

## My Notes....

### NATIONAL

#### MONUMENTS UNDER 'ADOPT A HERITAGE SCHEME'

Seven shortlisted companies were given 'Letters of Intent' for fourteen monuments under 'Adopt a Heritage Scheme' of Ministry of Tourism at the closing ceremony of 'Paryatan Parv' at Rajpath Lawns, New Delhi. These companies will be the future 'Monument Mitras' who would associate pride with their CSR activities. The Inter-Ministerial Oversight and Vision Committee members appreciated the positive response received from reputed organisations in the Initial phase, wherein Fifty Seven (57) responses have been recorded and fourteen (14) monuments have been opted through seven (7) Expression Of Interest(s). After detailed scrutiny, the following companies ranging from hospitality industry, travel industry and banking industry were shortlisted for vision bidding for final selection of Monument Mitras:

1. SBI Foundation shortlisted for the adoption of **Jantar Mantar, Delhi.**
2. **TK International Limited** shortlisted for the adoption of Sun Temple, Konark, Raja Rani Temple, Bhubaneswar, Ratnagiri Monuments, Jajpur, Odisha
3. **Yatra Online Pvt. Limited** shortlisted for the adoption of Hampi, Karnataka, Leh Palace, Jammu & Kashmir, Qutub Minar, Delhi and Ajanta Caves, Maharashtra
4. **Travel Corporation of India Ltd.** shortlisted for the adoption of Mattancherry Palace Museum, Kochi and Safdarjung Tomb, Delhi
5. **Adventure Tour Operator Association of India** shortlisted for the adoption of Gangotri Temple Area and Trail to Gaumukh, Mt. StokKangri, Laddakh, Jammu and Kashmir

#### Flashback

1. The 'Adopt a Heritage Scheme' of Ministry of Tourism was launched on World Tourism Day i.e. 27th September, 2017 by the President of India.
2. Thereafter, Ministry of Tourism invited Private Sector Companies, Public Sector Companies and Corporate individuals to adopt the sites and to take up the responsibility for making our heritage and tourism more sustainable through conservation and development.
3. This scheme is a unique endeavour of Ministry of Tourism in close collaboration with Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) which envisages developing monuments, heritage and tourist sites across India and making them tourist friendly to enhance their tourism potential and cultural importance, in a planned and phased manner.
4. **India is renowned across the World for its rich and diverse cultural and natural heritage.**
5. Adopt a Heritage /Apni Dharohar Apni Pehchan Project is a unique endeavour of Ministry of Tourism in close collaboration with Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) which envisages developing monuments, heritage and tourist sites across India and making them tourist friendly to enhance their tourism potential and cultural importance, in a planned and phased manner.
6. The project primarily focuses on development and maintenance of world-class tourist infrastructure and amenities which includes basic civic amenities and advanced amenities like Cleanliness, Public Conveniences, Ease of access, secure environment, illumination and night viewing facilities for an overall inclusive tourist experience that will result in more footfall from both domestic and foreign tourists.

6. **Special Holidays Travel Pvt. Ltd. (With) Rotary Club of Delhi** shortlisted for the adoption of Agrasen ki Baoli, Delhi
7. **NBCC shortlisted for the adoption of Purana Quila, Delhi.**

## NEW NORMS FOR WORSHIP AT TEMPLE

The **Supreme Court** gave its nod to new norms for worshipping at the ancient **Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga temple in Ujjain city of Madhya Pradesh**, including **allowing only 500 ml of reverse osmosis water** for the ceremony. The apex court approved **eight points of the resolution passed by the temple management committee** in consonance with the recommendation of an expert committee of officials of the **Archeological Survey of India** and **Geological Survey of India**.

### What

1. A bench of Justices Arun Mishra and L Nageswara Rao said **the recommendations of the expert committee need to be implemented to preserve the lingam** (symbol of the deity).
2. As per the new approved norms, the devotees would be **permitted a fixed amount of water measuring 500ml in an appropriate small pot per person for Jalabhishek** (worshipping by offering water).
3. It said that the water for **Jalabhishek shall be taken from the Reverse Osmosis (RO) machine installed during Simhastha** (religious fair), 2016, for which a connection shall be provided near the sanctum sanctorum.
4. The new resolution says that at present during the famous Bhasma Aarti (special prayer with sacred ash), half of the lingam is covered with cloth. Now on, it would be fully covered with dry cotton cloth during the prayers.
5. Restrictions were also **placed for Abhishek and only up to 1.25 litres of milk or panchamrut** (mixture of honey, liquid jaggery, milk, yogurt and ghee) per devotee shall be allowed. **After the Jalabhishek which concludes at 5 pm every day**, the lingam will be cleaned and dried to minimise the water content and thereafter only dry pooja would be permitted each day.
6. The **usual practice of rubbing of sugar powder on Shivalinga has been fully banned** and instead, the use of Khandsari (unrefined raw white sugar) will be promoted.
7. A new sewage treatment plant shall be set up within a year and dryers and fans will be used to avoid mositure in sanctum sanctorum. "Bilva (bel) leaves and flowers shall be used on the upper part of the Shivling to avoid any obstruction in natural breathing of the stone," the resolution approved by apex court said.

### Flashpoint

1. **On August 25, the apex court had constituted an expert committee comprising ASI, GSI and other officials** to survey and analyse the Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlingam and prepare a report containing the rate at which the deterioration in its size was taking place and the measures to prevent it.
2. The Committee was also directed to study the other structures and also the temple and submit recommendations on steps for overall improvement of the entire premises and its preservation.
3. **The committee had submitted an exhaustive report** which was taken on record by the court and the temple management committee was directed to consider the recommendations.

## INDIA BREAKS INTO TOP 100 CLUBS

India has for the first time broken into the club of the **top 100 nations easiest to do business in**. The **World Bank's doing Business Report 2018**, released on 31 October

2017, showed that **the countries global rank in ease of doing business jumped by 30 places to reach the 100th rank**. The rank was 130th in the previous year. India has also been **adjudged the 5th best performing nation globally** in reforming the business environment.

#### What

1. **It also improved its ranking in six of the ten sub-categories** used by the World Bank to judge the climate of business ease in a country.
2. The systematic reform by the country in a persistent manner has paid off. Annette Dixon, Vice President of South Asian region, World Bank said.
3. The multilateral agency has recognised reforms by the government in **eight sub-categories**.
4. Among these, **the biggest improvement in rankings was seen in the category of paying taxes where India managed to reach 119th position** from the 172nd position earlier.
5. **GST was not a majorly mentioned issue from the respondent's side**; it cautioned that the tax system would play out significantly in the rankings over the next few years.
6. In the protecting minority investor's category, **India is now the 4th best in the world**, a jump of 9 ranks from the 13th place last year.
7. However, despite hoping to get a better ranking in the securing construction permits category, India's rank has only improved to 181 from last year's 184.
8. The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) is pleased to announce that India ranks 100 among 190 countries assessed by the Doing Business Team. India has leapt 30 ranks over its rank of 130 in the Doing Business Report 2017.
9. **The DB Report is an assessment of 190 economies and covers 10 indicators** which span the lifecycle of a business.
10. **India has improved its rank in 6 out of 10 indicators** and has moved closer to international best practices (Distance to Frontier score).
11. **India is the only country in South Asia and BRICS economies** to feature among most improved economies of the DB Report this year.

### The important highlights of India's performance are:

#### Resolving Insolvency

1. Rank improved from 136 to 103
2. Distance to Frontier (DTF) score improved from 32.75 to 40.75
3. Strength of insolvency framework index increased from 6 to 8.5
4. Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code created for efficient handling of restructuring & insolvency proceedings
5. Professional institutes set up for handling restructuring & insolvency proceedings

#### Paying Taxes

1. Rank improved from 172 to 119
2. DTF score improved from 46.58 to 66.06
3. Payments reduced from 25 to 13 in a year
4. Time reduced from 241 to 214 hours
5. Total tax rate reduced from 60.6% to 55.3% (% of profit)
6. Post filing index improved from 4.3 to 49.31
7. Enabled electronic registration, return & payment of ESI & EPF contributions

#### Getting Credit

1. Rank improved from 44 to 29
2. DTF score improved from 65 to 75
3. Strength of legal rights index improved from 6 to 8
4. Credit bureau coverage increased from 21.4% to 43.5% (% of adults)

5. Increased coverage of security interest registration under SARFAESI Act
6. Secured creditors prioritized over Government dues for purposes of recovery

#### Enforcing Contracts

1. Rank improved from 172 to 164
2. DTF score improved from 35.19 to 40.76
3. Cost reduced from 39.6% to 31% (% of claim)
4. Quality of judicial process index improved from 9 to 10.3
5. Dedicated commercial courts established
6. National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) to monitor and manage court cases

#### Protecting Minority Investors

1. Rank improved from 13 to 4
2. DTF score improved from 73.33 to 80
3. Strength of minority investor protection index increased from 7.3 to 8
4. Extent of conflict of interest regulation index increased from 6.7 to 7.3
5. Extent of shareholder governance index increased from 8 to 8.7
6. Greater transparency requirements for interested parties transactions
7. Greater shareholder protection through action against directors & claims for damages

#### Construction Permits

1. Rank improved from 185 to 181
2. DTF score improved from 32.83 to 38.80
3. Procedures to obtain construction permits reduced from 35.1 to 30.1
4. Time reduced from 190.0 to 143.9 days
5. Cost reduced from 25.9 per cent to 23.2 per cent of warehouse value

### INDIA'S FIRST RO-RO SERVICE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 22 October 2017 inaugurated the first phase of his 'dream project,' the Rs 650-crore, 31-km 'roll-on, roll-off' (Ro-Ro) ferry service between **Ghogha in Bhavnagar district of Saurashtra region and Dahej in Bharuch district of South Gujarat across the Gulf of Khambhat in the Arabian Sea.** This may be a project between Ghogha and Dahej, but **it is a landmark project in South East Asia. The ferry service is a first of its kind.**

#### What

1. The **ferry service has been hanging fire for various technical and financial issues since 1995** and was **first conceived in the early 1960s.** The foundation stone for the current works was laid by Modi as the chief minister in 2012.
2. The ferry service **would now reduce the travel distance between Saurashtra and South Gujarat from 360 km to 31 km,** saving five hours in travel time and money for people frequently travelling between the two regions. The ferry can take up to 250 passengers.



3. In subsequent phases, **the ferries would be able to transport cars and trucks across the Gulf**. The project would be a boon for over 25 lakh people from Saurashtra settled in diamond and textiles hub of Surat in South Gujarat.
4. The prime minister said **plans were afoot to expand the ferry service to Hazira at a later stage**. The ferry services would not be restricted to one route.
5. Modi then boarded the ferry '**Island Jade**' from **Ghogha to travel via sea route to Dahej**, which he would reach after an hour-and-a-half, before flying off to Vadodara, where he would address a public rally and inaugurate projects worth Rs 1,140 crore.
6. The prime minister was accompanied by about 100 physically challenged children aboard the ferry to Dahej.

