

My Notes....

NATIONAL

SDG INDIA INDEX REPORT

The NITI Aayog on 21 December 2018 released the Baseline Report of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index, which comprehensively documents the progress made by **India's States and Union Territories** towards implementing the 2030 SDG targets. The SDG India Index, which was developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Global Green Growth Institute and United Nations in India, was launched by NITI Aayog.

What

1. NITI Aayog has the twin mandate to oversee the implementation of SDGs in the country, and also promote Competitive and Cooperative Federalism among States and UTs.
2. The SDG India Index acts as a bridge between these mandates, aligning the SDGs **with the Prime Minister's clarion call of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, which** embodies the five Ps of the global SDG movement – people, planet, prosperity, partnership and peace.
3. The world is now into the third year of the SDG era. The SDGs are ambitious global development goals that address key aspects of universal wellbeing across different socio-economic, cultural, geographical divisions and integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development.
4. **India's National Development Agenda is mirrored** in the SDGs. India's progress in SDGs is crucial for the world as the country is home to about 17% of the world population.
5. The SDG India Index tracks progress of all States and UTs on 62 Priority Indicators selected by NITI Aayog, which in turn is **guided by MoSPI's National Indicator Framework** comprising 306 indicators and based on multiple-round consultations with Union Ministries/Departments and States/UTs.
6. The Index spans 13 out of 17 SDGs. Progresses on SDGs 12, 13 & 14 could not be measured as relevant State/UT level data were not available and SDG 17 was left out as it focuses on international partnerships.
7. A composite score was computed between the range of 0-100 for each State and UT based on their aggregate performance across 13 SDGs, which indicates average performance of State/UT towards achieving 13 SDGs & their respective targets.
8. If a State/UT achieves a score of 100, it signifies that it has achieved the 2030 national targets. The higher the score of a State/UT, the greater the distance to target achieved.

Classification Criteria based on SDG India Index Score is as follows:

1. Aspirant: 0-49
2. Performer: 50-64
3. Front Runner: 65-99
4. Achiever: 100

OVERALL	Aspirant	Assam, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh
	Performer	Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Telangana, Tripura, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, Delhi and Lakshadweep
	Front Runner	Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Chandigarh and Puducherry
	Achiever	NA

1. The Index is designed to function as a tool for focussed policy dialogue, formulation and implementation, moving towards development action pegged to globally recognisable metrics of SDG framework.
2. **The Index also supplements NITI Aayog's continuous efforts towards** encouraging evidence-based policy making by supporting States/UTs to benchmark their progress, identifying priority areas and share best practices.
3. The SDG India Index will also help highlight crucial gaps related to tracking SDGs and the need for India to develop its statistical systems at National & State/UT levels.
4. This shall lead to the index evolving and becoming more comprehensive over the coming years. The indicators shall be further refined and additional indicators will be added with improvement in data collection, reporting processes & methodology.
5. NITI Aayog is also exploring potential for disaggregating data and developing capacity for real time monitoring and measuring incremental progress.

Overall Findings:

<i>Particular</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>UT</i>
SDG India Index Score Range	42-69	57-68
Top Performer/s	Himachal Pradesh & Kerala	Chandigarh
Aspirant	Uttar Pradesh	Dadra & Nagar Haveli

1. Himachal Pradesh ranks high on providing clean water & sanitation, in reducing inequalities & preserving mountain ecosystem
2. **Kerala's top rank** is attributed to its superior performance in providing good health, reducing hunger, achieving gender equality & providing quality education
3. Chandigarh leads because of its exemplary performance in providing clean water & sanitation, affordable & clean energy, generating decent work & economic growth, & providing quality education

STRATEGY FOR NEW INDIA @ 75

The NITI Aayog on 19 December 2018 unveiled its comprehensive national Strategy for New India, which defines clear objectives for 2022-23. It is a detailed exposition across forty-one crucial areas that recognize the progress already made, identifies binding constraints, and suggests the way forward for achieving the clearly stated objectives. The Strategy for New India @75 put together by NITI Aayog is an attempt to bring innovation, technology, enterprise and efficient management together, at the core of policy formulation and implementation.

What

1. NITI Aayog followed an extremely participative approach in preparing the strategy. Each area vertical in NITI Aayog had in-depth consultations with all three groups of stakeholders, viz., business persons, academics including scientists, and government officials.
2. This was followed by consultations at the level of the Vice Chairman with a diverse group of eminent persons from seven sets of stakeholders that included scientists and innovators, farmers, civil society organizations, think-tanks, labor representatives and trade unions, and industry representatives.
3. Central Ministries were brought on board for inputs, suggestions and comments, with each draft of individual chapters being circulated for consultations.
4. The draft document was also circulated to all the States and Union Territories from whom valuable suggestions were received and incorporated.
5. Over 800 stakeholders from within the government – central, state and district levels – and about 550 external experts were consulted during the preparation of the document.
6. The overarching focus of the Strategy document is to further improve the policy environment in which private investors and other stakeholders can contribute their fullest towards achieving the goals set out for New India 2022 and propel India towards a USD 5 trillion economy by 2030.
7. The forty-one chapters in the document have been disaggregated under four sections: Drivers, Infrastructure, Inclusion and Governance.
8. The first section on Drivers focuses on the engines of economic performance **with chapters on growth and employment, doubling of farmers' incomes; upgrading the science, technology and innovation eco-system; and promoting sunrise sectors like fintech and tourism.**

Key recommendations on drivers

1. Steadily accelerate the economy to achieve a GDP growth rate of about 8% on average during 2018-23. **This will raise the economy's size in real terms from USD 2.7 trillion in 2017-18 to nearly USD 4 trillion by 2022-23.**
2. Increase the investment rate as measured by gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) from the present 29% to 36% of GDP by 2022.
3. **In agriculture, shift the emphasis to converting farmers to 'agripreneurs'** by further expanding National Agriculture Markets and replacing the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee Act with the Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing Act.
4. **Give a strong push to 'Zero Budget Natural Farming'** techniques that reduce costs, improve land quality and increase farmers' incomes. This has emerged as a tested method for putting environment carbon back into the land.
5. To ensure maximum employment creation, complete codification of labor laws and a massive effort must be made to upscale and expand apprenticeships.
6. **Launch a mission "Explore in India"** by revamping minerals exploration and licensing policy.
7. The second section on Infrastructure deals with the physical foundations of growth which are crucial to enhancing the competitiveness of Indian business as **also ensuring the citizens' ease of living.**

Key recommendations in the section on infrastructure

1. Expedite the establishment of the Rail Development Authority (RDA), which is already approved.
2. RDA will advise or make informed decisions on an integrated, transparent and dynamic pricing mechanism for the railways.
3. Double the share of freight transported by coastal shipping and inland waterways.

4. Initially, viability gap funding will be provided until the infrastructure is fully developed. Develop an IT-enabled platform for integrating different modes of transport and promoting multi-modal and digitized mobility.
5. With the completion of the Bharat Net programme in 2019, all 2.5 lakh gram panchayats will be digitally connected. Aim to deliver all government services at the state, district, and gram panchayat level digitally by 2022-23.
6. The section on Inclusion deals with the urgent task of investing in the **capabilities of all of India's citizens**. The three themes in this section revolve around the dimensions of health, education and mainstreaming of traditionally marginalized sections of the population.

Key recommendations in the section on inclusion

1. Successfully implementing the Ayushman Bharat programme including the establishment of 150,000 health and wellness centres across the country, and rolling out the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Abhiyaan (PM-JAY).
2. Create a focal point for public health at the central level with state counterparts. Promote integrative medicine curriculum.
3. Upgrade the quality of the school education system and skills, including the creation of a new innovation ecosystem at the ground level by establishing at least 10,000 Atal Tinkering Labs by 2020.
4. **Conceptualize an electronic national educational registry for tracking each child's learning outcomes.**
5. As already done in rural areas, give a huge push to affordable housing in urban **areas to improve workers' living conditions and ensure equity while providing a strong impetus to economic growth.**
6. The final section on Governance delves deep into how the governance structures can be streamlined and processes optimized to achieve better developmental outcomes.

Key recommendations in the section on governance

1. Implement the recommendations of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission as a prelude to appointing a successor for designing reforms in the changing context of emerging technologies and growing complexity of the economy.
2. Set up a new autonomous body, viz., the Arbitration Council of India to grade arbitral institutions and accredit arbitrators to make the arbitration process cost effective and speedy, and to preempt the need for court intervention.
3. Address the backlog of pending cases - shift part of workload out of regular court system.
4. Expand the scope of Swachh Bharat Mission to cover initiatives for landfills, plastic waste and municipal waste and generating wealth from waste.

GSAT-7A SUCCESSFUL

The Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) on 19 December 2018 successfully placed Gsat-7A -- the second communication satellite meant primarily for military applications -- in orbit. Gsat-7A is meant for augmenting the existing communication capabilities of satellites utilised by the Indian Air Force. GSLV-F11 (Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle) carrying the satellite lifted off from the second launch pad at Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. It was the 13th flight of GSLV Mark II and the seventh flight with an indigenous cryogenic engine. Around 19 minutes after take-off, the three-stage launcher ejected the satellite into a geosynchronous transfer orbit.

What

1. In the coming days, the satellite will be moved to its final geostationary orbital slot at an altitude of around 35,000km by firing its onboard chemical propulsion system.
2. Gsat-7A -- the 39th communication satellite of Isro -- has communication capabilities to users in Ku-band over the Indian region.

3. Gsat-7A is expected to interlink all ground-based radars, airbases and airborne early warning and control aircraft for surveillance, maintain air superiority, gather intelligence by detecting aircraft, vessels and other vehicles in long range.
4. The satellite is also expected to boost the **IAF's network**-centric warfare capabilities, i.e., linking all its platforms.
5. It will help drones conduct surveillance and satellite-controlled unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) improve their range and endurance to strike at enemy targets from long distances.
6. In September 2013, Isro launched Gsat-7 (Rukmini), a communication satellite exclusively for Navy to monitor the Indian Ocean Region up to 2,000 nautical miles and provide real-time inputs to Indian warships, submarines and maritime aircraft.

