

# My Notes...

## NATIONAL

### HEALTH INDEX REPORT

NITI Aayog released on 9 February 2018 a comprehensive Health Index report titled, **“Healthy States, Progressive India”** at a function in Delhi. The report ranks states and Union territories innovatively on their year-on-year incremental change in health outcomes, as well as, their overall performance with respect to each other. The report was released jointly by NITI Aayog and World Bank. It is the first attempt to establish an annual systematic tool to measure and understand the heterogeneity and complexity of the nation’s performance in Health.

What

- The report has been developed by NITI Aayog, with technical assistance from the World Bank, and in consultation with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW),
- States and UTs have been ranked in three categories namely, Larger States, Smaller States, and Union Territories (UTs), to ensure comparison among similar entities.
- The Health Index is a weighted composite Index, which for the larger States, is based on indicators in three domains: (a) Health Outcomes (70%); (b) Governance and Information (12%); and (c) Key Inputs and Processes (18%), with each domain assigned a weight based on its importance.
- Among the Larger States, Kerala, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu ranked on top in terms of overall performance, while Jharkhand, Jammu & Kashmir, and Uttar Pradesh are the top three ranking States in terms of annual incremental performance.
- Jharkhand, Jammu & Kashmir, and Uttar Pradesh showed the maximum gains in improvement of health outcomes from base to reference year in indicators such as Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR), Under-five Mortality Rate (U5MR), full immunization coverage, institutional deliveries, and People Living with HIV (PLHIV) on Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART).
- Among Smaller States, Mizoram ranked first followed by Manipur on overall performance, while Manipur followed by Goa were the top ranked States in terms of annual incremental performance.
- Manipur registered maximum incremental progress on indicators such as PLHIV on ART, first trimester antenatal care (ANC) registration, grading quality parameters of Community Health Centres (CHCs), average occupancy of key State-level officers and good reporting on the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP).

#### Flashpoint

- Health Index has been developed as a tool to leverage co-operative and competitive federalism to accelerate the pace of achieving health outcomes.
- It would also serve as an instrument for **“nudging” States & Union Territories (UTs)** and the Central Ministries to a much greater focus on output and outcome based measurement of annual performance than is currently the practice.
- With the annual publication of the Index and its availability on public domain on a dynamic basis, it is expected to keep every stakeholder alert to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal number 3.
- The process of index refinement involved inputs from the States and UTs, national and international sector experts, and development partners.

- Among UTs, Lakshadweep showed both the best overall performance as well as the highest annual incremental performance. Lakshadweep showed the highest improvement in indicators such as institutional deliveries, tuberculosis (TB) treatment success rate, and transfer of National Health Mission (NHM) funds from State Treasury to implementation agency.

## INDIA JOINS ASHGABAT AGREEMENT

India has joined the Ashgabat agreement which envisages setting up of an international transport and transit corridor linking central Asia with the Persian Gulf to significantly ramp up trade and investment. Turkmenistan, as depository State of Ashgabat Agreement, informed India that all the four founding members have consented to the accession of India (to the agreement).

What

- Besides Turkmenistan, the other founding members of the agreement are Iran, Oman and Uzbekistan and these countries had signed the pact on April 25, 2011.
- Accession to the Agreement would diversify India's connectivity options with central Asia and have a positive influence on India's trade and commercial ties with the region.
- Too bad that the pakis are too dumb to go with their national self-interest. If there were a stable environment in South Asia this place would be the envy of the world.
- It said India's accession to the agreement will come into force on 3 February 2018.
- After approval of the Union Cabinet, India had deposited the instrument of accession with Turkmenistan in April 2016.

### Ashgabat Agreement

- It establishes international transport and transit corridor between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf countries. Pakistan is also its member since October 2016.
- It will enable India to utilise this existing transport and transit corridor to facilitate trade and commercial interaction and ties with Central Asia and Eurasian region.
- It will synchronise India's efforts to implement the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) for enhanced connectivity.
- It will provide India an opportunity for reorientation of the freight traffic from the traditional sea route to land transcontinental routes.
- India had deposited the Instrument of Accession with Turkmenistan in April 2016.

## INDIA'S FIRST MSE SENTIMENT INDEX

The Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Shri Arun Jaitley launched **CriSidEx**, **India's first sentiment index for micro and small enterprises** (MSEs) developed jointly by CRISIL & SIDBI. CriSidEx is a composite index based on a diffusion index of 8 parameters and measures MSE business sentiment on a scale of 0 (extremely negative) to 200 (extremely positive). The parametric feedback was captured through a survey of 1100 MSEs in November –December. CriSidEx will have 2 indices, **one for the 'survey quarter' and another for the 'next quarter' once a trend emerges** after few rounds of the survey, providing independent time series data.

What

- The crucial benefit of CriSidEx is that its readings will flag potential headwinds and changes in production cycles and thus help improve market efficiencies. And by capturing the sentiment of exporters and importers, it will also offer actionable indicators on foreign trade.
- The Finance Minister said that the health of MSME sector is extremely vital to the economy and with the number of steps taken by the government in the past 2 years, there is increased integration of MSME sector into formal economy.

3. MSME sector is backbone of the economy . It is one of the largest employers in the country and with the vast population where employment either in government or in the large industry itself has limited potential.
4. This is one sector where people not only exhibit their entrepreneurial skills , become part of large value chains but also become job creators in the process. And that is the reason why a bulk of the jobs in manufacturing , trading have been created in this particular sector.

## NATIONAL HEALTH PROTECTION SCHEME

**Union finance minister announced the government's vision** of Ayushman Bharat, or the National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS), assuring 100 million families of coverage of up to Rs5 lakh for secondary and tertiary care. From previous years, health has emerged as the central topic of post-budget analysis and critique. Media newsrooms have been brimming with policymakers, academics, industry executives and politicians explaining the details and mechanics of the NHPS. The NHPS has been labelled many things—visionary, populist, pro-private insurance market, suboptimal solution for universal health, scaled-up version of old schemes, pre-election gimmick, and more.

What

1. Conspicuous by its absence in these debates has been the voice of the customer—the reaction of those belonging to the 100 million households meant to be relieved by the NHPS of the financial hardship of paying for healthcare.
2. The National Council of Applied Economic Research labels them **“Deprived Households”**. The annual income of these households lurks below Rs1.5 lakh.
3. It is a theoretical exercise to predict their likely reaction to the NHPS, based on the established correlation between economic capacity, health-seeking behaviour, and the gamut of risk factors endangering well-being and health in the bubble of deprivation.
4. On an average, the medical expenses of such deprived households with low income capacity hover between 5-6% of total expenses. The pursuit of health may trap them in medium- or long-term therapy regimens, pulling this single-digit proportion into a catastrophic range of 10% or above. Hence, the majority of them do not report sickness, until rendered inactive to work and earn, either by injury or the flare-up of a chronic condition.
5. For rural dwellers, seeking health is not even a matter of choice if the nearest medical touch point (public or private) lies miles away. There are still others, **who don't trust** the quality of available care to be worth dwindling family finances.
6. The top ailments adding the maximum burden of disease in EAG states include ischaemic heart diseases, lower respiratory tract infections such as bronchitis and asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder, tuberculosis and diarrhoeal diseases.
7. Most of these are chronic conditions that require regular outpatient consultations to manage disease prognosis. Hospitalization is a one-off event.

### First state to opt out of NHPS

1. The West Bengal became the first state to opt out of **Centre's** National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS) announced in Union Budget 2018-19.
2. According to State Government, it has already made hospitalisation and medical treatment free for its citizens and has already enrolled 50 lakh people under its Swasthya Sathi programme.

## THE FIRST EVER INTERNATIONAL KALA MELA

The First ever International Kala Mela was inaugurated by the Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu in New Delhi. The International Kala Mela has been organised by the Lalit Kala Akademi in partnership with IGNCA of the Ministry of Culture. More than 800 artists from across the world are taking part in the Festival.

What

1. The Vice President said that Culture is like the heartbeat of a civilization and it is an expression of its world view, a symbol of its value system.
2. He further said that it represents the hopes and aspirations of its people and it chronicles the saga of their lives. It springs from the depths of their hearts and touches the inner core of humanity and is truly the barometer of the quality of life, he added.
3. As the world is becoming increasingly globalized, we should preserve and propagate the best facets of our individual cultures. We should bring out the best traditions, noble ideals and the finest expressions of human excellence in all art forms, he added.
4. The Vice President congratulated the Lalit Kala Akademi for fostering cultural contacts within the country and also with other countries, through art exhibition and such Art Festivals.
5. The Festival is being organized from February 4th, 2018 to February 17th, 2018 at the IGNCA, New Delhi.

## INDIA IN GLOBAL IP INDEX

**India has “increased substantially” its score in the latest international Intellectual Property (IP) index** released by the US Chambers of Commerce on 8 February 2018, ranking 44th out of 50 countries. **India’s overall score has increased substantially** from 25 per cent (8.75 out of 35) in the 5th edition of the Index to 30 per cent (12.03 out of 40) in the 6th edition, according to the annual report prepared by the Global Innovation Policy Center (GIPC) of the US Chambers of Commerce. Despite improvement in the score, India continues to remain towards the bottom of the ladder. It now ranks 44 out of 50 countries.

What

1. Last year, India ranked 43rd out of 45 countries in the index, with an overall **score of 8.4 points**. **India’s ranking**, the report said, reflects a relatively strong performance in the new indicators as well as positive reform efforts on patentability of computer-implemented inventions (CIIs) and registration procedures for well-known marks.
2. Additionally, the government created IP awareness workshops and technical training programmes for enforcement agencies, implementing key deliverables of the National Intellectual Property (IP) Rights Policy.

**INDIA RANK 44 / 50**

### 2018 OVERALL SCORES

#### BOTTOM 10

Thailand	12.55	
Nigeria	12.38	
Indonesia	12.14	
<b>India</b>	<b>12.03</b>	
Ecuador	11.60	
Argentina	11.55	
Pakistan	10.41	
Egypt	10.10	
Algeria	9.53	
Venezuela	6.85	

#### TOP 10

US	37.98	
UK	37.97	
Sweden	37.03	
France	36.74	
Germany	36.54	
Ireland	35.98	
Netherlands	35.33	
Japan	34.58	
Singapore	33.45	
Switzerland	33.42	

3. However, **India's score continues to suggest that additional, meaningful** reforms are needed to complement the policy.
4. Among key areas of weaknesses are limited framework for protection of life sciences IP; patentability requirements outside international standards; lengthy pre-grant opposition proceedings; previously used compulsory licensing for commercial and nonemergency situations; limited participation in international IP treaties and no participation in international PPH (Patent Prosecution Highway) tracks.
5. For the first time, India has broken free of the bottom ten per cent of economies measured, and its score represents the largest percentage improvement of any country measured. This is further evidence of a country on the move.
6. The report analyses the intellectual property (IP) climate in 50 world economies based on 40 unique indicators that benchmark activity critical to innovation development surrounding patent, trademark, copyright, and trade secrets protection.

### AGNI-I SUCCESSFULLY TEST-FIRES

India on 6 February 2018 successfully test-fired its short-range nuclear capable ballistic missile Agni-1 with a strike range of over 700 km from a test ranges off the Odisha coast. The indigenously developed surface-to-surface missile was launched as a part of a periodic training activity by the Strategic Forces Command (SFC) of the Army to consolidate operational readiness.