## WCD CAMPAIGN TO END GENDER BIAS

The **Women and Child Development (WCD)** Ministry has launched an **online campaign** to spread a message that a woman can move **mountains for another woman**. The online **campaign, #IamThatWoman**, is an effort to end gender bias in women against women. When a woman has the support of her womanhood, she can be unstoppable. Join the '#IamThatWoman' campaign and spread the message that a woman can move mountains for another woman.

### What

1. Through this campaign, the Ministry aims at shedding light on **“the enormous contributions”** made by women for women.
2. A mother-in-law can be her daughter-in-law's best companion. It is the time we did away with the **'in-law' in 'daughter-in-law'**.
3. A woman manager can easily empathise with her female juniors and help her climb the ladder of success. Likewise, a landlady's affection towards a female tenant makes a world of difference in making the young girl feel at home, away from home.
4. The union minister also appealed to the people to shun “stereotypes” associated with the women harming other women.
5. The online campaign will be carried out through various social media platforms.

## FIRST EVER AIIA DEDICATED TO THE NATION

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi on 17 October 2017 **dedicated the All India Institute of Ayurveda, in New Delhi, to the Nation**. The **first ever All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA)** is set up along the lines of AIIMS. As an **apex institute under the Ministry of AYUSH**, the AIIA will bring synergy between the traditional wisdom of Ayurveda and modern diagnostic tools and technology.

### What

1. The Prime Minister congratulated the gathering on the celebration of Dhanvantari Jayanti as Ayurveda Divas. He complimented the Ministry of AYUSH for the establishment of the All India Institute of Ayurveda.
2. The Prime Minister asserted that nations cannot progress unless they value and cherish their history and heritage. **Those nations, who leave their heritage behind**, is destined to lose their identity.
3. The **government is also encouraging the private sector to invest in the field of Ayurveda**. He appealed to practitioners, students and followers of Ayurveda, to take benefit of programs like Skill India, Digital India, Swastha Bharat-Swaccha Bharat and Start-up India, to fulfill the dream of **'Ayushman Bharat'**.
4. The Ministry has published an **'Ayurveda standard guideline'** to standardize medicines and treatments in this ancient therapy system.
5. The **Pharmacopeia Commission** of Indian medicine is working for the standardization of medicines.

6. On this occasion, **The Prime Minister released the “Ayurvedic Standard Treatment Guidelines”**. These guidelines were developed by the Ministry of AYUSH.
7. **The All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) has been set up** with a total campus area of 10.015 acres with a budget of Rs.157 Crore.

### 'SUSTAINED DIALOGUE' IN J&K

A **sustained dialogue will be initiated by the government to find a solution to the Kashmir issue**, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh said on 23 October 2017. Addressing a hurriedly-convened press conference, Singh said **former director of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) Dineshwar Sharma** would be the central government's representative to initiate dialogue with all stakeholders in Jammu and Kashmir.

#### What

1. **Sharma, a 1979-batch (retired) officer of the Indian Police Service**, served as the IB director between December, 2014 and 2016.
2. Sharma will decide whom he wants to hold talks with, Singh said when asked whether he would have dialogue with the Hurriyat Conference.
3. The initiative has been taken as per Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day address.

### FIRST PMKK FOR SKILLING

To bring momentum in **skilling through collaborative efforts**, the Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh inaugurated **India's first Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK) for Skilling in Smart Cities, in collaboration with New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC)**. The ministers also laid the foundation for a **Skill Development Centre at Moti Bagh** and a **Centre of Excellence at Dharam Marg**, New Delhi.

#### What

1. Affirming synergies with **the Government of India's flagship programs**, the new skill development centres underscore the commitment of the Ministry of Urban Affairs & Housing (MUHA) and the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) to support skilling in smart cities.
2. **National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), an executive arm of MSDE**, has collaborated with **New Delhi Municipal Council Smart City Limited (NDMCSCCL)** to extend cooperation for setting up of PMKK Centres for Smart Cities, **to provide skill training for unemployed youth through its short-term training (STT) module** and contribute to the capacity building of municipal employees through **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program**.
3. **India which has the privilege of being a young nation**, would gain from this demographic dividend to become a superpower and be amongst the top three countries in the world by 2030.
4. The **newly inaugurated Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra leverages NDMC infrastructure for skilling initiatives**.
5. Located at Mandir Marg, New Delhi, the NDMC-PMKK Centre for Skilling in Smart Cities is an exemplary heritage building of approx. 30,000 sq.ft., with a capacity of skilling 4,000 youth annually.
6. Catering to healthcare and solar energy sectors, the centre will be managed by one of NSDC's affiliated training partners - Orion Edutech, which has an impeccable record of training nearly 3 lakh candidates through its network of over 275 skill development centres across the country.

### INTEGRITY INDEX FOR CENTRAL ORGANISATIONS

The **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)** will develop an Integrity Index for government establishments **with the help of IIM-Ahmedabad (IIM-A)** in line with the broader strategy and emphasis on preventive vigilance. **The IIM-A will follow a research-based approach for creating the index**. At the outset, **it has selected 25**

**organisations** from various sectors for the exercise as it believes that the next level of systemic change can be through the tool of Integrity Index. Subsequently, it is proposed to extend the concept to all other CPSUs and organisations of the Centre.

#### What

1. The institutions include **Steel Authority of India, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, National Thermal Power Corporation, Syndicate Bank, Central Board of Direct Tax**, Mumbai Port Trust, Ministry of Railways, Competition Commission of India and Mahanagar Telecom Nigam Ltd.
2. **The CVC has decided to go in for development of the Integrity Index-based** on benchmarking of internal processes and controls within an organisation as well as management of relationships and expectations of outside stakeholders.
3. The **Integrity Index will bring out annual rankings of public sector undertakings**, public sector banks and financial institutions as well as departments and ministries of the central government by linking the essential drivers of vigilance with long-term efficiency, profitability and sustainability.
4. **This is aimed at creating an internal and external ecosystem** that promotes working with integrity in public organisations.
5. **The index would be developed on the basis of defining what constitutes integrity of public organisations**, identifying different factors of integrity and their inter-linkages and creating an objective and reliable tool that can measure the performance of organisations.
6. **It will also keep in mind to validate the findings over a period of time to improve the robustness of the tool** and create an internal and external ecosystem that promotes working with integrity where public organisations lead the way.

## SC UPHOLDS RIGHT TO ABORT

The **Supreme Court has dismissed a man's petition seeking damages from his estranged wife for undergoing abortion without his consent**, and ruled that an adult woman had an **unimpeachable right to give birth or terminate pregnancy**. Terming the abortion, to which he had objected, "illegal", the husband had also demanded compensation from the woman's parents and brother, and two doctors. **The Punjab and Haryana high court had dismissed the husband's plea saying termination of pregnancy was the sole prerogative of the woman.**

#### What

1. The termination of pregnancy had not **soured the relations between the two...** So, keeping in view the legal position, it is held that no express or implied consent of the husband is required for getting **pregnancy terminated under the (Medical Termination of Pregnancy) Act.**
2. The CJI-headed bench further fortified the HC ruling by adding, "**She is a mother and an adult who says she did not want the pregnancy.** How can she or others be made liable for it? Even a mentally challenged woman has a right to terminate her pregnancy. How can parents and doctors be made liable?"
3. **The couple got married in 1994 and had a son in 1995.** Due to discord, the wife and son had been staying with her parents in Chandigarh since 1999. During pendency of the wife's petition seeking maintenance, the Lok Adalat in Chandigarh had mediated, and persuaded the couple to live together in the husband's house in Panipat.
4. In November 2002, they started living together and in January 2003 discovered that she was pregnant. As the relationship showed no signs of improvement, the woman wanted to terminate the "unwanted" pregnancy. The man objected.

5. She contacted her parents, who took her to Chandigarh. The husband refused to sign the hospital papers for medical termination of pregnancy but the woman went ahead with the abortion at a Chandigarh hospital.
6. **The man filed a civil suit against his wife, her parents and brother, and the doctors for recovery of Rs 30 lakh** towards damages on account of mental pain, agony and harassment. He argued that the termination of pregnancy without any medical need and without the consent of the unborn child's father was illegal **under the MTP Act**.

## PARYATAN PARV

**Three week long “Paryatan Parv” a nation-wide celebration of Tourism organized by Ministry of Tourism**, in collaboration with other Central Ministries, State Governments and Stakeholders from **5th to 25th October 2017 concluded**. The **Parv was organized with the objective of drawing focus on the benefits of tourism**, showcasing the **cultural diversity of the country** and reinforcing the principle of **“Tourism for All”**.

### Paryatan Parv focused on

1. **Dekho Apna Desh:** To encourage Indians to visit their own country. There were **several activities organised across the Country** like Photograph and Blog Competitions of sites visited during the Event, Stories of India through Travelers’ Eyes, on Social Media, Tourism related Quiz, Essay, Debate and Painting Competitions for Students. The general public has shown tremendous response and **shared their activities on MyGov platform**.
2. **Tourism for All:** Tourism Events at sites across all States in the country were organised. The activities at these sites included **illumination in and around the Sites, Cultural Programmes of Dance, Music, Theatre**, Story Telling, Sensitisation Programmes for Stakeholders around the Sites, Tourism Exhibitions, Showcasing Culture, Cuisine and Handicrafts / Handlooms, Guided Heritage Walks, etc. Large scale public participation made it “People’s Events” with
3. **Tourism & Governance:** Interactive Sessions & Workshops with Stakeholders on varied themes were organised across the Country:

#### Focus Area

- Skill Development in Tourism Sector
- Innovation in Tourism
- For inducting Ex-servicemen as service providers for Taxi Operation
- Developing Rural Tourism in locations near established Destinations
- Community Sensitisation Workshops on Homestay and B&B Opportunities
- Conference on investment Opportunities in tourism sector

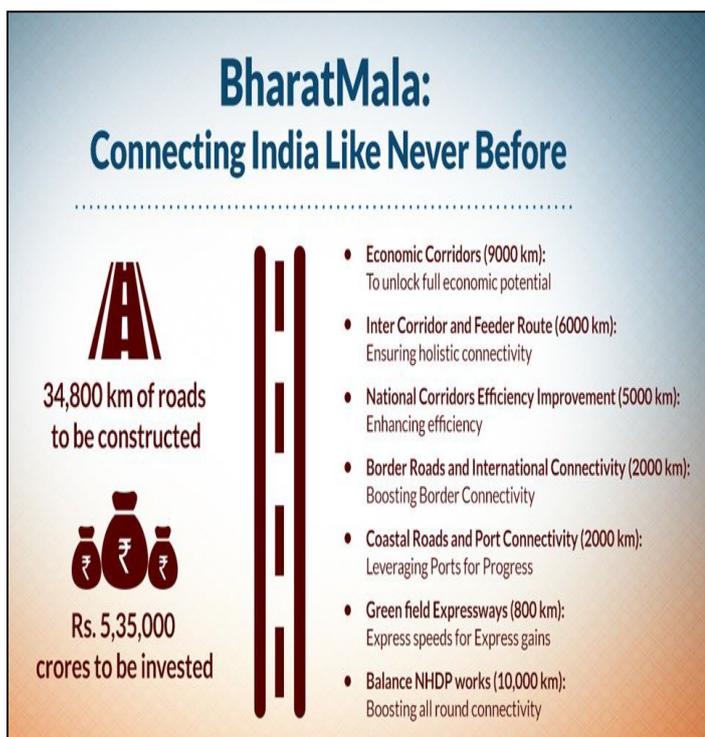
## BHARATMALA APPROVED

The government on 23 October 2017 approved **Rs7 trillion worth highway projects** including the ambitious Bharatmala. The development comes barely few months after union minister Nitin Gadkari told that the government will soon launch the **Bharatmala project** to build over 20,000km of highways in the first phase. The cabinet gave the go ahead to highway projects worth about **Rs7 trillion for development of over 80,000km of highways including Bharatmala project in the next five years**.