What It does

1. Interlinks ground-based radars, airbase and airborne early warning and control (AWACS) aircraft; detecting aircraft, vessels, etc., in long range
2. Enables real time air-to-air communication between planes in air and with the ground
3. Helps drones conduct surveillance by capturing videos and images of a location and transmit them to ground stations
4. Helps satellite-controlled unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drones, improve their range and endurance to strike at enemy targets from long distances

How It Work

1. Help fighter jets communicate. Gsat-7A relies on sound converted into signal, which the jet then transmits to the satellite
2. Satellite receives and amplifies signal from jet and changes the frequency
3. Satellite then transmits the signal to the receiver antenna in another aircraft where signals are converted into sound
4. The same can be picked up by antennas on ground

Shot In the Arm

1. It boosts coverage by other satellites and ground systems like radars and stations in Indian Ocean Region
2. **Links the air force's assets and** enhances network-centric warfare capability
3. The Gsat-7A launch comes at a time when India is in the process of acquiring American Predator-B or Sea Guardian drones, which are high-altitude and long endurance satellite controlled UAVs that can fire at enemy targets from afar

Ku-Band Advantage

1. Signals can be captured with smaller antenna
2. Provides wide beam coverage compared to other bands
3. Less vulnerable to rain and other atmospheric disturbances

What We have Now

1. India has 13 satellites with military applications
2. Gsat-7 launched in 2013 for Indian Navy monitors 2,000 nautical miles of Indian Ocean Region and sends real time inputs to warships, submarines, aircraft

OUTCOME OF COP24

After two weeks of intense negotiations, the COP24 climate talks ended with an **agreement that is broadly in India's favour**. Over the last two weeks, nearly 200 countries were busy developing a set of rules to operationalise the 2015 Paris Agreement, in which they agreed to strive to limit the rise in global warming to well less than 2 degrees Celsius, over pre-industrial levels, by 2100.

What

1. The evolution of a rulebook is an extremely important step in operationalising the Paris Agreement, especially in the light of a recent report of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change — **the UN's scientific body for climate**

- change — which stressed on the need and feasibility to limit global warming to not more than 1.5 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels.
2. The soul of the Paris Agreement is in six of its 27 Articles. **These are: ‘market mechanism’ (A.6)**, which allows a country to fund green projects in another country and buy credits.
 3. Finance (A.9); **‘technology development and transfer’ (A.10); ‘capacity building’ (A.11); ‘transparency framework’ (A.13)**, which deals with reporting of each **country’s actions**; and **‘global stock-take’ (A.14)**, which calls for periodic review and improvement of each **country’s commitment and action for fighting** climate change.
 4. This rulebook is supposed to put into motion the Paris Agreement on climate change, a landmark 2015 accord that the US Trump administration has promised to abandon.
 5. After fraught and much-delayed talks at the COP24 climate change conference in Polish coal country, more than 190 countries agreed to the rules.
 6. They punted, however, on a critical but complicated issue involving how countries trade and account for certain pollution. Brazil nearly blocked the process amid concerns that its proposals would lead to "double counting" and, essentially, cheating, according to observers and a senior negotiator involved in the discussions.
 7. Ministers also did not agree to emphatically embrace the latest climate science, which stunned some attendees.
 8. Countries reached a "compromise" statement in which they welcomed the publication of an alarming report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).
 9. That "administrative" compromise fails to underscore the extreme urgency posed by the climate crisis, said Simon Stiell, Grenada's minister for climate resilience and environment.
 10. The IPCC report says the world has only about 12 years to avoid 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming above pre-industrial levels, which is one of the goals of the Paris Agreement.
 11. That report is an "ear-splitting wake-up call," UN Secretary-General António Guterres said upon its release. The science crunched the timeline for doing something and upped the stakes of inaction. In Poland, Guterres said it would be "suicidal" and "immoral" to fail at COP24.
 12. The United States, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Kuwait, however, stood in the way last week of "welcoming" the findings of the scientists. The Trump administration has denied the basic consensus of climate science, which is that humans are causing dangerous warming by burning fossil fuels.

Finance rules

1. **The most critical of these is ‘finance’.** India is satisfied with what the rulebook says on this count. There are two broad aspects to this. One, where the developed countries shall provide visibility on the quantum of funds that **would be made available to developing countries’ efforts for fighting climate change** (under Article 9.5). India is satisfied with the level of detailing in such reporting, an Indian negotiator said.
2. The second aspect is when developed countries are to state, under Article 9.7, how much funding they have provided.
3. Now, developed countries are not going to be forced to make a distinction between any grants they may give and commercial loans that would have to be repaid with interest.
4. **“Rich countries** have a moral and legal responsibility to provide money and technology to developing countries to make their economies greener. Instead of taking this seriously, they pushed through a rulebook riddled with loopholes allowing them to avoid this responsibility.
5. **But Indian officials did not seem to think much on the provision of ‘finance’**, perhaps because India is not a prominent claimant of global climate funds.

6. India is also satisfied with the flexibility developing countries would be allowed in the stringency of reporting its climate actions, even though India has the capability to report pretty granular details.
7. On the whole, India is fine with the rulebook. Some independent observers, **though, are unhappy that there's not enough emphasis on the adaptation finance needed for developing countries to cope with effects of climate change and 'loss and damage', which is important for poor, island nations to cope with the after-effects of climatic events.**

FIRST-EVER START-UP RANKING

Gujarat tops first-ever start-up ranking of states by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), ahead of states such as Karnataka, Kerala, Odisha, and Rajasthan. The first-**ever States' Start-up** Ranking 2018 by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), released on 20 December 2018, also showed major states remain a top draw for start-ups, while smaller states and the Northeast remain untouched by the start-up revolution. India currently has the third-largest start-up ecosystem worldwide.

What

1. The ranking is based on 38 specific action points divided across seven broad categories that include the **states' start-up** policy and implementation, incubation support, seed funding, angel and venture funding, simplification of regulations, easing public procurement, and awareness and outreach.
2. On the basis of performance in these categories, states have been recognised as the Best Performer, Top Performers, Leaders, Aspiring Leaders, Emerging States, and Beginners.
3. Gujarat came out on top, **followed by 'top performers' Karnataka, Kerala, Odisha, and Rajasthan.** Northeastern states like Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura came at the very bottom.
4. Interestingly, a report handed out at the launch of the ranking showed that Maharashtra, followed by Karnataka, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Telangana, hosts the highest number of start-ups registered with the DIPP.
5. Gujarat, with its credentials as the state with the best ecosystem, occupies the sixth place. The comprehensive national report on start-ups maps the road map of the Start-up India programme.
6. The evaluation committee comprising independent experts from the start-up ecosystem assessed the responses across various parameters.
7. Many parameters involved getting feedback from beneficiaries. More than 40,000 calls were made in nine different languages to connect with the beneficiaries to get a pulse of the implementation, a senior DIPP official said.
8. An online portal was also launched, which was instrumental in enabling states to seamlessly submit their initiatives across these reform areas, he added.
9. **Fifty-one officers from states and UTs have been identified as 'champions', who have made significant contribution towards developing their state's start-up ecosystem.**

INDIA'S SECOND BUR TO UNFCCC

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved Submission of India's second Biennial Update Report (BUR) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) towards fulfilment of the reporting obligation under the Convention. The scope of BUR is to provide an update to India's first BUR to UNFCCC.

The BUR contains five major components

1. National Circumstances
2. National Greenhouse Gas Inventory
3. Mitigation Actions

4. Finance, Technology and Capacity Building Needs
5. Support Received and Domestic Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) arrangements

Salient Features

1. BUR has been prepared based on a range of studies conducted at the national level.
2. The BUR has undergone multitier review process, through peer review, review by Technical Advisory Committee of Experts chaired by Additional Secretary (Climate Change) and by National Steering Committee chaired by Secretary (EF&CC).

3. The National Steering Committee is an inter-ministerial body comprising NITI Aayog, Agricultural Research and Education, Agriculture Cooperation and Farmers Welfare, Economic Affairs, External Affairs, New and Renewable Energy, Science & Technology, Coal, Power, Railway Board, Road Transport & Highways, Shipping, Petroleum & Natural Gas, Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Rural

Background

1. India is a Party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
2. The Convention, in accordance with its Article 4.1 and 12.1, enjoins upon all Parties, both developed country Parties and developing country Parties to furnish information, in the form of a National Communication regarding implementation of the Convention.
3. Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC in its sixteenth session decided vide paragraph 60 (c) of decision 1 that developing countries, consistent with their capabilities and the level of support provided for reporting, should also submit biennial update reports containing updates of national greenhouse gas inventories and information on mitigation actions, needs and support received.

- Development, Housing and Urban Affairs, Industrial Policy & Promotion, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Steel, Civil Aviation, Statistics and Programme Implementation and India Meteorological Department.
4. The BUR has been finalized after addressing all the relevant comments and modifications as per the multi-tier review process.
5. In 2014, a total of 26,07,488 Gigagram (Gg) CC-2 equivalent (around 2.607 billion tonnes of CC-2 equivalent) of GHGs were emitted from all activities (excluding LULUCF) in India.
6. The net national GHG emissions after including LULUCF were 23,06,295 Gg CO₂e equivalent (around 2.306 billion tonnes of CO₂e equivalent).
7. Out of the total emissions, energy sector accounted for 73%, IPPU 8%, agriculture 16% and waste sector 3%. About 12% of emissions were offset by the carbon sink action of forestland, cropland and settlements.
8. Submission of India's Second BUR will fulfil the obligation of India to furnish information regarding implementation of the Convention, being a Party.

A summary of India's national GHG inventory of 2014 is provided in the table below

Category	CO ₂ equivalent (Gg)
Energy	19,09,765.74
Industrial Process and Product Use	2,02,277.69

Agriculture	4,17,217.54
Waste	78,227.15
Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF)	-3,01,192.69
TOTAL without LULUCF	26,07,488.12
TOTAL with LULUCF	23,06,295.43

INDIA SUBMITS NR6 TO THE CBD

India on 29 December 2018 submitted its Sixth National Report (NR6) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The report was submitted online to the CBD Secretariat by the Union Environment Minister, Dr. HarshVardhan, during the inaugural session of the 13th National Meeting of the State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) organized by the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), New Delhi. The Minister also released the document **‘Progress on India’s National Biodiversity Targets: A Preview’** on the occasion.