What

1. The state-of-the-art missile was launched from a mobile launcher at Pad 4 of the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at the Dr Abdul Kalam Island, formerly known as Wheeler Island.
2. The trajectory of the trial was tracked by a battery of sophisticated radars, telemetry observation stations, electro-optic instruments and naval ships right from its launch till the missile hit the target area with pin point accuracy.
3. The sophisticated Agni-I missile is propelled by a solid rocket propellant system and is equipped with a specialised navigation system that ensures it reaches the target with a high degree of precision.
4. The missile, which has already been inducted into the armed forces, has proved its performance in terms of range, accuracy and lethality.
5. Weighing around 12 tonnes, the 15 metre-long Agni-I can carry payloads up to 1,000 kg and is capable of hitting a target beyond 700 km.
6. The missile is also capable of carrying nuclear warheads. It was developed by the Advanced Systems Laboratory (ASL) in collaboration with the Defence Research Development Laboratory (DRDL) and the Research Centre Imarat (RCI).
7. The missile was integrated by the Bharat Dynamics Limited, Hyderabad. The ASL is the premier missile development laboratory of the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO).

### ISFR 2017 RELEASED

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has released India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2017. It has revealed that total forest and tree cover in India has increased of over 8,021 sq km (about 80.20 million hectare) which is one percent increase from 2015.

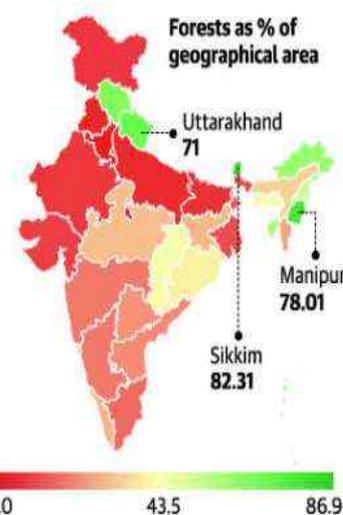
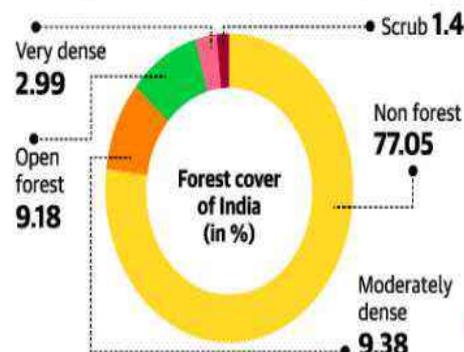
What

1. The increase in the forest cover has been observed as 6,778 sq km and that of tree cover as 1, 243 sq km.
2. The total forest and tree cover is 24.39% of geographical area of the country.
3. The increase in forest cover has been observed in Very Dense Forest (VDF) which absorbs maximum carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

4. It is followed by increase in forest cover in open forest.
5. India is ranked 10th in world, with 24.4% of land area under forest and tree cover, even though it accounts for 2.4 % of the world surface area and sustains needs of 17 % of human and 18 % livestock population.

### Green cover

India has about 7,08,273 square kilometres of forest, which is 21.53% of the geographical area of the country, according to the India State of Forest Report 2017



6. India was placed 8th in list of Top Ten nations reporting the greatest annual net gain in forest area.
7. 15 states/UTs have above 33% of geographical area under forest cover. About **40% of country's forest cover is present in 9 large contiguous patches of the size of 10, 000 sq.km, or more.**
8. 7 States/UTs have more than 75% forest cover: Mizoram, Lakshadweep, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Manipur.
9. 8 States/UTs have forest cover between 33% to 75%: Tripura, Goa, Sikkim, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Chhattisgarh and Assam.
10. Top 5 States with maximum increase in forest cover: Andhra Pradesh (2141 sq km), followed by Karnataka (1101 sq km) and Kerala (1043 sq km), Odisha (885 sq kms) and Telangana (565 sq kms).
11. Top 5 States with maximum Forest cover (in terms of area): Madhya Pradesh (77,414 sq km) Arunachal Pradesh (66,964 sq km) and Chhattisgarh (55,547 sq km).
12. Top states with highest Forest cover in terms of percentage geographical area: Lakshadweep with (90.33%), Mizoram (86.27%) and Andaman & Nicobar Islands (81.73%)
13. Top 5 states where forest cover has decreased: Mizoram (531 sq km), Nagaland (450 sq km), Arunachal Pradesh (190 sq km), Tripura (164 sq km) and Meghalaya (116 sq km). These states are in North Eastern region of the country where total forest cover is very high i.e. more than 70% in each state.

#### Flashback

- The India State of Forest Report 2017 (ISFR 2017) is 15th such report in the series prepared by Forest Survey of India (FSI).
- The report has been prepared with the help of scientific tools and contains information on forest cover, tree cover, mangrove cover, **carbon stock in India's forests, growing stock** inside and outside the forest areas and forest cover in different patch size classes.
- The report for first time contains information on decadal change in water bodies in forest during 2005-2015, forest fire, production of timber from outside forest, state wise carbon stock in different forest types and density classes.
- FSI has been assessing the forest and tree resources of our country on a biennial basis since 1987.
- The results of the assessment are published **in its biennial report titled "India State of Forest Report (ISFR)".**

## GLOBAL DEMOCRACY INDEX

**India world's largest democracy was ranked 42nd** among 165 independent states on annual 2017 Global Democracy Index (GDI) released by UK-based company, Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). **India's rank has slipped from 32nd in 2016 GDI and its overall score dropped 0.58 points from 7.81 to 7.23.**

What

- The index ranks 165 independent states and 2 territories on basis of 60 indicators grouped in five different categories viz. electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation and political culture.
- It categories countries into four broad categories viz. full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime and authoritarian regime based on their score on a scale from 0 to 10.
- It is released by EIU, a research and analysis division of UK-based media behemoth The Economist Group.
- Top 10 countries in 2017 GDI: Norway, Iceland, Sweden, New Zealand, Denmark, Ireland, Canada, Australia, Finland and Switzerland. Top three positions on the list were occupied by Nordic countries.
- Top-ranked Norway was given overall score of 9.87 with perfect-ten scores for electoral process and pluralism; political participation; and political culture. Only top 19 countries **have been classified as 'full democracies'**
- Global Scenario: US (ranked 21), Japan, Italy, France, Israel, Singapore, and Hong Kong were named among **'flawed democracies'**.
- The hybrid regimes classified by it includes India's neighbours Pakistan (110th), Bangladesh (92nd), Nepal (94th) and Bhutan (99th). Those named as **'authoritarian regimes'** include China (139th), Myanmar (120th), Russia (135th) and Vietnam (140th). North Korea was ranked lowest at 167th and Syria second last at 166th place.

### India related Highlights

- India's overall score has fallen to 7.23 points**, even as it scored well on electoral process and pluralism (9.17).
- It scored low on other four parameters—political culture, functioning of government, political participation and civil liberties. India was ranked 49th with regard to media freedom (measured this year by EIU), **with its media being classified as 'partly free'**.
- The rise of conservative religious ideologies in India is another factor that **has affected the country's ranking.**
- The strengthening of right-wing Hindu forces has led to rise of vigilantism and violence against minority communities, particularly Muslims, as well as other dissenting voices.

## FIRST EVER HIGHWAY CAPACITY MANUAL

The Minister of Road Transport & Highways, Shipping and Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation Shri Nitin Gadkari released **India's first ever** Highway Capacity Manual in New Delhi on 12 February 2018. The manual, known as Indo-HCM, has been developed by CSIR – CRRI on the basis of an extensive, country-wide study of the traffic characteristics on different categories of roads like single lane, two-lane, multi-lane urban roads, inter-urban highways and expressways and the associated intersections on these roads.

What

- The study involved seven academic institutions including IITs at Roorkee, Mumbai and Guwahati, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi, Indian Institute of Engineering and Science and Technology, Shibpur, Sardar Vallabhai Patel National Institute of Technology, Surat and Anna University, Chennai.

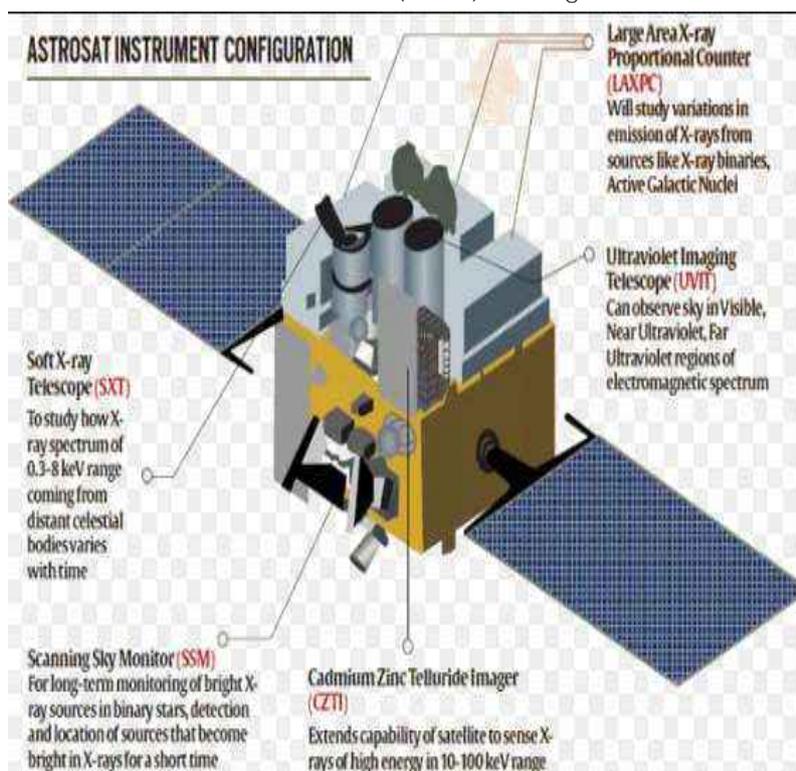
2. The manual lays down guidelines for when and how to expand or manage different types of roads and their intersections and the level of services to be put in place.
3. It is designed to be a useful tool for guiding road engineers and policy makers in the country. It has been developed based on the unique nature and diversity of traffic on Indian roads.
4. While countries like USA, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan developed their own Highway Capacity Manuals long time back, this is the first time that the manual has been developed in India.
5. Shri Gadkari also underscored the need to popularize the use of new material like fly-ash, plastic, oil slag and municipal waste in road construction, saying that scientists and the media should also play an active role in this regard. He also called upon researchers and engineers to expedite formulation of a good design for safe and effective speed breakers for Indian roads.

## ASTROSAT ACCOMPLISHES X-RAY POLARISATION

Astrosat, India's first dedicated multi-wavelength space observatory, has accomplished the extremely strenuous job of X-ray polarisation, putting up a strong challenge to prevailing theories of high energy radiation from pulsars. A team of Indian astronomers has documented the results of their 18-month study of the Crab Pulsar in the Taurus constellation and measured the variations of polarisation as this highly-magnetised neutron star spins around 30 times every second.