### What

1. Road, transport minister Gadkari had earlier said **detailed project reports (DPRs)** are being prepared for the Bharatmala project.
2. **Bharatmala is a mega plan of the government** and the second largest highways project after **National Highways Development Project (NHDP)** that

- saw development of about 50,000km, and aims at improving connectivity in border and other areas.
- The official said the highway projects approved on 23 October 2017 also include **economic corridor developments aimed at faster movement of cargo**. The government had earlier planned to develop economic corridors with a **length of about 21,000km besides 14,000km of feeder routes**.
  - The corridors included Mumbai-Cochin-Kanyakumari, Bengaluru-Mangaluru, Hyderabad-Panaji and Sambalpur-Ranchi, to name a few.
  - A study under the **proposed Bharatmala project by global consultancy firm AT Kearney had identified 44 economic corridors**.
  - The Prime Minister's Office, earlier this year, had asked for Public Investment Board's (PIB) clearance to the first phase of the project. PIB, chaired by the expenditure secretary, had later approved it.
  - Other members of PIB included secretaries of economic affairs, Niti Aayog, statistics and programme implementation, environment and forests, besides the secretary of the administrative ministry concerned.



## SC BANS USE OF COAL ALTERNATIVE

**India's top court on banned the use of petroleum coke**, a dirtier alternative to coal, in New Delhi in a bid to clean the air in one of the **world's most polluted cities**. The Supreme Court, which recently banned the sale of firecrackers in the New Delhi area, also **ordered a ban on the sale and use of furnace oil** — another dirty refinery by-product — in and around the capital and ordered implementation of strict emission norms by the end of December.

### What

- It is a big win for clean air," Sunita Narain, an environmental activist** and a member of a committee set up by the government which recommended the ban of such fuels around the Indian capital.
- Petroleum coke, a dark solid composed mainly of carbon, **emits 11 percent more greenhouse gases than coal**, according to the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy.
- Annual demand for the fuel, which is more energy efficient than coal, has nearly doubled over the past four years to more than 27 million tonnes.
- India tops deaths from pollution globally, according to The Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health**, with 2.5 million Indians dying early in 2015 because of pollution.
- The health ministry data shows that **respiratory issues killed about 10 people per day in the year** ended March 2017 in the National Capital Region - a rapidly urbanizing and polluted area around **New Delhi that is a third the size of New York state**, but houses 2.5 times more people.

6. The ban on the sale and use of petcoke, which will be effective from Nov. 1, could hit the country's small and medium scale industries, which employ millions of workers and operate on thin margins.
7. **Sulphur-heavy petcoke** and other cheap, highly polluting fuels such as furnace oil are widely used by cement factories, dyeing units, paper mills, brick kilns and ceramics businesses.
8. **Petcoke demand fell in August after Hurricane Harvey hit shipments from the United States**, the biggest exporter to India, but analysts and traders say consumption is likely to recover and continue growing, unless there is a country-wide ban.

## INS KILTAN COMMISSIONED

The Indian Navy is rapidly pursuing the policy of indigenisation and the commissioning of the **third Kamorta class Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) stealth corvette** is a significant step in that direction. **INS Kiltan** was commissioned at the **Eastern Naval Command**, the **third of the four Project-28 Kamorta class ASW warships**.

### What

1. **This ship is unique, as about 81 per cent of the ship is built indigenously** and is the first ship built by India that has a superstructure made up of carbon fibre composite material. This makes the ship a **stealth corvette and ours is one of the few nations** that have this technology or this class of ships.
2. The **keel of the ship was laid in 2010 under the Project-28 scheme** and was built by **Garden Reach Ship Builders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata**.
3. This is part of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's **'Make in India' initiative** and we need to become more self-reliant.
4. The ship has been constructed using **high grade steel (DMR 249A)** produced in state-owned Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL).
5. The ship has a displacement of 3500 tonnes, spans 109 meters in length and 14 meters at the beam and is propelled by four diesel engines to achieve speeds in excess of 25 knots with an endurance of 3450 nautical miles. It is well equipped to fight in nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) warfare conditions.
6. The ship derives its name from one of the islands in **Aminidivi group of the Lakshadweep and Minicoy group of islands** and its war cry is 'We hunt the hunters'.

## SC CONCERNED OVER NON-UTILISATION OF FUNDS

The **Supreme Court has expressed concern over non-utilisation of funds for providing shelters to the urban homeless and non-constitution of committees** for the purpose in the **urban local bodies of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal**. Seeking a roadmap from these states on **how they plan to provide such shelters**, the apex court has observed that the executive committees to oversee the implementation of the **National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM)** have not been constituted by most of the **Urban Local Bodies (ULB) in the states**.

### What

1. **These three states will also give a roadmap** of what they propose to do for the implementation of the **National Urban Livelihood Mission**.
2. **The court directed that a senior officer dealing with the NULM** should file an affidavit within two weeks and made it clear that no extension of time will be granted.
3. It noted that no information was available with regard to the status of executive committee in the ULBs in Haryana in the status report filed by the Centre.
4. As far as the state of **West Bengal is concerned, only six committees have been constituted out of 125 ULBs** and as far as the state of **UP is concerned,**

- only 74 committees have been constituted out of 130 ULBs**, the bench noted.
5. The court is first dealing with the status of three states—**Haryana, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh**—among eight and two Union Territories which have been highlighted by the apex court-appointed committee headed by former Delhi High Court judge Justice Kailash Gambhir to oversee the implementation of the NULM across the country.
  6. The bench said the Centre's affidavit does not clearly showcase the status of utilisation of funds for the NULM, while noting that the funds have not even been released to several states like Bihar, Maharashtra and Delhi.
  7. The counsel for the Centre assured the bench that the details regarding utilisation of funds and constitution of committees will be made available to the court, especially with respect to the three states.
  8. **The apex court on September 13 favoured an audit of the government funds** meant for providing shelters to the urban homeless, saying the money was not being spent by the states and the homeless people continued to suffer.
  9. **It had also observed that the mission of the NULM scheme** "remains a distant dream even after lapse of a long period.
  10. **The NULM was launched in September 2013 to reduce poverty and vulnerability of urban poor households.**
  11. The Centre had earlier told the court that an amount of Rs 1,000 crore, released under the NULM, does not pertain only to urban homeless but to other activities also.

### ANTI-SUBMARINE WARFARE EXERCISE

**Navies of India and Japan** on 29 October 2017 began a **three-day anti-submarine warfare exercise in the Indian Ocean region** to deepen their operational coordination in the **strategically important sea lanes** around the two countries. **Indian Navy's two P-8 I long-range maritime reconnaissance anti-submarine warfare aircraft** and two P-3C Orion jets of the Japanese Navy will be part of the exercise.

#### What

1. **The two P-3C Orions**, which are anti-submarine warfare aircraft, landed at **naval air station Hansa in Goa**. The short duration exercise is taking place amid concerns in India and Japan over China's growing presence in the Indo-Pacific region.
2. Aircrew from both navies will also have extensive interaction to evolve a **"concept of joint operations"** "This exercise takes the bilateral relations to an unprecedented level of 'Strategic and Global partnership'".
3. **Japan Navy has participated in the recent trilateral Malabar exercise along with India and the US**. The three navies have been intensifying their cooperation considering China's expansionist behaviour in the critical sea lanes.

### ALL AADHAAR CASES REFERS TO CONSTITUTION BENCH

The Supreme Court on 30 October 2017 **referred all Aadhaar-related challenges to a five-judge constitution bench to be constituted by November-end**. The direction was passed by a bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra after being informed by the Centre that it did not wish to **extend the deadline for linking Aadhaar** to various schemes to 31 March, and wanted the matter to be heard by the court.

#### What

1. **A total of 22 cases had been tagged by the court to be heard by a smaller bench**. The cases challenge aspects of Aadhaar and the use of data collected **under the unique identification programme**.
2. Among the challenges are those on making Aadhaar mandatory for availing social welfare benefits, infringement of the right to privacy, making Aadhaar

- mandatory for filing income tax returns and for obtaining and retaining a permanent account number, or PAN.
3. Two new pleas challenging Aadhaar—**one by the West Bengal government on the mandatory linking of Aadhaar to various schemes and another challenging its mandatory linking with mobile numbers**—have added to the challenges.
  4. On 25 October, the Centre had told the court that it was willing to extend the deadline for linking Aadhaar to various schemes to 31 March next year. It was, however, clarified that this would apply only to those who have not yet enrolled for Aadhaar.
  5. In a path-breaking ruling on 24 August, **the apex court held that privacy is a fundamental right under the Constitution of India.**
  6. The Centre had last extended the deadline for obtaining Aadhaar for availing government schemes and subsidies by three months to 31 December. The extension was to be applicable only for those who are yet to apply for Aadhaar.
  7. Earlier in the day, the Supreme Court directed the West Bengal government to modify its plea challenging the mandatory use of Aadhaar for various schemes and had issued a notice on the mandatory linking of Aadhaar to mobile numbers.

### SC DEFERS HEARING IN ARTICLE 35A

The Supreme Court on 30 October 2017 **deferred the hearing in the politically contentious Article 35A case by three months.** The apex court was set to take up a clutch of petitions challenging the **constitutional validity of the Article 35A**, a provision incorporated in the Constitution that empowers the Jammu and Kashmir Legislature to define permanent residents of the state.

#### What

1. **Four petitions demanding striking down of the provision have been listed** before a bench of Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices A M Khanwilkar and D Y Chandracud.
2. **Delhi-based NGO We the Citizens** had filed **the main petition in 2014**, before three more petitions challenged the Article. Later, they were clubbed with the main one.
3. As per the J&K Constitution, **a Permanent Resident was a state subject on May 14, 1954, or who has been a resident of the state for 10 years**, and has “lawfully acquired immovable property in the state”.
4. The Jammu and Kashmir government had filed a counter-affidavit and sought the dismissal of the petition following the writ petition by the We the Citizens NGO. However, the Central government did not do so despite request from the state government, especially its state partner PDP.
5. The Union government’s decision to not back the J&K government’s stance has been seen by some as an attempt by it to weaken J&K’s special status.