What

1. India is among the first five countries in the world, the first in Asia and the first among the biodiversity rich mega diverse countries to have submitted NR6 to the CBD Secretariat.
2. While globally, biodiversity is facing increasing pressure on account of habitat fragmentation and destruction, invasive alien species, pollution, climate change and overuse of resources, India is one of the few countries where forest cover is on the rise, with its forests teeming with wildlife.
3. Submission of national reports is a mandatory obligation on Parties to international treaties, including CBD. As a responsible nation, India has never reneged on its international commitments and has earlier submitted on time five National Reports to the CBD. Parties are required to submit their NR6 by 31 December 2018.
4. The NR6 provides an update of progress in achievement of 12 National Biodiversity Targets (NBT) developed under the Convention process in line with the 20 global Aichi biodiversity targets.
5. The Report highlights that while India has exceeded/overachieved two NBTs, it is on track to achieve eight NBTs and in respect of the remaining two NBTs also, India is striving to meet the targets by the stipulated time of 2020.
6. With well over 20 percent of its total geographical area under biodiversity conservation, India has exceeded the terrestrial component of 17 percent of Aichi target 11, and 20 percent of corresponding NBT relating to areas under biodiversity management.
7. Similarly, India has also made noteworthy achievement towards NBT relating to access and benefit sharing (ABS) by operationalising the Nagoya Protocol on ABS. Having published the first internationally recognized certificate of compliance (IRCC) under the Protocol in 2015, India has since published nearly 75% of the IRCCs published so far on ABS Clearing House. Thus, in respect of these two NBTs (6 and 9), the progress made by India has exceeded the targets.
8. India has done well on raising awareness about biodiversity, which is an important thrust area in several programmes of the Government. As a megadiverse country harbouring nearly 7-8% of globally recorded species while

supporting 18% of the global human population on a mere 2.4% of the world's land area, India's quest for inclusive economic development while maintaining integrity of its natural capital is being pursued through various programmes and strategies.

9. Measures have been adopted for sustainable management of agriculture, fisheries and forests, with a view to provide food and nutritional security to all without destroying the natural resource base while ensuring intergenerational environmental equity.
10. Programmes are in place to maintain genetic diversity of cultivated plants, farms livestock and their wild relatives, towards minimising genetic erosion and safeguarding their genetic diversity.
11. Mechanisms and enabling environment are being created for recognising and protecting the vast heritage of coded and oral traditional knowledge relating to biodiversity for larger human welfare while safeguarding the interests and rights of the local communities as creators and holders of this knowledge.
12. India has been investing a huge amount on biodiversity directly or indirectly through several development schemes of the Central and State Governments, to the tune of Rs 70,000 crores per annum as against the estimated annual requirement of nearly Rs 1,09,000 crores. India has nearly two third of the population of wild tigers in the world.
13. The population of lion has risen from 177 in 1968 to over 520 in 2015, and elephants from 12,000 in 1970s to 30,000 in 2015.
14. One-horned Indian Rhino which was on the brink of extinction during the early 20th century, now number 2400. Further, while globally over 0.3 % of total recorded species are critically endangered, in India only 0.08% of the species recorded are in this category.
15. India is committed to protecting its rich heritage of biodiversity which are so vital to our economic and social development.

NABCB ACCREDITATION IN ASIA- PACIFIC REGION

The National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB), India's national accreditation body, has secured equivalence for its accreditation programme for Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems (OHSMS) Certification Bodies in Asia- Pacific region. It has signed the Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) of the Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (PAC) on 19 December 2018. Any industry carrying ISO 45001 certificate with NABCB logo will be recognized in the Asia Pacific region.

What

1. The immediate beneficiary of this equivalence is the Indian Industry which is exporting products to various countries especially in the Asia Pacific region.
2. It can also be used by regulators for establishing confidence in certified units as Goa Government has done by accepting OHSMS certification under **NABCB accreditation in lieu of annual audits under Factories' Act.**
3. Now, NABCB can facilitate export of Indian goods into the world market by attesting that these are certified as per international standards by competent certifying bodies.
4. The NABCB accreditation programme is based on international standards, ISO/IEC 17021-1 and ISO 45001, applicable for OHSMS.
5. The recognition by PAC is based on demonstration by NABCB that it complies with international standard, ISO/IEC 17011, applicable to it and has competence in OHSMS to accredit certification bodies in this sector.
6. NABCB has currently accredited 6 certification bodies for Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems.
7. NABCB is the third accreditation body in the Asia Pacific Region to become internationally equivalent in the region, the other two being the accreditation bodies of Hong Kong and Mexico.

8. The MLA with PAC would facilitate signing MLA with International Accreditation Forum (IAF) to secure full international equivalence.
9. IAF signatory member status signifies that the accreditation of certification bodies by NABCB for Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems will be accepted as internationally equivalent.

Flashback

1. NABCB, a constituent Board of the Quality Council of India, is responsible for accreditation of certification/inspection bodies as per applicable international standards under an international system of equivalence.
2. NABCB has already secured international equivalence for its accreditation programmes for ISO 9001 certification bodies in 2002 and ISO 14001 certification bodies in 2007, Product certification bodies based on ISO 17065 in 2013, Inspection Bodies based on ISO 17020 also in 2013, Global Gap in 2014, ISO 22000 certification bodies and ISMS certification bodies as per ISO 27001 in 2015 and Energy Management System as per ISO 50001 in 2018.
3. Accreditation reduces risk for business and its customers by assuring that accredited Certification Bodies (CBs) are competent to carry out the work they undertake within their scope of accreditation.
4. Accreditation Bodies (ABs) that are members of PAC and the CBs they accredit are required to comply with appropriate international standards and the applicable PAC application documents for the consistent application of those standards.
5. ABs that are signatories to the PAC Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) is evaluated regularly by an appointed team of peers to provide confidence in the operation of their accreditation programs.
6. Accreditation has become an essential tool for getting acceptance of inspection, testing and certification done in India internationally and it is referenced in many bilateral Free Trade Agreements like the India – Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement in which NABCB accreditation is a requirement for certification of electrical/electronic and telecom products.
7. Thus, accreditation eliminates technical barriers to trade and facilitates export of Indian products in world market.

SECOND DELTA RANKING OF THE ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICTS

The NITI Aayog on 27 December 2018 released the Second Delta ranking for the Aspirational Districts which measures the incremental progress made by them between June 1, 2018 and October 31, 2018, across six developmental areas of Health and Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Financial Inclusion, Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure.

What

1. The ranking factors in validated data from Household Surveys conducted by NITI **Aayog's knowledge partners, namely**, TATA Trusts and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (IDInsight).
2. The Surveys were carried out in all Aspirational Districts during the month of June 2018 covering more than 1,00,000 households. These surveys were used to validate critical data-points and provide inputs for nine further data-points for which district-level data is not readily available at regular intervals.
3. Delta Ranking have constantly endeavoured to ensure transparent, real-time measurement of qualitative development in Aspirational Districts through the use of third-party validated data.
4. This will strengthen the spirit of competitive and cooperative federalism on the foundations of evidence-based policy making.
5. The delta ranking is computed in a transparent manner for combined improvements made during June and October 2018.

6. The delta ranking of the Aspirational Districts combines the innovative use of data science with pragmatic administration, keeping the district at the locus of inclusive development.
7. This positioning is expected to aid the District Magistrates/Collectors to focus more on these sectors and improve their ranking in future.

In the overall ranking, the most improved districts are as follows:

Rank	District	State
1	Virudhunagar	Tamil Nadu
2	Nuapada	Odisha
3	Siddharthnagar	Uttar Pradesh
4	Aurangabad	Bihar
5	Koraput	Odisha

The Second Delta ranking also details the following districts as Least Improved over the period of June – October 2018:

Rank	District	State
107	Kiphire	Nagaland
108	Giridih	Jharkhand
109	Chatra	Jharkhand
110	Hailakandi	Assam
111	Pakur	Jharkhand

The districts which have shown great initiative and displayed a qualitative jump in their scores between June and October 2018, have been dubbed as **'Fast Movers'**:

District, State	June 2018	October 2018
Kupwara, Jammu and Kashmir	108	7
Ranchi, Jharkhand	106	10
Siddharthnagar, Uttar Pradesh	103	3
Jamui, Bihar	99	9
Fatehpur, Uttar Pradesh	82	25

About 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programme

1. Launched by the **Prime Minister in January this year, the 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programme** aims to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts of the country.
2. The broad contours of the programme are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), **Collaboration (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors)**, and Competition among districts driven by a Mass Movement or a Jan Andolan.
3. With States as the main drivers, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.
4. The Government is committed to raising the living standards of its citizens and ensuring inclusive growth for all – SabkaSaath, SabkaVikas.
5. To enable optimum utilization of their potential, this program focuses closely on **improving people's ability to participate fully in the burgeoning economy.**
6. Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure **are this programme's** core areas of focus.
7. After several rounds of consultations with various stakeholders, 49 key performance indicators have been chosen to measure progress of the districts.
8. Districts are prodded and encouraged to first catch-up with the best district within their state, and subsequently aspire to become one of the best in the country, by competing with, and learning from others in the spirit of competitive & cooperative federalism.

GAGANYAAN APPROVED

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the Gaganyaan Programme with demonstration of Indian Human Spaceflight capability to low earth orbit for a mission duration ranging from one orbital period to a maximum of seven days. A human rated GSLV Mk-III will be used to carry the orbital module which will have necessary provisions for sustaining a 3-member crew for the duration of the mission. ISRO will collaborate extensively with National agencies, laboratories, academia and industry to accomplish the Gaganyaan Programme objectives.