What

1. Scientists and astronomers, who participated in the project hail from the country's top scientific institutes -- the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Mumbai; the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thiruvananthapuram; ISRO Satellite Centre (ISAC), Bengaluru; The Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune; and Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), Ahmedabad.
2. A pulsar is a celestial body, believed to be made up on neutrons, and rotates 30 times per second. Even though they are comparatively tiny in size, they have mass more than that of the entire Sun, and hence are known as compact objects.
3. Having an extremely large mass condensed in a very small volume, these objects possess extremely strong gravitational and magnetic fields, both approximately trillion times that on the Earth.
4. They are known to be sources of intense X-ray radiation, electromagnetic waves similar to light but having ten to hundred thousand times higher energy,



which carries vital clues to understand them as well as the physical processes responsible for the radiation.

5. Astronomers have extensively studied various properties of this radiation to piece together a complete picture of compact objects and their immediate surroundings.
6. X-ray polarisation measurement is so difficult that so far the only reliable measurement obtained worldwide is for the pulsar in the Crab Nebula -- the ghostly remains of a massive stellar explosion known as supernova, observed in 1054 AD.

## 'PASCHIM LEHAR' BEGINS

Around 40 ships, submarines and fighter aircraft participated in 'Paschim Lehar', a tri-service maritime exercise off India's western coast, the Navy said on 14 February 2018. The objective of the exercise, which commenced on February 12, is to build interoperability.

What

1. This exercise includes participation of a large number of ships, submarines and aircraft from the Western Naval Command of the Indian Navy.
2. Units from Eastern Naval Command, Indian Army, Indian Air Force and the Coast Guard are also participating to build interoperability.
3. Over 40 ships and submarines, a similar number of maritime surveillance, fighter aircraft, helicopters and Remotely Piloted Aircraft of the Indian Navy and the IAF are participating.
4. The Amphibious capabilities of the armed forces, along with the elements of Army Amphibious Brigade will also be deployed and tested for operational tasking during the exercise.
5. The exercise includes a number of weapon firings, including missile, gun and torpedo firings during the initial phase.
6. The second phase is structured to validate and refine the operational plans of the Western Naval Command.

## INDIA'S DEFENCE BUDGET IN WORLD'S TOP 5

India's defence budget broke into the world's top five, beating the UK for the first time, a new report by a London-based global think-tank has said, signalling a key shift in the military balance between the two countries. India overtook the UK as the fifth-largest defence spender in the world in 2017 at USD 52.5 billion, up from USD 51.1 billion in 2016, according to the 'Military Balance 2018' report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). In contrast, the UK's defence budget fell from USD 52.5 billion in 2016 to USD 50.7 billion last year.

What

1. This represents a key shift in the military balance between India and the UK, with India allocating more capabilities to develop its regional resources than the UK in a global context.
2. The report notes that while India continues to modernise its military capabilities, China with the world's second-largest defence budget after the US remains far ahead with three times India's defence budget at USD 150.5 billion.
3. China's real defence spending increased by nearly 25 per cent in 2016-17, whereas India's rose by just 2.4 per cent.
4. Since 2000, China has built more submarines, destroyers, frigates and corvettes than Japan, South Korea and India combined. China will continue to dominate the region militarily and seek to challenge the US in the region as well.
5. Overall, the report found that China and Russia, with the world's fourth-largest defence budget at USD 61.2 billion, are challenging the military supremacy of the US (USD 602.8 billion) and its allies and that the West can no longer rely on the strategic advantage it has enjoyed until now.

- Saudi Arabia, with a defence spending of USD 76.7 billion, came in third to complete the world's top five the US, China, Saudi Arabia, Russia and India.

## INTERNATIONAL

### SANSKRIT NAME FOR AIRBUS

European major Airbus has chosen Sanskrit word 'Vahana' (meaning vehicle) for what might be the future of urban mobility — a self-piloted, vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) aircraft. The aircraft manufacturer completed the first full-scale test flight of Vahana in Oregon, US, on January 31, describing it a "milestone in advancing urban air mobility".

What

- Airbus started the project in 2016 with an aim to provide "personal flight".
- The aircraft we're building doesn't need a runway, is self-piloted, and can automatically detect and avoid obstacles and other aircraft.
- Designed to carry a single passenger or cargo, it is the first certified passenger aircraft without a pilot. It fly a full-size prototype before the end of 2017, and to have a productizable demonstrator by 2020.
- Vahana, the all electric, self-piloted, VTOL aircraft from A<sup>3</sup> by Airbus... successful completion of its first full-scale flight test, reaching a height of 5 meters before descending safely. Its first flight, with duration of 53 seconds, was fully self-piloted and the vehicle completed a second flight the following day.
- The Vahana project is developed at A<sup>3</sup>, the Silicon Valley outpost of Airbus.
- A<sup>3</sup> enables access to unique talent and ideas, new partnership opportunities, and execution at speed. Vahana aims to democratize personal flight and answer the growing need for urban mobility by leveraging the latest technologies in electric propulsion, energy storage, and machine vision.

### MID-COURSE MISSILE INTERCEPTOR

China said 6 February 2018 that it successfully tested a mid-course anti-missile defense system within its own territory, a move that comes amid tensions over North Korea's nuclear weapons program and China's own military developments in the South and East China Seas.

What

- No details were given about the type of weapon tested, although China has been working on advancements to its standby HQ-9 anti-missile defense system.
- Mid-course interception involves destroying a ballistic missile while it is flying in space before re-entering the atmosphere.
- China is North Korea's closest economic and diplomatic partner** but has signed on to increasingly tough United Nations sanctions aimed at curbing **Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program**.
- Despite that threat, it has adamantly opposed the deployment of an advanced US anti-missile system known as THAAD to South Korea, saying it would take countermeasures in response.

### VENEZUELA, LIBYA LOSE UN VOTE

Venezuela and Libya have been suspended from voting in the UN General Assembly for the third time in three years because of millions of dollars in unpaid dues to the world body.

What

- Secretary-General Antonio Guterres informed the General Assembly in late January that 14 countries including Venezuela and Libya were in arrears,

- and Assembly spokesman Brenden Varma confirmed that Venezuela has lost its vote in the 193-member global organisation as a result. Libya did as well.
2. According to a letter from Guterres to the Assembly president, Venezuela must pay a minimum of USD 25,200,296 to restore its voting rights and Libya must pay at least USD 6,594,842.
  3. Venezuela is mired in an economic and political crisis and Libya has two rival governments, each backed by an array of militias.

## SYRIA REJECTS ON CHEMICAL WEAPON USE

The Syrian Foreign Ministry has rejected the US claims about the Syrian government using chemical weapons in the war as “lies.” **The ministry said in a statement that the US remarks about the use of chemical weapons in the Eastern Ghouta region of the east of the capital Damascus are “false claims”. Such allegations were timed to undermine the efforts to resolve the Syrian war through a peaceful settlement between the Syrians without foreign interventions.**

What

1. The Syrian government reaffirms its position against the use of chemical weapons, and Syria has handed over all its chemical arsenals to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.
2. **The US and its allies are “desperately” searching for a pretext to target Syria,** following the success of the Syrian army in its war against terror-designated militant groups across Syria, it pointed out.
3. US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis recently threatened Syria with a military action if hard evidence is found to back up the claims of another sarin attack in Syria.
4. The Syrian forces used chlorine in an attack on the rebel-held Eastern Ghouta countryside of Damascus, causing 21 people to suffer from breathing difficulties.
5. In April last year, the US struck a military base in central Syria with more than 50 Tomahawk missiles, in retaliation for an alleged chemical attack by the government forces on a rebel-held town in the northwestern province of Idlib.
6. **The Syrian government denied the accusations, saying it’s rebels who mounted the attack to frame the government and draw in a military action from the US.**

## CREATECH SUMMIT IN MUMBAI

**Britain is to push for closer links with India’s** creative and technology sectors as it hosts its first India-UK Createch Summit in Mumbai this week. The event, which will bring together more than 1,000 personalities from business and government, including a UK delegation, in areas that include creative robotics, gaming and augmented reality and **immersive technology, will be launched by Britain’s Minister for Trade and Export Promotion, Baroness Rona Fairhead, who will also visit Bangalore.**

What

1. A healthcare sector delegation, including healthcare providers, hospitals and suppliers, led by NHS Chairman Malcolm Grant, will also participate in the summit, and also travel to New Delhi and Mumbai to look at potential for greater cooperation in disruptive healthcare technology.
2. Britain believes collaboration in areas such as immersive reality will have scope for cooperation in areas as diverse as healthcare and the oil and gas sector. The minister will also launch a new campaign to boost tourism between the two countries.
3. The Createch summit is part of a wider drive to step up collaboration and ties between India and the UK **ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to London for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April, which will also be a bilateral trip.**
4. Last year the Indian High Commission launched its Access India programme to help British small- and medium-sized companies access the Indian market and identify partners, while earlier this month, a new partnership was

launched to foster ties between India and the city of Manchester, at the heart of **Britain's efforts to revive a northern powerhouse.**

5. Indian companies had already been key to job creation and innovation in Britain, noting that in the past year they safeguarded more jobs in the UK than any other country.

## WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL ROCKET

**The world's most powerful rocket, SpaceX's Falcon Heavy**, roared into space through clear blue skies in its debut test flight from a Florida launch site where moon missions once began, in another milestone for billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk's private rocket service. The 23 story-tall jumbo rocket, carrying a cherry red Tesla Roadster from **the assembly line of Musk's electric car company** as a mock payload, thundered off its launchpad in billowing clouds of steam and rocket exhaust from the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral.

What

1. Boisterous cheering could be heard from SpaceX workers **at the company's** headquarters in Hawthorne, California, where a livestream feed of the event originated. At least 2,000 spectators cheered the blast-off from a campground near Cocoa Beach, 8 km from the space center.
2. **Within three minutes, the Falcon Heavy's two side boosters separated from the** central rocket in one of the most critical points of the flight. Then, capitalizing on cost-cutting reusable rocket technology pioneered by SpaceX, the two boosters flew themselves back to Earth for safe simultaneous touchdowns on twin landing pads at Cape Canaveral Air
3. Falcon Heavy is designed to place up to 70 tons into standard low-Earth orbit at a cost of \$90 million per launch.
4. **That is twice the lift capacity of the biggest existing rocket in America's space** fleet—the Delta 4 Heavy of rival United Launch Alliance (ULA), a partnership of Lockheed Martin Corp and Boeing Co—for about a fourth the cost.
5. The demonstration flight put the Heavy into the annals of spaceflight as the **world's most powerful rocket in operation, with more lift capacity than any space vehicle to fly since NASA's Saturn 5, which was retired in 1973, or the Soviet-era** Energia, which flew its last mission in 1988.
6. Propelled by 27 rocket engines, the Heavy packs more than 5 million pounds of thrust at launch, roughly three times the force of the Falcon 9 booster rocket that until now has been the workhorse of the SpaceX fleet. The new rocket is essentially constructed from three Falcon 9s bolted together side by side.

## UN COUNCIL FAILS FOR SYRIA TRUCE

The UN Security Council has failed to back an appeal from UN aid officials for a month- long humanitarian ceasefire in Syria, where four days of government raids have killed scores of civilians. Russia dismissed the proposal as unrealistic but Kuwait and Sweden, which requested the meeting, said they were considering other ways to address the worsening humanitarian crisis in the war-wracked country.