#### What is the challenge before the Supreme Court?

1. A batch of petitions challenged the **constitutional validity of the Article 35A.**
2. A Supreme Court bench headed by the then Chief Justice J S Khehar referred the matter to a three-judge bench which will take up the petitions today.
3. Delhi-based NGO **We the Citizens**, in its petition, **argued that Article 35A** goes against the “very spirit of oneness of India” as it creates a “class within a class of Indian citizens”.
4. Another petition, filed by lawyer **Charu Wali Khanna**, **claims Article 35A discriminates against a woman’s right to property.**

## What is Article 35A?

1. **It is a constitutional provision that allows the Jammu-Kashmir assembly to define permanent residents of the state.**
2. According to the Jammu-Kashmir constitution, a Permanent Resident is defined as a person **who was a state subject on May 14, 1954**, or who has been residing in the state for a period of 10 years, and has “lawfully acquired immovable property in the state”.

## When was Article 35A introduced?

1. **It was brought in by a presidential order in 1954** in order to safeguard the rights and guarantee the unique identity of the people of Jammu-Kashmir.
2. **Only the Jammu-Kashmir assembly can change the definition of PR through a law** ratified by a two-thirds majority.

## INTERNATIONAL

### FIRST EVER INTERNATIONAL TRI SERVICE EXERCISE

Giving the Indo-Russian defence cooperation a major boost, **Exercise INDRA-2017, the first ever Tri Services Joint Exercise between Indian and Russian Armed Forces** was conducted in the **Eastern Military District of Russia from 19 to 29 Oct 2017**. Exercise INDRA in its **previous nine avatars has been conducted as a single service** exercise alternately between the two countries.

#### What

1. The year 2017 marks a major milestone as this Exercise **has been upgraded to involve all the three Services of the Armed Forces (Army, Navy & Air Force)**, which further accentuates the importance of Joint Services in the present world environment.
2. Exercise **INDRA-2017 was conducted at the 249th Combined Army Range Sergeevskiy** and in the **Sea of Japan near Vladivostok**.
3. The Indian contingent was comprised of 350 personnel from Army, 80 from Air Force, two IL 76 aircraft and one Frigate and Corvette each from the Navy.
4. The Russian Federation Armed Forces was represented by approximately 1000 troops of the 5th Army, Marines and Ships of Pacific Fleet and aircraft from Eastern Military District.
5. The scope of the Exercise includes professional interactions, establishment of joint command and control structures between the Indian & Russian forces and elimination of terrorist threat in a multinational environment under the UN mandate.
6. Exercise INDRA-2017 was strengthened mutual confidence, inter-operability and enable sharing of best practices between both the armed forces.
7. It was a landmark event in the history of **Indo-Russian defence cooperation**.

### 2ND TERM FOR XI JINPING

**China's ruling Communist Party** on 24 October 2017 **endorsed a second five-year term for President Xi Jinping** and appointed a new set of leaders backed by him. 64-year-old Xi's second term was endorsed by the party at the end of its week-long once-in-a-five-year Congress. The conference attended by over 2,350 delegates ended at the Great Hall of the People, the seat of power of China's Communist leadership. **Xi along with Premier Li Keqiang, 62, ranked number one and two in the Communist Party of China's hierarchy**, would continue based on two five-year tenure convention for top leaders. Five new members will be elected to the seven member Standing Committee of the party which rules the country. **Xi and Li took over power in 2012 and set to continue till 2022.**

**What**

1. **The new Standing Committee would be unveiled for China and the world** on 25 October 2017 when they would formally appear in front of the media during a live telecast.
2. Reports in the Hong Kong media said that **Xi may not have his way at the Congress as his closest aide Wang Qishan**, who led the massive anti-corruption campaign in which Xi's opponents were allegedly crushed, is likely to step down from the powerful Standing Committee belying speculation that he would be retained by overriding the 68-year retirement rule.
3. The Congress may keep the number of the Standing Committee members to seven, contrary to reported preference of Xi to reduce its number to five.
4. **The new seven-member committee** may retain balance of power among various factions within the party though Xi may still remain powerful with the induction of some of his close associates into the Standing Committee.
5. **Xi, regarded as the most powerful Chinese leader in recent times heading the party**, presidency and the military too is expected to retire by 2022 after his second term.
6. The **19th Congress of the CPC** which ended will make great contribution to the world thanks to the concepts mentioned in a key report to the congress.

**WORLD'S FIRST HYDROGEN TRAM**

The **world's first hybrid electric tram powered by hydrogen fuel cells** has started running in China, marking a big step in the application of **green energy in public transport**. Researched and manufactured by Chinese, **it is the world's first hybrid electric tram**, with **hydrogen being the main power source**, according to China Railway Rolling Corporation (CRRC) Tangshan Co, the maker of the tram.

**What**

1. **The tram was put into commercial operation for the first time in Tangshan**, north China's Hebei Province.
2. **With water being its only emission, the tram emits no pollutants**. No nitrogen oxides will be produced as the temperature of the reaction inside hydrogen fuel cells is controlled under 100 degrees Celsius.
3. The distance between carriage floor of the tram and the rail is only 35 centimeters thanks to the latest low-floor technology, which can remove station platforms and thus making boarding easy for passengers, the report said.
4. **The tram, having three carriages with 66 seats**, can run for 40 kilometers at a maximum speed of 70 kilometers per hour after being refilled with 12 kilograms of hydrogen.
5. The tram operates on a 136-year-old railway line in Tangshan City, one of China's earliest industrial cities, and links several of its industrial heritage sites.

**SPAIN, CATALONIA BATTLE**

Tension is gripping Spain, with the national government and **Catalonia's political leaders clashing over the wealthy region's recent push to secede**. Such a standoff has never happened before and is crucial for Spain's future.

**What does Catalonia want?**

1. The **Catalan regional parliament in Barcelona passed a motion** on 27 October 2017 unilaterally establishing a new country.
2. The motion was approved by the **votes of pro-independence lawmakers, with 70 out of 135 votes in favor of secession**.
3. The Catalan regional government supported the breakaway bid, though opposition lawmakers walked out of the chamber ahead of the vote in protest. Secessionists hold a slim majority in the current parliament.

4. The issue has been simmering for years and boiled over when a plan to grant Catalonia, with its population of 7.5 million people, greater powers of self-government was ruled illegal by the Constitutional Court.

#### What does the Spanish government say?

1. The **national government rejects Catalan independence**, noting the constitution says Spain is 'indivisible.'
2. The government deployed large numbers of police to Catalonia to stop an Oct. 1 regional independence referendum, which the Constitutional Court ruled illegal. Some heavy-handed policing caused outrage among Catalans.

#### Who will win?

1. After the Senate on 27 October 2017 granted the **government extraordinary powers to end the Catalan secession drive**, the government dismissed the Catalan regional government, dissolved its parliament and called an **early election for December 21**.
2. The central government's measures will likely trigger a Catalan backlash. Resistance from public servants and regional police is probable, as are large street protests, which will keep the issue alive.
3. **Regional elections in 2015 returned a slim majority of pro-independence lawmakers**, who took this as a mandate to push ahead with the independence drive.

### AGREE TO DEVELOP ROVUMA GAS FIELD

India and Mozambique on 18 October 2017 **agreed to expedite development of the giant Rovuma gas discovery**, which is planned to be **converted into liquefied natural gas (LNG) for exports**. Oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who is in Tokyo to attend the "**LNG Producer-Consumer Conference**", met his Mozambique counterpart Leticia Klemens to discuss the development of the gas field. "**Met Energy Minister of Mozambique**; agreed to expedite our project of gas development where Indian companies have invested about USD 6.5 billion.

#### What

1. **ONGC Videsh Ltd**, the **overseas arm of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC)**, holds **16% stake in Mozambique offshore block Rovuma Area 1**. Oil India Ltd has 4% stake while a unit of **Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL) holds 10% stake**.
2. The Area 1 covers roughly 10,000 square kilometer area and is located in northernmost part of offshore Mozambique Rovuma Basin.
3. According to ONGC Videsh, second and final exploration phase for Area 1 ended on 31 January, 2015 and have resulted in five discoveries, with combined recoverable resource of about 60 trillion cubic feet.
4. **Area 1 represents one of the largest natural gas discoveries in offshore East Africa** and has the potential to become one of the world's largest LNG producing hubs.
5. Area-1 plans to develop initially two LNG trains of capacity 6 million tonnes per annum each. Area-1 is working towards taking **final investment decision (FID)** as quickly as possible.
6. **Area-1 has also incorporated Mozambique LNG1 Company Pte Ltd in Singapore** to oversee marketing and shipping activities of LNG from first 2 trains of Golfinho-Atum field.
7. The partners are negotiating with buyers for conversion of existing non-binding **heads of agreements (HOAs) to sales purchase agreements (SPAs)**. Area-1 targets to raise up to \$12-15 billion through project finance.

## ECONOMY

### FIRST SHIPMENT BY CHABAHAH PORT

India on 29 October 2017 started exporting wheat to Afghanistan through the Chabahar Port in Iran - bypassing Pakistan, which has been blocking connectivity initiatives between South and Central Asia. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj was joined by her Afghan and Iranian counterparts Salahuddin Rabbani and Javad Zarif through a joint video conference, to ceremonially flag off the first shipment. **The shipment is part of a commitment made by the Government of India to supply 1.1 million tonnes of wheat for the people of Afghanistan on a grant basis.**

#### What

- This is the first shipment that would be going to Afghanistan** through the Chabahar port after New Delhi, Kabul and Tehran inked a Trilateral Agreement on Establishment of **International Transport and Transit Corridor** signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Iran in May 2016. **Six more shipments** will be sent over the next few months.
- New Delhi noted that the shipment of wheat was a landmark moment as it would pave the way for operationalisation of the Chabahar Port as "an alternate, reliable and robust connectivity" between India and Afghanistan.
- It would open up new opportunities for trade and transit from and to Afghanistan and enhance trade and commerce between the three countries and the wider region.
- India's continued commitment to support reconstruction**, capacity building and socio-economic development of Afghanistan, including **under the framework of the New Development Partnership** that she had jointly announced with Rabbani last month during the India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Council meeting.
- The **route Chabahar Port is intended to improve landlocked Afghanistan's trade connectivity with India** and other countries in **South and South-East Asia**.
- It will also help India to **access the markets of Central Asia and Europe through Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan**.
- In June, India and Afghanistan launched a dedicated air freight corridor to boost bilateral commerce averting bottlenecks created by Pakistan on land connectivity between Central and South Asia.



#### Strategic utility

- The **Chabahar port, located in the Sistan-Baluchistan Province on the south-eastern coast**, is a port of great strategic utility for India.
- It lies outside the Persian Gulf** and can be accessed from India's western coast.