What

1. The total fund requirement for the Gaganyaan Programme is within Rs.10,000 crore and includes cost of technology development, flight hardware realization and essential infrastructure elements. Two unmanned flights and one manned flight will be undertaken as part of Gaganyaan Programme.
2. Gaganyaan Programme will establish a broader framework for collaboration between ISRO, academia, industry, national agencies and other scientific organizations.
3. It will allow pooling in of diverse technological and industrial capabilities and enable broader participation in research opportunities and technology development benefitting large number of students and researchers.
4. The flight system realization will be through Industry.
5. It is expected to generate employment and train human resources in advanced technologies.
6. It will inspire large number of young students to take up science and technology careers for national development.
7. Gaganyaan Programme is a national effort and will involve the participation of the Industry, Academia and National Agencies spread across the length and breadth of the country.

Implementation Strategy and Targets

1. Gaganyaan Programme will be a national effort in collaboration with Industry, Academia and other scientific agencies and laboratories as stake holders along with ISRO.
2. ISRO will be responsible for realizing the flight hardware through Industry. National agencies, laboratories and Academia will participate in crew training, human life science technology development initiatives as well as design reviews.
3. First human space flight demonstration is targeted to be completed within 40 months from the date of sanction. Prior to this, two unmanned flights in full complement will be carried out to gain confidence on the technology and mission management aspects.

Impact

1. The programme is expected to spur research and development within the country in niche science and technology domains.
2. Huge potential for technology spinoffs in areas such as medicine, agriculture, industrial safety, pollution, waste management, water and food resource management etc.
3. Human spaceflight programme will provide a unique micro-gravity platform in space for conducting experiments and test bed for future technologies.
4. The programme is expected to give impetus to economic activities within the country in terms of employment generation, human resource development and enhanced industrial capabilities.
5. Human Spaceflight capability will enable India to participate as a collaborating partner in future Global space exploration initiatives with long term national benefits.

Background

1. ISRO has completed the development of launch vehicle GSLV Mk-III which has the necessary payload capability to launch a 3-member crew module in low earth orbit.
2. ISRO has also tested the crew escape system which is an essential technology for human space flight. The aerodynamic characterization of crew module has been completed as part of GSLV Mk-III X mission flight.
3. Elements of life support system and Space suit also have been realized and tested. In addition, the orbital & re-entry mission and recovery operations have been flight demonstrated in Space Capsule Re-entry experiment (SRE) mission.
4. ISRO has developed and demonstrated most of the baseline technologies essential for undertaking human spaceflight mission. Globally also, there is a renewed interest in undertaking manned exploration initiatives.

BOGIBEEL BRIDGE INAUGURATES

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Bogibeel bridge in Assam on the birth anniversary of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee (25 December 2018). The Bogibeel bridge will **connect the south bank of the Brahmaputra river in Assam's** Dibrugarh to Silapathar in Dhemaji bordering Arunachal Pradesh. The 4.9 km-long bridge on the Brahmaputra river boasts of being **Asia's second longest rail-cum-road** bridge. After inaugurating the bridge, PM Modi also flagged off a train - the Tinsukia-Naharlagun Intercity Express, which will run five days a week. The bridge is seen as an attempt by India to shore up its defence requirements along the Sino-Indian border.

What

1. The Bogibeel bridge is constructed at an estimated cost of Rs 5,900 crore.
2. **The bridge, has a** 'serviceable period of around 120 years.
3. The Bogibeel bridge is built by Hindustan Construction Company(HCC).

4. The bridge has a two-line railway track on the lower deck and a three-lane road on the top deck. For the first time for Indian Railways, the girder has A steel floor system for railway tracks and concrete for road.
5. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the bridge on 25 December 2018, 16 years after it was announced by the then prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee.
6. The bridge will reduce travel time from Assam to Arunachal Pradesh to four hours. It will also reduce the Delhi to Dibrugarh train-travel time by about three hours to 34 hours as against 37 hours presently.
7. Sanctioned on 22 January 1997, the then Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda had laid the foundation stone for the bridge. However, construction began only after former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee inaugurated the work site on 21 April, 2002.
8. The bridge will reduce the distance to Northeast region by 165 km, saving fuel worth Rs 10 lakh per day in the region.
9. The bridge is among the infrastructure projects planned by India to improve logistics along the border in Arunachal Pradesh.
10. While inaugurating the Bogibeel bridge in May 2017, PM Narendra Modi dedicated it to the musician and film-maker Bhupen Hazarika.

GENDER GAP INDEX 2018

India has been ranked 108th in World Economic Forum (WEF) gender gap index, same as 2017, while recording improvement in wage equality for similar work and fully closing its tertiary education gender gap for the first time. As per the WEF's Global Gender Gap Report 2018, released 18 December 2018, while India has many challenges as it ranks 142nd out of 149 countries in the economic opportunity and participation subindex, it also has a few achievements. Gender gap was measured across four key pillars -- economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, and health and survival.

What

1. It (India) needs to make improvements across the board, from women's participation to getting more women into senior and professional roles, WEF said.
2. India continues to rank third-lowest in the world on health and survival, remaining the world's least-improved country on this subindex over the past decade. In fact, India actually widens the gender gap on this subindex this year.
3. However, on the positive side, India has slightly improved in WEF's wage equality for similar work indicator, where it stood at 72nd place.
4. The country has also closed its tertiary education enrolment gap for the first time in 2018 and has managed to keep its primary and secondary gaps closed for the third year running.
5. Interestingly, India has the second-largest artificial intelligence (AI) workforce but one of the largest AI gender gaps, with only 22 per cent of roles filled by women.
6. The world has closed 68 per cent of its gender gap and at the current rate of change; it will take 108 years to close the overall gender gap and 202 years to bring about parity in the workplace.
7. South Asia was the second-lowest ranking region in the index, with only 65 per cent of its gender gap now closed. India is slightly ahead of the regional average having closed 66 per cent.
8. The global list was topped by Iceland having closed more than 85.8 per cent of its overall gender gap. Iceland holds the top spot in the index for the 10th consecutive year.
9. Nordic countries Norway (2nd, 83.5 per cent), Sweden (3rd, 82.2 per cent), and Finland (4th, 82.1 per cent) dominated the top slots.
10. Other countries in the top-10 include Nicaragua (5th, 80.9 per cent), Rwanda (6th, 80.4 per cent), New Zealand (7th, 80.1 per cent), the Philippines (8th, 79.9 per cent), Ireland (9th, 79.6 per cent) and Namibia (10th, 78.9 per cent).

11. The economies that will succeed in the fourth industrial revolution will be those that are best able to harness all their available talent.
12. Proactive measures that support gender parity and social inclusion and address historical imbalances are therefore essential for the health of the global economy as well as for the good of society as a whole, said WEF.

SURROGACY BILL PASSED

The Lok Sabha on 19 December 2018 passed a Bill aimed at regulating surrogacy in the country after a thorough, clause-by-clause discussion on the Bill. The arguments contesting various nuances of the bill lasted about an hour and a half before the way was paved for its passage. The Bill was introduced in the Lower House almost two years ago. Those who wish to opt for surrogacy will be required to submit their certificate of infertility within 90 days.

What

1. There was an argument over non-mention of same sex couples in the Bill, even though the Supreme Court has now legitimised same-sex relationships.
2. While male couples require a surrogate mother, female couples may not necessarily require surrogates, but we have to include them in the Bill, said Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, a Member of the Lok Sabha.
3. Gynaecologists in India had opposed the original Bill tooth and nail. Her argument that banning commercial surrogacy and promoting altruistic surrogacy may create an undue pressure on women who may not be in a position to negotiate becoming surrogates.
4. If a daughter-in-law is forced to become a surrogate for the daughter in the family, and she may not be able to say no, this leads to exploitation.
5. In 2009, the Law Commission had recommended that a Bill be drafted to keep a check on commercial surrogacy.

INDIA'S NEW LAND WARFARE DOCTRINE

The Indian Army (IA) is seeking to create integrated battle groups (IBGs), expand its cyber warfare capabilities, and induct energy-directed weapons as well as artificial intelligence-based systems to manage multiple security challenges, the service announced in its Land Warfare Doctrine-2018. **IA cadets take part in a 'tactical continuity training' exercise at an officers training academy in Chennai in March 2018.** The IA published its Land Warfare Doctrine-2018 in mid-December.

What

1. The doctrine states that the IA will employ "composite" IBGs comprising a mix of five to six battalions to execute conventional combat operations for "greater flexibility in force application".
2. Each IBG, which would be larger than the existing 3,000 personnel-strong brigade but smaller than a 10,000-strong division, would be headed by a two-star officer and include infantry, armoured, artillery, air-defence, and support units, all of which would be backed by attack helicopters.
3. According to the doctrine, the IA's will also focus on developing cross-domain capabilities, facilitating enhanced jointness and integration among the three services, and optimising the available forces and resources "for effective and robust military responses in a future battlefield milieu".
4. The IA is also refining its strategies to deal with dangers emanating from "restive, complex and active" border disputes with Pakistan and China and what it referred to as "state-sponsored-terrorism from across the border".
5. The doctrine states that the IA will deal with "deliberate transgressions" by China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) across the disputed 4,057 km-long Line of Actual Control (LoAC) in a "firm and resolute manner" and in "consonance with existing agreements and protocols".
6. This comes after the IA and the PLA were embroiled in a 72 day-long stand off that ended in August 2017 at the Doklam tri-junction, which is situated along the

disputed borders between India, China and Bhutan. The IA is of the view that it faced down the PLA at the time.

7. The doctrine also states that the IA will continue to carry out counter-insurgency (COIN) operations against Pakistan to "ensure deterrence through punitive measures" such as the September 2016 cross-border 'surgical strike' carried out by IA Special Forces against suspected militants in the disputed border region of Kashmir.

INTERNATIONAL

INDIA EXTENDS ASSISTANCE TO MALDIVES

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 17 December 2018 announced \$1.4 billion financial assistance to Maldives after his extensive talk with President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, where both the sides vowed to deepen security cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. The two countries have also inked four pacts, including visa facilitation.