What

1. The UN humanitarian coordinator for Syria, Panos Moumtzis, called for the month-long ceasefire to reach civilians in need as fighting in Eastern Ghouta and Idlib escalated.
2. During the closed-door session, council members heard UN aid chief Mark Lowcock appeal again for the pause in fighting to allow safe access to civilians, diplomats said. But there was no agreement on a council statement, which requires consensus among the 15 members.
3. French Ambassador Francois Delattre called for a strong response from the council ahead of the meeting, appealing for an immediate ceasefire and unhindered access for aid workers.

4. Eastern Ghouta is experiencing a Middle Ages-style siege. That is totally **unacceptable,** Delattre told reporters. **“In Syria, we are now back to the darkest period of this conflict, with the highest death toll among civilians over the last year.**
5. The United States demanded an end to the air strikes, with the State **Department saying in Washington, “These attacks must end now.”**
6. UN aid officials accuse the Syrian government of blocking all aid convoys to besieged areas since January. More than 13.1 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian aid, including 6.1 million who have been displaced within the country during the nearly seven-year war.

## INDIA, UAE AGREE TO STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC TIES

India and the UAE have agreed to further strengthen their economic and commercial ties especially in the sectors of civil aviation, climate and energy as Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed the Gulf nation’s interest in investing in infrastructure development in India. Modi and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan held wide-ranging bilateral talks. The two leaders noted the excellent trade and economic ties between the two countries, as each other’s major trading partners and expressed satisfaction at the current level of bilateral trade, which amounted to about USD 53 billion in 2016-17, according to a joint statement issued at the end of Modi’s two-day visit to the UAE.

What

1. The two sides agreed to further strengthen these ties, particularly through diversifying non-oil trade.
2. With an aim to devise a long-term strategy on trade enhancement, the two leaders decided to examine various tariff and non-tariff barriers, and agreed to focus on encouraging trade in identified commodities and to expand access of goods and services in both markets.
3. They acknowledged the positive effect presence of a number of Indian and UAE **companies in each other’s market has in bilateral trade promotion efforts.**
4. The two sides viewed the agreement between Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange and **Bombay Stock Exchange concluded during this visit, as another “constructive mechanism” for furthering economic and commercial ties.**
5. India and the UAE also agreed to further enhance their cooperation in areas of green energy and climate change under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
6. Both sides noted the improvement in the ease of doing business in India and the UAE as per the **World Bank’s latest global rankings.**
7. The two leaders expressed satisfaction at the cooperation in energy sector, noting **that the UAE is one of the leading suppliers of crude oil to India. “Prime Minister Modi thanked the UAE for being a reliable partner in India’s energy security.**
8. Modi is visiting the United Arab Emirates for the second time after his 2015 trip to the Gulf country.

## INDIA, OMAN SIGN 8 AGREEMENTS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 12 February 2018 held wide-ranging talks with the Sultan of Oman as the two sides signed eight agreements, including pacts on cooperation in the field of defence, health and tourism. Modi, who arrived from Dubai on the last leg of his three-nation tour, led delegation-level talks with Qaboos bin Said al Said and discussed measures to strengthen cooperation in trade and investment, energy, defence, security, food security and regional issues.

What

1. They also signed an agreement on mutual visa exemption for holders of diplomatic, special, service and official passports and an MoU on cooperation in the field of health, tourism and peaceful uses of outer space.

2. The two countries also signed an agreement on cooperation between Foreign Service Institute, Ministry of External Affairs, India and Oman's Diplomatic Institute.
3. An MoU on academic and scholarly cooperation between National Defence College, Sultanate of Oman and the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. The two sides also signed annexure to the MoU on military cooperation.
4. More than nine million Indians work and live in the Gulf region. In Oman, they constitute the largest expatriate community.
5. On the first leg of his trip, Modi had travelled to Ramallah, becoming the first Indian prime minister to make an official visit to Palestine. From there he visited the UAE, before arriving in Oman.

## INDIA, UAE TO HOLD FIRST JOINT NAVAL DRILL

PM Narendra Modi entered the last leg of his three-nation tour on 11 February 2018, landing in Muscat to visit India's closest ally in the region, Oman. Before he flew on to Muscat, the PM, wrapping up a state visit to the UAE, reiterated strong cooperation on combating terrorism and a defence partnership that will see the Indian Navy conducting an exercise in the Gulf waters. Addressing the World Government Summit in Dubai, Modi highlighted the importance of assimilating technology with governance to ensure equitable growth, a key message relating to his government's programmes promoting inclusive growth through banking and DBT.

What

1. A joint statement issued at the end of Modi's visit focused substantially on a joint approach to tackling terrorism and radicalisation.
2. Indian institutions will cooperate with Sawab and Hedayah of the UAE, two entities that are actively addressing radical thoughts and actions at the level of religious places, schools and among the youth.
3. This is the first time Indian Navy will be exercising in the Gulf, going beyond the Arabian Sea. Modi told his audience that India aspired to assume leadership position in Artificial Intelligence, nanotechnology, cyber security and cloud computing.
4. He laid the foundation stone for the Swaminarayan temple, to be built on 55,000 sqm of land on the Abu Dhabi-Dubai highway, keeping local religious sentiments in mind while making it a place of worship for all manner of Hindus, whatever their chosen deity.

## MINIMATA CONVENTION APPROVED

India will soon be part of the Minamata Convention on Mercury - a legally binding global treaty to protect human health and environment from ill effects of mercury - as the Cabinet on 7 February 2018 gave its approval for ratification of the deal by the country. The Convention, however, allows India and other developing countries to continue its use and processes involving mercury compound till 2025. It also excludes use of mercury in Ayurvedic, Siddha and Unani medicines. The Convention was formally

### Highlights of the Minamata Convention

- The MC provides controls and reductions across a range of products, processes and industries
- The treaty also addresses the direct mining of mercury, export and import of the metal and safe storage of waste
- A range of mercury products will be banned by 2020
- Certain types of non-electronic medical devices are also included for phase-out by 2020
- Exceptions for some large measuring devices where currently there are no mercury-free alternatives
- Vaccines have been excluded from the treaty
- The MC calls for a phase down of dental fillings using mercury amalgam



adopted by over 100 countries in October, 2013. India had signed it in September, 2014. It had come into force last year.

What

1. Since mercury is considered one of the most toxic metals as it can easily enter food chain and human body and impact nervous system, the Convention aims at minimising its use.
2. Besides ban on mercury mining, the treaty also lays down procedures and time-line for phase-down and phase-out of mercury use in a number of products and processes. The Convention also spells out detailed norms for storage of mercury and its disposal.
3. It (Convention) seeks to protect human health & environment from ill effects of Mercury. However, the Convention excludes use of Mercury in Ayurvedic, Siddha & Unani medicines.
4. Besides outlining dos and don'ts for mercury use, the Convention also urges enterprises to move to mercury-free alternatives in products and non-mercury technologies in manufacturing processes. This will drive research & development, and promote innovation.
5. The (Cabinet) approval entails ratification of the Convention on Mercury along with flexibility for continued use of mercury-based products and processes involving mercury compound up to 2025.
6. The Convention protects the most vulnerable from the harmful effects of mercury and also protects the developmental space of developing countries. Therefore, the interest of the poor and vulnerable groups will be protected.

## ECONOMY

### HIGHLIGHTS OF BUDGET 2018-19

Finance Minister Shri Arun Jaitley presents general Budget 2018-19 in Parliament. Budget guided by mission to strengthen agriculture, rural development, health, education, employment, MSME and infrastructure sectors. A series of structural reforms will propel India among the fastest growing economies of the world. Country firmly on course to achieve over 8 % growth as manufacturing, services and exports back on good growth path. MSP for all unannounced kharif crops will be one and half times of their production cost like majority of rabi crops: Institutional Farm Credit raised to 11 lakh crore in 2018-19 from 8.5 lakh crore in 2014-15. 22,000 rural haats to be developed and upgraded into Gramin Agricultural Markets to protect the interests of 86% small and marginal farmers.

What

1. **“Operation Greens” launched to address price fluctuations in potato, tomato and onion for benefit of farmers and consumers.**
2. Two New Funds of Rs10, 000 crore announced for Fisheries and Animal Husbandary sectors; Re-structured National Bamboo Mission gets Rs.1290 crore.
3. Loans to Women Self Help Groups will increase to Rs.75, 000 crore in 2019 from 42,500 crore last year.
4. Higher targets for Ujjwala, Saubhagya and Swachh Mission to cater to lower and middle class in providing free LPG connections, electricity and toilets.
5. Outlay on health, education and social protection will be 1.38 lakh crore. Tribal students to get Ekalavya Residential School in each tribal block by 2022. Welfare fund for SCs gets a boost.
6. **World’s largest Health Protection Scheme covering over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families launched with a family limit upto 5 lakh rupees for secondary and tertiary treatment.**
7. Fiscal Deficit pegged at 3.5 %, projected at 3.3 % for 2018-19.
8. Rs. 5.97 lakh crore allocation for infrastructure

9. Ten prominent sites to be developed as Iconic tourist destinations
10. NITI Aayog to initiate a national programme on Artificial Intelligence(AI)
11. Centres of excellence to be set up on robotics, AI, Internet of things etc
12. Disinvestment crossed target of Rs 72,500 crore to reach Rs 1,00,000 crore
13. Comprehensive Gold Policy on the anvil to develop yellow metal as an asset class
14. 100 percent deduction proposed to companies registered as Farmer Producer Companies with an annual turnover upto Rs. 100 crore on profit derived from such activities, for five years from 2018-19.
15. Deduction of 30 percent on emoluments paid to new employees Under Section 80-JJAA to be relaxed to 150 days for footwear and leather industry, to create more employment.
16. No adjustment in respect of transactions in immovable property where Circle Rate value does not exceed 5 percent of consideration.
17. Proposal to extend reduced rate of 25 percent currently available for companies with turnover of less than 50 crore (in Financial Year 2015-16), to companies reporting turnover up to Rs. 250 crore in Financial Year 2016-17, to benefit micro, small and medium enterprises.
18. Standard Deduction of Rs. 40,000 in place of present exemption for transport allowance and reimbursement of miscellaneous medical expenses. 2.5 crore salaried employees and pensioners to benefit.
19. Exemption of interest income on deposits with banks and post offices to be increased from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 50,000.
20. TDS not required to be deducted under section 194A. Benefit also available for interest from all fixed deposit schemes and recurring deposit schemes.
21. Hike in deduction limit for health insurance premium and/ or medical expenditure from Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 50,000 under section 80D.
22. Increase in deduction limit for medical expenditure for certain critical illness from Rs. 60,000 (in case of senior citizens) and from Rs. 80,000 (in case of very senior citizens) to Rs. 1 lakh for all senior citizens, under section 80DDB.
23. Proposed to extend Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana up to March, 2020. Current investment limit proposed to be increased to Rs. 15 lakh from the existing limit of Rs. 7.5 lakh per senior citizen.
24. More concessions for International Financial Services Centre (IFSC), to promote trade in stock exchanges located in IFSC.
25. To control cash economy, payments exceeding Rs. 10,000 in cash made by trusts and institutions to be disallowed and would be subject to tax.
26. Tax on Long Term Capital Gains exceeding Rs. 1 lakh at the rate of 10 percent, without allowing any indexation benefit. However, all gains up to 31st January, 2018 will be grandfathered.
27. Proposal to introduce tax on distributed income by equity oriented mutual funds at the rate of 10 percent.
28. Proposal to increase cess on personal income tax and corporation tax to 4 percent from present 3 percent.
29. Proposal to roll out E-assessment across the country to almost eliminate person to person contact leading to greater efficiency and transparency in direct tax collection.
30. Proposed changes in customs duty to promote creation of more jobs in the country and also to incentivise domestic value addition and Make in India in sectors such as food processing, electronics, auto components, footwear and furniture.