3. India, Afghanistan and Iran recently inked a trilateral transport and transit deal, which would allow Indian exporters utilise Chabahar Port and access markets in Afghanistan through Zahedan.
4. New Delhi last year agreed to provide provision and operationalisation of credit of \$ 150 million from EXIM Bank for development of Chabahar Port.
5. **India will equip and operate two berths in Chabahar Port Phase-I with a capital investment of \$ 85.21 million** and annual revenue expenditure of \$ 22.95 million **on a 10-year lease.**

## PANEL ON PSU BANK MERGERS

Moving ahead with **banking reforms in for public sector lenders**, the government on 30 October 2017 **constituted a ministerial panel** headed by finance minister Arun Jaitley oversee PSU bank mergers. The other members of the panel on PSU bank mergers include railway and coal minister Piyush Goyal and defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

### What

1. **Govt walks the talk on banking reforms;** constitutes Alternative Mechanism for PSBs consolidation; Finance Minister to head, Financial Services Secretary Rajiv Kumar said.
2. While announcing the unprecedented Rs2.11 trillion bank recapitalisation plan for PSU banks last week, Jaitley had said capital infusion move will be accompanied by series of banking reforms over the next few months.
3. **The Union Cabinet had in August decided to set up an Alternative Mechanism to fast track PSU bank consolidation to create strong lenders.**
4. The move to create large banks aims at meeting the credit needs of the growing Indian economy and building capacity in the PSU bank space to raise resources without dependence on the state exchequer.
5. **The Alternative Mechanism will oversee the proposals coming from boards of PSU banks for consolidation.** The decision to set up the Alternative Mechanism follows State Bank of India's (SBI) merger with its five associate banks and the Bharatiya Mahila Bank.

## INDIA REJECTS GLOBAL E-COMMERCE RULES

**India has rejected fresh efforts** by a clutch of countries led by the **European Union (EU), Japan, Canada and Australia** to negotiate new global e-commerce rules under the **aegis of the World Trade Organization (WTO)**. During an informal meeting at the WTO, **the EU, Canada, Australia, Chile, Korea, Norway and Paraguay**, among other countries, circulated a restricted draft ministerial decision to establish **"a working party"** at the upcoming WTO ministerial meeting in **Buenos Aires** and authorizing it to **"conduct preparations for and carry out negotiations on trade-related aspects of electronic commerce on the basis of proposal by Members.**

### What

1. **India fears that new rules could provide unfair market access to foreign companies**, hurting the rapidly growing domestic e-commerce platforms.
2. A key demand by the developed countries is to make permanent the **current ban on customs duties on global electronic transactions**—they were suspended in 1998.
3. Presumably playing on **India's mind is the previous WTO deal on the Information Technology Agreement**, under which it agreed to abolish tariffs on hardware, squeezing the domestic electronics manufacturing industry.
4. Responding to the latest proposals by the developed countries, India asked the sponsors to stick to the **existing mandate set out in the 1998 electronic commerce work programme.**
5. According to us (India), negotiations on rules and disciplines in e-commerce would be highly premature at this stage and like a leap in the dark, especially given the highly **asymmetrical nature of the existing e-commerce space.**

6. The one-page draft proposal circulated by the developed countries, "The Working Party shall establish its own procedures and shall report periodically to the General Council".
7. Prior to the **latest proposal from the EU and other members, Japan and Russia** also circulated their respective submissions seeking to establish a "working group".
8. Japan claimed that all "**existing WTO Agreements apply to electronic commerce**". According to it, even issues such as the free flow of data located on computer servers without data localization requirements, permanent moratorium on customs duties, non-disclosure of source code and prohibition of forced technology transfer will come under the purview of future negotiations as and when they are launched.
9. **India wants to continue with the current work programme of 1998** because it remains "**exploratory and non-negotiating**".

### MPC MINUTES SUGGESTION

The minutes of the recent monetary policy committee (MPC) meeting suggest that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is likely to tread a cautious path and there is little chance of a rate cut in the near term as inflation is expected to inch upwards, says a report. According to a Kotak Economic Research report, besides inflationary pressures, fiscal slippage concerns and possible volatility in global markets worried some MPC members. The minutes of the October MPC meeting reinstated the cautious approach of most members as inflation is likely to inch upwards.

#### What

1. They suggest that growth is expected to recover cyclically in the second half of the current fiscal, but factors like low capacity utilisation, debt overhang of corporate and stressed assets of banking sector may act as structural constraints to growth.
2. The reports expects retail inflation to average around 3.3% in this fiscal, noting however that directionally inflation will be trending higher and core inflation too will likely stay sticky around 4.5%.
3. With RBI fixated on the 4 per cent target on a durable basis, and with plausible case of fiscal slippage, it looks less convincing for a policy easing in the near term, unless data surprises on the downside significantly.
4. Earlier this month, RBI kept benchmark interest rate unchanged on fears of rising inflation while lowering growth forecast to 6.7% for the current fiscal.
5. It also raised its inflation forecast to a range of 4.2 to 4.6% during remainder of current fiscal as against 4 to 4.5% previously.

### PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS CAPITALISATION PLAN

The Indian government approved on 23 October 2017 a state bank recapitalisation plan of Rs 2.11 lakh crore over the next two years, in a bid to clean banks' books and revive investment in a slowing economy. Of the planned sum, recapitalisation bonds will account for Rs 1.35 lakh crore, while Rs 76,000 crore will come from budgetary support and equity issuance. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said the recapitalisation of state banks would be followed by a series of reforms.

#### What

1. The nature of the bonds and details of the bonds would be made public during course of time.
2. Non-performing assets of banks have increased from Rs 2.75 lakh in March 2015 to Rs 7.33 crore as on June 2017.
3. The finance minister said banks would get Rs 18,000 crore under the Indradhanush plan.
4. Under Indradhanush roadmap introduced in 2015, the government had announced to infuse Rs 70,000 crore in state- run banks over four years to

- meet their capital requirement in line with global risk norms, known as **Basel-III**.
5. In line with the plan, **public sector banks were given Rs 25,000 crore in 2015-16**, and similar amount has been earmarked for the following years. Besides, Rs 10,000 crore each would be infused in 2017-18 and 2018-19.
  6. While banks remain **the main source of funding for India's companies**, the stubborn bad debt problem has eaten into bank profits and choked off new lending, especially to smaller firms, at a time when an economy that depends on them is stalling.
  7. **PSB Twenty one state-run banks account for more than two-thirds of India's banking assets**. But they also account for a bulk of the record Rs 9.5 lakh crore of soured loans.
  8. This milestone announcement on recapitalizing banks in one-go is a bold and courageous move and was indeed the need of the hour. It will generate balance in overall demand and supply by bringing more investments in sectors like infrastructure.
  9. **These funds will also help in efficiently managing risk** and credit capital related requirements of the banks. The steps will also encourage private participation thus boosting growth going forward.
  10. The thrust to infrastructure will generate direct and indirect positive cascading effects for lot of related sectors and will create feel good factor for all stakeholders.

## CS FAMILY REPORT

**India has 108 publicly-listed family-owned businesses, the third highest in the world**, while **China tops the tally with 167 such companies followed by the US** which has 121, says a Credit Suisse report. According to the Credit Suisse Research Institute's (CSRI) latest "**CS Family 1000**" report, with an average market capitalisation of \$6.5 billion, **India ranks fifth in the Asia-Pacific excluding Japan, and 22nd globally, in terms of average m-cap**. Besides China, the US and India, the top 10 countries in terms of number of **family-owned companies include France (fourth place), Hong Kong (fifth)**, Korea (sixth), Malaysia (seventh), Thailand (eighth), Indonesia (ninth), Mexico (10th). However, in terms of average size, the ranking changes much more in favour of developed markets, the report said.

### What

1. **Average market capitalisation of family-owned companies is greatest in Spain (\$30 billion)**, the Netherlands (\$30 billion), Japan (\$24 billion) and Switzerland (\$22 billion), the report that covered close to 1,000 family-owned, publicly-listed companies by region, sector and size said.
2. **Indian companies surveyed are more mature, with 60 per cent of family businesses in their third generation** compared to 30 per cent of Chinese companies.
3. According to Credit Suisse, the financial performance of family-owned companies is also superior to that of non-family-owned peers. Furthermore, family businesses appear to focus more on long-term growth and they have outperformed their peers in terms of share price returns.
4. **At the country-level, Chinese, Indian and Indonesian family-owned companies appear to be the most expensive**, trading at high absolute multiples, with a 12-month median price to earnings (P/E) of 15-16 times, compared to around 10-13 times P/E multiples of companies in Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore," the report said.
5. The definition used for the database of family or founder-owned companies is a **minimum shareholding of 20 per cent and/or minimum voting rights of 20 per cent**.
6. In terms of key concerns and challenges, Chinese family-owned companies rank succession planning as their least important issue and do not envisage a reduction in ownership.

7. However, they tend to worry much more about the threat of technological disruption (30 per cent said this was very concerning) which may be driven by China's overall greater exposure to disruptive technologies globally and its state of economic development.
8. More than half of the Indian and Chinese family companies that Credit Suisse surveyed generate revenues in excess of \$500 million, with the majority of these businesses located across the sectors of IT, financials and industrials.
9. **India lags slightly behind China not just on the adoption of environment-related issues, but also on social issues**, with 35 per cent of companies implementing policies in relation to this compared to 65 per cent for China.

## FIRST INDIAN COMPANY TO CROSS RS6 TRILLION MARKET CAP

**Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) became the first Indian company** to cross Rs6 trillion market capitalisation after its shares surged over **75% so far this year** and hit a fresh lifetime high on 26 October 2017. The stock touched a record high of Rs958.20 on the BSE and gained as much as 1.3%. At 2.33pm, it was trading at Rs944.8, up 1% from its previous close. Currently, its market cap is at Rs6.02 trillion.

### What

1. The recent rally in the stock was **due to tariff hike by its telecom arm Reliance Jio** which, analysts expect, will improve the company's profitability. Jio increased its tariff by 15% for its popular 84-day plan at Rs459 from 19 October, under which subscribers get 1GB 4G data at high speed per day.
2. **RIL's 15-20% hike in telecom tariffs raises confidence in our bullish (versus consensus) earnings estimates.** It reduces drag on energy returns from telecom with sustainable ROE (return on equity) rising to 15%—among the top quartile in our global energy coverage," said Morgan Stanley in a note to its investors.
3. On 13 October, Reliance Jio reported a profit at earnings before interest and tax (Ebit) level even though it ended up with a net loss of Rs271 crore. The telecom unit reported revenue of Rs6,147 crore and Ebit of Rs260 crore.
4. Jio should be able to maintain the revenue traction in the forthcoming quarters while **reduction in IUC (inter-connection usage charges)** will help in keeping costs under control.
5. The Indian telecom industry is seeing huge amount of consolidation and with decreasing choices for the subscribers the operators will compete on quality of service over the medium to long term.