What

1. The security interests of the two countries were intertwined and both sides will work together to further strengthen cooperation in the Indian Ocean region.
2. India is extending \$1.4 billion as budget support, currency swap and line of credit for the social and economic development of Maldives.
3. The two sides agreed to strengthen maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean region through coordinated patrol and aerial surveillance.
4. Solih arrived on 16 December 2018 on a three-day state visit, his first foreign trip after assuming the charge of the top office in the island nation a month ago. Modi had **attended Solih's swearing-in ceremony** on November 17.
5. Relations between India and the Maldives deteriorated after then president Abdulla Yameen imposed emergency on February 5 this year.
6. India had criticised his decision and asked his government to restore the credibility of the electoral and political process by releasing political prisoners. The emergency lasted for 45 days.

Flashback

1. The Maldives, officially the Republic of Maldives, is an Asian country, located in the Indian Ocean, situated in the Arabian Sea.
2. It lies southwest of Sri Lanka and India. The chain of 26 atolls stretches from Ihavandhippolhu Atoll in the north to the Addu City in the south.
3. Comprising a territory spanning roughly 298 square kilometres (115 sq mi), the Maldives is one of the world's most geographically dispersed sovereign states as well as the smallest Asian country by land area and population, with around 427,756 inhabitants.
4. Malé is the capital and most populated city traditionally called the "King's Island" for its central location.

CHINA, PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN SIGN MOU

China, Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to cooperate on counter-terrorism and coordinate to call on the Taliban to return to the negotiating table and to move ahead with the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process, the Chinese foreign ministry said on 17 December 2018. On December 15, state councillor and foreign minister Wang Yi attended the second China, Afghanistan and Pakistan trilateral foreign ministers' dialogue in Kabul where a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on counter-terrorism was signed between the three countries.

What

1. The three countries will seize the opportunity and move ahead the Afghan-led, Afghan-owned reconciliation process with Afghanistan playing the primary role.
2. It was decided that Afghanistan and Pakistan will further improve their bilateral ties and engage in more sound interactions and resolve their differences through friendly consultations and avoid hurting bilateral ties.
3. China is a friend to both Afghanistan and Pakistan and would like to play a constructive part to help improve their bilateral ties.
4. The three countries have also decided to expand soft approach such as exchanges and training, and explore hard projects like livelihood and transportation and infrastructure.
5. It was also decided that the three sides will enhance regional connectivity and economic development within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative that Afghanistan could benefit from regional cooperation projects including the multi-billion China-Pakistan economic corridor by leveraging its unique geographic advantages.
6. They agreed to expand counter-terrorism cooperation by implementing the MoU on counter-terrorism signed during this second dialogue to enhance policy coordination, practical cooperation, exchanges and cooperation under the multilateral frameworks.
7. China will support Afghanistan and Pakistan in moving forward counter-terrorism cooperation. The Taliban are fighting to flush out international forces and re-establish their regime in Afghanistan after their ouster in 2001.

FRANCE TO INTRODUCE GAFA TAX

France will introduce its own tax on large internet and technology companies from January 1, finance minister Bruno Le Maire said 17 December 2018 amid difficulties in finalising a new EU-wide levy. France has been pushing hard for a new so-called **“GAFA tax”** -- named after Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon -- to ensure the global giants pay a fair share of taxes on their massive business operations in Europe.

What

1. The tax will be introduced whatever happens on January 1 and it will be for the whole **of 2019 for an amount that we estimate at €500 million (\$570 million)**.
2. The low tax rates paid by US tech giants in Europe has repeatedly caused anger among voters in many European countries but the 28-member bloc is divided on how to tackle the issue.
3. Ireland, which hosts the European headquarters of several US tech giants, leads a small group of otherwise mostly Nordic countries that argue a new tax could lead to reprisals against European companies and stoke anger in the US.
4. France and Germany agreed earlier this month to introduce a new joint measure in 2021, which would give the Paris-based OECD time to work on a new global solution.
5. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, which groups major world economies, is working on a proposal for a new international scheme that would regulate taxation on tech firms.
6. Policymakers across the world have had difficulty in taxing the US-based giants who dominate their sectors internationally, but who often route their revenues and profits via low-tax jurisdictions to reduce their liabilities.
7. **France’s move to introduce the tax on January 1 could be driven by** domestic budget concerns, with the finance ministry looking for new sources of revenues and savings.
8. **Under pressure from “yellow vest” protesters**, President Emmanuel Macron announced a series of measures last week for low-income families which has left a multi-billion-euro hole in the 2019 budget.

9. Some other EU member states such as Britain, Spain and Italy are also working on national versions of a digital tax, with Singapore and India also planning their own schemes.

MOU BETWEEN INDIA AND AFGHANISTAN APPROVED

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on 18 December 2018 has given its approval for signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Afghanistan on cooperation in the field of Human Resource Development. The MoU would facilitate students and faculty of Educational Institutions in Afghanistan to register and use the SWAYAM Courses. Also, it would facilitate them to upload on SWAYAM, the courses developed in Afghanistan. The required training to students and faculty from Afghanistan would be imparted by MHRD, Government of India.

What

1. Through this MoU, Government of India would provide access and share the technology of other major ICT Initiatives in Education such as National Digital Library of India (NDLI), Virtual Labs and Spoken Tutorials.
2. It is also proposed to establish Joint Master Degree Programmes between Indian and Afghanistan Universities / Institutions.
3. MHRD would assist the Ministry of Higher Education, Afghanistan in the areas of Curriculum Development and Capacity Development of Teaching Staff.
4. Through this MoU, both the countries agree to sign an agreement on mutual recognition of academic qualifications. This is expected to promote student mobility under Study in India program, by attracting more foreign students to come and study in Afghan Institutions.
5. This MoU would be a significant mile-stone in the collaboration between two countries in education sector.

Background

1. India and Afghanistan have strong diplomatic relations in various areas including education. To strengthen this further, both the countries have decided to cooperate in the field of Human Resource Development by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).
2. Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India has taken up number of technology enabled learning initiatives under National Mission on Education through ICT (NMEICT).
3. SWAYAM, India's own MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) platform is one such major initiative, which offers various online courses prepared by the best faculty from across the country.
4. Till date, more than 35 Lakhs students have enrolled in about 2000 courses that have been offered through SWAYAM.
5. This includes courses from Class 9th to Post-Graduation and also for lifelong learning. The students can avail credit transfer upto 20 % for the courses done through SWAYAM. Also, this platform is being used to provide Annual Refresher courses for higher education faculty.

CHINA SUCCESSFULLY TESTS S-400

China has successfully tested the advanced S-400 air defence system imported from Russia for which India also signed-up recently despite concerns over threat of sanctions from the US. It was the first time the People's Liberation Army (PLA) tested the system since it received the last shipments of the weaponry from Russia in July under a \$3 billion contract signed in 2015. China's People's Liberation Army Rocket Force last month tested the S-400 Triumph air defence systems successfully shooting down a

"simulated ballistic target" almost 250 kilometre away and moving at the supersonic speed of 3 kilometre per second.

What

1. India signed a \$5 billion deal with Russia to buy the same system in October this year despite concerns over threat of sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) instituted by the US Congress on arms purchases from Russia.
2. India wants the long-range missile systems to tighten its air defence mechanism, particularly along the 3488 km-long Sino-India border.
3. S-400 is known as Russia's most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system.
4. China was the first foreign buyer to seal a government-to-government deal with Russia in 2014 to procure the lethal missile system. Moscow has already started delivery of an undisclosed number of the S-400 missile systems to Beijing.
5. Russia says the S-400 is a cutting-edge air defence system that can detect and shoot down targets including ballistic missiles, enemy jets and drones up to 600 kilometre away at an altitude between 10 metres and 27 kilometres.
6. The system can simultaneously shell 36 targets moving at a speed of up to 4,800 metres per second with 72 ground-to-air missiles.
7. China and Russia have significantly boosted their military ties in the past decade as both the countries compete with the US for regional and global influence.

Flashback

1. The S-400 Triumf previously known as the S-300 PMU-3 is an anti-aircraft weapon system developed in the 1990s by Russia's Almaz Central Design Bureau as an upgrade of the S-300 family.
2. It has been in service with the Russian Armed Forces since 2007.
3. The S-400 uses four missiles to fill its performance envelope: the very-long-range 40N6 (400 km), the long-range 48N6 (250 km), the medium-range 9M96E2 (120 km) and the short-range 9M96E (40 km).
4. The S-400 was described by The Economist in 2017 as "one of the best air-defence systems currently made".

IFC-IOR INAUGURATED

Mrs. Nirmala Sitharaman, the Honourable Raksha Mantri, launched the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) on 22 Dec 18, at Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) Gurugram. Apart from representation by officials from the MoD, MEA, MHA, Ministry of Shipping and the NSCS, Ambassadors and Resident Defence Attaches of partner countries also participated in the event.

What

1. The Indian Ocean Region is vital to world trade and economic prosperity of many nations **as more than 75% of the world's maritime trade and 50% of global oil consumption passes through the IOR.**
2. However, maritime terrorism, piracy, human and contraband trafficking, illegal and unregulated fishing, arms running and poaching pose myriad challenges to maritime safety and security in the region. Response to these challenges requires enhanced situational awareness of the maritime activities in the region so as to enable security agencies function effectively.
3. However, the scale, scope and the multi-national nature of maritime activities, make it difficult for countries to address these challenges individually. Hence, collaborative efforts between maritime nations in the IOR, is essential.
4. Towards this, the IFC-IOR aims to engage with partner nations and multi-national maritime constructs to develop comprehensive maritime domain awareness and share information on vessels of interest.

5. The intention of this collaborative endeavour shall be to secure the global commons for a peaceful, stable and prosperous region towards the well-being of all.
6. The objective of having an IFC-IOR is more for partners, equals to work towards keeping the global commons safe and democratically available for all of us.
7. The information exchange at the IFC-IOR would be initially undertaken by virtual means, using telephone calls, faxes, emails and video conferencing over internet. Subsequently, to enable better interaction, quicker analysis of information and provide timely inputs, the IFC-IOR would host Liaison Officers from partner countries.