## SDF INTRODUCE IN BUDGET 2018

The government has approved the long pending demand of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to introduce an uncollaterised deposit facility, adding one more tool to its liquidity management measures. In his budget speech, finance minister Arun Jaitley said

that the government is looking to amend the Reserve Bank of India Act to introduce standing deposit facility or SDF, which will help banks with excess funds to park it with RBI, without having to provide any collateral. The central bank had recommended this tool following demonetization when banks witnessed a surge in cash deposit leading to a liquidity surplus of Rs4 trillion in March 2017. However, the government was yet to give its approval as it required amendment to the RBI Act. SDF was first proposed in the Urijit Patel committee report in January 2014. The new tool will help RBI define a floor rate in the inter-bank market, especially in liquidity surplus conditions. It also gives the central bank a window to intervene in both directions, when needed, to achieve the operating interest rate target.

What

1. Standing deposit facility is a remunerated facility that will not require the provision of collateral for liquidity absorption.
2. Banks, at different points in time, may be short of funds or flush with money. When they need money for the short-term, **they borrow from the bankers' bank—RBI.**
3. Repo rate — that RBI sets at every monetary policy — is the rate at which banks borrow funds, for which they pledge government securities.
4. What happens when banks have excess funds? They lend it to the RBI at the reverse repo rate that is lower than the repo rate. Here too, government securities act as collateral.
5. The demonetisation exercise has left banks flush with funds. The past two months, banks have been lending left, right and centre to the RBI under the reverse repo window.
6. Enter the Standing Deposit Facility. This will allow the RBI to absorb surplus funds from banks without collateral.
7. Banks too continue to earn interest (though possibly lower than the existing reverse repo rate). In effect, it will empower the RBI to suck out as much liquidity as needed.

## LTCG WILL NOT IMPACT NPS

The proposal of long-term capital gains tax will not have much impact on the National Pension Scheme (NPS), a top Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) official has said. It will not have much impact on us. Investments in the National Pension System are made by our trust (NPS Trust), which is a tax-exempted body. As far as pension investments are concerned, LTCG will not have an impact, NPS regulator and PFRDA said. Contractor said this on the sidelines of a conference on NPS in association with Stock Holding Corporation.

What

1. However, it will have an impact on tier-II accounts also known as a non-pension account, he said. NPS manages two types of accounts -- tier I and tier II.
2. Tier II has no tax benefits. The Tier II account would be impacted but the investments corpus in tier II is much smaller.
3. Budget 2018 had proposed to re-introduce long-term capital gains tax on gains arising from the transfer of listed equity shares exceeding Rs 1 lakh at 10 per cent(excluding cess). The same also implies on mutual funds. The total NPS corpus is currently Rs 2.25 lakh crore from a base of two crore subscribers.
4. PFRDA also expects its Asset under Management (AUM) would grow by 45-47 per cent in the next year.
5. The Atal Pension Yojana, he said the pension fund body has targeted reaching one crore subscribers under the Yojana by March 31.

## BILL TO AMEND PMLA THROUGH FINANCE ACT 2018

Following amendments have been made in the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) through Finance Act 2018. The Amendments aim at further

enhancing the effectiveness of the Act, widen its scope and take care of certain procedural difficulties faced by the Enforcement Directorate in prosecution of PMLA cases. The major amendments proposed are as follows:

### Measures to enhance effectiveness of investigations

1. Section 5(1) of the Act provides that every order of provisional attachment passed by an officer of Enforcement Directorate shall cease to have effect after 180 days from the date of the provisional attachment order, unless confirmed by the Adjudicating Authority under PMLA within that period.
2. The section is proposed to be amended to include the period of stay in this time limit of 180 days and also further period of not more than 30 days to take care of delays if any in communication of judicial orders.
3. Under the existing provision of Section 8(3), presently, the Directorate is required to file prosecution immediately after confirmation by Adjudicating Authority. Proposed amendment gives 90 days more for investigation to ED, before prosecution is filed.
4. New sub-section (2) of section 66 is being introduced to provide for clear guidelines to share the information relating to contraventions of other laws noticed during investigation by ED, with concerned authorities under the said Acts.
5. This shall enable exchange of information among agencies and enhance effectiveness of efforts against black money.
6. Measures for restoration of property of persons adversely affected by PMLA investigation
7. Present provisions under Section 8(8) allow distribution of confiscated property to the rightful claimants, only after the trial is complete. Present amendment allows Special Court, if it thinks fit, to consider the claims of the claimants for the purposes of restoration of such properties even during trial also, in such manner as may be prescribed.

#### Measures to enhance effectiveness of PMLA

1. **Amendment in definition of "proceeds of crime"** :The definition of "proceeds of crime" in PMLA was amended in 2015 to include "property equivalent held within the country" in case proceeds of crime is taken out or held "outside the country". The present amendment shall allow to proceed against property equivalent to proceeds to crime held outside the country also.
2. Amendment in bail provisions: Amendment proposed in Section 45(1) would make the applicability of bail conditions uniform to all the offences under PMLA, instead of only those offences under the schedule which are liable to imprisonment of more than 3 years.
3. This will be a significant step forward in delinking the proceedings against scheduled offences and Money laundering offences under PMLA.
4. Further limit of Rs.one crore shall allow court to apply bail provisions more leniently to less serious PMLA cases.
5. Corporate frauds included as Scheduled offence:Section 447 of Companies Act is being included as scheduled offence under PMLA so that Registrar of Companies in suitable cases would be able to report such cases for action by Enforcement Directorate under the PMLA provisions.
6. This provision shall strengthen the PMLA with respect to corporate frauds.

## GOBAR-DHAN SCHEME ANNOUNCED

In an effort to make the villages open defecation free and improving the lives of villagers, the Finance Minister in his budget speech announced the launch of Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan (GOBAR-DHAN). The Minister added that this will manage and convert cattle dung and solid waste in farms to compost, bio-gas and bio-CNG.

What

1. The Finance Minister also announced that 187 projects have been sanctioned under Namami Gange Programme for infrastructure development, reverse surface cleaning, rural sanitation and other interventions at a cost of Rs.16, 713 crore.
2. 47 projects have been completed and remaining projects are at various stages of execution All 4465 Ganga Grams villages on the bank of river have been declared open defecation free.
3. To achieve the vision of an inclusive society, the Government has identified 115 aspirational districts taking various indices of development in consideration, aiming at improving the quality of life in these districts by investing in social services like health, education, nutrition, skill up gradation, financial inclusion and infrastructure like irrigation, rural electrification, potable drinking water and access to toilets at an accelerated pace and in a time bound manner.
4. These 115 districts are expected to become model of development.

## IIT-IIT LAUNCHED

In a new initiative, key members of the large IIT alumni group resident in India have come together to launch the IIT-IIT (IITans for Influencing India's Transformation). The mission of IIT-IIT.org is to make a catalytic impact on India's social landscape - with special focus on education, livelihood skills and healthcare - and accelerate successful social impact projects that have strong government participation.

What

1. Kartik Kilachand, Founder & Global Convener of IIT-IIT said: There are thousands of NGOs in the country doing excellent work, but for all these organizations, creating scale, which is critical to generating impact, is the biggest challenge.
2. These social impact NGOs need a strong platform which will act as an advocate, help open new marketplaces, facilitate co-operation between NGOs, work collaboratively with government and enable access to talent and capital.
3. Similar to the stellar work done by NASSCOM for IT and BPM firms in the country, we intend to take great success stories in the social sector which have had local impact and help scale them nationally.
4. India's largest social impact entity in education (Pratham) has an annual outlay of \$ 40 million while Bangladesh's and Kenya's largest NGOs have budgets greater than \$100 million. There is tremendous scaling possible and IIT-IIT will be a catalytic force for that scaling.

## AGREEMENT FOR SOLAR PARKS

Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (IREDA) and Rewa Ultra Mega Solar Limited (RUMSL) signed an agreement on 1 February 2018 for financing the shared infrastructure of two large Solar Parks in Madhya Pradesh. Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE), World Bank & IREDA have been able to work out a proposal to channelize US\$ 100 Million for creating common infrastructure for ultra-mega solar parks in India to achieve the 100 GW solar capacity addition target by 2022, set by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

What

1. The broad terms and condition of the agreement include fixed interest rate of 8.5% p.a. for entire loan tenure, moratorium from principal repayments upto 5 years and loan repayment period of upto 20 years.

2. The initiative of MNRE support of The World Bank and more specifically of DEA to reduce the Sovereign Guarantee fee to 0.5%. This support from DEA will enable to expedite development of such proposals in other states also.
3. India being in leading position in solar technologies, there is immediate attention for the development of 121 projects of solar technologies in 121 ISA member countries by April 21,2018.
4. RUMSL, at present, is implementing two solar parks i.e. Rewa with capacity of 750 MW and Mandsaur with 250 MW capacity in the state of Madhya Pradesh.
5. With the solar park model, Payment Security Mechanism and the Line of Credit from The World Bank, the tariff for Rewa project is discovered as low as Rs.3.30 on levelized basis.
6. Out of the total power proposed to be generated at Rewa solar park, 24% has been agreed to be purchased by Delhi Metro Rail Corporation and balance 76% by Madhya Pradesh Power Management Company Ltd (MPPMCL).

### 3 INSURANCE COMPANIES MERGED

Three public sector insurance companies—The Oriental Insurance Co. Ltd, National Insurance Co. Ltd, and United India Insurance Co. Ltd— will be merged into a single insurance company and listed on the bourses, finance minister Arun Jaitley announced in the Union Budget on 1 February 2018. The merging of the three state-run insurers will lead to the creation of a mammoth organization, and will be a key **part of the government's divestment target of Rs 80, 000 crore** set for fiscal year 2018-19.

What

1. It is a very positive move. **It is the government's resolve that CPSEs achieve** scale, heft and strengthen their balance sheets.
2. The government has initiated strategic disinvestment in 24 public sector undertakings (PSUs), including flag carrier Air India.
3. In 2017, the government listed two state-owned insurers—New India Assurance Company Ltd and General Insurance Corporation of India—on 13 November and 25 October, respectively. These stocks are down 17.50% and 16.67% respectively from their offer price.
4. To be sure, analysts had flagged the stretched valuations of these initial public offerings, and the shares slid post listing.
5. **The Indian equity market's largest institutional investor, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC),** had bought 8.42% and 8.67% stake respectively in General Insurance Corp. and New India Assurance Co. during their IPOs.

### NEW CRITERIA FOR CLASSIFYING MSMES

The Cabinet has approved a change in the basis of classifying Micro, Small and Medium enterprises **from 'investment in plant & machinery/equipment' to 'annual turnover'.** **This will encourage 'ease of doing busin**esses, make the norms of classification growth oriented and align them to the new tax regime revolving around GST (Goods & Services Tax).