## PERMISSION FOR SELLING SSS

**In order to encourage savings**, the government has allowed banks, including **top three private sector lenders**, to accept deposits under various **small savings schemes (SSS)** like **National Savings Certificate (NSC), Recurring Deposits and Monthly Income Scheme (MIS)**. Until now, most of the small savings schemes were sold through post offices. According to a recent government notification, **banks can also sell National Savings Time Deposit Scheme 1981, National Savings (Monthly Income Account) Scheme 1987, National Savings Recurring Deposit Scheme 1981 and NSC VIII issue.**

### What

1. As per the notification, all public sector banks and top three in the private sector — **ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank** — to receive subscription from the expanded portfolios.
2. So far, these banks were allowed to receive subscription under **Public Provident Fund, Kisan Vikas Patra-2014, Sukanya Samridhhi Account, Senior Citizen Savings Scheme-2004.**
3. Increased outlets for selling small savings scheme would result in higher mobilisation under the scheme.

4. Last month, the government kept unchanged interest rates on small savings schemes for the October-December quarter. Since April last year, interest rates on all small saving schemes have been recalibrated on a quarterly basis.
5. **Investments in the public provident fund (PPF) scheme will fetch annual rate of 7.8% while Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP) investments will yield 7.5% and mature in 115 months. The one for girl child savings, Sukanya Samridhi Account Scheme will offer 8.3% annually.**
6. Similarly, **the investment on 5-year Senior Citizens Savings Scheme will yield 8.3%.** The interest rate on the senior citizens scheme is paid quarterly.
7. On the basis of the decision of the government, interest rates for small savings schemes are to be notified on a quarterly basis since 1 April 2016, the ministry said while notifying the rates for third quarter of financial year 2017- 18.

## FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION

The First International Consumer Protection Conference on **“Empowering consumers in new markets”** for the South, South East and East Asian Countries was held on 26 to 27 October 2017 in New Delhi. Prime Minister of India inaugurated the Conference which was attended by 1600 participants that **included delegates from 19 countries**, senior dignitaries from the Central Government, State Governments from India, Presidents of the Consumer Commissions, as well as private sector, consumer associations and academia. **Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD** addressed the conference in the Inaugural session. The Prime Minister during his inaugural speech stated that **Consumer Protection is one of the priority areas for the Government.** Government’s vision is a step further from **Consumer Protection to Consumer Empowerment** and to Protection of Consumer Interests.

### What

1. **The Conference was chaired by Shri Ram Vilas Paswan**, Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution. The deliberations and exchange of experiences led to the following conclusions:
2. **The comprehensive implementation of the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection is a priority for Governments** and stakeholders in ensuring more effective and better-coordinated protection efforts in all countries and across all areas of commerce.
3. Wide stakeholder participation and engagement of consumer associations, businesses, and the academia is necessary for a successful consumer policy-making and enforcement.
4. **The protection of consumers’ rights in the digital context is important for a sustainable** and inclusive development of e-commerce, which also needs to address cross-border cooperation and enforcement.
5. **Creating a structured mechanism for communication**, mutual sharing of best practices, creating new initiatives for capacity building and starting joint campaigns in this regard should be pursued in mutual interest.
6. Towards meeting these objectives, it was decided that Regional Consumer Protection Conferences on biannual basis will be considered, in consultations with countries in the Region regarding the structure and organisational details.

## RULES FOR VALUATION OF UNLISTED FIRMS

After much dilly-dallying, **the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) has come up with rules on valuation of unlisted companies** that will do away with arbitrariness at the time of **mergers and acquisitions (M&As), and transfer of shares.** The draft for the same was put up for consultations four years back. However, **these rules are limited to valuers** and do not have the all-important component of methodology of valuation. Till the time **the methodology is framed by a committee that is yet to be set up**, international standards will be followed. Experts state that till the final methodology is drawn up, it is difficult to say which country’s rules will have a presence in India. **Each country has its own set of rules for the same.**

**What**

1. There are **three broad global methods of valuation** — **assets, income**, and the **market approach of the company**.
2. India has never had rules for all firms, though **there are separate norms for listed companies laid down by the markets regulator**.
3. Currently, **the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi)** has its own set of valuation guidelines for listed companies on takeovers, preferential allotment of shares and so on. As such, this is a beginning towards framing rules for valuation by registered valuers.
4. According to **the Companies (Registered Valuers and Valuation) Rules, 2017, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI)** is the authority responsible for these regulations.
5. These rules are basically about who could become valuers and the process of registration and deregistration of these valuers with the IBBI.
6. According to the rules, chartered accountants can conduct a financial audit, while subject experts will have to be hired for other specific audits such as for machinery and real estate.
7. Essentially, **there will be separate financial valuers and technical valuers**. These rules will also be applicable to companies going in for liquidation under the Insolvency Code. Once the methodology is also finalised, it will help other regulators such as Sebi to follow uniform guidelines.
8. Companies are now allowed to function as registered valuers, provided three or all of their directors are registered valuers. Because of this, merchant bankers also qualify to become valuers.
9. This is a modification of **drafts issued by the MCA in 2013**, which had proposed to allow only individuals and partnership firms such as limited liability partnerships (LLPs). Around 95 per cent of merchant bankers in India are companies and only five per cent are LLPs.
10. A **disciplinary committee will be constituted which will hear complaints against the valuer**. An appellate panel will also be set up which will look into appeals against the disciplinary committee's order.
11. An appeal can be filed within 30 days of the initial order. An individual who has been declared bankrupt cannot enrol as a valuer.

**Norms for Valuers**

1. Chartered accountants (CAs), company secretaries (CS), subject experts can become valuers
2. Unlike draft rules, these norms allow companies to become valuers
3. Merchant bankers can become valuers
4. CAs/CS will be allowed to conduct only financial audits
5. Others (subject experts) will do technical audits
6. Professionals with a graduate degree will need 3-year audit experience
7. Draft rules had proposed 5-year audit experience
8. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India to be regulatory authority

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY****INDIA RANKS 9TH IN DSI**

India may be the **poster child of a mobile-first population** but **Indian companies ranked ninth out of 14 in the latest edition of the Korn Ferry Digital Sustainability Index (DSI)**, with below-average performance in four of the five dimensions of digital sustainability.

## What

1. **This suggests that the country's digital infrastructure, connected business practices, skills support, empowerment and focus on digital working strategy** are serious concern areas, demonstrated by the poor rankings in areas like **agility, connectivity**, empowerment and alignment, and discipline and focus.
2. According to the new report titled "Thriving in a digital world: Korn Ferry's Digital Sustainability Index", **US companies are the most digitally sustainable**, with consistent strong performance across the **five DSI dimensions**.
3. The **UK (second) and the Netherlands (third)** complete the top three nations, while Mexico (12th), Brazil (13th) and Turkey (14th) are placed at the bottom.
4. India lags in the overall list from developing countries but still outperforms countries like China, Russia and Brazil.
5. India is also ranked ahead of China and Brazil in connectivity, and ahead of Russia in terms of agility.

## NEW INDIAN SPIDER NAMED

In 2012, Satara-based researcher Siddharth Kulkarni spotted a spider in the Western Ghats that he thought to be a known species, **Meotipa picturata**. Three years of research in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa, however, showed that the spiny comb-footed spider belonged to a new species of the same genus. He named it **Meotipa sahyadri**, after the Sanskrit name for the Western Ghats (Sahyadri).

## What

1. The **female Meotipa sahyadri has a translucent portion in the abdomen**, with white and brown stripes, while the **male is pale white without the translucent abdomen**.
2. The female is 4 times larger, around 5.5mm to the 1.25mm male. **These spiders are active at night and hide under broad leaves in inconspicuous webs during the day**.
3. Meotipa have a unique resting position: sideways and underleaf.
4. Kulkarni and teammates documented the species in a recent paper in Zootaxa. Studying for his **Master's degree at Satara's Y C Institute of Science** at the time he was conducting the research, Kulkarni is now a doctoral student at George Washington University, working on evolution of spiders.
5. Others in the team were Atul Vartak, a dentist interested spiders and spider photography; Vishwas Deshpande, a zoologist at Y C Institute; and Dheeraj Halali, a student at Goa's Parvatibai Chowgule College.
6. They **observed Meotipa sahyadri in its habitat and its morphology in the lab**. They compared sahyadri with other Meotipa species for similarities and differences in reproductive organs, an identifier of spider species.

## PLASMA TECHNOLOGY CAN PRODUCE OXYGEN

Mars has nearly ideal conditions for efficiently creating oxygen from atmospheric carbon dioxide in the future using **plasma technology**, a study has found. According to researchers from University of Porto in Portugal and Ecole Polytechnique in Paris, **Mars has 96 per cent carbon dioxide (CO2) in its atmosphere**. The research, published in the journal Plasma Sources Science and Technology, shows that **the pressure and temperature ranges in the Martian atmosphere mean non-thermal plasma** can be used to produce oxygen efficiently. Sending a manned mission to **Mars is one of the next major steps in our exploration of space**.

## What

1. **Plasma reforming of CO2 on Earth is a growing field of research**, prompted by the problems of climate change and production of solar fuels.
2. **Low temperature plasmas are one of the best media for CO2 decomposition** – the **split-up of the molecule into oxygen and carbon**

- monoxide** – both by direct electron impact, and by transferring electron energy into vibrational excitation.
- Mars has excellent conditions for **In-Situ Resource Utilisation (ISRU) by plasma**. As well as its CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere, the cold surrounding atmosphere may induce a stronger vibrational effect than that achievable on Earth.
  - The low atmospheric temperature** also works to slow the reaction, giving additional time for the separation of molecules.
  - The low temperature plasma decomposition method** offers a twofold solution for a manned mission to Mars. Not only would it provide a stable, reliable supply of oxygen, but as source of fuel as well, as carbon monoxide has been proposed as to be used as a **propellant mixture in rocket vehicles**.
  - This ISRU approach could help significantly simplify the logistics of a mission to Mars. It would allow for increased self-sufficiency, reduce the risks to the crew, and reduce costs by requiring fewer vehicles to carry out the mission.

## INDIAN ROLE IN GRAVITY WAVES DETECTION

**Forty Indian scientists from 13 institutions**, including two in Bengaluru, played a crucial role in the **discovery of the strongest ever gravity wave** signal reported by an international team of astronomers on 16 October 2017. **The waves emerged from a pair of colliding neutron stars** — one of the **dying phases of a heavy-duty star** in the far away universe. **Albert Einstein** had predicted the existence of these waves a century ago. But the **first gravity wave signal was spotted only in September 2015**.

### What

- In the last two years, **scientists were able to detect only four of these weak signals**, which came from **collapsing black holes, billions of light years away**.
- The latest gravitational wave, on the other hand, is the **first one from a neutron star and gave the strongest signal as it originated in the constellation of Hydra** at a relatively close distance of 130 million light years (one light year is the distance travelled by the light in a year) from the earth.
- Typical **neutron stars are heavier than the sun**, but have a diameter of just about 20 kilometres (objects so dense that a teaspoonful of neutron star material weighs more than the Mount Everest.)
- The detection was confirmed by nearly 70 telescopes around the world that studied various forms of radiation from the merger. Observations from three Indian telescopes were also used in the final analysis.
- The **gravity wave was spotted first on August 17**, following which hundreds of physicists from around the world studied the source and the waves in details.
- One of the key contributions from the Indian scholars** was to find out ways to find whether a particular signal is of environmental origin or emanating from an astronomical source.
- Mitra was one of the 11 Indian scientists, who are the part of the discovery team comprising scientists from US-based Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) and Europe's Virgo detector.
- The two Bengaluru institutes — **Indian Institute of Astrophysics and International Centre for Theoretical Sciences** — were part of the discovery.
- In the last three decades, **several Indian scholars richly contributed to the development of the underlying mathematics** that led to the discovery of these extremely feeble waves from the other sides of the universe.
- The latest discovery would help us accurately measure the expansion rate of the universe from which its age can be calculated independently. There are scientific debates on the Universe's age, which has been calculated as 13.82 billion years.