ECONOMY

PANEL CONSTITUTE ON RBI RESERVES TRANSFER

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on 26 December 2018 constituted an expert committee headed by former governor Bimal Jalan to review its economic capital framework, and whether the central bank needs to hold as much reserves as it currently does. Former deputy governor Rakesh Mohan will be vice-chairman of the six-member committee, which also includes RBI central board directors Bharat Doshi and Sudhir Mankad, Economic Affairs Secretary Subhash Chandra Garg and RBI deputy governor N S Vishwanathan.

What

1. It was decided in the November 19 board meeting of the RBI that an expert committee would be formed to **examine if the central bank's reserves were adequate**, going by the global standards, and if in excess, how much money could be transferred to the government.
2. **This board meeting had taken place after the government's persistent demand** that part of the RBI's excess reserves be transferred back, either to recapitalise banks or for other expenditures.
3. According to the government, most central banks keep 13-14 per cent of their assets as reserves, but in the case of the RBI, it is 27 per cent. Therefore, the implicit demand was to have a reserve transfer of Rs 3-4 trillion. However, the RBI, under Urjit Patel, contested transfer of reserves, and therefore the need of the committee arose.
4. **Accordingly, the terms of reference of the committee, according to the RBI's latest circular, would be to "review status, need and justification of various provisions, reserves and buffers presently provided for by the RBI," and "review global best practices followed by the central banks in making assessment and provisions for risks which central bank balance sheets are subject to".**
5. The committee would also suggest an adequate level of risk provisioning that the RBI needs to maintain, determine whether the RBI is holding provisions, reserves and buffers in surplus / deficit of the required level of such provisions, reserves and buffers, propose a suitable profits distribution policy taking into account all the likely situations of the RBI, including the situations of holding more provisions than required and the RBI holding less provisions than required, **and "any other related matter including treatment of surplus reserves, created out of realised gains, if determined to be held"**.
6. The last point says old reserves would be evaluated by the committee, even as sources had told Business Standard after the November 19 meeting that **accumulated reserves won't be touched, but the committee would examine future payouts.**
7. According to the RBI communiqué, the expert committee will submit its report within 90 days from the date of its first meeting.

CRZ NOTIFICATION CLEARED

The Cabinet approved the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 2018 on **ground that it will** “lead to enhanced activities in coastal regions” **thereby** “promoting economic growth” **while** “respecting conservation principles of coastal regions”. However, the approval follows multiple representations made by civil society pointing out that the draft notification works towards diluting rules that govern the **country’s 7,500-km** long coastline. When the draft rules were made public in April, environmentalists had alleged that the notification will open up fragile intertidal areas to real estate agents and was framed with the intent to favour large-scale industry at the cost of fishing communities.

What

1. The CRZ 2018 notification states that in order to address pollution in coastal **areas** “**treatment facilities have been made permissible activities** in CRZ 1-B area subject to necessary safeguards. The draft rules specify that CRZ 1-B refers to intertidal areas.
2. The notification will affect how common areas used by fisherfolk are managed and also attempt to bifurcate coastal zones along rural areas based on population density. When the draft rules were made public in April, environmentalists had alleged that the notification will open up fragile intertidal areas to real estate agents and it was framed with the intent to favour large-scale industry at the cost of fishing communities.
3. The proposed CRZ **Notification... will lead to enhanced activities in the** coastal regions thereby promoting economic growth while also respecting the conservation principles of coastal regions.
4. It will not only result in significant employment generation but also to better life and add value to the economy of India. The new notification is expected to **rejuvenate the coastal areas while reducing their vulnerabilities,”** the Cabinet note said.
5. Among salient features specified in the Cabinet note is streamlining of CRZ clearances. Only such projects/activities, which are located in the CRZ-I (Ecologically Sensitive Areas) and CRZ IV (area covered between Low Tide Line and 12 Nautical Miles seaward) shall be dealt with for CRZ clearance by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
6. The powers for clearances with respect to CRZ-II and III have been delegated at the State level with necessary guidance, the Cabinet note states.
7. Further, the floor space index will be according to current norms in the CRZ index. In other words, while the 2011 notification had frozen the FSI for CRZ-II areas at 1991 Development Control Regulation (DCR) levels, the new draft proposes to de-freeze the same and permit FSI for construction projects as prevailing on the date of the new notification.
8. The notification approved by the Cabinet, however, does not specify a feature from the draft that makes the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM) the final authority to lay down standards for High Tide Line (HTL).
9. The Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change notified the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification in 1991, which was subsequently revised in 2011, this particular version of the notification has come under criticism for not taking into consideration representations from stakeholders.

ANTI-DUMPING DUTY FOR 5 YEARS

The revenue department has imposed anti-dumping duty for five years on a Chinese chemical used in making detergents to guard domestic players from cheap imports from the neighbouring country. The levy on **‘Zeolite 4A’ [Detergent grade]** has been imposed on recommendations of Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) after conducting a probe in this regard. The duty in the range of \$163.90-207.72 per tonne of the chemical will remain in force for five years (unless revoked, superseded or amended earlier).

What

1. DGTR, the investigation arm of the commerce ministry, had conducted the probe on complaint of Gujarat Credo Mineral Industries and Chemicals India which alleged injury to the domestic industry on account of the cheap import from China.
2. **In its final findings, DGTR said there was a “positive dumping margin” as well as material injury to the domestic industry, caused by the dumped imports, and recommended imposition of definitive anti-dumping levy.**
3. Detergent grade Zeolites are primarily water softener compounds, used to remove calcium and magnesium ions from hard water.
4. Soft water requires less soap for the same cleaning effort, as soap is not wasted mopping up calcium ions. It is mainly used as a builder in detergents.
5. Countries carry out anti-dumping probe to determine whether their domestic industries have been hurt because of a surge in below-cost imports.
6. The duty is also aimed at ensuring fair trading practises and creating a level-playing field for domestic producers with regard to foreign producers and exporters.
7. India has already imposed anti-dumping duty on several products to check cheap imports from countries including China with which India has a major concern of widening trade deficit.
8. The deficit has increased to \$63.12 billion in 2017-18 from \$51.11 billion in the previous fiscal.

What is Anti-Dumping Duty

1. An anti-dumping duty is a protectionist tariff that a domestic government imposes on foreign imports that it believes are priced below fair market value.
2. Dumping is a process where a company exports a product at a price lower than the price it normally charges in its own home market.
3. To protect local businesses and markets, many countries impose stiff duties on products they believe are being dumped in their national market.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

FIRST MILITARY FLIGHT BY BIO-FUEL

On 17 December 2018, Experimental Test Pilots and Test Engineer from IAF's premier testing establishment ASTE, flew **India's first military flight** using blended bio-jet fuel on the An-32 transport aircraft. The project is a combined effort of IAF, DRDO, Directorate General Aeronautical Quality Assurance (DGAQA) and CSIR-Indian Institute of Petroleum.

What

1. Indian Air Force carried out extensive engine tests on the ground. This is now followed by flight trials using 10% biojet blended ATF.
2. This fuel is made from Jatropha oil sourced from Chattisgarh Biodiesel Development Authority (CBDA) and then processed at CSIR-IIP, Dehradun.
3. IAF intends to fly the An-32 transport aircraft using biojet fuel on 26 January 2019, in the Republic Day flypast.

Flashback

1. Jatropha curcas belonging to family Euphorbiaceae, a perennial plant produces seed with 31-37 percent of oil, which can be combusted as fuel without being refined.
2. This fuel known as the process of transesterification can produce bio-diesel.

3. Jatropha plant is grown in marginal and poor soil with minimum cultural practices or in wastelands with low fertility, rockiness, and shallowness of soil.
4. Besides higher cetane number, oil reduces emission of carbon monoxide by 44 percent, sulphates by 100 percent and ozone forming potential by less than 50 percent.
5. Through Jatropha cultivation, not only bio-diesel can be obtained but also a tremendous opportunity will be there for employment generation in an agricultural country like India.

MOST-DISTANT OBJECT EVER DISCOVERED

Scientists have discovered the most-distant body ever observed in our solar system — located over 100 times farther than Earth is from the Sun. The new object, discovered by Scott S Sheppard from Carnegie Institution for Science, David Tholen from University of Hawaii, and Chad Trujillo from Northern Arizona University in the US, has been given the provisional designation 2018 VG18. **2018 VG18, nicknamed “Farout”** by the team for its extremely distant location, is at about 120 astronomical units (AU), where 1 AU is defined as the distance between the Earth and the Sun.

What

1. The second-most-distant observed solar system object is Eris, at about 96 AU. Pluto is currently at about 34 AU, making 2018 VG18 more than three-and-a-half times more distant than the solar system’s most-famous dwarf planet.
2. **2018 VG18 was discovered as part of the team’s continuing search for extremely distant solar system objects, including the suspected Planet X, which is sometimes also called Planet 9.**
3. In October, the same group of researchers announced the discovery of another **distant solar system object, called 2015 TG387 and nicknamed “The Goblin,”** because it was first seen near Halloween.
4. The Goblin was discovered at about 80 AU and has an orbit that is consistent with it being influenced by an unseen Super-Earth-sized Planet X on the solar system’s very distant fringes.
5. The existence of a ninth major planet at the fringes of the solar system was first proposed by this same research team in 2014 when they discovered 2012 VP113, nicknamed Biden, which is currently near 84 AU.
6. 2015 TG387 and 2012 VP113 **never get close enough to the solar system’s giant planets, like Neptune and Jupiter, to have significant gravitational interactions with them.**
7. This means that these extremely distant objects can be probes of what is **happening in the solar system’s outer reaches. The team doesn’t know 2018 VG18’s orbit very well yet,** so they have not been able to determine if it shows signs of being shaped by Planet X.
8. 2018 VG18 is much more distant and slower moving than any other observed solar system object, so it will take a few years to fully determine its orbit.
9. The discovery images of 2018 VG18 were taken at the Japanese Subaru 8-metre telescope located atop Mauna Kea in Hawaii on November 10, 2018.
10. 2018 VG18 was seen for the second time in early December at the Magellan telescope at **Carnegie’s Las Campanas Observatory in Chile.**
11. Over the week, researchers monitored 2018 VG18 with the Magellan telescope to secure its path across the sky and obtain its basic physical properties such as brightness and colour.
12. The Magellan observations confirmed that 2018 VG18 is around 120 AU, making it the first Solar System object observed beyond 100 AU.
13. Its brightness suggests that it is about 500 km in diameter, likely making it spherical in shape and a dwarf planet. It has a pinkish hue, a colour generally associated with ice-rich objects.