What

1. The Section 7 of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act, 2006 will be amended to define units producing goods and rendering services in terms of annual turnover.
2. After the decision, a micro enterprise will be defined as a unit where the annual turnover does not exceed 5 crore, a small enterprise will be defined as a unit where the annual turnover is more than 5 crore but does not exceed 75 crore.

3. A medium enterprise will now be a unit where the annual turnover is more than 75 crore but does not exceed 250 crore.

## PROGRAMME UNDER AYUSHMAN BHARAT

The Government on 1 February 2018 announced two major initiatives in health sector, as part of Ayushman Bharat programme. The Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Shri Arun Jaitely while presenting the General Budget 2018-19 in Parliament said that this was aimed at making path breaking interventions to address health holistically, in primary, secondary and tertiary care systems, covering both prevention and health promotion.

## THE INITIATIVES ARE AS FOLLOWS

1. Health and Wellness Centre: - The National Health Policy, 2017 has envisioned Health **and Wellness Centres as the foundation of India's health** system. Under this 1.5 lakh centres will bring health care system closer to the homes of people. These centres will provide comprehensive health care, including for non-communicable diseases and maternal and child health services. These centres will also provide free essential drugs and diagnostic services. The Budget has allocated Rs.1200 crore for this flagship programme. Contribution of private sector through CSR and philanthropic institutions in adopting these centres is also envisaged.
2. National Health Protection Scheme:- The second flagship programme under Ayushman Bharat is National Health Protection Scheme, which will cover over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families (approximately 50 crore beneficiaries) providing coverage upto 5 lakh rupees per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization. **This will be the world's largest government funded health care programme.** Adequate funds will be provided for smooth implementation of this programme.
3. These two health sector initiatives under Ayushman Bharat Programme will build a New India 2022 and ensure enhanced productivity, well being and avert wage loss and impoverishment. These Schemes will also generate lakhs of jobs, particularly for women.
4. In order to further enhance accessibility of quality medical education and health care, 24 new Government Medical Colleges and Hospitals will be set up, by up-grading existing district hospitals in the country.
5. This would ensure that there is at least 1 Medical College for every 3 Parliamentary Constituencies and at least 1 Government Medical College in each State of the country.

## CBDT SIGNS 7 APAS IN JANUARY

The CBDT has signed five unilateral advance pricing agreements (APAs) and 2 bilateral APAs with Indian taxpayers in January as it looks to reduce litigation by providing certainty in transfer pricing. The seven APAs entered into during January pertain to sectors like banking, insurance, investment advisory, information technology, chemicals and engineering. The international transactions covered in these agreements include provision of IT-enabled services, provision of software development services, contract manufacturing, payment of royalty, sale of goods.

What

1. With the signing of these agreements, the total number of APAs entered into by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has gone up to 196, which includes 178 unilateral APAs and 18 bilateral APAs.

2. In the current financial year, a total of 44 APAs (seven bilateral and 37 unilateral) have been signed till date.
3. The two bilateral agreements signed in January, include the first such pact signed with the USA.
4. The progress of the APA scheme **strengthens the government's resolve** of fostering a non-adversarial tax regime.

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### GRAPHENE RADIATION DETECTOR

Scientists have developed a novel graphene-based radiation detector which has a fast response time and works over a wide range of temperatures. With a simple design and relatively low cost, the device classified as a bolometer could be scaled up, enabling a wide range of commercial applications. The new bolometer created by researchers at Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden is based on **graphene's thermoelectric** properties. Radiation heats part of the device, inducing electrons to move. The displaced electrons generate an electric field, which creates a voltage difference across the device.

What

1. The change in voltage thus provides an essentially direct measurement of the radiation. Other devices rely on the generation of electrical current or resistance change by incoming radiation.
2. However, measuring changes in current or resistance requires an external power source to generate an initial current. The mechanism is much simpler than in other bolometers, according to Grigory Skoblin of Chalmers University.
3. The piece of graphene in the new bolometer is small, so it is one of the fastest bolometers because it heats up and responds quickly.
4. The device remains sensitive to radiation at temperatures up to 200 degrees Celsius. Conventional bolometers typically work only at cryogenic temperatures.
5. Other researchers have previously made graphene bolometers, with better properties than this new device, but these models contain a double layer of graphene, making them more difficult to scale.
6. Another advantage of the new device is its coating. The researchers previously developed a method to coat graphene with a dielectric polymer called Parylene, which offers a good balance of performance and scalability.
7. The prototype bolometer works only with microwave radiation at 94 gigahertz, but future designs will widen the frequency range.

### JUNO PROBE COMPLETES ORBIT OF JUPITER

NASA said its **Juno spacecraft accomplished a close flyby over Jupiter's churning** atmosphere, successfully completing its 10th science orbit. The closest approach was at **6.36 am PST on February 7, NASA said. All of Juno's science instruments and the spacecraft's JunoCam were in operation during the flyby**, collecting data that is now being returned to Earth, the statement added.

What

1. Launched on August 5, 2011, **Juno recently probed the depths of Jupiter's famous storm, the Great Red Spot.**
2. During its first pass over this iconic feature in July 2017, Juno found that the storm penetrates well below the clouds – about 300 kilometres into the **planet's atmosphere.**
3. **Jupiter's Great Red Spot is a giant oval of crimson**-coloured clouds in Jupiter's southern hemisphere that race counter-clockwise around the oval's perimeter with wind speeds greater than any storm on Earth. It is about 1.3 times as wide as Earth.
4. The spacecraft arrived in orbit around Jupiter on July 4, 2016. During its mission **of exploration, Juno soars low over the planet's cloud tops** – as close as about 3,400 kilometers.

5. During these flybys, Juno is probing beneath the obscuring cloud cover of Jupiter **and studying its auroras to learn more about the planet's origins, structure, atmosphere and magnetosphere.**

## IN MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH IN RETINAL NEURONS

**It's no longer a hope; but very close to real** — neurons in the retina of the eye that are damaged and cause vision problems can be regenerated. This has opened up the possibilities for ophthalmologists to reconstitute the neural network in the eye of an adult retina, a Japanese Scientist from Kobe. Retina performs the critical role of converting the light rays into neural signals and transfers it to the brain for visual recognition.

What

1. It also happens to be the innermost part of the eye, which is considered to be the window to the world for a human being.
2. Two of the major diseases of the eye — age-related macular degeneration (ARMD) and Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) — both affect the retina and can lead to blindness.
3. India carries a major burden of eye diseases and blindness. Estimates put the number of people suffering from RP at half a million while another 1.4 million are carriers. With the percentage of ageing population growing,
4. ARMD is also expected to see a dramatic rise in the near future. Some studies project doubling of numbers from the present three to six million by 2020.

## RAILWAYS LAUNCHES 'WHISTLEBLOWER' PORTAL

Indian Railways launched the 'Voluntary Safety Reporting' website for its 13 lakh employees to report internal lapses in safety operations and hazards without disclosing their identity. This information will be used to fix lapses and prevent mishaps.

What

1. In an effort to make each staff alert to safety issues with the functioning of railways, the information received through the website will not be used as material evidence for taking disciplinary action against the person reporting the hazard.
2. The person reporting this is free to provide his contact details or not and his/ her identity will be confined up to chief safety officer.
3. These details will be utilised only for obtaining additional information if needed or to provide feedback on the action taken on the reported hazard.
4. Persons reporting such lapses can also check the status or action taken on the hazard.

## WEF REPORT ON ONLINE THREATS

Majority of kids in the age bracket of 8-12 are subjected to online threats like cyber-bullying and video game addiction, **and the situation is 'acute' in emerging economies**, says a survey. The joint report by DQ Institute and the World Economic Forum, over 50 per cent of 8-12 year olds are susceptible to cyber-bullying, video game addiction, offline meetings, disinformation and online sexual grooming. Notably, **the problem is more acute in emerging economies, where 'internet adoption has been more rapid and less subject to appropriate safeguards by parents, industry or government'.**

What

1. **The purpose of the '2018 DQ Impact Report'** is to highlight the need for concerted action by government, industry and civil society to help parents counter **the threats facing the youngest 'digital citizens' and "such a need is more acute in emerging economies"**.
2. We must act quickly and take positive steps to help these children facing cyber-risks around the world, especially in information and communication technology (ICT)-emerging countries.

3. We need to work together to help our children outsmart cyber-risks and become successful and responsible digital citizens who maximise their potential and minimise cyber-risks,” said Yuhyun Park, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the DQ Institute, Singapore.
4. The study of 38,000 children noted that 47 per cent have been victimised through cyber-bullying in the past year.
5. **Today’s youth make up an important part of our informed society, they will be tomorrow’s voters and our future leaders. Ensuring they are better equipped to face the challenges of hyper-connected life, earlier on, should be a societal priority.**
6. Moreover, the children spend an average of 32 hours per week in front of digital screens for entertainment alone – longer than the time they spend in school.
7. There is a positive association between screen time and exposure to cyber-bullying, video game addiction, offline meetings and online sexual behaviours.

## DIGITAL GENDER ATLAS

Digital Gender Atlas has been developed to identify the low performing geographic pockets for girls, particularly from marginalised groups such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and Muslim minorities, on specific gender related education indicators. The Atlas is designed around the two broad areas of performance of girls' education and vulnerabilities visualized in the following five sections: Comparative Composite Index based Quartile Ranking grouped under categories of access, infrastructure, teachers and outcome indicators and based on 25 indicators pertaining to primary, upper primary and secondary level which can be visualized at State, district and block level.

What

1. A Trend Analysis of the performance status of 25 individual indicators can be visualised at State, district and block levels over three years viz 2011-12, 2012-13 & 2013-14.
2. Spatial Distribution of Special Focus Districts. These are districts with a population of 25% and above of people belonging to Schedule Tribes (109 districts), Schedule Castes (61 districts), Muslims (88 districts with a muslim population of more than 20%), minority community (121 districts as identified by **Ministry of Minority Affairs under PM’s 15 PPP**), **Left Wing Extremist affected** districts (88 districts identified by Ministry of Home Affairs), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) districts (161 districts) and Educationally Backward Blocks (3479 blocks).
3. Vulnerability status of an area based on a composite index of 3 broad indicators (i) rural female literacy (ii) percentage girls/boys married below the legal age of marriage and (iii) working children can be visualized.
4. Separate visualisations are given for working children for the following sub-indicators: disaggregation by gender and age for the 5-9 years, 10-14 years and 15-19 years age groups as well as for marriage below the legal age. These maps are available up to the district level.
5. Children with Disabilities: The performance status of six individual indicators can be visualized at state and district level across three years i.e. 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14. This Digital Gender Atlas can be accessed at website [www.rmsaindia.gov.in](http://www.rmsaindia.gov.in)® Gender Atlas.
6. All the states have been mapped in the Digital Gender Atlas. The states have been using it as a planning tool to come up with strategies for inputs for the state SSA and RMSA annual plans.

## NEW ALIEN SPECIES INVASIONS RISING GLOBALLY

The number of newly emerging alien species – those never before encountered as aliens – continues to rise, posing a significant challenge to biosecurity interventions

worldwide, according to a study. Researchers, including those from University College London (UCL) in the UK, found that up to 16 per cent of all species on Earth may be alien species and if they invade new regions, impacts will be difficult to predict. Approaches to tackle the growing issue **largely rely on knowledge of species' invasion history** elsewhere, giving new previously unrecorded alien species a higher chance of slipping through border controls and eluding early response management.

