronger, based on calculations using a model developed by them. The near-Earth and inter-planetary space environmental conditions and solar radiative forcing of

climate over the upcoming sunspot cycle 25 will likely be similar or marginally more extreme relative to what has been observed during the past decade over the current solar cycle. The method makes it possible to make predictions almost a decade before the next sunspot cycle activity peaks in strength.

8. New tool developed for autism screening

In many cases, autism is misdiagnosed as mental retardation and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Early identification and interventions may help children with autistic disorders. To help this process, scientists at the Government Medical College and Hospital, **Chandigarh**, have developed an Indian tool for screening children for autism. The Chandigarh Autism Screening Instrument (CASI) is designed to help community health workers to carry out initial screening for autism.

9. Hope for Alzheimer's, Huntington's

Scientists at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, have figured out the way memory deficit develops in early stages, resulting in Alzheimer's disease . They have found that early breaking down of a protein, fibrillar actin or F-actin, in the brain leads to disruption in communication among nerve cells and consequently memory deficits. This knowledge can be used to develop early diagnosis test in future. In another study done in fruit flies, researchers at Department of Genetics at Delhi University South Campus found that it was possible to restrict the progression of Huntington's disease by increasing insulin signaling in the brain neuronal cells.

10. Green technique can address Plaster of Paris pollution

A team of scientists at Pune-based National Chemical Laboratory (CSIR-NCL) has

developed a technique that helps recycle Plaster of Paris waste from hospitals in an eco-friendly and economical way. The new technique disinfects waste and converts it into useful products like ammonium sulphate and calcium bicarbonate. The technique can also be used to disintegrate PoP waste from idols immersed in water bodies.

11. Stone Age tools, genetic studies throw new light on peopling of India

The Stone Age tools discovered in a village near Chennai suggest that a Middle Palaeolithic culture was present in India around 385,000 years ago — roughly the same time that it is known to have developed in Africa and in Europe. The discovery pushes back the period when populations with a Middle Palaeolithic culture may have inhabited India, and challenges popular theory that the Middle Palaeolithic was brought to India by modern humans dispersing from Africa only around 125,000 years ago or later. In the North, population genetic study has revealed that the Rors who inhabit modern Haryana came to the Indus Valley when it was flourishing during the Bronze Age and inducted West Eurasian genetic ancestry

12. Sikkim gets real-time landslide warning system

A real-time landslide warning system has been set up in the Sikkim-Darjeeling belt of north-eastern Himalayas which is highly vulnerable to landslides. The warning system consists of over 200 sensors that can measure geophysical and hydrological parameters like rainfall, pore pressure and seismic activities. The system is capable of warning about 24 hours in advance. It has been deployed by researchers of Kerala-based Amrita University and **Sikkim** State Disaster Management Authority.

13. Computing capacity for weather forecasting gets a boost

During the year, the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) upgraded its computing capacity for weather forecasting and climate monitoring, taking its total high performance computing (HPC) power to as high as 6.8 Petaflop. With this, India rose to the fourth position, next only to United Kingdom, Japan and USA in terms of dedicated capacity for HPC resources for weather and climate proposes.

14. Scientists use silk polymer to develop artificial vertebral disc

Scientists at Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati developed a silk-based bioartificial disc that may find use in disc replacement therapy in future. The group has developed a fabrication procedure for a silk-based bioartificial disc adopting a “directional freezing technique”. The disc mimics internal intricacy of human disc and its mechanical properties too are similar to those of the native ones. The use of a silk biopolymer to fabricate a biocompatible disc can reduce the cost of artificial discs in future.

15. Transgenic rice with reduced arsenic accumulation, flowering mustard

To address the problem of arsenic accumulation in rice grains, researchers at Lucknow-based CSIR-National Botanical Research Institute developed transgenic rice by inserting a novel fungal gene, which results in reduced arsenic accumulation in rice grain. They cloned Arsenic methyltransferase (WaarsM) gene from a soil fungus and inserted it into rice genome. In another study, TERI School of Advanced Studies has developed an early flowering transgenic variety of mustard.

In other significant developments, the Department of Science and Technology launched a national mission on Cyber-Physical Systems with an outlay of Rs 3660 crore for five years. The Indian Institute of Astrophysics in Bangalore commissioned India's first robotic telescope to keep an eye on the dynamic cosmos, while the ambitious India Neutrino Observatory (INO) project got a go ahead from the National Green Tribunal.

NARENDRA MODI RENAMES ROSS ISLAND TO NETAJI DWEEP

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday announced renaming of three islands of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago as a tribute to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

The Ross Island was renamed Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Dweep, the Neil Island as Shaheed Dweep and the Havelock Island as Swaraj Dweep, Mr. Modi said during a speech amid thunderous applause from the audience here.

Classic IAS Academy

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