ADOLESCENT STAR DISCOVERED

Scientists have discovered a young star undergoing a rare growth spurt – giving a fascinating glimpse into the development of these distant stellar objects. The newfound star, called Gaia 17bpi, belongs to a group of **stars known as FU Ori's**, named after the original member of the group, FU Orionis found in the Orion constellation. Typically these FU Ori stars, which are less than a few million years old, are hidden behind thick clouds of dust and are therefore hard to observe. Researchers from University of Exeter in the UK spotted the star undertaking a dramatic phase of evolution, whereby matter swirling around falls onto the star, and so bulking up its mass. The team was able to see this stellar outburst through both infrared and visible light.

What

1. Gaia 17bpi is only the 25th member of the FU Ori class found to date, and one of only about a dozen caught in the act of an outburst. |
2. It also gives us insight into events which may have happened as the planets in our own Solar System were beginning to form from a disc of material around the Sun.
3. **Gaia 17bpi was first spotted by the European Space Agency's Gaia satellite**, which scans the sky continuously and makes precise measurements of stars in visible light. **The star's brightening had been independently captured in infrared light by NASA's asteroid-hunting NEOWISE satellite at the same time that Gaia saw it, as well as one-and-a-half-years earlier.**
4. **NASA's infrared-sensing Spitzer Space Telescope also happened to have witnessed the beginning of the star's brightening phase twice back in 2014, giving the researchers a bonanza of infrared data.**
5. These FU Ori events are extremely important in our current understanding of the process of star formation but have remained almost mythical because they have been so difficult to observe, said Lynne Hillenbrand, professor of at Caltech.
6. **This is actually the first time we've ever seen one of these events** as it happens in both optical and infrared light, and these data have let us map the movement of material through the disk and onto the star, said Hillenbrand.
7. The findings shine light on some of the longstanding mysteries surrounding the evolution of young stars, including how a star acquires all of its mass.
8. The study shows how material moves from the midrange of a disk, in a region located around one astronomical unit – the distance between the Earth and the sun – from the star, to the star itself.

SPACE X DEPLOYS GPS SATELLITE INTO ORBIT

Billionaire Elon Musk-owned SpaceX has successfully launched and deployed a powerful next-generation GPS navigation satellite into orbit— making it the **company's** first-ever US government-sanctioned national security space mission. A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket climbed into orbit with the GPS 3 satellite designed to beam higher-power positioning, navigation and timing signals around the world. **It was SpaceX's** fifth attempt following technical and weather delays. SpaceX successfully launched the **US Air Force's first Global Positioning System III space vehicle (SV)** from Space Launch Complex 40 (SLC-40) at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Florida.

What

1. The satellite was deployed to its intended orbit approximately one hour and 56 minutes after lift-off. Due to mission requirements, SpaceX did not attempt to **land Falcon 9's first stage after launch.**
2. The most important thing is that we get that rocket up safely and securely and it achieves its mission, said US Vice President Mike Pence, also Chairman of the US National Space Council.
3. The \$529 million GPS 3 satellite is the first of 10 being built by Lockheed Martin. The satellite would provide data for use by devices ranging from

smartphones to automobiles, commercial aircraft and virtually all sectors of the transportation industry.

- Multiple data streams will enable receivers in aircraft, for example, to compensate for atmospheric effects that might otherwise reduce accuracy. SpaceX won an initial contract to launch the first GPS 3 satellite in 2016.

Flashback

- Space Exploration Technologies Corp., doing business as SpaceX, is a private American aerospace manufacturer and space transportation services company headquartered in Hawthorne, California.
- It was founded in 2002 by entrepreneur Elon Musk with the goal of reducing space transportation costs and enabling the colonization of Mars.
- SpaceX has since developed the Falcon launch vehicle family and the Dragon spacecraft family, which both currently deliver payloads into Earth orbit.
- SpaceX's achievements include the first privately funded liquid-propellant rocket to reach orbit (Falcon 1 in 2008).

SCIENTISTS **MAP MERCURY'S GLACIER** FORMATION

Scientists have modelled the processes that led to the formation of glaciers at the cratered poles of Mercury, the planet closest to the Sun. The researchers at the University of Maine in the US studied the accumulation and flow of ice on Mercury, and how the glacial deposits on the smallest planet in our solar system compare to those on Earth and Mars. The findings, published in the journal *Icarus*, add to our understanding of how **Mercury's ice accumulations** — estimated to be less than 50 million years old and up to 50 metres thick in places — may have changed over time. Changes in ice sheets serve as climatic indicators, researchers said.

What

- Analysis of **Mercury's cold**-based glaciers, located in the permanently shadowed craters near the poles and visible by Earth-based radar, was funded by NASA, and is part of a study of volatile deposits on the moon.
- Like the moon, Mercury does not have an atmosphere that produces snow or ice that could account for glaciers at the poles.
- Simulations by the team suggest that **the planet's ice was deposited** — likely the result of a water-rich comet or other impact event — and has remained stable, with little or no flow velocity.
- That is despite the extreme temperature difference between the permanently shadowed locations of the glaciers on Mercury and the adjacent regions illuminated by the Sun.

Flashback

- Mercury is the smallest and innermost planet in the Solar System. Its orbital period around the Sun of 87.97 days is the shortest of all the planets in the Solar System.
- It is named after the Roman deity Mercury, the messenger of the gods.
- Like Venus, Mercury orbits the Sun within Earth's orbit as an inferior planet, and never exceeds 28° away from the Sun when viewed from Earth.
- This proximity to the Sun means the planet can only be seen near the western or eastern horizon during the early evening or early morning. At this time it may appear as a bright star-like object, but is often far more difficult to observe than Venus.
- The planet telescopically displays the complete range of phases, similar to Venus and the Moon, as it moves in its inner orbit relative to Earth, which reoccurs over the so-called synodic period approximately every 116 days.

- The researchers reconstructed the shape and outline of past and present ice sheets on Earth and Mars, with findings published in 2002 and 2008, respectively.

MISCELLANEOUS

THIRD EDITION OF THE WTI AWARDS

The NITI Aayog organised the Third Edition of the Women Transforming India Awards 2018 and launched the upgraded portal of the Women Entrepreneurship Platform. The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu presided over as the chief guest of the event where launched the WEP Portal 2.0 and conferred World Transforming India (WTI) Awards 2018. The Women Entrepreneurship Platform will help to realise the dreams of Women Entrepreneurs across India and that the development story of a New India is being scripted with women at the forefront.

What

- The Women Transforming India Awards were instituted to recognise and celebrate stories of exemplary women from across India.
- This year's theme is "Women and Entrepreneurship"** and fifteen winners have been chosen through an extensive six-month long process to identify fascinating and inspiring stories of women entrepreneurs.
- The Women Entrepreneurship Platform seeks to transform the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country and shall be a one-stop resource centre for future and budding women entrepreneurs.
- It seeks to act as a medium for various stakeholders in the economy to come together and offer integrated services such as Incubation Support, Mentorship, Funding avenues, Compliance, Marketing Assistance etc.
- The WEP Conclave saw participation of more than 400 people from various sectors, ranging from established entrepreneurs, industry veterans, renowned experts, senior government officials, budding entrepreneurs etc.
- WTI Awards 2018 received over 2300 nominations this year, and through a highly objective and transparent screening and evaluation process have selected 15 winners from sectors such as Renewable Energy, Education, Sanitation, Art and Culture, Social Innovation and Impact to name a few.

The awardees for the Third Edition of the Women Transforming India Awards are:

Sr. No.	Name	Org
1	Kshetrimayum Indira Devi	Chanu Creations
2	Ajaita Shah	Frontier Markets Consulting Pvt Ltd.
3	Pranshu Patni	Hello English
4	Namita Banka	Banka Biolo Ltd.
5	Ezhil Subbian	String Bio Pvt Ltd
6	Priyanka Agarwal	Wishberry Online Services Pvt. Ltd
7	Kavita Iyer Rodrigues	Zumutor Biologics Pvt Ltd
8	Neelima Chaturvedi	Korea Mahila Grih Udyog
9	Shikha Shah	Canva Fibre Labs LLP and BrewSight Analytics LLP

10	Devika Malik	Wheeling Happiness
11	Monika Shukla	LetsEndorse Development
12	Thinlas Chorol	Ladakhi Women's Travel Company
13	Tage Rita	Lambu Subu Food & Beverages
14	Yamuna Sastry V	Cab Dost
15	Seema Prem	FIA Technology Services Private Ltd.

Background of WEP

1. On November 28-30, 2017, NITI Aayog, Government of India in partnership with the Government of the United States of America hosted the 8th Annual Global Entrepreneurship Summit (GES) in Hyderabad, India with the overarching theme of 'Women First, Prosperity for All'.
2. To take the idea forward, CEO, NITI Aayog announced setting up of Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) to promote and support established as well as aspiring women entrepreneurs in India.
3. WEP is the first of its kind unified access platform which enables meeting of several stakeholders in the entrepreneurial space on a single platform, work in collaboration with various partner organizations to provide a wide range of support services to women entrepreneurs under various service verticals of WEP.
4. WEP partners such as Google, CRISIL, SIDBI, NIC, NASSCOM, UN India Business Forum, WEE Foundation, SEWA bank, MannDeshi Foundation, Shopclues, ICAI, ALC India, LK, GEN India, SSM have committed specific services such as WE check, Free Credit Rating, Free Ad credits, apprenticeship, mentorship, technical workshops etc.
5. WEP registered women entrepreneurs under verticals such as Financial Assistance and Funding Support, Entrepreneurship Skilling, Incubation and Acceleration, Compliance Assistance, Marketing Assistance and a dedicated vertical for Social Entrepreneurship.