What

1. The study, published in the journal PNAS, analysed a global database of 45,984 records detailing the first invasions of 16,019 established alien species from 1500 until 2005 to investigate the dynamics of how alien species spread worldwide.
2. Between the years 2000 and 2005, one quarter of records are of species that had not previously been found anywhere as an alien, which is a worryingly high proportion.
3. For plants, mammals, and fishes, the proportion of newly emerging alien species has remained constant during the last 150 years but the total number of alien species has increased.
4. Insects, molluscs and other invertebrates have the highest proportion of emerging alien species. Birds are the only group exempt from the trend, showing the lowest proportions of emerging alien species, with a distinct decline noted recently.
5. Humans have been moving species to new places for thousands of years, so we might have expected that most species that have the potential to become aliens would already have done so. Instead, it seems the pool of new aliens is far from dry.

## MISCELLANEOUS

### MIFF TO HONOUR BENEGAL

Veteran filmmaker Shyam Benegal would be conferred with the coveted V Shantaram Lifetime Achievement Award of the Mumbai International Film Festival for Documentary, Shorts & Animation Films (MIFF) 2018. The award carrying a trophy, a shawl, citation and cash prize of Rs 1 million (Rs 10 lakhs) will be presented to the 83-year-old Benegal.

What

1. An independent committee comprising Rahul Rawail, Kiran Shantaram, Prasoon Joshi, Bharathi Pradhan and Vinod Anupam unanimously recommended the name of Benegal, taking note of his significant contribution to the growth and sustenance of documentary movements in India.
2. One of the leading and widely respected filmmakers of India, Benegal is known for making thought provoking films centre around contemporary Indian experience. He is credited with pioneering new cinema in the country.
3. While Benegal has made 28 feature films including landmark films like 'Ankur', 'Nishant', 'Mandi' and 'Junoon', his filmography also includes 41 documentaries covering a wide variety of subjects including cultural anthropology, sustainable growth, biopic, art and culture.
4. His 1982 documentary 'Satyajit Ray' won the National Award for Best Biographical Film, while his 1985 film 'Nehru' won the award for Best Historical Reconstruction.
5. His work on television consists of several popular series including the 53 part series Bharat Ek Khoj, first broadcast on Doordarshan in 1988.
6. He also made the much acclaimed 'Samvidhaan - The Making of the Constitution of India'.
7. Born in 1934 in Hyderabad, Shyam Benegal completed his M.A. in Economics from the Osmania University and began working in an advertising agency, before venturing into film making.

8. He made his first documentary film 'Gher Behti Ganga' (Ganga at Doorstep) in Gujarati in 1963.

## ELECTORAL BOND UNDER JUDICIAL SCANNER

The Centre's decision to introduce electoral bond scheme has come under judicial scrutiny with the Supreme Court agreeing to hear plea of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) to set it aside, and seeking the government's response. Claiming that the scheme will clean up political funding in India, the NDA government had, in last year's Budget, decided to bring electoral bonds despite stiff opposition from the political opposition and some reservations from the Election Commission. The EC had initially referred to the move as a "retrograde step".

What

1. Challenging the government's action, CPM and its general secretary Sitaram Yechury approached the apex court pleading that the move to float electoral bonds should be scrapped as it would lead to greater political corruption.
2. The petitioners submit that the confluence of uncapped corporate resources funding political parties can only lead to private corporate interests taking precedence over the needs and rights of the people in policy consideration.
3. The system of corporate donations has been made correspondingly secretive by removing the requirement of disclosure of the names of political parties to whom contributions have been made by amendment to the Company Act, 2013, the petition said.
4. In effect, at both ends of the transaction, neither the contributor nor the recipient of the funds is required to disclose the identity of the other. The inevitable consequences of these amendments is destruction of the principle underlying Article 19(1) (a) and the concept of democratic institutions.
5. As per the provisions, the bonds will be issued in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh and Rs 1 crore, available at specified branches of SBI.

## WORLD CANCER DAY

Oncologists are unanimous that 90 per cent of oral cancers could be prevented if **the government implements the Supreme Court's order which banned** chewing tobacco being sold rampantly in twin packs. The Supreme Court on September 23, 2016 had imposed ban on sale of tobacco in twin-packs such as gutka, tobacco, pan masala, khaini etc.

What

1. As per the Global Adult Tobacco Survey 2017, there are 26.7 crore users of tobacco in India and 5500 children initiate tobacco use everyday. One-third of these tobacco users will die prematurely.
2. Lakhs of Indian families are devastated with cancer deaths, which are preventable. Tobacco is the single most preventable cause of death.
3. The governments

### Background

1. World Cancer Day is an international day marked on February 4 to raise awareness of cancer and to encourage its prevention, detection, and treatment.
2. World Cancer Day was founded by the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) to support the goals of the World Cancer Declaration, written in 2008.
3. The primary goal of the World Cancer Day is to significantly reduce illness and death caused by cancer by 2020.
4. World Cancer Day targets misinformation, raises awareness, and reduces stigma. Multiple initiatives run on World Cancer Day to show support for those affected by cancer.

should think over it seriously as it accounts for more deaths worldwide than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined.

4. As Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, I had suggested the then government to reduce tobacco cultivation and compensate the farmers for the losses in other ways, but nothing has been done as yet.

## ADULT WOMAN FREE TO CHOOSE PLACE OF LIVING

An adult woman is free to choose where she wants to live and with whom, the Supreme Court said. A bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra had summoned a woman for an interaction after her sister and brother had moved the court alleging she had been abducted and forced to live with a person in a Haryana village.

What

1. Dayawanti appeared before the bench, also comprising Justices A M Khanwilkar and D Y Chandrachud, and said she was willingly living with her partner, Jagdish, and would like to remain in her new house.
2. Senior advocate Colin Gonsalves, appearing for her sister and brother, alleged the woman was abducted and taken to various places in Gujarat and was now being forced to live with the man.
3. In pursuance of our order dated January 9, 2018, Dayawanti has been produced. She says that she wants to stay with Jagdish.
4. She has also stated that she is not saying anything out of coercion but out of her own volition. In view of the aforesaid, nothing remains to be adjudicated in this habeas corpus petition, and the same is disposed of accordingly, the bench said.
5. It said a woman was free to choose where she wanted to be and the partner with whom she wanted to live.

## J&K TO GET NEW ACT AFTER 114 YEARS

More than a century after enacting an Act to preserve fisheries in Jammu and Kashmir, the state is all set to get a new legislation for the sector. The Legislative Council on 6 February 2018 passed "a Bill to provide for the protection, conservation and development of fisheries in the state and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto...". The bill was moved by Minister for Animal, Sheep Husbandry and Fisheries, Abdul Gani Kohli and passed with a voice vote. It was passed in the state assembly.

What

1. The existing Jammu and Kashmir Fisheries Act of 1903 is more than 114 years old, which called for an updated legislation for the sector.
2. No person shall after commencement of this Act, carry on fishing in any trout water, reserved waters and protected waters without a license, the bill said.
3. It further said that no person shall use any dynamite or other explosive substance in any water with intent thereby to catch or destroy the fishes.
4. No person shall put any poison lime or noxious materials into any water with the intent to catch fish.
5. As per the new bill, whoever though having been granted a licence under this Act, fishes or attempt to fish in any trout (fish) water, reserved waters and protected waters between hours of sunset and sunrise shall be liable to be punished with imprisonment for a term which extends to three months or with fine which may extend to Rs 5,000 or both.

## ASIA UNIVERSITY RANKINGS 2018

Banaras Hindu University, Jamia Millia Islamia and 10 other Indian institutions have for the first time made it to the list of top-350 varsities in the Asia University Rankings 2018. These entrants increased the overall representation of Indian institutes to **42. Two of the country's newcomers made it to the top 200** — the Indian School of Mines at

141st and the Banaras Hindu University at a joint 194th position, Times Higher Education (THE) said in a statement. Jamia Milia Islamia was ranked in the range of 201-250.

What

1. India now has 42 universities in the Asia rankings and that the country has improved on 12 of the 13 metrics underlying the rankings.
2. The top Indian varsities on the list were the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), IIT-Bombay, IIT-Kharagpur, IIT-Roorkee and IIT-Kanpur.
3. The global list was topped by the National University of Singapore, Tsinghua University and Peking University (both from China), University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.
4. **The main trend of this year's THE Asia University Rankings is the continued rise of China. The People's Republic now claims almost one in five places in the rankings and several of its institutions have made strong gains, not least Tsinghua University, which is now the country's top ranked institution for the first time in the table's six-year history.**
5. Though there were many new entrants this year, the performance of many top Indian institutions were disappointing. The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Madras the saw the biggest decline on the top-200 list, dropping 41 places to 103.
6. The IISc and IIT-Bombay slipped two points each, and were ranked 29 and 44, respectively.
7. The IISc and all other IITs had also failed to score in the top 200 World University Rankings 2018 released last year.
8. The IISc dropped from the 201-250 band in the previous rankings to the 251-300 band. The IIT-Delhi and IIT-Kanpur slipped from the 401-500 band to the 501-600 band. IIT-Bombay remained in the 351-400 range.
9. Indian institutions picked up points in other areas such as research productivity, even though it tends to lag on research environment. Its only area of decline was teaching reputation.
10. Officials in the Ministry of Human Resources Development said the Centre has taken several measures to increase the global rankings of Indian universities.

## CCI SLAPS FINE ON GOOGLE

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) on 8 February 2018 imposed a fine of Rs136 crore on search engine major Google for unfair business practices in the Indian market for online search. Passing the order on complaints that were filed back in 2012, the regulator **said the penalty is being imposed on Google for "infringing anti-trust conduct"**.

What

1. Globally, this is one of the rare cases where Google has been penalised for unfair business ways.
2. It was alleged that Google is indulging in abuse of dominant position in the market for online search through practices leading to search bias and search manipulation, among others.
3. **The penalty amount of Rs135.86 crore translates to 5% of the company's average total revenue generated from India operations from its different business segments for the financial years 2013, 2014 and 2015, according to the CCI order.**
4. The CCI said it has given thoughtful consideration on the submissions made by Google on issue of penalty and found it appropriate to impose a fine.
5. The ruling has come on complaints filed by Matrimony.com and Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS)—back in 2012—against Google LLC, Google India Pvt Ltd and Google Ireland Ltd.

## NEW AFFILIATION NORMS FOR ITIS

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has introduced new affiliation/accreditation norms to reinvigorate the ITI ecosystem by emphasising on its qualitative aspect. These 13,000+ ITIs spread across India offer hands-on technical and skill training churning out a large number of employable youth. The new norms aim to ensure that the procedural and civil norms are strictly adhered to in all the existing and new ITIs to curb the mushrooming of unauthorized institutes across India and to improve the overall quality of these institutes.