11. The Pune centre spearheads the Indian effort to set up another gravity wave observatory, which is to be operational by 2024.

## PLASTIC IN SEAS COMES FROM RIVERS

**Up to 95 per cent of all plastic debris found in the sea** is carried by 10 major rivers, including the Ganga, scientists have found. **Eight of these are in Asia and two from Africa** which have hundreds of millions of people live. Every year, **millions of tonnes of plastic debris end up in the sea** - a global environmental problem with **unforeseeable ecological consequences**. The path taken by plastic to reach the sea must be elucidated before it will be possible to reduce the volume of plastic input. Researchers showed that **plastic debris is primarily carried into the sea by large rivers**.

### What

1. In the meantime, **minute plastic particles can be found in the water in virtually every sea and river**. This constitutes a serious and growing global environmental problem.
2. **There are enormous quantities of input each year** and plastic weathers only very slowly. **Marine life can be harmed by the tiny plastic particles** floating in the water.
3. One example of how this happens is when fish, seabirds or marine mammals mistake the particles for food and consume them.
4. **It is still impossible to foresee the ecological consequences of this**. One thing is certain, however: this situation cannot continue, said Christian Schmidt, from Helmholtz **Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ)** in Germany.
5. Researchers analysed various scientific studies that examined the plastic load - that is the quantity of plastic carried by the water - in rivers.
6. They **converted the results of the studies into mutually comparable datasets** and determined the ratio of these figures to the quantity of waste that is not disposed of properly in the respective catchment area.
7. The more waste there is in a catchment area that is not disposed of properly, the more plastic ultimately ends up in the river and takes this route to the sea.
8. In this context, large rivers play a particularly large role - not only because they also carry a comparatively large volume of waste on account of their larger discharge.
9. **The concentrations of plastic ie the quantity of plastic per cubic metre of water** are significantly higher in large rivers than small ones.
10. The plastic loads consequently increase at a disproportionately higher rate than the size of the river.

## MISCELLANEOUS

### INDIAN PEACEKEEPERS AWARDED UN MEDAL

**Fifty Indian peacekeepers stationed in South Sudan** have been awarded the **UN Medal for their professionalism and service in protecting civilians** and building durable peace in the **conflict-ridden country**. The Indian peacekeepers are part of the **UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)**. They are deployed with the Indian battalion stationed at Bor in the Jonglei region of South Sudan. They were presented with the award recently by **UNMISS Force Commander General Frank Mushyo Kamanzi**.

### What

1. Presenting the award, **General Kamanzi acknowledged their contribution** in carrying out patrols across the region as well as providing a safe and secure environment for the 2,500 civilians who have sought **sanctuary at the UN Protection of Civilians site at Bor**.
2. The **Indian battalion had played an important role in keeping the community safe** as well as encouraging local peace efforts.

3. They had also provided much-needed services to the community outside of their core mandate, such as medical care for local residents and support for local farmers with veterinary treatment for their animals.
4. The **battalion has been intimately associated with peacekeeping efforts** and the battalion has supported the mandate of the United Nations and the overall peace process.
5. Indian Ambassador to South Sudan, Srikumar Menon, attended the medal ceremony and thanked the peacekeepers for their commitment and service.
6. India is committed to the **objectives of the UN Charter and therefore** is ready to support the United Nations' peacekeeping efforts globally.

## QS ASIA UNIVERSITY RANKINGS 2018

**The Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IIT Bombay)** has emerged as the only Indian institute to better its performance among the top 100 universities in the latest **Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Asia University Rankings 2018**. The **top-ranked Indian institute in the QS Asia University Rankings**, IIT Bombay saw its best position at **34th rank in the last three years since its 46th rank in 2016**. Earlier this year, **IIT Bombay was ranked 179th** in the **QS World University Rankings**, showing an improvement in its 2017 performance by 40 places.

### What

1. Other Indian institutes like **IIT Delhi ranked at 41, IIT Madras (48), Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore (51), IIT Kanpur (59), IIT Kharagpur (62)**, University of Delhi (72), IIT Roorkee (93) and IIT Guwahati (98) showed a decline in their respective rankings as against last year. For instance, in 2016, while IIT Delhi was ranked 36, IIT Madras was ranked 43.
2. **IISc registered the biggest decline in its positions by 18 places**, down from 33 in 2017 to 51 in 2018.
3. **IIT Bombay had an overall score of 75.7 out of 100**. In terms of different parameters, IIT Bombay scored 88.1 in academic reputation, 97.5 in employer reputation, 44.5 in faculty-student ratio, 96.3 in staff with PhD, 89.6 in papers per faculty, 9.7 in international faculty, 6.3 in international students, 10.9 in inbound exchange students, 9.1 in outbound exchange students, and 41.4 in citations per paper.
4. **Among the 10 parameters**, employer reputation indicated the strongest one for **IIT Bombay with a rank of 21 globally**.
5. This is a reflection of the excellent work being done by faculty and students of the institute.
6. **Overall, the QS Asia University Rankings 2018 saw Nanyang Technological University of Singapore being top-ranked in the list**, followed by National University of Singapore, **The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology**, and The University of Hong Kong at second, third, fourth and fifth ranks, respectively.

## MAN BOOKER PRIZE 2017

**US author George Saunders** became only the second American writer to win **Britain's renowned Man Booker Prize**, which was awarded for his first full-length novel **Lincoln in the Bardo**. Judges for the prestigious **English-language literary award** praised as "utterly original" the book that chronicles the death of **Abraham Lincoln's 11-year-old son Willie using the accounts of hundreds of narrators**.

### What

1. The **form and style of this utterly original novel** reveals a witty, intelligent, and deeply moving narrative, said Lola Young, chair of the judging panel, in announcing the prize at a ceremony in London.
2. This year's **Man Booker Prize shortlist pitted three US and three British writers against one another**.

3. **The award, launched in 1969**, was only open to writers from Commonwealth states until **it began permitting authors from other English-speaking countries in 2014**.
4. Last year **Paul Beatty became the first American** to win the award for his novel **The Sellout**.
5. Saunders was the British bookmakers' favourite ahead of the announcement. In a lengthy and varied writing career, he has penned award-winning short story collections, essays, illustrated fables and a bestselling children's book, as well as many pieces of journalism.
6. In 2006, he was awarded both a Guggenheim Fellowship and a MacArthur Fellowship, while in 2009 he received an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

## INDIA TOPS LIST OF POLLUTION-LINKED DEATHS

**INDIA has topped the list of countries with pollution-related deaths in 2015**, with 2.51 million people dying prematurely in the country that year **due to diseases linked to air, water and other forms of pollution**, according to a new study published in the reputed medical journal, The Lancet. **India accounted for about 28 per cent of an estimated 9 million pollution-linked deaths worldwide** in 2015, the study found. It also topped the list of deaths linked to polluted **air (1.81 million)** and **water (0.64 million)**.

### What

1. **Most of the pollution-related deaths — 92 per cent** — were reported in low and middle income countries, and in rapidly industrialising nations **such as India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Madagascar and Kenya**, the study said.
2. **China**, with 1.8 million pollution-linked deaths in 2015, **followed India** on The Lancet list. Most of these deaths were due to **non-communicable diseases caused by pollution**, such as heart disease, stroke, lung cancer and **chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)**, according to The Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health's study.
3. The study is part of a two-year project that involved more than 40 international health and environmental authors **led by Philip Landrigan**, an environmental scientist, and Richard Fuller, founder of NGO Pure Earth, and the secretariat of the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution. Among the authors of the study are former environment minister Jairam Ramesh and IIT-Delhi's Prof Mukesh Khare.
4. According to The Lancet report, **air pollution was the biggest contributor, linked to 6.5 million deaths in 2015**, ahead of water pollution (1.8 million) and workplace-related pollution (0.8 million).
5. Of the 2.51 million deaths in India, 1.81 were related to air pollution, 0.64 million to water pollution, 0.17 million to occupational exposure and 95,000 linked to lead pollution, according to the study.
6. **China (1.58 million)** was placed after India in deaths linked to **air-pollution, followed by Pakistan (0.22 million), Bangladesh (0.21 million) and Russia (0.14 million)**. In deaths linked to water pollution, Nigeria (0.16 million) and Pakistan (74,000) were placed after India.
7. The Lancet study **concluded that pollution is now the largest environmental cause of disease and death in the world today** — three times more those from HIV-AIDS, TB and malaria put together.
8. The aim of the Lancet Commission is **to raise global awareness on pollution, end neglect of pollution-related diseases**, and mobilise resources and political will to effectively confront pollution, according to its co-lead.
9. The report found that **pollution from outdoor and indoor air, water and soil contamination, and chemical pollutants is one of the largest risk factors leading to premature death**.

## RURAL TOILETS BECOMES 'IZZAT GHAR'

The Centre has written to each state government to name toilets built in rural households as "izzat ghar" or "house of dignity" or any other appropriate equivalent in the local language. Noting that the toilets in rural households in many parts of Uttar Pradesh are being named izzat ghar, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation wrote to state government's principal secretaries, who are in charge of rural sanitation, to consider doing the same in their states, too.

### What

1. It is recommended that **this practice could be considered for replication in other parts of the country.**
2. Hindi-speaking areas may continue using the name **izzat ghar**, while other regions could come up with a corresponding term in the local language that signifies the equivalent of a house of dignity," the ministry wrote in its communique to all the state governments.
3. **All states are encouraged to initiate similar local initiatives and good practices** that associate a sense of dignity and pride among the households with having and using toilets.
4. The ministry has been overseeing implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission in villages across the country, with the objective of achieving a clean and **open defecation- free rural India by October 2, 2019.**
5. The ministry stated that 4.99 crore toilets have been built in villages across the country since the launch of the **Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin in 2014.**
6. Besides, over 16.41 lakh toilets have been built under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme till March 31 this year.
7. Over 2.57 lakh villages, 214 districts and six states have been declared open defecation- free in the past three years.

## WORLDSKILLS COMPETITION

**Two Indians bagged a silver and a bronze at the global skill competition in Abu Dhabi**, showing the **best ever performance by India** since the country began participating in the **WorldSkills' challenge in 2007**. The Indian team comprising 28 competitors also won nine Medallions of Excellence across key skills. **India had won a silver medal in 2009** and **five medallions of excellence in 2015**.