FIRST IN COUNTRY

The Maharashtra State Agricultural Marketing Board (MSAMB) has appointed six officers as its representatives outside the state to facilitate trade in semi-perishable commodities. With this move, the MSAMB will become the first marketing board to appoint out-of-state representatives. Sunil Pawar, managing director of MSAMB, said these trade representatives will not only collect relevant market information but also facilitate trade across states. When it comes to production of fruits and vegetables, Maharashtra leads India both in production as well as acreage.

What

1. The state is the leader in production of fruits and vegetables like onions, mangoes and grapes. But farmers rarely manage to penetrate markets outside the state given the unavailability of market information and lack of local contacts. Invariably, this trade is controlled by traders who have developed resources and contacts over the years.
2. Explaining the role of trade representatives, Pawar said they will act as the representatives of the Board and, in turn, of farmer producer companies (FPC)s **and farmers' cooperatives in those states.**
3. Their main work will be to identify the market and facilitate coordination between such markets and producers in Maharashtra.

4. Trade representatives have been posted in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Assam and Tamil Nadu. Pawar said letters have been written to the Agricultural Marketing Boards of those states, requesting their cooperation.
5. This would be the second important step taken by the Board to improve inter-state trade. Earlier this year, the Board had announced transport subsidy **for FPCs and farmers' cooperatives for trade outside the state.**
6. **These trade representatives will also help the FPCs and farmers' cooperatives** during the process of sales in these markets as well as prevent them from being cheated.
7. Inter-state trade is a neglected sector, with most farmers competing for a piece of the export markets directly. In some cases, officers said realisation from inter-state trade is better than that from overseas markets. But this trade has mostly been cornered by traders.
8. MahaFPCs are dealing with onions, and at least 500 tonne of onion from the state have already been sent to other markets.

ANDHRA PRADESH GETS NOD FOR SEPARATE HC

President Ram Nath Kovind, through an order, has constituted a separate High Court for Andhra Pradesh from January 1, 2019 with the principal seat at Amaravati. The Presidential order, passed on 26 December 2018, stated that with the constitution of the High Court of Andhra Pradesh, 15 judges of the High Court at Hyderabad will become judges of the High Court of Andhra Pradesh at Amaravati with effect from January 1.

What

1. The Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014, was enacted with a view to provide the reorganisation of the existing State of Andhra Pradesh and for matters connected therewith.
2. And under the Act, it was provided for setting up a separate High Court for Andhra Pradesh.
3. In the past couple of years, there have been several agitations seeking a separate High Court for AP and the order is likely to put to rest these demands.

Flashback

1. There are 25 high courts at the state and union territory level of India, which together with the Supreme Court of India at the national level, comprise the country's judicial system.
2. Each high court has jurisdiction over a state, a union territory or a group of states and union territories.
3. Below the high courts there are hierarchy of subordinate courts such as the civil courts, family courts, criminal courts and various other district courts. High courts are instituted as constitutional courts under Part VI, Chapter V, Article 214 of the Indian constitution.
4. The high courts are the principal civil courts of original jurisdiction in each state and union territory.

MRINAL SEN PASSES AWAY

Dadasaheb Phalke award-winning film director Mrinal Sen passed away on 30 December 2018 after a prolonged battle with age-related ailments, family sources said. He was 95. The Padma Bhushan awardee, best known for films such "Neel Akasher Neechey", "Bhuvan Shome", "Ek Din Achanak", "Padatik" and "Mrigayaa", was one of the most acclaimed filmmakers of the country and an ambassador of parallel cinema.

What

1. The National Award-winning director and recipient of Padma Bhushan award was not keeping well for some years and had withdrawn from public life.
2. He had also been conferred with Dadasaheb Phalke Award in 2003, besides receiving awards from several film festivals across the world for his films.
3. Along with his contemporaries Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak, he is often considered to be one of the greatest ambassadors of Bengali parallel cinema on the global stage.
4. Sen was born on 14 May 1923, in the town of Faridpur, now in Bangladesh. After finishing high school there, he left home to come to Calcutta as a student.
5. He studied physics at Scottish Church College and subsequently earned a postgraduate degree at the University of Calcutta. As a student, he got involved with the cultural wing of the Communist Party of India.
6. Although he never became a member of the party, his association with the **socialist Indian People's Theatre Association brought him close to a number of** like-minded culturally associated people.
7. Mrinal Sen made his first feature film, Raat Bhore, in 1955. After making five more films, he made a film with a shoe-string budget provided by the Government of India.
8. This film, Bhuvan Shome (Mr. Shome), finally launched him as a major filmmaker, both nationally and internationally. Bhuvan Shome also initiated the **"New Cinema" film movement in India.**
9. In 1982, he was a member of the jury at the 32nd Berlin International Film Festival. In 1983, he was a member of the jury at the 13th Moscow International Film Festival.
10. In 1997, he was a member of the jury at the 20th Moscow International Film Festival.

RENAMES 3 ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 30 December 2018 announced renaming of three islands of Andaman and Nicobar on the occasion of 75th anniversary of Tricolour hoisting by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. The Ross Island was renamed as Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Dweep, the Neil Island as Shaheed Dweep and the Havelock Island as Swaraj Dweep, Modi said. The three islands are major tourist spots.

What

1. Earlier in the day, the Prime Minister inaugurated a slew of development projects and laid foundation stones of several others related to energy, connectivity, education, tourism and health sectors.
2. Donning the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army) cap, he addressed a public meeting at Netaji Stadium on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the hoisting of the Tricolour by Bose here.
3. On this day in 1943, Bose had suggested that Andaman and Nicobar Islands be renamed as Shahid and Swaraj Dweep respectively.
4. During the World War II, the Japanese had captured the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Netaji came here as the Azad Hind Fauz led by him was an ally of the Japanese force.
5. At the stadium, the PM also released a commemorative stamp, its first-day cover and a Rs-75 coin on this special day. He also announced setting up of a deemed university named after Bose.

6. The cells of the Cellular Jail where great freedom fighters such as Veer Savarkar, Baba Bhan Singh, Indu Bhushan Roy were tortured for years by the British are no less than temples, the prime minister said.
7. The Cellular Jail, also known as Kala Pani, was constructed between 1896 and 1906.
8. The prime minister announced a number of development projects including a submarine optical fibre cable between Chennai and Port Blair, a 7-MW solar power plant and a model solar village, and a State Wide Area Network (SWAN) project connecting 12 major islands. A 50-bed AYUSH hospital, a 50-MW LNG power plant would also be set up.

SUDHIR BHARGAVA NEW CIC

The government has appointed Sudhir Bhargava as new chief information commissioner (CIC) along with four new information commissioners in the central information commission which had been functioning with just three of them as against a sanctioned strength of 11, including the chief information commissioner. Bhargava, who is information commissioner in the CIC, has been appointed as new chief of the panel. President Ram Nath Kovind has approved the appointment of former IFS officer Yashwardhan Kumar Sinha, former IRS officer Vanaja N Sarna, former IAS Neeraj Kumar Gupta and former law secretary Suresh Chandra as information commissioners in the central information commission. Sinha is a 1981-batch Indian Foreign Service officer who was the High Commissioner of India in the United Kingdom.

What

1. The only woman in the CIC will be Sarna, a 1980-batch Indian revenue service (customs and excise) officer, who was the chief of central board of excise and customs (CBEC).
2. Neeraj Kumar Gupta, a 1982-batch IAS officer, was secretary in the department of investment and public asset management.
3. Chandra, an Indian legal service officer, retired as Union law secretary this year and was also private secretary to the then law minister Arun Jaitley between 2002 and 2004.
4. All the bureaucrats appointed by the government have retired this year.
5. The Supreme Court had asked the Centre and states to maintain transparency in appointments of chief information commissioner and information commissioners and upload the details of search committees and applicants on website.
6. The Centre seems to have ignored plea of former information commissioner Sridhar Acharyulu who had called for adequate representation of non-bureaucrats in the Commission in accordance with the Right to Information (RTI) Act.
7. Citing Section 12 (5) of the RTI Act, he had written to the President that the Act provides for selecting people of eminence, having experience in law, science and

Flashback

1. Chief Information Commission includes 1 Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and not more than 10 Information Commissioners (IC) who are appointed by the President of India.
2. The first Chief Information Commissioner of India was Wajahat Habibullah.
3. First woman Chief Information Commissioner was Deepak Sandhu.
4. The Central Information Commission (CIC) set up under the Right to Information Act is the authorised body, established in 2005 under the Government of India.

technology, social service, management, journalism, mass media or administration and governance.

GOVT EXTENDS AFSPA IN NAGALAND

The entire state of Nagaland has been declared "disturbed area" for six more months, till June-end, under the controversial AFSPA, which empowers security forces to conduct operations anywhere and arrest anyone without any prior notice. In a notification, the Home Ministry said the central government is of the opinion that the area comprising the whole of state of Nagaland is in such a disturbed and dangerous condition that the use of armed forces in aid of civilian power is necessary. Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (No. 28 of 1958), the central government hereby declares that whole of the state to be a 'disturbed area' for a period of six months with effect from 30th December, 2018, for the purpose of that Act, the notification said.

What

1. A home ministry official said the decision to continue the declaration of Nagaland as "disturbed area" has been taken as killings; loot and extortion have been going on in various parts of the state which necessitated the action for the convenience of the security forces operating there.
2. There have been demands from various organisations in the Northeast as well as in Jammu and Kashmir for repealing the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), which, they say, gives "sweeping powers" to security forces.
3. The AFSPA has been in force in Nagaland for several decades. It has not been withdrawn even after a framework agreement was signed on August 3, 2015 by Naga insurgent group NSCN-IM general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah and government interlocutor R N Ravi in presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
4. The framework agreement came after over 80 rounds of negotiations spanning 18 years with the first breakthrough in 1997 when the ceasefire agreement was sealed after decades of insurgency in Nagaland.

Flashback

1. Armed Forces (Special Powers) Acts (AFSPA), are Acts of the Parliament of India that grant special powers to the Indian Armed Forces in which each act terms "disturbed areas".
2. According to The Disturbed Areas (Special Courts) Act, 1976 once declared '**disturbed**', the area has to maintain status quo for a minimum of 3 months.
3. The Act passed on September 11, 1958.