### MAIN SALIENT FEATURES

1. The civil and infrastructural requirements have been majorly overhauled. The minimum requirement for building ITIs has been reduced.
2. The application and assessment stage for ITIs has also been made digital to simplify the process. The contenders can apply and receive acknowledgement online.
3. A new ITI can be set up with 4 trades and the minimum plot size will be around 1 acre to accommodate all technical requirements.
4. The land lease period has also been reduced to 10 years to assist entrepreneurs aspiring to enter the long-term training space.
5. Stringent physical inspection of infrastructure and machinery to be done by an expert committee.
6. These new affiliation norms supersede all the previous civil and procedural norms for affiliating ITIs under the aegis of National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT).
7. The affiliation and procedural norms for Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) have been revised by NCVT in consultation with the expert committees, trade experts, industry, academia and the State governments specially to improve training in unserved blocks of the country.
8. The ITI ecosystem has been adeptly delivering technically trained workforce to various industries in India.

### MOST ETHICAL COMPANIES

IT services and outsourcing provider Wipro Limited and Tata Steel Ltd are the two Indian firms that have been selected among 135 of the world's most ethical companies for 2018 by the US-based think tank Ethisphere Institute. The 135 companies dedicated to "defining and advancing the standards of ethical business practices" were selected from 23 countries across 57 industries, Ethisphere said in a statement.

What

1. Microsoft, Dell, Salesforce, and Adobe is some of the global tech giants who figured in the 2018 list.
2. Over the last 12 years, we have repeatedly seen that those companies who focus on transparency and authenticity are rewarded with the trust of their employees, their customers, and their investors.
3. While negative headlines might grab attention, the companies who support the rule of law and operate with decency and fair play around the globe will always succeed in the long term.
4. The listed ethical companies outperformed the large-cap sector over five years by 10.72 per cent and over three years by 4.88 per cent.
5. We are honoured to be listed among the World's Most Ethical Companies for the fifth consecutive year, said Michael Dell, Chairman and CEO of Dell Technologies.
6. The institute will organise an event in New York on March 13 to felicitate the companies where PepsiCo Chairperson and CEO Indra Nooyi is expected to deliver the keynote address.

## INDIA'S FIRST RADIO FESTIVAL

**India's first radio festival was held at the UNESCO House in New Delhi** to mark World Radio Day (February 13). It was organised by International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT) in partnership with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

What

1. The festival aimed to bring together radio professionals, podcasters and other digital audio programmers.
2. It included discussions of expert panels, exhibition and live performances. Its discussions were based on the theme for World Radio Day 2018 – Radio and Sports.
3. It examined potential of sports as a platform for social change, ways to make it more creative and trace journey of music on radio.

About IAWRT

1. IAWRT is global organization of women in broadcasting industry.
2. It was established in 1949 by professional women working in electronic and allied media. Its mission is to strengthen initiatives towards ensuring women's views and values are integral part of programming and advance impact of women in media.
3. It is in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
4. It also organizes conferences, implements projects and undertakes activities, collaborates with and media organizations. It is managed by international board, which oversees funding initiatives for a number of local chapters and member activities.

## NEW PM OF NEPAL

CPN-UML Chairperson **K P Sharma Oli** became **Nepal's Prime Minister for the second time**, over two months after his Left alliance routed the ruling Nepali Congress in **the country's historic parliamentary and local polls**. President Bidhya Devi Bhandari appointed 65-year-old Oli as the **country's 41st prime minister**. Oli, who is known for his pro-China stance, had served as the country's prime minister from October 11, 2015 to August 3, 2016. Oli's PM candidacy was supported by the UCPN-Maoists, Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal, and Madhesi Rights Forum-Democratic along with 13 other small parties.

What

1. Earlier, former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba had addressed the nation and submitted his resignation to the president. Deuba was elected as the 40th Prime Minister on June 6 with support from the CPN (Maoist Centre), which is now a part of the Left alliance and opting for a merger with CPN-UML.
2. The elections of three tiers of government have been successfully held under my leadership, setting the foundation to long transition.
3. The Left alliance of the CPN-UML, led by Oli and CPN-Maoist Centre, led by Prachanda, had in December secured 174 seats in the 275-member Parliament in the historic provincial and parliamentary polls that many hope will bring much-needed political stability to the Himalayan nation.
4. It had also secured an overwhelming majority in the upper house of Parliament with 39 out of the 59 seats.

## GEOSPATIAL WORLD EXCELLENCE AWARD 2018

**Odisha Government has won 'Geospatial World Excellence Award-2018'** for successful IT application for tracking of mineral production, dispatch and value accrued on real-time basis through its i3MS web-based software. The award was presented at the

Geospatial World Forum Meeting held at Hyderabad, Telangana. The event was attended by more than 3,000 geospatial experts from 90 different countries.

What

1. i3MS is GPS-linked web-based software designed by scientists of Odisha Space Applications Centre (ORSAC), Bhubaneswar.
2. This system has enabled for first time in India to fix GPS devices on large number of moving objects in the mining sector.
3. Geospatial World Excellence Awards is internationally-acclaimed private award that recognizes exemplary innovations and practices in global geospatial industry.
4. It was initiated in 2007. It encourages all geospatial and allied projects.
5. It is given in three categories viz. Geospatial Application Excellence Awards, Geospatial Technology Innovation Awards and Geospatial Policy Implementation Awards.

## INDIA US SORT OUR ISSUES ON POULTRY

The Department for Animal Husbandry and Fisheries has resolved the health certification issue for poultry with the USFDA. The US poultry industry could start exporting to India soon. Hopefully, Washington will now consider the WTO dispute to be over. The latest changes made in the health certification requirement could now lead to the **Indian poultry industry's worst fear come true** — that of facing the stiff challenge of competing with cheap chicken legs from the US. According to industry estimates, the US could potentially take away 40 per cent of the market of domestic breeders, who produce 3.5 million tonnes of chicken annually.

What

1. The US had challenged the stringent restrictions on imports of poultry that India had in place on poultry imports, ostensibly to check the spread of avian influenza or bird flu, at the WTO. In 2015, New Delhi lost the case and the WTO ruled that the import restrictions were unscientific and should be removed.
2. India then made two rounds of changes in its rules on health restrictions to **comply to DSB's ruling and take care of specific concerns raised by the US**. The US, however, remained dissatisfied with the changes and sought damages.
3. The US wanted that the health certification requirement should be modified to recognise the disease control system in the country and their systems approach so that their industry could export without fear of rejection by Indian authorities.
4. Since minor modifications are done in health certifications to take care of country-specific requirement, the Animal Husbandry Department made the modifications sought by the USFDA.
5. While the Commerce Ministry is concerned about the implications of the move on the domestic poultry industry, officials say that restrictions on imports, if any, have to be applied based strictly on OIE guidelines (globally accepted guidelines on health and sanitary requirements).
6. The government, together with the poultry industry, is examining issues such as the long-periods of deep-freezing of dressed chicken done in the US and the genetically modified feed given to the chicken to see if imports could be restricted on such genuine health concerns.

## WORLD CANCER DAY

The World Cancer Day (WCD) is observed every year on 4 February across the world to raise awareness of cancer and to encourage its prevention, detection, and treatment. Its primary goal is to reduce the illness and related deaths by 2020. The theme **for this year is "We can. I can"**.

What

1. It reflects on what everyone can do to raise awareness of cancer and asks to take pledge and action in fight against cancer.

2. **“We can. I can” is special three-**year campaign for the World Cancer Day from year 2016 to 2018.
3. It seeks to explore how everyone- as individuals or as a collective – can do their part to reduce the burden of cancer globally.
4. The WCD was instituted by Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) in 2008 by formally writing goals of the World Cancer Declaration.
5. The primary goal of observing the day is to reduce illness and death caused by it by 2020.
6. The origin of day can be traced to 2000 at first World Summit Against Cancer, which was held in Paris, France.

#### UICC

1. It is Geneva based leading international non-governmental organisation (NGO) founded in 1933.
2. Its purpose is to help the global health community to accelerate the fight against cancer.
3. It has a membership of over 800 organisations spread across 155 countries.

## WORLD WETLANDS DAY

The World Wetland Day (WWD) is observed every year on 2 February to raise awareness about the value of wetlands for humanity and the planet. This day marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands (also called as Ramsar Convention) in 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. The theme for year **2018 is “Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future“**. **The theme underlines the importance** of wetlands and that the future of urban centres hinges on wetlands.

#### Flashback

1. For first time, World Wetland Day was celebrated in year 1997.
2. Since then it is observed every year to spread awareness about Ramsar Convention in particular for conservation of Wetlands.
3. **The theme for year 2017 Theme was “Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction”**.
4. Wetlands are transitional lands between terrestrial and aquatic eco-systems where water table is usually at or near surface or land is covered by shallow water.
5. Ramsar Convention aim to raise public awareness on conservation, proper utilisation and management of wetlands and their resources.

## GOVT DROPS THE IDEA OF AN INDIA EV POLICY

The government has decided against formulating an electric vehicle (EV) policy in an apparent U-turn from its position so far, providing a breather to many carmakers that are unprepared for an abrupt shift to the clean-fuel technology. There is no need for any policy now,” **Nitin Gadkari**, minister for road transport, said at a press briefing. He was addressing reporters along with Amitabh Kant, chief executive of government think tank NITI Aayog.

#### What

1. This is a remarkable volte-face, given that as recently as last month, Gadkari said the policy was awaiting approval from the union cabinet.
2. **He had earlier outlined the government’s ambitious plan to shift to electric** vehicles by 2030. Companies such as Toyota Kirloskar Motor Pvt. Ltd, the local unit of Toyota Motor Corp., have been publicly voicing concerns about the proposed India EV policy.
3. Electric vehicle sales are low in India because of few available models and a lack of charging infrastructure. Sales rose 37.5% to 22,000 units in fiscal 2016 from 16,000 in the previous year, according to automobile lobby group Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM). Only 2,000 of these were, however, cars and other four-wheelers.
4. To overcome some of the problems for electric vehicles, NITI Aayog, along with Colorado-based Rocky Mountain Institute, in their 2017 report on the future of shared, electric and connected mobility future in India, had suggested setting up

“a manufacturer consortium for batteries, common components, and platforms to develop battery cell technologies and packs and to procure common components for Indian original equipment manufacturers”.

- The report said that adoption of electric and shared vehicles could help India save \$60 billion in diesel and petrol, along with cutting down as much as 1 gigatonne of carbon emissions by 2030.

## 6TH WORLD GOVERNMENT SUMMIT

The sixth edition of World Government Summit (WGS) 2018 was held at Madinat Jumeirah in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) from February 11 to 13, 2018. India was guest **country at this year's event** and Prime Minister Narendra Modi had delivered the inaugural speech on day one.

What

- More than 130 speakers across 120 interactive sessions and more than 4,000 participants from 140 countries – including heads of governments and representatives of 16 international organisations had attended the event.
- In his inaugural speech PM Modi propounded idea of six Rs for sustainable development- Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover, Redesign and Remanufacture, with the view to safeguarding nature.

### World Government Summit (WGS)

- WGS is global platform dedicated to shaping future of government worldwide.
- It brings together leaders in government for global dialogue about governmental process and policies with focus on issues of futurism, technology and innovation etc.
- The first WGS was held in Dubai in 2013 and since then it is held annually.
- The Summit sets agenda for next generation of governments with focus on how they can harness innovation and technology to solve universal challenges facing humanity.
- It functions as thought leadership platform and networking hub for policymakers, experts, and pioneers in human development.
- The Summit is considered as gateway to future as it functions as stage for analysis of future trends, issues, and opportunities facing humanity.