### What

1. **Over 1,300 candidates from 59 countries competed across 51 skill categories this year.**
2. **Mohit Dudeja won silver for Patisserie and Confectionery** whereas Kiran bagged a bronze for Prototype Modelling.
3. Nine Medallions for Excellence were won in trades/skills like mechatronics, brick-laying, restaurant service, automobile technology, jewellery, graphic design technology, mobile robotics, beauty therapy and car painting.
4. The country should take great inspiration from the grit, the confidence and the determination with which the young team has performed at the Olympic of Skills and proved their mettle against countries like **China, Russia, Korea, Japan, Brazil**, said Rajesh Agrawal, Official delegate India for WorldSkills.

## FIRST 'FISH LIZARD' FOSSIL FOUND IN INDIA

In a first, a **near-complete fossilised skeleton of a Jurassic ichthyosaur** - large marine reptile which lived alongside dinosaurs - has been **discovered in India**, scientists

said. **Fossil records of ichthyosaurs**, which means 'fish lizards' in Greek, have been found in North American and Europe previously. However, in the Southern Hemisphere, they have mostly been **limited to South America and Australia**. Researchers including those from the **University Of Delhi And University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (FAU) in Germany** have found what they believe to be the **first Jurassic ichthyosaur in India, from the Kachchh area in Gujarat**.

#### What

1. The **near-complete skeleton, nearly 5.5 meters long**, is thought to belong to the **Ophthalmosauridae family**, which likely lived between around 165 and 90 million years ago.
2. It was found among fossils of ammonites and squid-like belemnites, and its tooth wear patterns suggest it predated such hard, abrasive animals.
3. This is a remarkable discovery not only because it is the **first Jurassic ichthyosaur record from India**, but also it throws light on the evolution and diversity of ichthyosaurs in the Indo-Madagascan region of the former Gondwanaland and India's biological connectivity with other continents in the Jurassic, said Guntupalli Prasad, from the Department of Geology in University of Delhi.

## TROJAN HORSE STRATEGY

Researchers have found that the **Zika virus is transmitted from mother to a foetus by infected cells** that will later go on to develop into the **brain's first and primary form of defence against the invasive pathogens**. It's a **Trojan horse strategy**. During **embryogenesis** -- the early stages of prenatal development -- cells called **microglia form in the yolk sac** and then disperse throughout the central nervous system of the developing child, said Alysson Muotri, professor at the University of California - San Diego. In the brain, **this microglia will become resident macrophages whose job is to constantly clear away plaques**, damaged cells and infectious agents. However, considering the timing of transmission, the researchers **hypothesised that microglia might be serving as a Trojan horse** to transport the virus during the invasion of the central nervous system.

#### What

1. The **Zika virus can infect this early microglia**, sneaking into the brain where they transmit the virus to other brain cells, resulting in the devastating neurological damage.
2. For the study, published in the journal Human Molecular Genetics, the team used human induced pluripotent stem cells to create two relevant central nervous system cell types: **microglia and neural progenitor cells (NPCs)** and **examined their interactions in vitro when exposed to the Zika virus**.
3. The researchers found that the microglia cells engulfed Zika-infected NPCs, doing their job.
4. These **microglia carrying the virus were placed in contact with non-infected NPCs**, they transmitted the virus to the latter.
5. That suggests microglia may indeed be the culprit for transmitting the virus to the central nervous system during prenatal neurodevelopment.
6. The researchers suggest that microglial cells could be a therapeutic target for reducing Zika transmission into the central nervous system of developing foetuses.

## UN SUMMIT ON CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES IN 2020

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has announced that India will host next Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) Conference of Parties 13 (CMS COP13) in year 2020. CMS COP is also known as a Global Wildlife Conference.

### What

1. The announcement was made during **12th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties 12 (COP12) to CMS held in Manila, Philippines.**
2. It was held from 23 to 28 October 2017 and was attended by over 500 delegates from more than 91 countries participated in the summit which is held once in three years.
3. The theme of the CMS COP12 was **"Their Future is Our Future – Sustainable Development for Wildlife and People"**.
4. **This was for first time the summit was held in Asia.**
5. The CMS COP12 was also the largest-ever meeting in the 38-year history of the convention.

### Convention on the CMS

1. **CMS is an international treaty** concluded under aegis of **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**, concerned with conservation of wildlife and habitats on a global scale.
2. It is commonly abbreviated as Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) or the Bonn Convention.
3. **CMS aims to conserve terrestrial, marine and avian migratory species** throughout their range.
4. It was signed in 1979 in Bonn (hence the name), Germany and entered into force in 1983. **Its headquarters are in Bonn, Germany.** Since its entry into force, its membership has grown steadily to include over 120 Parties from Africa, Central and South America, Asia, Europe and Oceania.
5. CMS is only global and UN-based intergovernmental organization established exclusively for conservation and management of terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range.

## 70 INDIAN WORDS ADDED TO OED

From endearing words like 'Abba' and 'Anna' to Indian delicacies like 'gulab jamun' and 'vada' can now be found in the **Oxford English Dictionary (OED)**. As per the latest list of inclusions, **70 new Indian words from Telugu, Urdu, Tamil, Hindi and Gujarati languages** have been added to the dictionary. Several most-commonly used words in India like 'jugaad', 'dadagiri', 'achcha', 'bapu' and 'surya namaskar' are now part of the Oxford dictionary, the OED said in a statement. Many of the words describe food and relationships, such as 'anna' (elder brother), 'abba' (father), 'gulab jamun', 'mirch masala', 'keema', 'funda' and 'chamcha'. Oftenly used terms like 'timepass', 'natak' and 'chup' also have their meanings in the dictionary now.

### What

1. **The September 2017 update adds to the 900 items** already covered by the dictionary and **"identified as distinctive to Indian English"**.
2. **Indian speech etiquette features a complex system of kinship terms** and terms of address, in which age, gender, status, and family relationships are marked by a highly specific vocabulary with no direct equivalents in English.
3. The words were added to the dictionary as Indians have "a highly specific vocabulary with no direct equivalents in English."
4. **The four centuries that the English were present in India have left an indelible mark on the language.**
5. It is clear that the shared history between Britain and India has left behind a legacy of loanwords and other lexical innovations that have greatly enriched the English word stock.

6. The seventy words newly added to the OED reflect not only the history of the country, but also the many and diverse cultural and linguistic influences which have shaped and changed the English language in India.
7. The **OED publishes four updates a year in March, June, September and December respectively.**

## UN REPORT ON GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

**Greenhouse gas emissions are on course to be about 30% above** the level needed to keep global warming to an internationally **agreed target in 2030**, the United Nations said on 31 October 2017. Without enhanced ambition the likely **global average temperature increase** will be in the **range of 3.0-3.2 degrees Celsius** by the end of the century, UN Environment said as it issued its annual audit of emissions reductions.

### What

1. By 2030, annual emissions are likely to be 53.0-55.5 billion tonnes of **carbon dioxide** equivalent, far above the **42 billion tonne threshold for averting a temperature rise of more than 2 degrees Celsius** (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) this century, the UN environment agency said.
2. The latest projection, which assumes all countries meet their commitments, **is slightly lower than the gap of 12-14 billion tonnes foreseen a year ago**, reflecting new data on national emission reduction programmes.
3. There was increasing evidence that **carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels**, cement production and other industrial processes remained stable for the past three years, largely due to **slower growth in coal use in China and the United States**. But the trend could be reversed, and 80-90% of coal reserves must remain in the ground.
4. **In 2015, 195 countries signed the Paris climate accord**, pledging to limit global warming to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times. Ministers will meet in Bonn next month to work on guidelines for the agreement.
5. **A harder target of keeping warming to within 1.5 degrees would mean a further reduction of about 5 billion tonnes of emissions.**
6. The UN said the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere grew at record rate in 2016 to a level not seen for millions of years, potentially fuelling a 20-metre (65-foot) rise in sea levels and adding 3 degrees Celsius to temperatures.

## UN COORDINATOR FOR ROHINGYA CRISIS

The United Nations named a new interim **UN resident coordinator for Myanmar** on 31 October 2017, appointing **Knut Ostby of Norway** to take over **the humanitarian role at a time of growing strains** with the Myanmar government **over the handling of the Rohingya crisis**. The appointment of a temporary placeholder was expected after Myanmar blocked an upgrade of the UN country chief position. **Myanmar’s de facto leader, Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi**, has told diplomats in private meetings that she is frustrated with the United Nations, particularly its human rights arm.

### What

1. **Ostby, who has served with the United Nations in a number of hotspots**, including Afghanistan and East Timor, will replace **Renata Lok-Dessallien**, who has completed her term. Some 600,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled to Bangladesh after ethnic violence erupted in Myanmar’s northern Rakhine state in late August.
2. Rights monitors and Rohingya refugees say the army and Rakhine Buddhist vigilantes have forced them to flee their homes.
3. UN investigators **interviewing Rohingyas living in refugee camps near Cox’s Bazar** said they had gathered testimony pointing to a “consistent, methodical pattern” of killings, torture, rape and arson.
4. The fact-finding team, led by former Indonesian attorney general Marzuki Darusman, said the death toll from the Myanmar army’s crackdown following

- Rohingya insurgent attacks on Aug. 25 was unknown, but “may turn out to be extremely high”.
5. The UN team, **which was established by the UN Human Rights Council in March**, renewed its appeal for access to Rakhine state and for talks with the Myanmar government and military to “establish the facts”.
  6. In the early stages of the crisis, the United Nations described the military campaign as “ethnic cleansing”, an accusation rejected by Myanmar, which says its military was engaged in counter-insurgency operations against Rohingya militants behind a series of attacks on security posts.
  7. **Myanmar, an overwhelmingly Buddhist country with small Christian and Muslim minorities**, is struggling to emerge from decades of military rule, and Suu Kyi’s democratically elected government is engaged in a peace dialogue with members of various armed ethnic groups.

## RASHTRIYA EKTA DIWAS

**Rashtriya Ekta Diwas (National Unity Day)** is observed every year across India on **31 October** to commemorate **birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhai Patel** who had played important role in unifying the country. Observance of day provides an opportunity to **re-affirm inherent strength** and resilience of our nation to withstand actual and potential threats to unity, integrity and security of our country.

### What

1. **Run for Unity** was organised in New Delhi from the National Stadium.
2. The idea of **Rashtriya Ekta Diwas was mooted by PM Narendra Modi** in October 2014 to mark the birth anniversary of Independent **India’s first Deputy Prime Minister** and Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbbhai Patel.
3. **He was born on 31 October, 1875 at Karamsand, Gujarat** and died on 15 December 1950 in Mumbai, Maharashtra.
4. He is known as **Iron Man of India or Bismarck of India**.
5. His biggest contribution to India was his role in the integration of the over 500 princely states with India during 1947-49.
6. He is also remembered as **Patron Saint of India’s civil servants** for establishing modern All-India services.
7. He was posthumously conferred with Bharat Ratna, India’s highest Civilian honour, in 1991.